

Characteristics of Southern Literature

- A focus on Southern History
- Significance of family
- A sense of community and one's role within it
- A sense of justice
- Religion and the burdens/rewards religion often brings
- Issues of racial tension
- Land and the promise it brings
- A sense of social class and place
- Southern dialect

Southern Gothic

- Uses the macabre, supernatural, grotesque, and ironic to examine the values of the South
- Known for its damaged and delusional characters
- First popularized by Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Ambrose Bierce
- Portrays a world in ruins
- Often deals with the plight of those who are ostracized or oppressed by traditional Southern culture
- When southern gothic authors examine the human condition, they see the potential to do harm.
- Morality is in question for many characters.
- A major theme for southern gothic writers hinges on innocence, and the innocent's place in the world — they are often asked to act as redeemer.

Elements of the Southern Gothic Genre:

Freakishness

In most southern gothic stories, there is a pivotal character or someone close to them who is set apart from the world by a disability or odd way of seeing the world. You won't meet very many "normal" characters in the writings of William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Truman Capote or Carson McCullers—and this is by design. This fascination with the outsider is in many ways used to show readers not only the individuality of the southern culture, but also to connect each reader to their own unique "freakish" nature.

Imprisonment

This is often both literal and figurative. While many southern gothic tales include an incident where a character is sent to jail or locked up, there are also several gothic characters that live in *fate's* prison without hope of parole.

Violence

Southern gothic writers covered a period in the South's history when violence was particularly prevalent. After the bloodshed of the Civil War, and the period of reconstruction that followed, racial tension and fear ran high in many small southern towns. This plays its part in many of the stories of this genre.

Sense of Place

It wouldn't be southern gothic if you didn't feel like you'd been thrust in the center of a dusty, peach-scented, lonely downtown where porch-bound widows rock gently on creaky rockers, rusty pick-up trucks drive by filled with grimy farmhands, the general store is run by the town drunk, and flies and mosquitoes circle glasses of ice-filled lemonade. The sense of place is strong—awash in calm, pregnant heat, lost dreams and wayward souls.