

The Social and Historical Context of the 19th Century

<p>Social Class</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. By 1860, although most people in Britain could read and write, books were well beyond the income of ordinary people. 2. Many novels were published in parts—in the three-volume form, or by a monthly dose, or even in a weekly magazine. 3. Society was strictly layered - not only into rich and poor, or even upper, middle and lower class, but hundreds of 'grades'. People were expected to 'know their place', and the Church taught them to be content in their 'station'. 4. At the time, many people were becoming aware of the need to improve the condition in which the poor found themselves. Britain had narrowly escaped revolution unlike it's European counterparts.
<p>Industrial Revolution</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. From 1780 factory owners in Britain began to use coal-fired steam engines to power the machines in big factories, bringing great fortune. 2. The Victorian period saw many major developments that made travel, communications and trade easier for many people. The railways allowed people to travel cheaply and rapidly, opening up new possibilities for both rich and poor. 3. The 1840s was a time of railway madness. Trains were cheaper and faster than canal boats or horse drawn carriages. 4. Many of the things we take for granted today, such as photography, telephones, electric light bulbs and cars were invented during Queen Victoria's reign. 5. People flocked from the countryside to the cities. London's population between 1800 and 1900 from 1 million to 6 million people. 6. Everything converted from traditional, manual labour to machine-driven, highly-productive labour. This caused a reduction in the amount of men needed for work, which therefore increased poverty levels and crime in the cities. Working with machinery was also was more dangerous and life threatening for the workers. 7. This led to over-crowding and hunger, disease and crime. There were no proper drainage / sewage systems. Many families had to share one tap / toilet. Children suffered the most and were exploited by factory owners who forced them to work long hours in dangerous conditions. 8. The spread of education and affluence in the Victorian era encouraged innovation, experimentation and scientific ideas.
<p>Women's Rights</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rights and privileges of Victorian women were limited, and both single and married women had to live with hardships and disadvantages. 2. Victorian women were disadvantaged both financially and sexually, enduring inequalities within their marriages and society. 3. There were sharp distinctions between men's and women's rights during this era; men were allotted more stability, financial status and power over their homes and women. 4. Marriages for Victorian women became contracts which were extremely difficult if not impossible to get out of during the Victorian era. 5. In the Victorian era women were seen, by the middle classes at least, as belonging to the domestic sphere, and this stereotype required them to provide their husbands with a clean home, to put food on the table and to raise their children. 6. Women's rights were extremely limited in this era, losing ownership of their wages, all of their physical property, excluding land property, and all other cash they generated once married.
<p>Religion</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Christianity held a strong influence in Victorian Britain, especially amongst the middle / upper classes. 2. Good Christians believed in a strict moral code – attending church regularly. 3. Sabbatarianism – when people spent Sunday going to church and resting. Dickens was opposed to this because it meant that working poorer people were denied any enjoyment on their one day off – everything was shut. 4. Charles Darwin's <i>On the Origin of Species</i> (1859) seemed to disprove creation (the belief that God created the world and that it had started with Adam and Eve), and substituted the new idea of 'evolution'. 5. Many people saw science and a belief in religion and the supernatural as being at odds with each other. A lot felt they had to choose between the two. And many believed that science had become dangerous and was meddling in matters which only God had control over.
<p>Capitalism</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The word capital means “something of value”. Capitalism is an economic system in which people who own the means of production (factories, land, shops, tools, machines, shipping companies etc.) are able to make a lot of money by producing what people want and need. 2. The profit is not shared with the employees. Some people argue that this system hurts workers, because businesses make more money by selling things than they pay the workers. Business owners become rich while workers remain poor and exploited.

Victorian Gothic Literature Context

- ⇒ The term 'Victorian Gothic literature' refers to a revival of Gothic literature, which took place in the mid-nineteenth century.
- ⇒ Authors of this revived literature used the themes and motifs from Gothic literature of the previous century, but combined this with more realistic elements, including a focus on science and psychology.
- ⇒ The name of the Gothic movement is taken from the type of architecture that the stories commonly featured, e.g. old, crumbling castles, abbeys, churches, monasteries etc.
- ⇒ Gothic literature prior to the Victorian era were often very shocking and scandalous, aiming to create a sense of terror in the reader.
- ⇒ With the arrival of the Victorian era and the Industrial Revolution, which saw vast and rapid social and economic change, many authors decided to discard some of the less believable elements of the Gothic and try to make the genre more realistic.
- ⇒ Victorian Gothic literature took many of the familiar tropes and themes of Gothic literature but, instead of setting them in distant castles and other wild settings, placed them in places that would be more familiar to the reader.
- ⇒ Victorian Gothic literature contained the same focus on the supernatural but also often kept the endings ambiguous, leaving the readers to question whether the thrilling events of the story have rational explanations or are indeed the results of supernatural activity.
- ⇒ One of the most interesting aspects of Victorian Gothic literature was the fascination with science. At this time, science was still an emerging field, and one that many people regarded with distrust.
- ⇒ The Victorian Gothic also explored the idea that human nature is weak and easily swayed to evil.

Archetypal Characters

- Protagonists with exaggerated characteristics fitting for their social class.
- Strong-minded women who try to challenge the status quo contrasted with submissive domesticated women.
- Characters possessing fatal flaws that are often seen to make errors in judgment based on morality.
- Eligible, intellectual bachelors with hidden duality.
- Villains, heroes, orphans, criminal children.

Methods and Motifs

Clash between time periods	For most people in the nineteenth century, new technology (for example, trains) evoked fear among many people. This fear of the unknown, and scepticism linked with distrust of science, led people to fall back into the belief of supernatural powers.	The supernatural	This is defined as that which cannot be explained by science and seems to involve ghosts, spirits, magic, etc. Writers would sometimes combine this with superstition (a belief or way of behaving that is based on fear of the unknown and faith in magic or luck.)
Realism	Literary realism is a literary movement that represents reality by portraying mundane, everyday experiences as they are in real life. It depicts familiar people, places, and stories, primarily about the middle and lower classes of society. Literary realism seeks to tell a story as truthfully as possible instead of dramatising or romanticising it.	Terror and horror	The distinction between horror and terror is a standard literary and psychological concept applied especially to Gothic and horror fiction. Terror is usually described as the feeling of dread and anticipation that precedes the horrifying experience. By contrast, horror is the feeling of revulsion that usually follows a frightening sight, sound, or otherwise experience.
Darkness/isolated settings/pathetic fallacy	Writers enlisted various settings, including: isolated places, situations which were ambiguous, using pathetic fallacy to create a sinister or fearsome effect, or subverting a normal situation with the anticipation of a dreadful event, etc..	Characters who seem to be outsiders or contradict social norms	Explore the writer's choice of character: are they everyday people or are they flamboyant and out of the ordinary? How has the writer manipulated the choice of character to fit into the story?
Madness	The story becomes a conflict between the narrator's reason, and a terror that threatens to overwhelm his intellect. Although Gothic stories deal with the psychology of fear, the focus is usually on what causes the fear. More often than not, this turns out to be a supernatural element, which may or may not be real. If it is real, then we can heave a sigh of relief: there's no reason to have been afraid after all. In ambiguous and stressful situations, we often question whether we're seeing things clearly, or what the nature of reality is. Some writers add further confusion by inserting dreams or nightmares, which the characters then find difficult to separate from reality.		