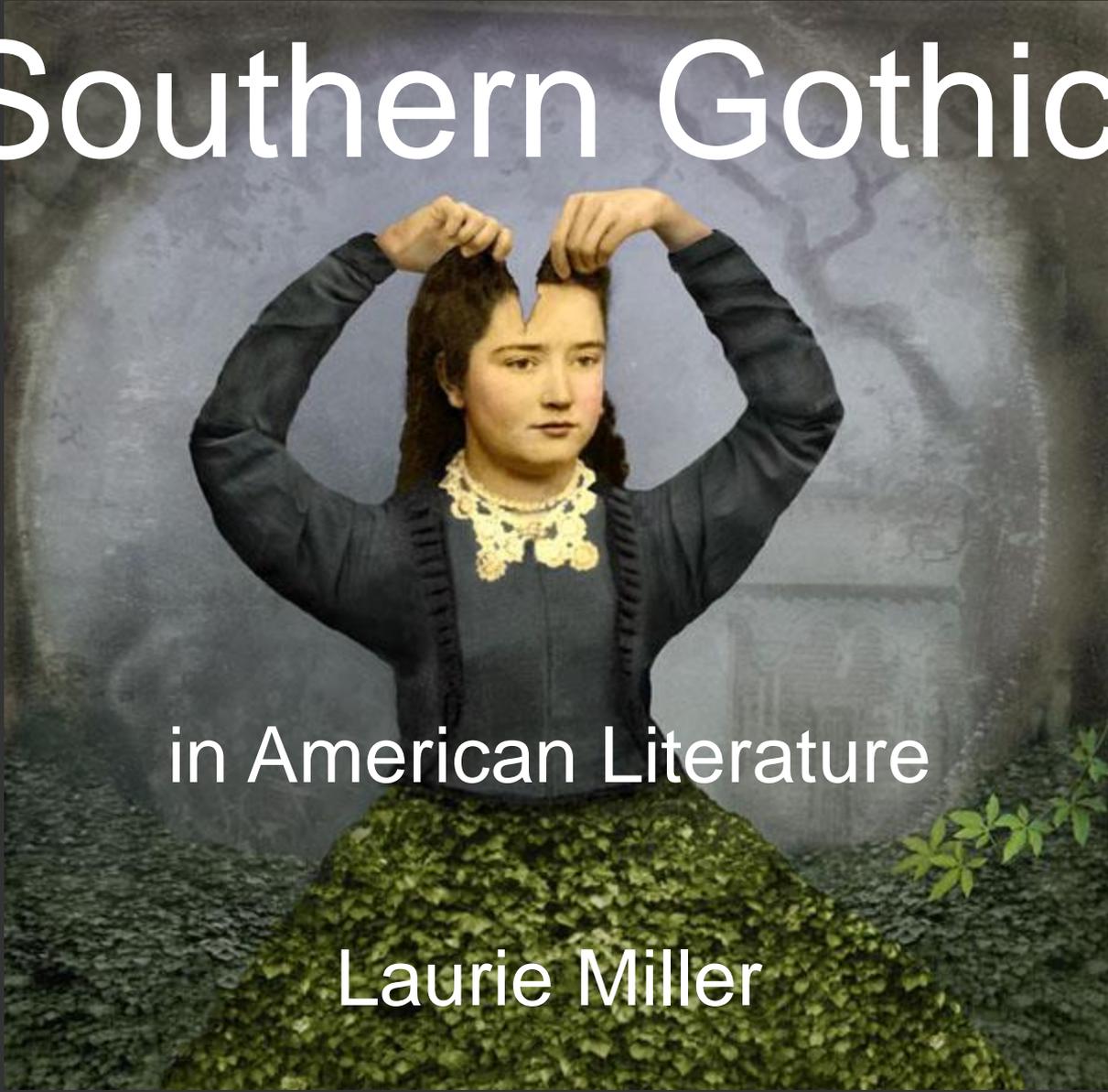


# Southern Gothic

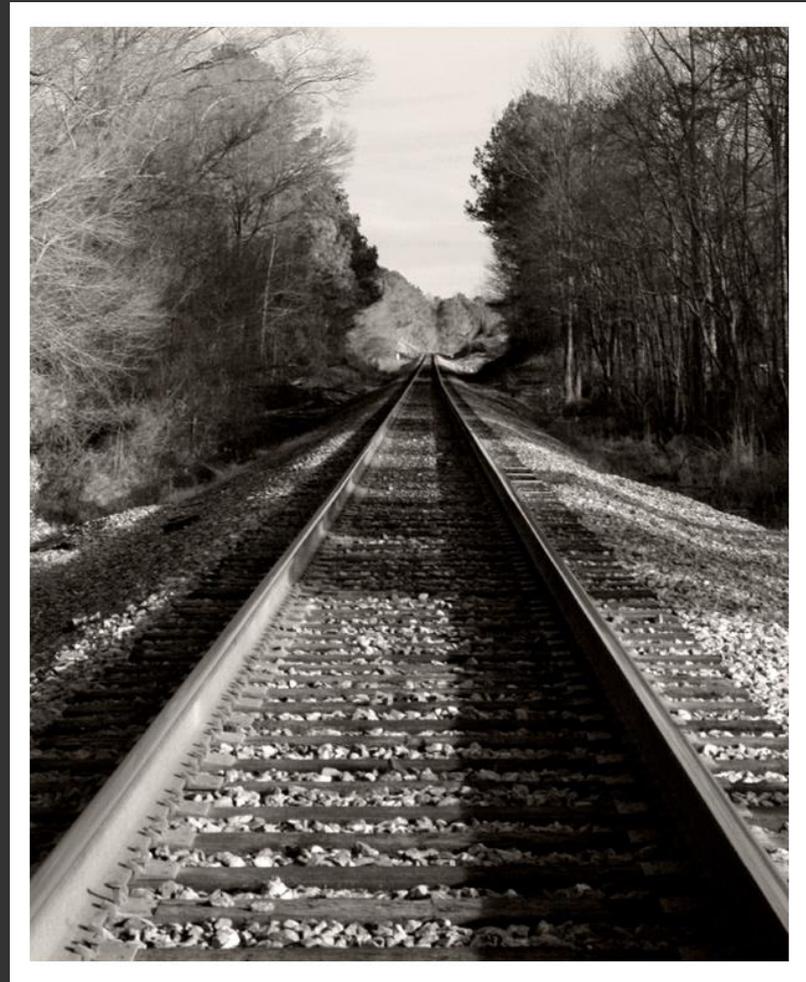


in American Literature

Laurie Miller

# Background

- Sub-genre of the Gothic style
  - Popular in Europe in 1800s
    - *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley
    - *Dracula* by Bram Stoker
- Unique to American literature
  - relies on supernatural, ironic or unusual events to guide the plot
  - uses these to explore social issues and 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
  - a spiteful, reclusive spinster; an uneducated drunk
  - a quiet, wise lawyer
- Most notable feature is the “grotesque”
  - a character whose negative qualities allow the author to highlight unpleasant aspects in Southern culture.
  - Something in the town, the house, the farm is bizarre and often falling apart



# Defining Feature

- Cast of off-kilter characters
  - Broken bodies, minds or souls
    - Used to symbolize problems created by the established pattern
    - Used to question established pattern's morality and ethical justification
  - The “Innocent” is a common character, who may or may not be “broken,” but who often acts as a redeemer for others



# Other Specific Features of 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 by in a negative way by a disability or an odd, and often negative way of seeing the world.



# Outsider

- Southern novels are filled with characters who are set a part from the established cultural pattern, but who end up being heroes because their difference allows 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 *fate's* 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 can't 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



# The End



# Credits

- “Southern Gothic” painting available @  
[http://www.internationaldigitalart.com/IDAA/2005IDAAGallery/pages/029\\_southern\\_gothic.html](http://www.internationaldigitalart.com/IDAA/2005IDAAGallery/pages/029_southern_gothic.html)
- To Kill a Mockingbird Pictures available @  
<http://www.foothilltech.org/rgeib/english/tkm/culminatingproject/pictures/>
- Genre information available @
  - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern\\_Gothic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Gothic)
  - [http://www2.oprah.com/obc\\_classic/featbook/thlh/gothic/thlh\\_gothic\\_main.jhtml](http://www2.oprah.com/obc_classic/featbook/thlh/gothic/thlh_gothic_main.jhtml)
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