Source 1

http://davidcwood.com/adnd/campaign/gothfiction.html

INTRODUCTION TO Gothic Fiction

The **Gothic** movement in literature, like Romanticism, is viewed as a reaction to Enlightenment rationalism, a return to the primitive. The 18th century was an "Age of Reason" concerned with classical principles and scientific progress. The novel, a young genre, was predominantly realistic and didactic. Appearing near the end of the 18th century, however, **Gothic novels** drew upon the conventions of the medieval (chivalric) romances that told of knights battling with magic and monsters. Gothic novels presented a protagonist's immersion into a dark, horrific realm of some kind and reintroduced supernatural elements into fiction. Gothic texts characteristically deal with difficult-to-express issues and anxieties. Boundaries or limits (political, philosophical, sexual, etc.) are both established and challenged in Gothic fiction. Blurring or disruptions of borders are common (e.g., inside/outside, illusion/reality, masculine/feminine, material/spiritual, good/evil), and the tensions between the scientific and the supernatural are often prominent. Originally called "Gothic romances," Gothic novels were consumed by a popular audience—often women—and initially considered to be of low literary quality. The Gothic novel's "golden age" is generally cited as lasting from 1764-1840; however, the Gothic influence remains visible not only in literature, but also in film, television, music, and even dance.

Source 2

Definitions of the Gothic

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English
1- The Gothic style of building was common in Western Europe between the 12th and 16th centuries and included tall pointed arches and windows and tall pillars. Ex: A Gothic church.
2- A Gothic story, film etc. is about frightening things that happen in mysterious old buildings and lonely places, in a style that was popular in the early 19th century.
3- Gothic writing, printing etc. has thick (=*épaisses*) decorated letters.

Advanced English dictionary
gothic [adj] characterized by gloom (*atmosphere of depression and melancholy*) and mystery and the grotesque (*the abnormal and hideous*).

Dictionary.com (based on the Random House Unabridged Dictionary)
7. (often cap.) noting or pertaining to a style of literature characterized by a gloomy setting (*dark or dim, deeply shaded*), grotesque, mysterious, or violent events, and an atmosphere of degeneration (*deterioration*) and decay (*decomposition, rot*).
9. (often cap.) being of a genre of contemporary fiction typically relating the experiences of an often ingenuous (*sincere, innocent, naive*) heroine imperiled, as at an old mansion (*manor*), where she typically becomes involved with as stern (*severe, strict*) or mysterious but attractive man.

Source 3

Gothic fiction

Origins

→ The word Gothic originally describes a style of European architecture which flourished from the 12th through the 16th centuries. Gothic architecture used pointed arches and vaults, narrow spires, stained glass windows, intricate patterns, and varied details; its upward movement was meant to suggest heavenward aspiration.

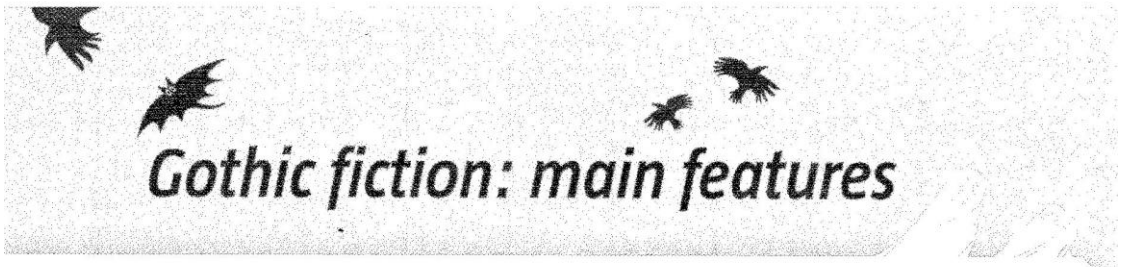
As a result of an increased interest in the Middle Ages, Gothic architecture experienced a revival in the late 18th century.

Gothic art and architecture was intended to have a magical or fantastic effect on the viewer, evoking a sense of awe, terror, and vulnerability. The Gothic building, old, unfamiliar, mysterious was the perfect setting for a story intended to terrify the reader. The point was to remove the reader from the ordinary, everyday world of the normal and the familiar.

Melrose Abbey, by J.W.W. Turner, 1822

→ The term Gothic came to be applied to the literary genre precisely because the genre dealt with such emotional extremes and dark themes, and because it found its most natural settings in the buildings of this style—castles, mansions, and monasteries, often remote, crumbling, and ruined.

Source 4



Gothic fiction: main features

Excess

Gothic signifies the writing of excess [...]. Tortuous, fragmented narratives relating mysterious incidents, horrible images and life-threatening pursuits predominate in the eighteenth century. Spectres, monsters, demons, corpses, skeletons, evil aristocrats, monks and nuns, fainting heroines and bandits populate Gothic landscapes as suggestive figures of imagined and realistic threats. This list grew, in the nineteenth century, with the addition of scientists, fathers, husbands, madmen, criminals and the monstrous double signifying duplicity and evil nature. Gothic landscapes are desolate, alienating and full of menace. In the eighteenth century they were wild and moutainous locations. Later the modern city combined the natural and architectural components of Gothic grandeur and wildness, its dark, labyrinthine streets suggesting the violence and menace of Gothic castle and forest.

The major locus of Gothic plots, the castle, was gloomily predominant in early Gothic fiction. Decaying, bleak and full of hidden passageways, the castle was linked to other medieval edifices—abbeys, churches and graveyards especially—that, in their generally ruinous states, harked back to a feudal past associated with barbarity, superstition and fear. [...] In later fiction, the castle gradually gave way to the old house: as both building and family line, it became the site where fears and anxieties returned in the present. [...]

Drawing on the myths, legends and folklore of medieval romances, Gothic conjures up magical worlds and tales of knights, monsters, ghosts and extravagant adventures and terrors. [...] Through its presentations of supernatural, sensational and terrifying incidents, imagined or not, Gothic produced emotional effects on its readers rather than developing a rational or properly cultivated response.

Exciting rather than informing, it chilled their blood, delighted their superstitious fancies and fed uncultivated appetites for marvellous and strange events, instead of instructing readers with moral lessons. [...] Gothic texts were also seen to be subverting the mores and manners on which good social behaviour rested.

Transgression

The excesses associated with Gothic figures were seen as distinct signs for transgression. [...] Gothic plots appeared to celebrate criminal behaviour, voracious passion, [...] stimulating excitements which blurred definitions of reason and morality. Transgression, like excess, is ambivalent in its aims and effects. The terrors and horrors of transgression in Gothic writing become a powerful means to reassert the values of society, virtue and propriety: transgression, by crossing the social and aesthetic limits, serves to reinforce or underline their value and necessity, restoring or defining limits.

Gothic novels frequently adopt this strategy, warning of dangers of social and moral transgression by presenting them in their darkest and most threatening form. [...] The emotions most associated with Gothic fiction are similarly ambivalent: objects of terror and horror not only provoke repugnance, disgust and recoil, but also engage readers' interest, fascinating and attracting them. Threats are spiced with thrills, terrors with delights, horrors with pleasures.

Diffusion

Many of the anxieties articulated in Gothic terms in the nineteenth century reappear in the twentieth century. Science fiction, the adventure novel, modernist literature, romantic fiction and popular horror writing often resonate with Gothic motifs. Terror and horror are diversely located in alienating bureaucratic and technological reality, in psychiatric hospitals and criminal subcultures, in scientific, future and intergalactic worlds, in fantasy and the occult. Threatening figures of menace, destruction and violence emerge in the form of mad scientists, psychopaths, extraterrestrials and a host of strange supernatural or naturally monstrous mutations.

Fred Botting, *Gothic* (1996)