

Gothic Fiction: characteristics

Characters :

Supernatural elements, specters, monsters, freaks, ghosts, witches, vampires, demons, heroes and villains, women in distress / fainting heroines, wicked / evil monks, werewolves, corpses, skeletons, mad scientists, psychopaths, strange supernatural mutations ...

Settings / Places:

(abandoned) castles, monasteries, abbeys, graveyards, dark tunnels, labyrinths, medieval buildings, ruins, secret passages, trap doors, dark or hidden staircases, Gothic buildings, desolate landscapes, alienating landscapes, wild and mountainous locations

Time of day:

At night or at dusk, full moon ...

Atmosphere:

Mysterious, wild, weird, confusing, disturbing, unsettling, disquieting, dark, eerie, scary, gloomy, terrifying, bloodcurdling, hair-raising, nightmarish, threatening

Senses:

Strange noises, whispers, groans, screams, sobs, cold, shiver, horrible visions, hallucinations ...

Feelings / emotions:

Terror, horror, threatening feelings, fear, high / extreme emotions, highly sentimental feelings, anger, sorrow, surprise, suspense, bewilderment (=perplexity) , confusion

Themes / events:

Madness, outrage, superstition, revenge, psychological fears, the unknown, pseudoscientific fantasy, crime solving story, enigma, mystery, terror, suspense, violence, evil

Elements of the plot / Events:

An ancient obscure (=inconnu) prophecy, omens, portents, visions, strange phenomenon, inexplicable or dramatic or amazing events, murders, fragmented narratives relating mysterious incidents, horrible images and life-threatening pursuits, supernatural, sensational and terrifying incidents

Effects on the reader

Produce emotional effects rather than develop a rational response / explanation
Excite rather than inform
Chill the blood, delight superstitious fancies, feed appetites for marvellous and strange events
Ambivalent emotions: disgust versus fascination
Thrills : terror bringing some sort of delight, pleasure in horror

Aims of Gothic fiction

Cross social and aesthetic limits / Defy the values of society (virtue and propriety) in order to warn of dangers of social and moral transgression
Present these transgressions in their darkest and most threatening forms to reassert the necessity for limits
Explore the unknown / the dark nature of humanity ...

Examples of sentences:

The story **is** often **set** in desolate landscapes such as high mountains (ex: The Alps in *Frankenstein*)

The action usually **takes place** in medieval buildings such as castles or monasteries.

The plots **involve** supernatural elements such as ghosts and vampires.

The tales **deal with** the unknown and mystery.

Gothic literature **focuses on** the frightening aspects of the universe and the human soul.

The work **is pervaded by** a threatening feeling and a prevailing atmosphere of mystery and terror. / An atmosphere of mystery and terror **prevails**.

The characters are often overcome by anger, sorrow and especially terror.