

# ELEMENTS OF GOTHIC LITERATURE

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## SETTING & ATMOSPHERE

- Old, rundown structures: especially castles or great country manors.
  - Hidden passages
  - Trap doors
  - Dungeons or secret rooms
  - Decline from its former greatness.
- Bleak foreboding environments
  - Dark forests
  - Imposing mountains
  - Stormy weather
  - Areas far away from civilization.
- Atmosphere
  - Mystery
  - Horror
  - Dread

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## PROTAGONIST

- The protagonists of Gothic literature are isolated or alone.
- Physical (trapped in a house far from civilization)
- Emotional (cut off from the people around her)
- Self-imposed or a result of circumstances beyond her control.
- Plot involves hidden secrets which threaten the protagonist.



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## EMOTIONS

- Emotions run high in Gothic literature.
- Characters are often passionate and strong-willed, defying others or even their own common sense in pursuit of their goals.
- Women are often curious and have a tendency to swoon, while men storm and rage in reflection of unseen inner torments.
- The events in Gothic literature emphasize high emotion and often reflect a heightened sense of drama.
- Examples include murders, kidnappings, people going mad and tragic illnesses

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## DAMSELS IN DISTRESS

- The "damsel in distress" motif appears quite often in Gothic literature, with women threatened by tyrannical men or just the circumstances in which they find themselves.
- They often appear frightened and may suffer from some kind of ailment.

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## FOREBODING

- Ominous implications precede dark events in Gothic literature.
- Unlucky omens appear, ancient curses linger in the air, and dark forces beyond the protagonist's control thwart his ambitions.



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## DECAY

- The overall impression of a Gothic world is one of decay: a formerly great family, community, country or individual who has peaked and now begins a slow process of decline.
- This appears both in the landscape (crumbling buildings) and in the characters themselves.

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## THE SUPERNATURAL

- The supernatural often appears in Gothic literature, particularly ghosts and unexplained manifestations.
- In some Gothic novels, these elements ultimately have a rational explanation, but the implication always suggest something not of this world.