CHAPTER II

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION IN GOTHIC LITERATURE

2.1. Historical Background of Gothic Literature

The historical background of Gothic literature as been cited in http://cai.ucdavis.edu/waters-sites/gothicnovel/155breport.html. Gothic has come to mean quite a number of things by this day and age. It could mean a particular style of art, be it in the form of novels, paintings, or architecture; it could mean medieval or uncouth. It could even refer to a certain type of music and its fans. The original meaning is something that is relating to, or resembling the Goths, their civilization, or their language.

The word ‘Goth’ derives originally from certain Germanic tribes who made attacks on the Roman Empire between the 3rd and 5th centuries AD. Since Rome and Greece were the seat of civilisation, the people of Northern Europe were considered barbarians. Indeed, the words ‘Goth’ and ‘Gothic’ have become synonymous with barbarism.

Centuries passed before the word ‘gothic’ meant anything else again. During the Renaissance, Europeans rediscovered Greco-Roman culture and began to regard a particular type of architecture, mainly those built during the Middle Ages, as Gothic, which is considered that these buildings were barbaric and definitely not in that Classical style they so admired. Centuries more passed before Gothic came to describe a certain type of novels, so named because all these novels seem to take place in Gothic-styled architecture, mainly castles, mansions, and abbeys.

Gothic was a literary form in the late eighteenth century. As a literary term, gothic can be defined as the subgenre of the novel with eerie, supernatural or horrifying events.

Gothic fiction is an European Romantic, portrayed fantastic tales dealing with the terrifying, archaic settings, which usually gives shape to concepts of
exploration and exploitation of the supernatural and dark, emotional plots that investigate closely to the unconscious human mind.

According to Elizabeth MacAndrew in her book, *The Gothic Tradition in Fiction* (1979 : 3), she said:

Gothic fiction is a literature of nightmare. Among its conventions are found dream landscapes and figures of the subconscious imagination. Its fictional form to amorphous fears and impulses common to all mankind, using an amalgam of materials, some torn from the author’s own subconscious mind and some the stuff of myth, folklore, fairy tale, and romance.

Gothic literature is generally believed to have begun in the year 1765 with the publication of *The Castle of Otranto*, by Horace Walpole and the meaning of the word ‘Gothic’ sort of switched from “medieval” to “macabre”. It should be noted that this novel was published in the 18th century, after the philosophical movement known as the Enlightenment had attempted to bring reason to the world, and to banish superstition. *The Castle of Otranto* is a novel in which the ingredients are the haunted castle, a villain named Manfred, mysterious deaths, supernatural happenings, a moaning ancestral portrait, and as the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* (2001.2) puts it, “violent emotions of terror, anguish and love.” The work was tremendously popular and imitations are followed in such numbers that the gothic novel was probably the commonest type of fiction in England for the next half century.

The first purpose of Gothic fiction, like that of sentimental novel, to which it was closely allied to educate the reader’s feelings through his identification with the feelings of the character; to arise his “sympathy” as the aesthetic of sensibility demanded; and to explore the mind of man and the causes of evil in it, so that evil might be avoided and virtue fostered.

Horace Walpole uses such means to make his readers experience ideas about human nature and the place of evil in the human mind. Other authors, following him, used the same devices-closed worlds, mediated narratives, ancient houses, dark villains, and perfect heroines for the same purpose. New devices were added later, but the purposes remained unchanged.
His most respectable follower was Ann Radcliffe, who’s "Mysteries of Udolpho" (1794) and "Italian" (1797) are among the best examples of the genre. A more sensational type of Gothic romance exploiting horror and violence flourished in Germany and was introduced to England by Matthew Gregory Lewis with "The Monk" (1796). Other landmarks of Gothic fiction are William Beckford’s Oriental romance "Vathek" (1786), which blended cruelty, terror and eroticism introduced the grotesque into the genre; and Charles Robert Marutin’s story of an Irish Faust, "Melmoth the Wanderer" (1820). The classic horror stories "Frankenstein" (1818), by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, and "Dracula" (1897), by Bram Stoker, are in the Gothic tradition but without the specifically Gothic trappings.

The following authors also added the new elements to the Gothic tradition and produced works whose further implications could again be picked up by them to add the new element to the developing of the genre. This process continued throughout the nineteenth century, as writers express the views of the later age in the same way.

The early Gothic romances died of their own extravagances of plot, but Gothic atmospheric machinery continued to haunt the fiction of such major writers as Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne and even Dickens.

The Gothic works of the nineteenth century seem to suggest that the era of nightmares were more terrible than in the eighteenth century. The development of Gothic elements continued throughout the nineteenth century, as writers expressed their views in the same way. Settings were changed from medieval to contemporary. A man’s house turned out to be still his Gothic castle and his soul, already reflected in paintings and statues, began to look back at him from mirrors and, worse, from his double, a living and breathing copy of himself.

Edgar Allan Poe uses other grotesques in a variety of ways. He introduces the atmosphere of hysteria and the decorative grotesque appears in his story. The decorative grotesque appear in "The Oval Portrait" (1842), "Ligeia"(1838) and "The Masque of the Red Death" (1842). Poe’s animal figures are also grotesques and appear in "The Balck Cat" (1843) , "Hop-Frog" (1849) and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841).
The Gothic influenced persisted throughout the nineteenth century in such works as Sheridan Le Fanu’s *The House by the Churchyard* and *Green Tea*, Wilkie Collin’s *The Moonstone* and Bram Stoker’s vampire tale *Dracula*. The influence was revived in the twentieth century by science fiction and fantasy writers such as Mervyn Peake in his *Gormenghast series*.

In the twentieth century, characters, settings, tone, plot are treated realistically. It is influenced by the widespread general knowledge of psychology and is reflected in the melding of Gothic fantasy and realistic fiction that can already be seen in the late nineteenth century. The setting does not change much as in nineteenth century, but it develops into a Southern town, a city house, an army camp in peacetime, or Central Park.

### 2.2. Characteristics of Gothic Literature

According to the *Dictionary of Literary Term & Literary Theory* (1996: 356), most Gothic novels are tales of mystery and horror, intended to chill the spine and curdle the blood. They contain a strong element of the supernatural and have all or most of the now familiar topography, sites, props, presences and happenings: wild and desolate landscapes, dark forests, ruined abbeys, feudal halls and medieval castles with dungeons, secret passages, winding stairways, oubliettes, sliding panels and torture chambers; monstrous apparitions and curses; a stupefying atmosphere of doom and gloom; heroes and heroines in the direst of imaginable straits, wicked tyrants, malevolent witches, demonic powers of unspeakably hideous aspect, and a proper complement of spooky effects and clanking spectres.

Edgar Allan Poe is one of the famous Gothic poet, critic and writers. Poe’s writing is always characterized by the elements of Gothic such as brooding atmosphere, thrilling exploration of characters in various states of extremity, sinister, violence and insanity. In this thesis, I will describe the three main characteristics of Gothic. They are mystery, horror and madness of the character.
2.2.1. Mystery

According to *Merriam Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature* (1995: 793), mystery is a work of fiction in which the evidence related to a crime or to a mysterious event. It so presented that the reader has an opportunity to solve the problem and the author’s solution being to final phase of the piece.

The mystery story is an age-old popular genre and is related to several other forms. Elements of mystery may be present in narratives of horror or terror, pseudoscientific fantasies, crime stories, accounts of diplomatic intrigue, affair of codes and ciphers and secret societies, or any situation involving an enigma. Edgar Allan Poe’s short story *The Gold Bug* is a classic example of one perennially popular type of mystery.

2.2.2. Horror

Horror is the usual but not necessarily the main ingredient of Gothic fiction. According to *Merriam Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature* (1995: 559), horror story focuses on creating a feeling of fear. It takes big part in forming the body of folk literature. They can have supernatural elements and features such as ghosts, witches or vampires or they can address more realistic psychological fears.

According to the *Dictionary of Literary terms & Literary Theory* (1996: 388, 389,396) the word *horror* derives from Latin *horrere* ‘to make the hair stand on end, tremble, and shudder’. It is not clear when the term ‘horror story’ first came into use. Apart from being about murder, suicide, torture, fear and madness, horror stories are also concerned with ghosts, vampires, *doppelgangers*, succubi, incubi, poltergeists, demonic pacts, diabolic possession and exorcism, witchcraft, spiritualism, voodoo, lycanthropy and the macabre, plus such occult or quasi-occult practices as telekinesis and hylomancy. Some horror stories are serio-comic or comic-grotesque, but none the less alarming or frightening for that.

From late in the 18th century until the present day – in short, for some two hundred years – the horror story in its many and various forms has been a diachronic feature of British and American literature and is of considerable importance in literary history, especially in the evolution of the short story. It is also important because of its connections with the Gothic novel and with a
multitude of fiction associated with tales of mystery, suspense, terror and the supernatural, with the ghost story and the thriller and with numerous stories in the 19th and 10th century in which crime is a central theme.

In the hands of a serious and genuinely imaginative writer the horror story explores the limits of what people are capable of doing and experiencing. Such a writer ventures into the realms of psychological chaos, emotional waste-lands, psychic trauma, abysses opened up by the imagination. He or she explores the capacity for experiencing fear, hysteria and madness, all that lies on the dark side of the mind and the near side of barbarism; what lurks on and beyond the shifting frontiers of consciousness and where, perhaps, there dwell ultimate horrors or concepts of horror and terror.

The horror story which through the Gothic novel becomes so popular, is part of a long process by which people have tried to come to terms with and find adequate descriptions and symbols for deeply rooted, primitive and powerful forces, energies and fears which are related to death, afterlife, punishment, darkness, evil, violence and destruction.

Edgar Allan Poe raised the horror story to a level far above mere entertainment through their skilful intermingling of reason and madness, eerie atmosphere and everyday reality. Poe had already shown a gift for writing about the horrific in The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym (1838). His tales are short, intense, and sensational and have the power to inspire horror and terror. He depicts extremes of fear, suffering and insanity and, through the operations of evil, gives us glimpses of hell. Among his most notable horror stories are The Fall of the House of Usher (1839), The Murders in the Rue Morgue (1841), A Descent into the Maelstrom(1841), The Masque of the Red Death (1842), The Pit and the Pendulum, The Black Cat and The Tell-tale Heart (all 1843), The Case of M. Valdemar (1845) and The Cask of Amontillado (1846). Poe’s long term influence was immeasurable and one can detect it persisting through the 19th century.
2.2.3. Madness of character

Madness of character is one of the Gothic elements, which is almost always appears in Gothic fiction. It is a change of the character’s attitude, which is influenced by evil thought, crime, superstitious belief, and obsession and so on. According to a website about elements of the Gothic Novel, usually the characters that get mad are male characters while the women are 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, suffering and destroyed by the madness that consumes the male character. It is also a characteristic of Gothic element.