

Gothicism Notes

AP English Literature and Composition
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The Gothic Tradition

- Has its origins in 1764 with the publication of Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*
- Not limited to literature – a study of the gothic is a study in paradoxes of duality that can be traced to the Middle Ages.
- Central image of the gothic – the Cathedral which “has both an outward, upward movement toward the heavens, and an inward, downward motion, convoluting in upon itself in labyrinthine passages and dark recesses, descending to Catacombs deep in the earth (Thompson 3).

Characteristics of Gothic Literature

- A helpless victim
- An evil victimizer whose powers are either immense or supernatural
- Setting must include (at some point) an impenetrable place (physical or psychological) – imprisonment
- Central image is the cathedral or haunted mansion
- Dark, mysterious atmosphere – impending doom
- Victim is entranced or fascinated by the inscrutable power of his victimizer

Characteristics of Southern Gothicism

- Sub-genre of Gothicism; unique to American literature
- Relies on supernatural or ironic events to explore social issues and reveal the culture of the south
- Avoids perpetuating antebellum stereotypes such as the contented slave, the demure belle, the chivalrous gentleman, the righteous preacher
- Adheres to gothic archetypes but modernizes them and presents them in a realistic manner

The Grotesque- most notable feature

- A stock character who possesses some cringe-inducing qualities (bigotry, self-righteousness) but appears good enough so the reader empathizes with him.
- Deeply flawed; disturbing to read about
- Helps author highlight unpleasant aspects in Southern culture without moralizing

According to Tennessee Williams

- Southern Gothic is “an intuition, of an underlying dreadfulness in modern experience.”

Flannery O'Connor

- Born in 1925 – the only child of Catholic parents
- Father died of lupus
- Published first novel at age 25
- Attempted to expose hypocrisy and idiocy of culture
- Work was intended to shock and awe
- Died of lupus in 1964
- “Good Country People”
- “A Good Man is Hard to Find”

Textbook Time!

- Open your textbooks to page 599 and read “A Good Man is Hard to Find”. This must be finished by tomorrow’s class – we will discuss it then.