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Gothic Literature

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Today, we want to talk with you about Gothic Literature of the 18th century.

Well, for us, french people, when we talk about this century, we immediatly think about the "Siècle des Lumières" (the century of Enlightenment) with of course Voltaire, Diderot and D'Alembert, etc... Actually those philosophic reflexions of the society of the time make us forget to talk about the Gothic Movement, which appeared in the second half of the century. This movement concerns a lot of things : art (in paintings for exemple), architecture and litterature. This is the last part we'll concentrate on : first, we will talk about the common characteristics and the main themes, we can find in a Gothic novel ; and in a second time we will present the major books of this era.

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The Gothic movement appeared in the **second half of the 18th century** with the **Castle of Otranto**, written by Horace Walpole.

A gothic novel often generally includes certain unmistakable elements regarding the setting, the plot, or the characters.

One of the typical stereotypes is the persecution of the young heroin. Generally the characters **are highly emotional, and favour passion over reason**. Frequently **parents are very serious and oppressive**, and there is **a lover who must go through many trials and hardships** to reach the heart (and the body by the way...) of their beloved. This is an heritage of the medieval novel.

In gothic novels, place and setting are of paramount importance. The action is always set in gloomy locations such as **haunted castles, crypts, jails, graveyards ; all this to create an effect of terror**.

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The **main topics are in majority death, ruins and past**. Gothic is **the first movement to show human's irrationality**. The readers are young, wealthy, educated and mostly women

Now we will present five majors books of this period :

- **The Castle of Otranto**, written by Horace Walpole in 1764. This is the story of a rich family who wants to marry their son with a rich heiress ; but the son dies the day of this wedding...

- **Dracula**, by Bram Stoker, in 1897. This book tells the story of a vampire, a person who kills somebody with drinking their blood...

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- **The Lady of the shroud**, by Bram Stoker (again !) in 1909. This is the story of a young man who inherits a large fortune BUT (there is always a "but") to have it, he must live during 18 months in a castle. One night, a woman knocks on the door. The boy falls in love with that girl who seems to be like a kind of ghost...

- **Frankenstein**, by Mary Shelley, in 1818. A man, the doctor Victor Frankenstein, decides to give life to dead people thanks to lightning. After, he decides to create somebody with members of dead people ; this book is the 1st book of science-fiction.

- **The Strange case of Dr Jerkyl and Mr Hyde**, by Robert Louis Stevenson, in 1886. The novel tells the story of doctor Jerkyl who invents a drug to separate his good side from his evil side. But day after day, night after night, his bad side will dominate him and he'll become Mr Hyde, a criminal.

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We can say that the Gothic movement is an important movement end of the XVIIIth century. Even if the movement disappeared in 1830, there are a lot of books which have some gothic aspects in them, for exemple **Jane Eyre**, written by Charlotte Brontë. Add to it nowadays there are still a lot of gothic books or films, like **Edward Scissorhands** by Tim Burton.