

**golden age:** The term derives from the *chronological primitivism* that was propounded in the Greek poet Hesiod's *Works and Days* (eighth century BC), as well as by many later Greek and Roman writers. The earliest period of human history, regarded as a state of perfect felicity, was called "the golden age," and the continuous decline of human well-being through time was expressed by the sequence "the silver age" and "the bronze age," ending with the present sad condition of humanity, "the iron age." See *primitivism and progress* and, for renderings of the golden age in the guise of a carefree rural existence, *pastoral*. Refer to Harry Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance* (1969).

**Gothic novel:** The word **Gothic** originally referred to the Goths, an early Germanic tribe, then came to signify "germanic," then "medieval." "Gothic architecture" now denotes the medieval form of architecture, characterized by the use of the high pointed arch and vault, flying buttresses, and intricate recesses, which spread through western Europe between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries.

The **Gothic novel**, or in an alternative term, **Gothic romance**, is a type of prose fiction which was inaugurated by Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1764)—the subtitle denotes its setting in the Middle Ages—and flourished through the early nineteenth century. Some writers followed Walpole's example by setting their stories in the medieval period; others set them in a Catholic country, especially Italy or Spain. The locale was often a gloomy castle furnished with dungeons, subterranean passages, and sliding panels; the typical story focused on the sufferings imposed on an innocent heroine by a cruel and lustful villain, and made bountiful use of ghosts, mysterious disappearances, and other sensational and supernatural occurrences (which in a number of novels turned out to have natural explanations). The principal aim of such novels was to evoke chilling terror by exploiting mystery and a variety of horrors. Many of them are now read mainly as period pieces, but the best opened up to fiction the realm of the irrational and of the perverse impulses and nightmarish terrors that lie beneath the orderly surface of the civilized mind. Examples of Gothic novels are William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786)—the setting of which is both medieval and Oriental and the subject both erotic and sadistic—Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and other highly successful romances, and Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), which exploited, with considerable literary skill, the shock effects of a narrative involving rape, incest, murder, and diabolism. Jane Austen made good-humored fun of the more decorous instances of the Gothic vogue in *Northanger Abbey* (written 1798, published 1818).

The term "Gothic" has also been extended to a type of fiction which lacks the exotic setting of the earlier romances, but develops a brooding *atmosphere* of gloom and terror, represents events that are uncanny or macabre or melodramatically violent, and often deals with aberrant psychological states. In this extended sense the term "Gothic" has been applied to William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794), Mary Shelley's remarkable and influential *Frankenstein* (1818), and the novels and tales of terror by the German E. T. A. Hoffmann. Still more loosely, "Gothic" has been used to describe elements of the macabre and terrifying that

are included in such later works as Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (for example, chapters 11, 16, and 47) and *Great Expectations* (the Miss Havisham episodes). Critics have recently drawn attention to the many women writers of Gothic fiction, and have explained features of the mode as the result of the suppression of female sexuality, or else as a challenge to the gender hierarchy and values of a male-dominated culture. See *feminist criticism* and refer to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), and Juliann E. Fleenor, ed., *The Female Gothic* (1983).

America, especially the American South, has been fertile in Gothic fiction in the extended sense, from the novels of Charles Brockden Brown (1771–1810) and the terror tales of Edgar Allan Poe to William Faulkner's *Sanctuary* and *Absalom, Absalom!* and some of the fiction of Truman Capote. The nightmarish realm of uncanny terror, violence, and cruelty opened by the Gothic novel continued to be explored in novels such as Daphne du Maurier's popular *Rebecca* (1938) and Iris Murdoch's *The Unicorn*; it is also exploited by authors of horror fiction such as H. P. Lovecraft and Stephen King, and by the writers and directors of innumerable horror movies.

See G. R. Thompson, ed., *The Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark Romanticism* (1974); William Patrick Day, *In the Circles of Fear and Desire* (1985); David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fiction from 1765 to the Present* (1979; 2d ed., 1996); Eugenia DeLamotte, *Perils of the Night* (1990); Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness* (1995); Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd Smith, eds., *Modern Gothic: A Reader* (1996); Fred Botting, *Gothic* (1996); E. J. Clery and Robert Miles, eds., *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook, 1700–1820* (2000). On "American Gothic"—and especially the "southern Gothic"—see Chester E. Eisinger, "The Gothic Spirit in the Forties," *Fiction in the Forties* (1963). For references to *Gothic novel* in other entries, see pages 228, 255, 355.

**grammar:** 173; 347.

**grammar of narration:** 208.

**grand style:** 98.

**Graveyard Poets:** A term applied to eighteenth-century poets who wrote meditative poems, usually set in a graveyard, on the theme of human mortality, in moods which range from elegiac pensiveness to profound gloom. Examples are Thomas Parnell's "Night-Piece on Death" (1721), Edward Young's long *Night Thoughts* (1742), and Robert Blair's "The Grave" (1743). The vogue resulted in one of the best-known English poems, Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1751). The writing of graveyard poems spread from England to Continental literature in the second part of the century and is represented in America by William Cullen Bryant's "Thanatopsis" (1817).

See Amy Louise Reed, *The Background of Gray's Elegy* (1924). Edith M. Sickels, in *The Gloomy Egoist* (1932), follows the evolution of graveyard and other melancholy verse through the Romantic Period. For the vogue in Europe, refer to Paul Von Tieghem, *Le Pré-romantisme* (3 vols., 1924–47).