German and French Gothic

• Before Gothic fiction started to flourish, German literature was prolific in fairytales, ghost stories, and spine-chillers with sinister settings, and bloody scenes.

• Readers responded well to Friedrich Schiller’s drama *Die Räuber (The Robbers, 1781)*, his novel-fragment *Der Geisterseher (The Ghost-Seer, 1789)*, and to Ludwig Tieck’s romantic fairytales (*Kunstmärchen*).

• Tieck translated supernatural phenomena that he already had critically observed in Shakespeare’s plays.
• Tieck confronts the reader with the opposition of dream-landscapes and illusion versus reality.
• In *Der blonde Eckbert* (*Eckbert the Blond*, 1796) and *Der Runenberg* (*Rune Mountain*, 1802) Tieck projects the reader into the fictive world of the unconscious and wish fulfillment and elaborates on the topic of sensuality all through the form of a fairytale.
• the characters discover and realize that the two worlds of the marvellous and the real are not exclusive.
• He accentuates the psychological component of literature that, later, will be immensely stressed by E.T.A. Hoffmann and his French contemporaries Charles Nodier and Théophile Gautier.
• Although French medieval literature, as for example *Le Roman d’Alexandre* (twelfth century) or *Perceval ou le Conte du Graal* (1190), contains supernatural elements and “gothic settings” (old castles, mysterious ruins, sublime environment), *le roman chevaleresque* differs from Gothic fiction in the respect that its settings and supernatural phenomena do not inspire the notion of terror and horror.

• The same applies to the French fairytale, which was very popular in seventeenth-century’s French literature. As in *le roman chevaleresque*, the supernatural in the fairytales has a marvellous connotation rather than one of danger or evilness.
• With Jacques Cazotte’s story *Le Diable amoureux* (1772), French literature attempts, for the first time, to combine the marvellous dimension of the supernatural with its dangerous and evil one.

• In presenting Don Alvare’s temptation to subscribe his soul to the Devil disguised in the form of the wonderful, young woman Biondetta, Cazotte contrasts fantasy with reality, the supernatural with the natural, the rational and explainable with the irrational and unexplainable. In doing so, the author foreshadows a literary trend that will be dominant in Matthew Lewis’ *The Monk* (1796), E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Die Elixiere des Teufels* (*The Devil's Elixirs*, 1817), and later on in Théophile Gautier’s *La Morte amoureuse* (*Clarimonde*, 1836).
• In each story the Devil appears in disguise, leads his chosen victim into temptation, and makes him / her experience serious inner conflicts resulting from repressed passions and desires that are opposed to established religious and / or social rules and / or conventions.

• The concept of (sexual) wish fulfillment, of possessing and of being possessed, as well as of controlling and of being controlled is dominant in every one of these stories.
The Body


• Body and mind/psyche become the places of interest of medical and psychological research by the end of the Eighteenth Century.

• Body and mind are the ‘places’ where the Enlightenment, the Romantic and the Victorian Age tried *to face* and *to limit* the fears and the desires of the society into which they were inscribed.
• Inscription of the body in the society (cor)responded to a precise respect of societal laws and rules.
• The body, whose development is not manageable by the human reason and will, escapes man’s control and during the Enlightenment begins to show the limits of reason itself.
• Interest of the late Enlightenment for abnormal and monstrous bodies.
• Investigations of late 18th-Century natural sciences were functional to scientifically understand the **physiology** and **anatomy** of the human being, although this scientific approach to the abnormal body is often mingled with the survival of alchemical, mystical and supernatural aspects.
• The abnormal **is excluded** by the norm and considered as an aberration of nature.
According to Michel Foucault, from the Medieval period, throughout Renaissance till the 19th Century, variations or types of monsters share the property of being strange “mixtures”:

- The monster is “essentially a mixture [...] of two realms, the animal and the human: the man with the head of an ox, the man with a bird’s feet – monsters. It is the blending, the mixture of two species: the pig with a sheep’s head is a monster. It is the mixture of two individuals: the person who has two heads and one body or two bodies and one head is a monster. It is the mixture of two sexes: the person who is both male and female is a monster. It is a mixture of life and death: the fetus born with a morphology that means it will not be able to live but that nonetheless survives for some minutes or days is a monster. Finally, it is a mixture of forms: the person who has neither arms nor legs, like a snake, is a monster.

• Monsters thus defy our categories of understanding, be they civil, scientific, religious, ethical or aesthetical. Therefore monsters are “Antiphysis”, as he defined them in one of his lectures of the 1974-1975 year, that is to say “the kind of natural irregularity that calls law into question and disables it”.

• Thanks to the **liminal figure** of the monster, the “fantastic” – the “uncanny” from the outside – and the “Gothic” – the “uncanny from the inside” – it was possible to put into questions established categories, religions, laws and scientific and philosophical methods.