What is Gothic Literature?

• *The Gothic Tradition in Fiction* (1979) by Elizabeth MacAndrew

• *The Literature of Terror* (1980) by David Punter

• *Histoire de la littérature fantastique en France* (1985) by Marcel Schneider

• *La littérature fantastique* (1997) by Jean-Luc Steinmetz

• *Gothic Radicalism: Literature, Philosophy and Psychoanalysis in the Nineteenth Century* (2000) by Andrew Smith

• *The Uncanny* by Nicholas Royle (2003).
• Focus on the protagonists
• Displaying their difficulties, troubles and inner conflicts
• Gothic as “a literature of nightmare” (p.3)
• A psychoanalytical reading
• Characters’ inner / outer problems in too general a way
• Double and the Uncanny (1979)
• Important element: the uncanny
• Psychoanalytical explanation of the exaggeration of characters’ fears resulting in terror
• The literary development of terror
• Notions of fear, anxiety, terror, and horror
• He does not support his statements with any psychoanalytical background knowledge

(1980)
• German (E.T.A. Hoffmann) and American (E.A. Poe) influence on French literature

• Description of the main characteristics in fantastic fiction by opposing it indirectly to Gothic fiction.

• Separation of the supernatural, the uncanny from without, from the uncanny from within.

(1985)
• From Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* to recent times

• Steinmetz combines the world of the uncanny from outside with the uncanny from inside

• One chapter is devoted to Sigmund Freud’s *The Uncanny* (*Das unheimliche*, 1919) ➔ Psychological component of the genre

• Steinmetz also underscores Hoffmann’s and Poe’s influence on fantastic writing.

(1997)
• Freud’s understanding of the uncanny with reference to literature

• the understanding of the sublime in connection with the uncanny

• Longius’, Burke’s, Kant’s and Weiskel’s perception of the sublime

• Smith combines the concept of the sublime with psychoanalysis:
  “how the Gothic rewrites the sublime and the uncanny in such a way that it radically critiques the status of nature, language and subjectivity” (p. 8).

(2000)
• Freud’s and his own understanding of the term

• Different implications of darkness, mysteriousness, arousal of the death instinct, premature burial

• E.T.A. Hoffmann’s short story *Der Sandmann* (1817)

(2003)
• All literary critics describe the phenomenon of the uncanny and its importance in literature

• No detailed or comparative illustration of the term’s understanding and development

• gothic, fantastic, and uncanny writing have to be assumed to be culturally and temporally independent genres
• Gothic fiction is a frequently discussed literary field within the Romantic Movement.

• Features: evaluation of the individual and critical interest in imagination, dreams, fears, dark settings, sinister characters, supernatural elements.

• Until the transitory period after the Enlightenment (eighteenth-century), the term gothic was still associated with the notion of cruelty and savageness of the Germanic tribe of the Goths and implied the meaning of “barbarous, rude, uncouth, unpolished, [and] in bad taste” (OED 702).
• The term underwent a slight change. “The word ‘Gothic’ ceased to be a synonym for “barbarous” and “violent” and became associated with the poetry of the Middle Ages: Gothic = Medieval.

• In addition to the medieval implications, later the term was given a third meaning - a supernatural one.

• Throughout the course of time, the connotation of gothic changed so that it finally was associated with all grotesque, awful, evil and ugly things, wherewith the former medieval meaning slightly faded away ➔ Supernatual mantained
Gothic in Literature

• These different meanings of the word gothic come together and characterize the Gothic novel: “à la mode en Angleterre” (Le Grand Robert de la langue française)

• English origins and, thus, implicitly points towards its possible or existing modifications in the literature of other cultures and languages, as for instance, in German or French.

• The literary term Gothic fiction is not universally transferable to other languages and literatures.
MacAndrew defines English genre as follows:

“Gothic fiction is a literature of nightmare. Among its conventions are found dream landscapes and figures of the subconscious imagination. Its fictional world gives form to amorphous fears and impulses common to all mankind, using an amalgam of materials, some torn from the author’s own subconscious mind and some stuff of myth, folklore, fairy tale, and romance. It conjures up beings - mad monks, vampires, and demons - and settings - forbidding cliffs and glowering buildings, stormy seas and the dizzying abyss - that have literary significance and the properties of dream symbolism as well. Gothic fiction gives shape to concepts of the place of evil in the human mind. [...] Gothic fiction has been called escape literature, intended to inspire terror for terror’s sake”. (Elizabeth MacAndrew, The Gothic Tradition in Fiction, 1979, p. 3ff)

• Protagonist’s hidden psyche ➔ psychoanalytical reading of Gothic fiction

• Andrews points to the uncanny that evokes “pity and fear” (p. 4) and describes the foundation of the uncanny house of literature.

• Etymological and thematic similarity of the German Schauerroman and the English Gothic novel

• The genre displays “secrecy, spook, subterranean vaults, mysterious ruins, murder, incest, […] figures of the double, Satanism” (p.224)

• The two literary fields can hardly be distinguished and should rather be seen as one complex.
• The gothic genre in French literature is referred to as *le roman noir / gothique / de terreur* (translation for Gothic novel), *la littérature fantastique*, and *la littérature frénétique*.

• *La littérature fantastique* distinguishes itself from early gothic writing in a very important point. In pronouncing the opposing questions of “Réalité ou rêve? Verité ou illusion?”, Tzvetan Todorov, in his treatise *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, leads the reader to the centre of the fantastic - the moment of uncertainty.

• Characters and reader are confronted with the unknown, they experience indecisiveness in reading and reacting to a particular event.

• Fantastic literature implies “une intégration du lecteur au monde des personnages [...] [et] il se définit par la perception ambiguë qu’a le lecteur même des événements rapportés” (Todorov 35-36)

• The reader tries to find an answer to the questions aroused by the textual situation and like the fictitious character completes and creates the momentum of reading by filling in the “gaps”.

• Everything unsaid in the text “comes to life in the reader’s imagination” (Iser, Act of Reading 168).

• The outcome is the exploitation of immense anxiety: Terror.
• The **Gothic novel** and the **Schauerroman** stress an evaluation of the mysterious and unknown that mainly comes from the outside, **la littérature fantastique** rather allows the uncanny from within (ourselves) to be the center of attention.

• English Gothic fiction, the German **Schauerroman**, and the French **littérature fantastique** all belong to the same genre: the ‘Literature of the uncanny.’

• The main difference among the three literary fields merely consists in the **direct** or **indirect articulation** of their implied and displayed psychological components.

• In all three fields they lead to the expression of strong emotions and fears which are frequently supported by hallucinations of the supernatural – by the uncanny.
THE UNCANNY

- Freud, *Uncanny*, p. 368: “it undoubtedly belongs to all that is terrible – to all that arouses dread and creeping horror”.

- The uncanny confronts us with something uncomfortable, sinister, and apparently unfamiliar (*unheimlich*).

- The characters of the chosen literary compositions feel haunted by something they are unable to define.

- Intellectual uncertainty evokes their sense of anxiety which easily develops into terror and, then, leads to the experience of the **uncanny** and the **sublime**.
A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful (1757)

• Edmund Burke responds in a philosophical and psychological way to fear, dread, pain, and terror.

• In Burke’s philosophical and Freud’s psychological reading of terror it is man’s imagination, with the resultant passions, and the following judgement that either creates the **sublime uncanny** or the **uncanny sublime**.

• The phenomena of obscurity, darkness, and solitude foster the sensation of extreme fear in Burke’s sublimity.
The Double

• Freud, Uncanny, pp. 386-7: the double “is a figure that is “to be considered identical by reason of looking alike [...] The double possesses knowledge, feeling and experience in common with another person, so that his self becomes confounded, or the foreign self is substituted for his own – in other words, by doubling, dividing and interchanging the self”

• Self-alienation that mostly ends in madness and frequently leads to suicide
• Freud, *Uncanny*, p. 389: “the quality of uncanniness can only come from the circumstance of the ‘double’ being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since left behind, and one, no doubt, in which it wore a more friendly aspect”

• Double back to a repressed notion that is part of the pole which Freud calls “infantile complexes” (p. 403)

• The figure of the double is “a creation dating back” (Freud, *Uncanny* 389) and when recalled, for example, in solitude, isolation, or at night in our dreams causes an uncanny atmosphere.

• The double is a repressed notion that suddenly comes to life when becoming conscious.

• “something long known to us, once very familiar” (Freud, *Uncanny*, p. 370), but that became unfamiliar or rather forgotten due to its repression.
• As a result of this, the appearance of the double is one possibility of facing the uncanny – something *heimlich* that has become *unheimlich* due to its unconscious existence and growth.

• The uncanny appears in a distorted form of the person’s unknown double and often takes the shape of what Freud calls the *Id* – an “unknown and unconscious” conception that “falls into instincts,” and “contains the passions” and as such, is an opposing entity to the ego, which “represents what may be called common sense” (Freud, *Ego and the Id* 17-19).
Early works of Gothic fiction

- Horace Walpole, *Castle of Otranto* (1765)
- Ann Radcliffe, *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794)
- Matthew Lewis, *Monk* (1792)
- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, Or the Modern Prometheus* (1818)
- E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Elixiere des Teufels* (1815-16) and his short-story *Der Sandmann* (1817)
- Theophile Gautier, *La Morte amoureuse* (1836)
- Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839) and *The Black Cat* (1843)
- Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898)

These works show that the original genre of Gothic fiction has over time not only assumed a rather fantastic tone, but also achieved dominance of the inner over the outer uncanny.
• Characters will be confronted with the unfamiliar unknown part of their personality.

• Ambiguity of the German word *heimlich* unfolds both its meanings: The meaning of *heimlich* in the sense of familiar on the one hand, and of secret on the other.

• The character’s personality is the home (*Heim*) of the familiar and the unfamiliar.

• The development of the uncanny from the characters’ mere perception of supernatural phenomena to the uncanny awareness of the second Self, the unconscious, becomes more and more important.
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GOTHIC FICTION – ITS ORIGINS

• An important genre in the Romantic period (1770-1850).

• Gothic novel as a counter reaction against the period of Enlightenment vs. an extension of the early Romantic Movement (Frühromantik) in which people aspired to” the marvellousness, exotic, adventures, lust, uncanny, the turning away from modern civilization and moving towards man’s inner and outer nature and towards previous forms of society [Middle-Ages]” (I. Stephan, Romantik als Lebens- und Schreibform, p. 202).
• The readership of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century asked for the expression of human feelings, perceptions, and dreams.

• Books that described man’s repressed and irrational dimensions attracted people.

• The individual requested literature conveying “latent fears as claustrophobia, persecution mania and the fear of death or reprehensible desires, a strong appetite for power, diabolicalness and perversion” (E. Kreutzer, *Die Entstehung des Romans in England: Aufklärung und Romantik 1700-1830*. Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 1988, p. 232).

• The reader longed for literature that expressed and revealed the uncanny and the sublime: the gothic.
• The unexplainable was contrasted to the mistaken idea of a totally explainable world that was claimed by the representatives of the Enlightenment, Voltaire, Rousseau, Gottsched, Lessing, or Godwin.

• The Enlightenment had rather stimulated this “illegal desire” for the long repressed and hidden aspects of life.


• The “sombre school” of Romanticism: i.e., graveyard-poetry and the gothic. Mournful reflections on the brevity of life, death, and of the sepulchral, a melancholic atmosphere, and an enormous longing for the discovery of the unknown were initial characteristics of graveyard poetry, later of the developing Gothic fiction.
• Edward Young, *The Complaint: or Night-Thoughts on Life, Death & Immortality* (1742-1745)

• Robert Blair, *The Grave* (1743)

• James Hervey, *Meditations among the tombs* (1745)

• Thomas Warton, *On the Pleasures of Melancholy* (1747)

• Thomas Gray, *Elegy written in a Country Churchyard* (1751)
• James Macpherson, *Fingal: An Ancient Epic Poem in Six Books; Together with Several other Poems by Ossian, son of Fingal* (1761) and *Temora: An Ancient Epic Poem in Eight Books; Together with Several other Poems by Ossian, son of Fingal* (1763)

*The Dream of Ossian*, by Jean Dominique Ingres (1815)
The *Ossian* Controversy

When it was first published Macpherson said that it was a *translation of an ancient manuscript in Scottish Gaelic* which had come into his possession, and which was a *copy of an original work written by Ossian*.

This was contested by various people, including notably Samuel Johnson, who said that it was entirely the work of Macpherson himself. Both sides became passionate and vituperative in expressing their own view, and the controversy rumbled on over the next fifty years. The alleged manuscript never appeared, but later researches have shown that the work is based partly on genuine Highland traditions.

The *Poems*:

- gave a tremendous impetus to both the nascent romantic movement, and the study of folklore and Celtic languages.
- Writers as diverse as William Blake, Henry Thoreau, George Byron, Walter Scott, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Matthew Arnold praised or imitated it.
- Felix Mendelssohn, Franz Schubert and Johannes Brahms composed pieces inspired by it.
Those familiar with the later, more authentic, versions in English of ancient Gaelic literature will recognise many of the names and stories - Fingal is evidently Fionn Mac Cumhaill; Temora is Tara (Temro in Old Irish); Cuthulinn is Cú Chulainn (though a much feebleer figure than the Irish hero), Dar-Thula is Deirdre of the Sorrows; Ros-cranna is Gráinne and Dermid is Diarmuid Ó Duibhne, though the Pursuit of Diarmuid and Gráinne is not one of Macpherson's stories. And so on. However, much of the work is Macpherson's own invention -- the tragic love story of Fingal and Agandecca, for example; and though "Temora" has some similarity to the Battles of Ventry and of Gabhra, the details are different. The footnotes (by Macpherson) are almost entirely misleading or downright wrong - be warned!