

Southern Gothic Writing

- “Southern gothic, a genre of the American South, retreats from the dark castles and clanking chains of 19th-century European literature to embrace the moody romance, mystery, terror, and grotesqueries”(4).
- Examples: William Faulkner’s “A Rose For Mary”, and novels by Eudora Welty.

Background

- Sub genre of the Gothic Genre
 - Popular in Europe in the 1800's
 - Frankenstein by Mary Shelley
 - Dracula by Bram Stoker
 - Unique to American literature
 - Relies on the supernatural, ironic or unusual events to guide the plot.
 - Uses these to explore social issues and to reveal the cultural character of the American South

Background

- Takes classic Gothic archetypes, such as the monster or the heroic knight, and turns them into American Southerners. Example: Spiteful reclusive spinster; an uneducated drunk, a quiet, wise lawyer.
- Most notable is the “grotesque”
 - A character whose negative qualities allow the author to highlight unpleasant aspects of southern culture.
 - Something in the town, the house, the farm is bizarre and often falling apart.

Defining Feature

- Cast off-killer characters
 - Broken bodies or souls—used symbolize problems created by the established pattern. Also used to question established pattern's morality and ethical justification.
 - The “innocent” is a common character, who may or may not be “broken,” but often acts as a redeemer for others.

Other Features of the Southern Gothic

- Freakishness
- Outsider
- Imprisonment
- Violence
- Sense of Place

Freakishness

- In most Southern gothic stories , there is an important character who is set apart from the world but in a negative by.
- This character might have a disability or an odd or often negative way of seeing the world.

Outsider

- Southern novels are filled with characters who are set apart from the established cultural pattern, but who end up being heroes because their differences allow them to see new ways of doing things that ultimately help to bring people out of the 'dark'

Imprisonment

- This is often both literal and figurative
 - Many Southern gothic tales include an incident where a character is sent to jail or locked up
 - There are also Southern gothic characters that live in 'fates' prison.

Violence

- Racial, social, and class difference often create underlying tension in Southern gothic novels that threatens, and usually does, erupt in violent ways.

Sense of Place

- You cannot read a Southern gothic novel without understanding what a Southern town ‘feels’ like:
 - Old, small towns
 - Houses have front porches with rocking chairs
 - Old downtown with stately but worn-down buildings.

Great Southern Novels

- To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee
- Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison
- The Color Purple by Alice Walker
- Gone With The Wind by Margaret Mitchell
- In Cold Blood by Truman Capote
- The Mind of The South by Wilbur Cash

Great Southern Writers

There are numerous famous southern authors.

Each person had different life experiences, thus they wrote and included varying themes in their books. Themes vary from reader to reader but prominent ones in southern works include: injustice, prejudice, standing up for your beliefs and many more.

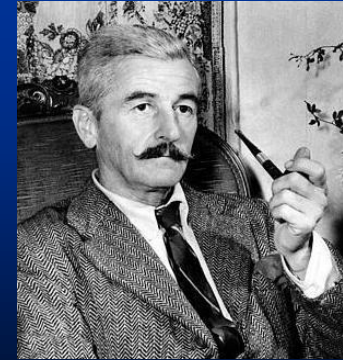
Margaret Mitchell



Margaret grew up hearing stories of war and wishing she was a boy so she could fight. As a young adult, Margaret Mitchell's mother passed away while she was attending college. She went back home to be with her family, but had great difficulty getting along with her father due to her independent nature.

Displayed in Gone With The Wind
(Scarlett)

William Faulkner



Many say William's short stories resembled his life. They included struggles with rage, alcoholism, and adultery. Each of these hardships were sadly common in Southern America during the 1920s through 1950s and even today. His works were famous in the South and encouraged many more southern novels.

Flannery O'Connor

Religion was a key factor in her life and thus reflected in her writing. She devout Roman Catholic but many of the characters in her books were Protestant.

“It was her observation that Protestants expressed their faith through dramatic action, something she did not see in Catholics” (7).



Impact of Southern Writing on The Literary World

With the arousal of southern literature came a new more authentic style of writing. They went against the grain by using small town issues and “average joe” dialect that made “their” South come to life. Many novels also aided in awareness on issues like racism and poverty.

With the unassuming grace of the great south these authors have enlightened us on a culture filled with romanticism and lamentable family values.

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