

# THE DARK ROMANTIC/ GOTHIC SHORT STORY

The Dark Romantics. Their stories are chilling, gripping, twisted...and we love them. The writing is suspenseful and detailed, while the characters are ambiguous. Yet through all of this, the reader sees human nature and guilt. Poe stressed that short story writers must select each detail with great care. Every detail must help create "a certain unique or single effect." Below, I have included 6 different characteristics, which include elements, metonymy, primordial symbols, vocabulary, romance, and the gothic conclusion.

## I. Gothic Elements:

1. **Setting in a castle.** The action takes place in and around an old castle, sometimes seemingly abandoned, sometimes occupied. The castle often contains secret passages, trap doors, secret rooms, dark or hidden staircases, and possibly ruined sections. The castle may be near or connected to caves, which lend their own haunting flavor with their branches, claustrophobia, and mystery. (Translated into modern filmmaking, the setting might be in an old house or mansion--or even a new house--where unusual camera angles, sustained close ups during movement, and darkness or shadows create the same sense of claustrophobia and entrapment.)
2. **An atmosphere of mystery and suspense.** The work is pervaded by a threatening feeling, a fear enhanced by the unknown. Often the plot itself is built around a mystery, such as unknown parentage, a disappearance, or some other inexplicable event. Elements 3, 4, and 5 below contribute to this atmosphere. (Again, in modern filmmaking, the inexplicable events are often murders.)
3. **An ancient prophecy** is connected with the castle or its inhabitants (either former or present). The prophecy is usually obscure, partial, or confusing. "What could it mean?" In more watered down modern examples, this may amount to merely a legend: "It's said that the ghost of old man Krebs still wanders these halls."
4. **Omens, portents, visions.** A character may have a disturbing dream, vision, or some phenomenon may be seen as a portent of coming events. For example, if the stature of the lord of the manor falls over, it may portend his death. In modern fiction, a character might see something (a shadowy figure stabbing another shadowy figure) and think that it was a dream. This might be thought of as an "imitation vision".
5. **Supernatural or otherwise inexplicable events.** Dramatic, amazing events occur, such as ghosts or giants walking, or inanimate objects (such as a suit of armor or painting) coming to life. In some works, the events are ultimately given a natural explanation, while in others the events are truly supernatural.
6. **High, even overwrought emotion.** The narration may be highly sentimental, and the characters are often overcome by anger, sorrow, surprise, and especially, terror. Characters suffer from raw nerves and a feeling of impending doom. Crying and emotional speeches are frequent. Breathlessness and panic are common. In the filmed gothic, screaming is common.
7. **Women in distress.** As an appeal to the pathos and sympathy of the reader, the female characters often face events that leave them fainting, terrified, screaming, and/or sobbing. A lonely, pensive, and oppressed heroine is often the central figure of the novel, so her sufferings are even more pronounced and the focus of attention. The women suffer all the more because they are often abandoned, left alone (either on purpose or by accident), and have no protector at times.
8. **Women threatened by a powerful, impulsive, tyrannical male.** One or more male characters has the power, as king, lord of the manor, father, or guardian, to demand that one or more of the female characters do something intolerable. The women may be commanded to marry someone she does not love (it may even be the powerful male himself), or commit a crime.

9. **Byronic Hero.** Dark, handsome appearance; brilliant but cynical and self-destructive. Traits may include: "Wandering," searching behavior, haunted by some secret sin or crime, sometimes hints of forbidden love, modern culture hero: appeals to society by standing apart from society, superior yet wounded or unrewarded

II. **The metonymy of gloom and horror.** Metonymy is a subtype of metaphor, in which something (like rain) is used to stand for something else (like sorrow). For example, the film industry likes to use metonymy as quick shorthand, so we often notice that it is raining in funeral scenes. Note that the following metonymies for "doom and gloom" all suggest some element of mystery, danger, or the supernatural.

Wind, especially howling	Rain, especially blowing
Doors grating on rusty hinges	Signs, moans, howls, eerie sounds
Footsteps approaching	Clanking chains
Lights in abandoned rooms	Gusts of winds blowing out lights
Characters trapped in a room	Doors suddenly slamming shut
Ruins of buildings	Baying of distant dogs (or wolves?)
Thunder and lightning	Crazed laughter

III. **Primordial Symbols.** These exist from the beginning of time. All humans share certain inborn impulses and concepts in the mind at the unconscious level.

Dark forests	Danger, obscurity, confusion, and the unknown with evil, sin, and death
River	Passage of time
Overcast sky	Gloom and depression
Flowers	Delicacy, beauty (or the opposite if dying)
Lamb	Innocence
Violent storm	Wrath, inconsolable grief
Colors	White = purity, innocence
Water	Rebirth or birth
Seasons	ie. Autumn = old age/Winter = death

#### IV. Elements of Romance

In addition to the standard gothic machinery above, many gothic novels contain elements of romance as well. Elements of romance include these:

1. **Powerful love.** Heart stirring, often sudden, emotions create life or death commitment. Many times this love is the first the character has felt with overwhelming power.
2. **Uncertainty of reciprocation.** What is the beloved thinking? Is the lover's love returned or not?
3. **Unreturned love.** Someone loves in vain (at least temporarily). Later, the love may be returned.

4. **Tension between true love and father's control**, disapproval, or choice. Most often, the father of the women disapproves of the man she loves.
5. **Lovers parted**. Some obstacle arises and separates the lovers, geographically or in some other way. One of the lovers is banished, arrested, forced to flee, locked in a dungeon, or sometimes, disappears without explanation. Or, an explanation may be given (by the person opposing lover's being together) that turns out to be false.
6. **Illicit love or lust threatens the virtuous one**. The young woman becomes a target of some evil man's desires and schemes.
7. **Rival lovers or multiple suitors**. One of the lovers (or even both) can have more than one person vying for attention. **The vocabulary of the gothic**. The constant use of the appropriate vocabulary set creates the atmosphere of the gothic.

## V. Vocabulary

<b>Mystery</b>	Diabolical, enchantment, ghost, goblins, haunted, infernal, magic, magician, miracle, necromancer, omens, ominous, portent, preternatural, prodigy, prophecy, secret, sorcerer, specter, spirits, strangeness, talisman, vision
<b>Fear, Terror, or Sorrow</b>	Afflicted, affliction, agony, anguish, apprehensions, apprehensive, commiseration, concern, despair, dismal, dismay, dread, dreaded, dreading, fearing, frantic, fright, frightened, grief, hopeless, horrid, horror, lamentable, melancholy, miserable, mournfully, panic, sadly, scared, shrieks, sorrow, sympathy, tears, terrible, terrified, terror, unhappy, wretched
<b>Surprise</b>	Alarm, amazement, astonished, astonishment, shocking, staring, surprise, surprised, thunderstruck, wonder
<b>Haste</b>	Anxious, breathless, flight, frantic, hastened, hastily, impatience, impatient, impatiently, impetuosity, precipitately, running, sudden, suddenly
<b>Anger</b>	Anger, angrily, cholera, enraged, furious, fury, incense, incensed, provoked, rage, raving, resentment, temper, wrath, wrathful, wrathfully
<b>Largeness</b>	Enormous, gigantic, giant, large, tremendous, vast

## VI. Conclusion

The Dark Romantics often place the climax at the very end of the story. You are left with a twist, and the story ends on that note. In addition, the ending is "dark" and reflects the sinful nature/guilt of the character(s). Ambiguity is used in Gothic literature to create mood and thought, as well.