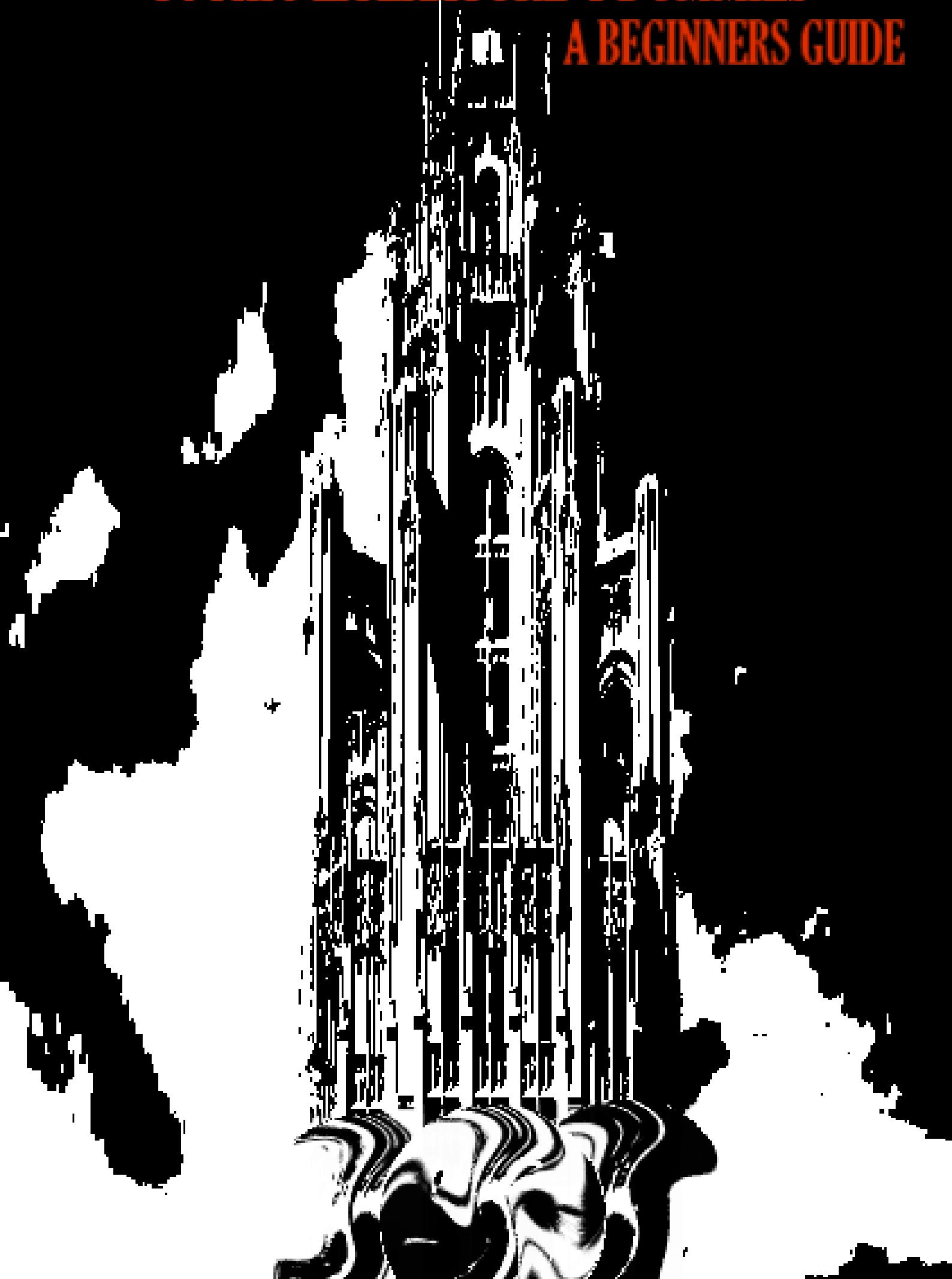


# GOTHIC LITERATURE 4 DUMMIES

## A BEGINNERS GUIDE



- I. What is a gothic story?
- II. Gothic Fiction History
- III. Gender, Sexuality, Race, and the Gothic Genre
- IV. Recommendations
- V. Autobiographical End Note



# I. What is Gothic Fiction?

Writers, English Lit PhDs, and professors will argue until their head turns red, maybe even blue. Here's my criteria for what makes a story a Gothic one:

## 1. The past begins to leak into the present.

Characters are briefly transported into their past. Ghosts of deceased loved ones, unfinished work is now becoming plot relevant, ancestral history is coming back to haunt characters one way or another



## 2. The Supernatural vs. Science

With a basis of science or something naturalistic, the Supernatural creeps into Gothic stories without asking. It reanimates the dead, angry poltergeists, hauntings, and unexplained phenomena.

## 3. The Setting as a Functional Character

A gothic story can't happen anywhere but where the story is originally set. A product of its setting. A castle owned for centuries, a graveyard filled with old dead, and a creepy manor isolated from the rest of the neighbors. The setting has its own unique characteristics that cement it as a permanent part of the story. You can't have Frankenstein without a laboratory—Wuthering Heights without the Moors.

## 4. Societal Ostracization

There is fear of the dark, fear of ghosts, fear of failure. Then there is fear of being scorned by society. This is a unique fear, for it is governed solely by the society at the time. Societal ostracization isolates the main character in a way that something physical can't. Gothic fiction plays with the taboos of society: gravedigging, incest, rape, crossdressing, physical and mental disability, and murder.

## II. The Gothic Literary Canon Timeline

Let's not argue. I'm making definitive statements now. Let's begin the Western Gothic Canon in 1796 with Ann Radcliffe's "The Romance of the Forest".

"But Castle of Otranto in 1764!" You cry, you shout, you bellow.

Otranto is a supernatural novel that is a precursor to many horror and gothic novels. However, I find that Otranto is missing the other criteria that I've decided make a story Gothic. Gilgamesh is a precursor to Isekai fiction. Gilgamesh isn't an Isekai. I say this definitely, but the truth is never definite.

- 1791: *The Romance of the Forest* by Ann Radcliffe
- 1796: *The Monk* by Matthew Gregory Lewis
- 1818: *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley
- 1845: *The Raven* by Edgar Allan Poe
- 1846: *The Double* by Fyodor Dostoevsky
- 1847: *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë
- 1852: *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens
- 1961: *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs
- 1886: *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson
- 1891: *The Picture of Dorian Grey*
- 1897: *Dracula* by Bram Stoker
- 1907: *The Phantom of the Opera* by Gaston Leroux
- 1916: *The Alchemist* by H.P. Lovecraft
- 1930: *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner
- 1938: *Rebecca* by Daphne Du Maurier
- 1959: *Psycho* by Robert Bloch
- 1976: *Interview with a Vampire* by Anne Rice
- 1987: *Beloved* by Toni Morrison
- 1992: *The Secret History* by Donna Tartt
- 2020: *The Only Good Indians* by Stephen Graham Jones
- 2021: *Mexican Gothic* by Silvia Moreno-Garcia

### III. Gender, Sexuality, Race, and the Gothic Genre

Taboos, or the forbidden, are an inherent part of the Gothic genre. As mentioned in my fourth criterion, "Social Ostracization". What is forbidden changes within each society.

#### gender

Oftentimes times, the horror of a female-fronted gothic novel begins and ends with how society treated women. Women in Gothic tales are viewed as going insane or naive. Between heterosexual couples, early Gothic novels often reinforce the strong "evil" of man and the pure innocence of woman.

Interestingly, Female to Male cross-dressing was a theme that repeated in Gothic literature. Most likely, this is to blur the boundaries between men and women and stress the difference in power between the genders. (Starting in 1796, "The Monk" with a woman who disguises herself as a man to enter the monastery, continuing with 1897 "Dracula" who describes female character Mina Harker as having a "man's brain")

#### Sexuality

As long as puritanism prominently exists, sex is forbidden. In Gothic literature, to hunt for pleasure is to hunt for danger. Even though sex is equated with evil, Gothic literature is still unique in detailing the sexual acts themselves. (The Monk stunned readers in the 18th century by going into explicit detail about sexual acts. Dracula aims to seduce his prey. The biological twins in The Secret History have an explicit romantic and sexual relationship playing on two taboos at once).

#### race

Minority races are represented in Gothic literature in two main ways.

One: The Exotic,

i.e., The Persian in Phantom of the Opera, Heathcliff in Wuthering Heights

Two: The Othered,

i.e., Sethe in Beloved's struggle with being a newly freed black slave in the American South, Naomi in Mexican Gothic as she lives with a white family who believes in racial purity

The Exotic will describe characters from another race as having unique mystical properties, thus dehumanizing them to further fit the Supernatural trope of Gothic lit. The Othered uses race as a means to show how they struggle to fit into society and the horror of experiencing oppression and racism.

# IV. Gothic Movie and Video Game Recommendations.

Novels aren't your speed? You could use other media that utilizes Gothic themes? Here are a few recommendations!

## Movies

**Rebecca** 1940 dir. Hitchcock

Using Du Maurier's novel as inspiration, this Hitchcock film invokes fear, anxiety, and the titular Manderly in nearly identical light to the novel.

**Suspries** 1977 dir. Argento

Beautiful movie following a ballet academy which seems to be involved in something sinister and evil.

**Nosferatu** 1922 dir. Murnau

Don't let the silent film fool you, this movie is a classic for a reason.

**Sleepy Hollow** 1999

Don't take my word from it, take my co-worker's word for it "I don't like horror but that movie is still the best movie ever."



**Pathologic 2**

A Russian gothic tale spreading over 12 days. You play as Artemiy, a man returning home to the Russian steppe after dropping out of Medical School. Your father has been murdered, and the threat of a plague is looming over your hometown.

**Fear & Hunger**

Choose a character and trek down the hopeless dungeons of fear and Hunger. You will die again and again and again and

**The House of Fata Morgana**

A visual novel. A strange, ethereal maid has welcomed you into a large Manor. Discover its secrets by opening up the doors and learning the previous manor owner's stories. E

**Sherlock Holmes: The Awakened**

Sherlock Holmes has a new case -investigating the Cthulhu Mythos as imagined by H.P Lovecraft. This classic adventure game style will have you digging deeper as Sherlock Holmes and looking at the supernatural.



## Video Games

## V. Autobiographicaly End Note

Gothic fiction is my catharsis.

In my own mind, I often find comfort in the thought of my death. Suicidality and neuroticism is my bread and butter, a constant background noise to my day-to-day activities. I say this not to ask for pity. I ask for understanding.

In Gothic fiction, protagonists are seduced into the darkness just as I am seduced to suicide by my thoughts. However, I'm not looking for protagonists who fight against the darkness, foolishly banging their heads against the same wall. I'm looking for those on my side. The ones who are tired of fighting. I can feel the release of my own exhaustion in these stories, just as the protagonists driven to insanity feel release in their mental episodes.

Neuroticism in women is seen as a shameful, scary behavior. Extra so, if, like me, you grew up with immigrant family members. I hide my behaviors at work, at home, and in my car. I am constantly working on making sure I appear normal by all standards.

Gothic literature is a way of releasing the normal and embracing the abnormal. It is a way of embracing myself.

## Additional Recommended Texts

Kier-La Janisse's: House of Psychotic Women: An Autobiographical Topography of Female Neurosis in Horror and Exploitation Films

[lithub.com-](https://lithub.com/) On the Evolution of Female-Driven Gothic Narratives: A Reading List by Christine Mangan

The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the 19th Century Literary Imagination by Gilbert and Gubar

Penguin Random House Publishing: So You Want to Read English Gothic Literature: Here's Where to Start