Gothic Literature

Historic Context

- The words *Goth* and *Gothic* describe the Germanic tribes (e.g., Goths, Visigoths, Ostrogoths) which sacked Rome and also ravaged the rest of Europe in the third, fourth, and fifth centuries.

- By the eighteenth century in England, *Gothic* had become synonymous with the Middle Ages, a period which was in disfavor because it was perceived as chaotic, unenlightened, and superstitious.

Horace Walpole

24 September 1717 - 2 March 1797

- Walpole wrote what is considered the first gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto (very melodramatic)*

- *Published in 1764*

- *Inspired by his reconstruction of his home and a nightmare he'd had*

Gothic Conventions

A few more gothic conventions

- Damsel in distress (frequently faints in horror)
- Secret corridors, passageways, or rooms
- Ancestral curses
- Ruined castles with graveyards nearby
- Priests and monks
- Sleep, dream, death-like states

Gothic architecture 12th~16th century

- Gothic architecture used pointed arches and vaults, flying buttresses, narrow spires, stained glass windows, intricate traceries, and varied details; its upward movement was meant to suggest heavenward aspiration.

Literary Connection to Gothic Architecture

- "gothic" came to describe a certain type of novels, so named because all these novels seem to take place in Gothic-styled architecture -- mainly castles, mansions, and, of course, abbeys ("Gothic...").

Metonymy of gloom and terror

- **The metonymy of gloom and horror.**
- Metonymy is a subtype of metaphor, in which something (like rain) is used to stand for something else (like sorrow). For example, the film industry likes to use metonymy as a quick shorthand, so we often notice that it is raining in funeral scenes.

Note the following metonymies that suggest mystery, danger, or the supernatural

wind, especially howling	sighs, moans, howls, eerie sounds
rain, especially blowing	clanking chains
doors grating on rusty hinges	gusts of wind blowing out lights
footsteps approaching	doors suddenly slamming shut
lights in abandoned rooms	crazed laughter
characters trapped in a room	baying of distant dogs (or wolves?)
ruins of buildings	thunder and lightning

Importance of Setting

- The setting is greatly influential in Gothic novels. It not only evokes the atmosphere of horror and dread, but also portrays the deterioration of its world. The decaying, ruined scenery implies that at one time there was a thriving world. At one time the abbey, castle, or landscape was something treasured and appreciated. Now, all that lasts is the decaying shell of a once thriving dwelling.

Archetypal Characters

- The Gothic hero becomes a sort of archetype as we find that there is a pattern to his characterization. There is always the protagonist, usually isolated either voluntarily or involuntarily. Then there is the villain, who is the epitome of evil, either by his (usually a man) own fall from grace, or by some implicit malevolence. The Wanderer, found in many Gothic tales, is the epitome of isolation as he wanders the earth in perpetual exile, usually a form of divine punishment.

Basic Plot Structure for a Gothic Novel

- Action in the Gothic novel tends to take place at night, or at least in a claustrophobic, sunless environment.

- ascent (up a mountain high staircase);

- descent (into a dungeon, cave, underground chambers or labyrinth) or falling off a precipice; secret passage; hidden doors;

- the pursued maiden and the threat or rape or abduction;

- physical decay, skulls, cemeteries, and other images of death; ghosts; revenge; family curse; blood and gore; torture; the *Doppelganger* (evil twin or double); demonic possession; masking/shape-changing; black magic; madness; incest and other broken sexual taboos.

Other Gothic Novels

1765: Horace Walpole. *The Castle of Otranto*
1794: Ann Radcliffe. *The Mysteries of Udolpho*
1794: William Godwin. *Caleb Williams*
1796: Mathew Lewis. *The Monk*
1798: Regina Maria Roche. *Clermont*
1806: Ann Mary Hamilton. *Montalva or Annals of Guilt*
1807: Charlotte Dacre. *The Libertine*
1818: Mary Shelly. *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus*
1820: Charles Robert Maturin. *Melmonth the Wanderer*
1826: Ann Radcliff: *Gaston de Blondeville*
1826: William Child Green. *The Abbot of Montserrat or The Pool of Blood*

Modern Gothic Novels

- *Rebecca* by Daphne Du Maurier

- *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë

- *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë

Other Gothic Writers

- Anne Rice

- Edgar Allan Poe

- Joyce Carol Oates

- Stephen King

- Stephenie Meyer