

**Dr. Katherine Harris**  
**Gothic Novel & Tradition**

**GOTHIC NOVEL**

A type of romance very popular late in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which has had considerable influence on fiction since. Most Gothic novels were tales of mystery and horror, intended to chill the spine and curdle the blood. They contained a strong element of the supernatural and the now traditional “haunted house” props. Often they were set in medieval castles which had secret passages, dungeons, winding stairways, a stupefying atmosphere of doom and gloom and a proper complement of spooky happenings and clanking ghosts. Other characteristics include:

- **Elements/Structure of Gothic Fiction:**
  - Setting = foreign land
  - Atmosphere = brooding and unknown terror
  - Plot
    - Exploration of the unknown or supernatural (wild)
    - Combines horror, crime, romance, realism and tragic events
  - Characters
    - Hero in search of self; usually has an irreversible fate
      - see definition of “**Byronic Hero**”
    - “damsels in distress” in strange and terrifying locales
    - Ghosts/monsters haunt the hero for his actions
- **Themes:**
  - sexuality, danger, desire, femininity
  - supernatural element
  - power gone mad
  - female rage & sexual desire
  - moral virtue emerges in different forms
  - slightly anachronistic/medieval morality
  - opens up dark, irrational side of the mind

**BYRONIC HERO**

- Both Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley were influenced by Byron’s dark heroes.
- You can see the influence of the philosophies and concepts created by P.B. Shelley and Byron in M.W. Shelley’s *Frankenstein*.
- Definition:
  - hero disdainfully rejects the offer of a pact w/powers of darkness
  - sets self up as the totally autonomous man, independent of external authority or power, who own mind generates the values by which he lives in sufferance or in joy and by reference which he judges, requites & finally destroys himself
  - moody, passionate & remorse-torn but unrepentant wanderer