



## Contexts: Authors

### **Edgar Allan Poe (1809 – 1849)**

An American writer, editor, and literary critic. He was the first well-known American writer to try to earn a living through writing alone, resulting in a financially difficult life and career. Poe's best known fiction works are Gothic, a genre that he started writing for simply because it was very popular at the time.

### **Mary Shelley (1797 – 1851)**

Shelley came from a very educated family. Both her parents were philosophers. In 1814, Shelley ran away with one of her father's friends, the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley – who was married at the time. They travelled around Europe together and married after the death of his wife in 1816. She spent many years travelling all over Europe. As well as Gothic fiction, she wrote biographies and travelogues, and edited a lot of work by other writers.

### **Bram Stoker (1847 – 1912)**

Born in Dublin, Ireland. He was the third of seven children. Although he gained a degree in Mathematics from Trinity College, he pursued an interest in the theatre and became a critic, writing reviews for newspapers. In 1890, he visited the coastal town of Whitby and its Gothic abbey inspired him to write *Dracula*. The story was also inspired by his Hungarian friend, Armin Vambery, who told him dark, supernatural stories about the Carpathian Mountains. Stoker spent several years researching European folklore and stories of vampires whilst working on 'Dracula'. The novel was published in 1897.

## Plot Summaries

### ***The Woman in Black***

London-based solicitor Arthur Kipps travels to the market town of Crythin Grifford to sort through the papers of recently-deceased Mrs. Alice Drablow. Whilst staying at Eel Marsh House, Kipps sees The Woman in Black, whom the people of the town believe causes the death of children. After discovering the woman's identity – that she is Mrs. Drablow's estranged sister – he returns to London. Years later, he sees The Woman in Black again, just before the death of his wife and his son.

### ***The Raven***

This narrative poem is about a demonic raven tormenting the speaker about his lost love until he falls into madness.

### ***The Tell-Tale Heart***

The story is told by an unnamed narrator who tries to convince the reader of his sanity, while describing a murder he committed. The victim was an old man with a filmy "vulture-eye", as the narrator calls it. The murderer hides the body by dismembering it and hiding it under the floorboards. Ultimately, the narrator's feelings of guilt, or a mental disturbance, result in him hearing the dead man's beating heart.

### ***Frankenstein***

Explorer Robert Walton discovers scientist Victor Frankenstein on his expedition to the North Pole. Frankenstein tells him the story of how he experimented with electricity and brought a creature – made up of dead body parts – to life. The Creature escapes and whilst in hiding learns that it disgusts others. In anger, it murders Frankenstein's brother, but then begs his creator to make him a companion. When Frankenstein refuses, the Creature murders his wife. At the end of the story, Frankenstein dies on Walton's ship and the Creature appears and weeps over his dead body.

### ***Dracula***

Solicitor Jonathan Harker visits the mysterious Count Dracula in his castle in the Eastern European country of Transylvania. Although he is initially entranced by the Count, he soon realises he is being kept prisoner. Barely escaping with his life, Harker boards a ship back to England which docks in Whitby. A young woman named Lucy, a friend of Harker's fiancée, Mina, is stalked by Dracula who feeds on her blood and turns her into a vampire. Dracula also feeds on Mina's blood and tries to control her. Dutch doctor, Abraham Van Helsing, is called upon to help defeat Dracula. Harker and Van Helsing chase Dracula back to his castle in Transylvania and manage to kill him by stabbing him through the heart.



# Year 9 Autumn 2 Gothic Literature: Knowledge Organiser



## Spellings

Mysterious	Alchemy
Malevolent	Galvanism
Deathly	Solicitor
Abandoned	Monstrous
Supernatural	Vampirism
Genre	Nightmare
Isolated	Suspense

## Key Themes

- The supernatural
- The unknown
- Mystery
- Isolation
- Monsters
- Evil
- Death/Murder
- Remote settings
- Darkness
- Psychological breakdown

## Gothic Conventions

- Abandoned houses, supposedly uninhabited
- Isolated, bleak settings
- Majority of the story takes place at night/in darkness
- Supernatural entity that wants revenge
- Death of a character or those close to a character
- Frequent use of the colour black
- Rational protagonist who doesn't believe in the supernatural
- Presence of evil/religious imagery
- Inhuman or monstrous antagonist
- Use of tension and suspense to create fear

## Origins of Gothic Literature

The term 'Gothic' was first coined in 1764 by English author Horace Walpole in his novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, which he subtitled 'A Gothic Story'. The novel was set in a haunted castle where the protagonist is plagued by supernatural occurrences.

Walpole used the word 'Gothic' because it refers to medieval buildings like castles and churches, where a lot of Gothic fiction is set.

Gothic Literature became immensely popular in England and Germany during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, with many other genres borrowing its conventions.

Gothic fiction is all about creating terror in the reader and using fear to create suspense.

## Stylistic Features and Methods

- **Pathetic Fallacy** – When the weather reflects the tone/mood of the scene.
- **Adjective** – Describes a noun.
- **Antagonist** – The villain of the story.
- **Dramatic Monologue** – A type of poem meant to be read out by a single speaker.
- **Epistolary Narrative** – A story told in a series of letters.
- **Motif** – A dominant or recurring idea.
- **Cryptid** – A creature whose existence is disputed due to insubstantial evidence.
- **Abstract Noun** – An idea, quality, or state rather than a solid object, e.g. truth, danger, happiness.
- **Interrogative Sentence** – A sentence which asks a question.
- **Olfactory Imagery** – Imagery to describe a smell.

## Key Quotations

*The Woman in Black*: "The house felt like a ship at sea, battered by the gale that came roaring across the open marsh."

*The Raven*: "Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!" Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

*The Tell-Tale Heart*: "I heard many things in hell. How then am I mad?"

*Frankenstein*: "It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils"

*Dracula*: "The mouth, so far as I could see it under the heavy moustache, was fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth."