



James Ward, *Gordale Scar*, 1814,
London, Tate Gallery

The Gothic novel

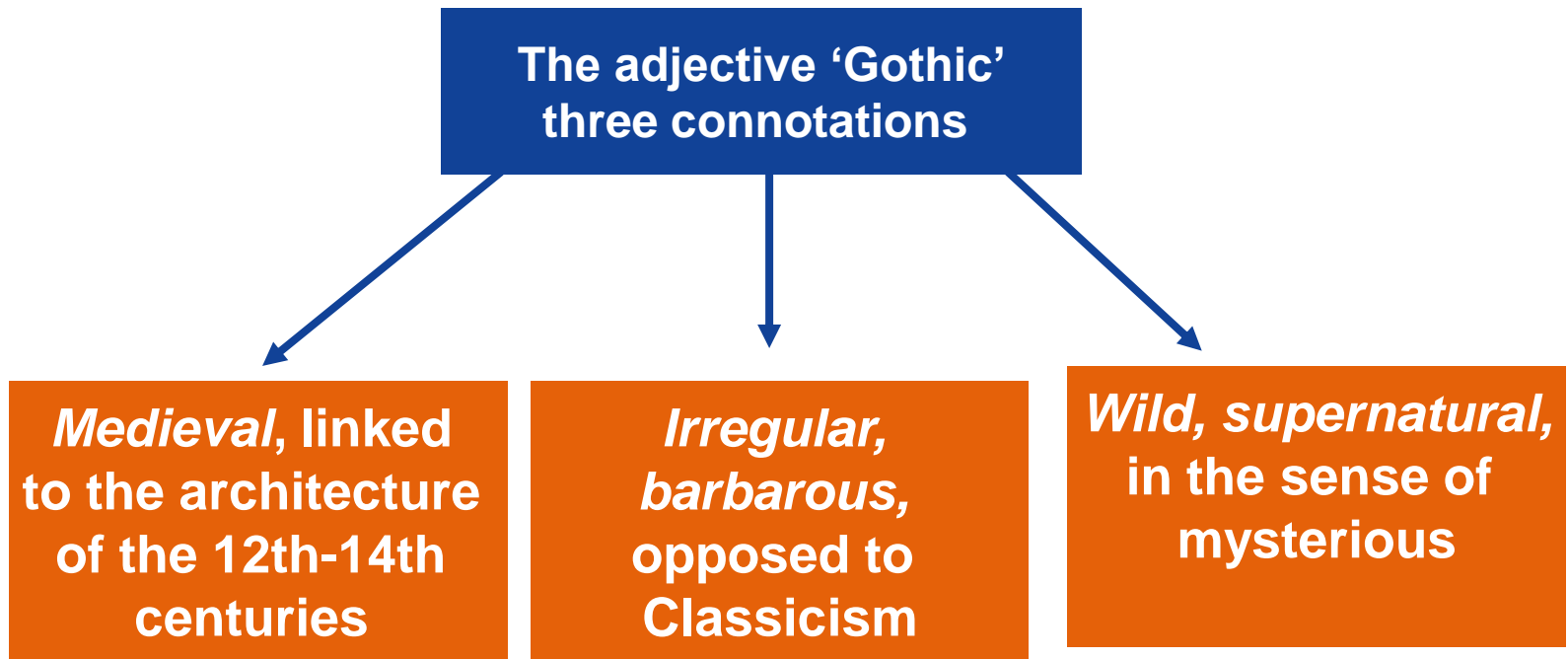
Compact Performer - Culture & Literature
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1. The origin of the name and popularity

The Gothic novel came to popularity at the end of the 18th century and it was also influenced by the concept of the sublime.

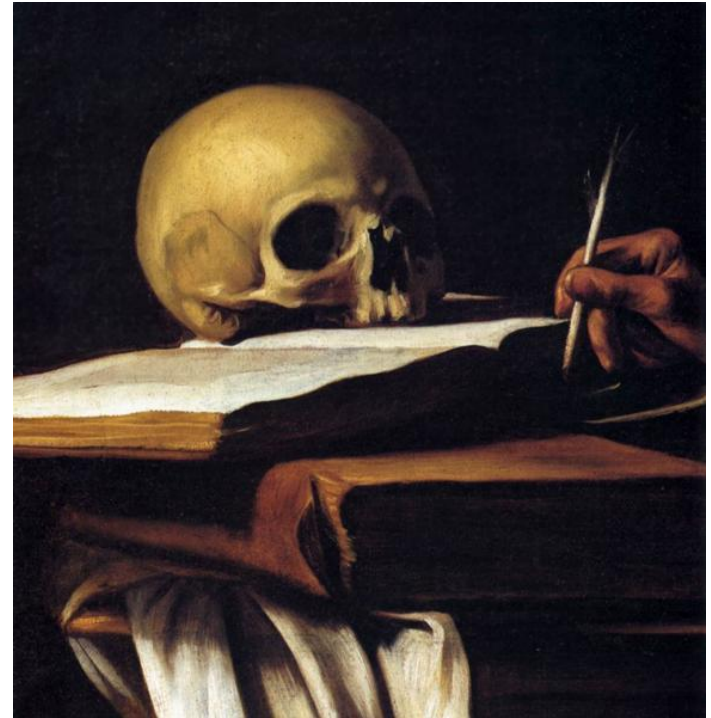


The first writer to apply the term to literature was Horace Walpole.



2. The Gothic setting (see page 106)

- Great importance given to terror, characterised by obscurity and uncertainty, and horror, caused by evil and atrocities.
- Darkness, a necessary ingredient for the mysterious, gloomy atmosphere (the most important events are set at night).





2. The Gothic setting

- Ancient settings: **isolated castles** and **mysterious abbeys** with hidden passages, underground cellars, secret rooms.
- Catholic countries as the setting for the **most terrible crimes**, due to Protestant prejudices against Catholicism.
- Complex plots.





3. The characters

- Supernatural beings: **vampires**, **monsters** and **ghosts**.
- **Heroines** dominated by exaggerated passions and fears, and **persecuted** by villains.
- **Sensitive heroes**: they **save heroines**.
- **The villains**: satanic, terrifying male characters, victims of their **negative impulses**.



Henry Fuseli (Johann Heinrich Füssli),
The Nightmare, 1781, Goethe Museum,
Frankfurt



4. The language

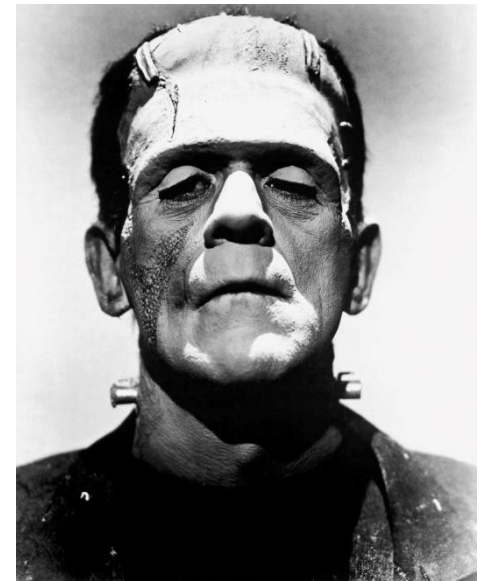
Gothic writers chose vocabulary that referred to emotions and feelings, capable of evoking anxiety, fear or horror.

Semantic areas	Words
Mystery	enchantment, ghost, haunted, infernal, magic, secret, spectre, vision
Fear / Terror / Sorrow	agony, anguish, apprehensions, despair, dread, fearing, frightened, hopeless, horror, melancholy, miserable, panic, sadly, scared, shrieks, sorrow, tears, terror, unhappy, wretched
Haste	anxious, breathless, frantic, hastily, impatient, running, suddenly
Anger	anger, enraged, furious, rage, resentment, wrath
Largeness	enormous, gigantic, large, tremendous, vast



5. First Gothic authors

- Horace Walpole → *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), with the subtitle “*A Gothic Story*”, he was the first to apply the word “Gothic” to literature.
- Ann Radcliffe → *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794)
- Mary Shelley → *Frankenstein* (1818)





6. Popularity

- Great interest during the 18th century common to **all social classes**
- These novels wanted to provoke fear in the reader, showing what the irrational side of our minds can do (very Romantic idea, opposed to the Enlightenment).
- Gothic novels influenced today's ghost and horror novels and films.
- Other important authors influenced by the Gothic novel are:
 - Charlotte Brontë
 - Edgar Allan Poe
 - Robert Louis Stevenson
 - Bram Stoker