

# Romantic and Gothic Literature

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# **Romanticism (c. 1798-1832)**

❖ **A literary and artistic movement** that reacted against the restraint and universalism of the **Enlightenment**. The Romantics **celebrated spontaneity, imagination, subjectivity, and the purity of nature.**

❖ Notable English Romantic writers include Jane Austen, William Blake, **Lord Byron, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley** and **William Wordsworth.**

❖ Prominent figures in the American romantic movement include Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Edgar Allen Poe, Williams Cullen Bryant, and John Greenleaf Whittier.

# Five Main Romantic Themes in American Literature



- ❖ Intuition (“the truth of the heart”) is more trustworthy than reason.
- ❖ To express deeply felt experience is more valuable than to elaborate universal principles.
- ❖ The individual is at the center of life and God is at the center of the individual.
- ❖ Nature is an array of physical symbols from which knowledge of the supernatural can be intuited.
- ❖ We should aspire to the ideal –to change what is to what ought to be.

# Romantic Characteristics

1. Emphasis upon subjective emotion and spontaneity
2. Love of one's own national literature and literary forms
3. Wild, exuberant writing dealing with unexpected, exotic and foreign topics
4. Objects contrasted with each other and arranged asymmetrically
5. Love of the country and nature

# The Byronic Hero



- ❖ This idea is based on the personality of George Gordon, Lord Byron who was a stormy, sensitive, fiercely proud man.
- ❖ The Byronic Hero is a mysterious, somewhat exotic creature whose passionate intensity cuts him off from others.
- ❖ They suffer from profound yearnings that are beyond the comprehension of lesser persons.
- ❖ Aware of their superiority, these Byronic Heroes are frequently aloof, sometimes sullen.
- ❖ They show disdain for the petty regulations of society.
- ❖ They are sometimes imprisoned or become voluntary exiles, living examples of the restless spirit of the Romantics.

# Gothic Literature



- ❖ It was an offshoot of Romantic Literature.
- ❖ Gothic Literature was the predecessor of modern horror movies in both theme and style.
- ❖ Gothic Literature put a spin on the Romantic idea of nature worship and nature imagery. Along with nature having the power of healing, Gothic writers gave nature the power of destruction. Frankenstein is full of the harsh reality of nature. Many storms arise in the novel, including storms the night the Creature comes to life.
- ❖ The most common feature of Gothic Literature is the indication of mood through the weather.



# Gothic vs. Romanticism

- ⦿ Romanticism developed as a reaction against the rationalism of the Age of Reason.
  - The romantics freed the imagination from the hold of reason, so they could follow their imagination wherever it might lead.
  - For some Romantics, when they looked at the individual, they saw hope (think “A Psalm of Life”).
- ⦿ For some Romantic writers, the imagination led to the threshold of the unknown—the shadowy region where the fantastic, the demonic and the insane reside.
  - ⦿ When the Gothic's saw the individual, they saw the potential of evil.

**Romantic writers celebrated the beauties of nature.**

**Gothic writers were peering into the darkness at the supernatural.**

# When did it become popular?

- Later 18th Century
- Started with a “Gothic Revival” -- mid-1700’s
  - Visible in gardens
  - Seen in architecture (gargoyles) of the Middle Ages
    - 1740’s - Horace Walpole - Strawberry Hill estate near London
    - Published *The Castle of Otranto: a Gothic Story* - 1764



<http://www.puzzlehistory.com/gothgrdn.jpg>



# Application to literature

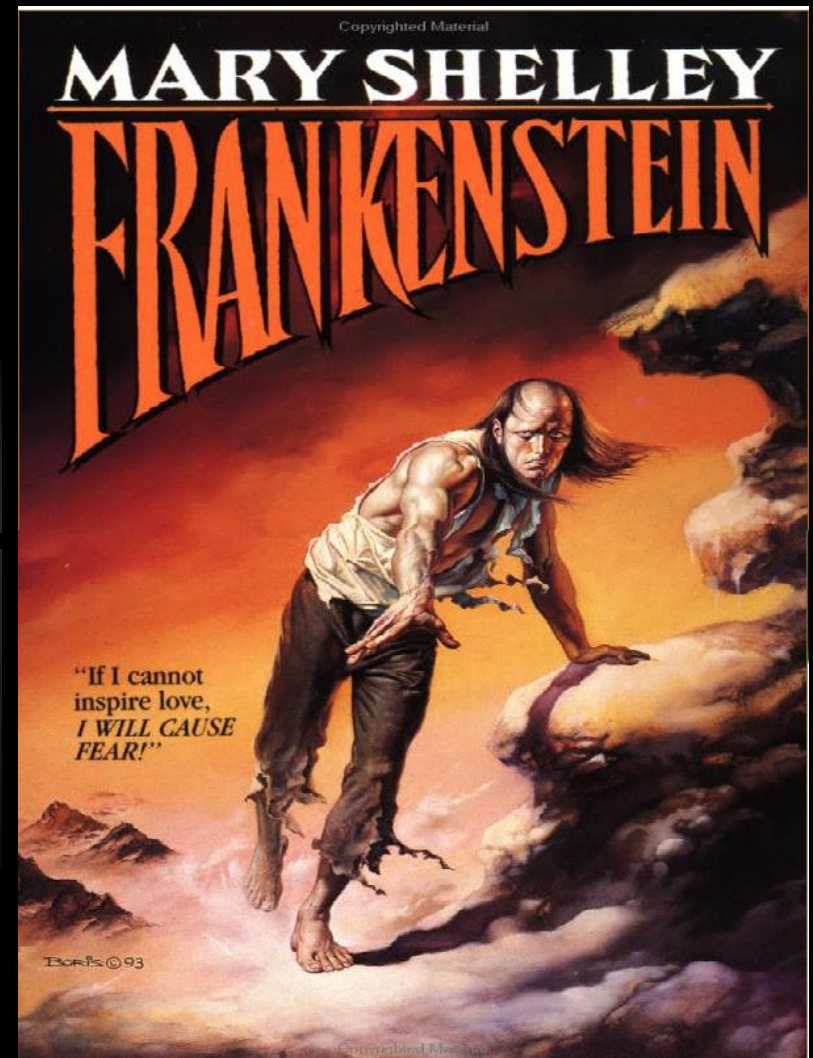


<http://www.greatscotland.be/evenementen.htm>

- Any kind of romantic, scary novel
- Came from Germany in the late 1700's - early 1800's
- Popular among female writers
- Became best sellers!

# A classic

- Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818)
  - Single most important product of this tradition
  - Themes relate to science, poetry, psychology, alienation, politics, education, family relationships, etc.
  - Tradition: 8-foot tall monster made of separate body pieces



# Influence felt elsewhere

- *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by Coleridge-- skeleton ship and the crew's reaction
- *Christabel* by Coleridge-- atmosphere, setting, and fragmentary plot of seduction and witchery
- *Manfred* by Byron -- initial scene
- *The Even of St. Agnes* by Keats -- setting

[http://www.wilsonsalmanac.com/images2/ancient\\_mariner4.jpg](http://www.wilsonsalmanac.com/images2/ancient_mariner4.jpg)



# Characteristics

- Set in Medieval times
- Dark, mysterious, evil tone
- Dark castles, palaces, chambers, haunted mansions
- Isolated setting
- All come together to emphasize the sense of evil





# More characteristics

- Presence of ghosts, spirits, vampires, and other supernatural entities
- Mysterious disappearances and reappearances
- Supernatural or paranormal occurrences



# Characteristics -- cont'd.

- Religion, usually Christianity or at least spirituality, is confronted.
- A gothic “double” is used in which a character who seems to be good is linked with another who is evil





# More characteristics

- Blood, pain, death
- Cruelty
- Eroticism
- Characters with “aberrant psychological states”
- Events are “uncanny, macabre, or melodramatically violent bordering between reality and unreality”



<http://www.pantip.com/cafe/chalermthai/newmovie/hauntedcastle/hc.html>

# Purpose

- To evoke “terror” versus “horror” in the reader because of situations bordering reality/unreality
  - Often used to teach a message
- May lack a Medieval setting but will develop an atmosphere of gloom and terror



# Differentiating between the two



- Horror
  - “An awful apprehension”
  - Described distinctly
  - Something grotesque
  - So appalling, unrealistic
  - Depends on physical characteristics
- Terror
  - “A sickening realization”
  - Suggestive of what will happen
  - Depends on reader’s imagination
  - Sense of uncertainty
  - Creates an “intangible atmosphere of spiritual psychic dread”

How does this incorporate both romanticism and gothic elements?

