

Hello, and welcome to our MOOC, *The Gothic Revival, Interdisciplinary Perspectives, 1700–1850*, based here in the Division of Literature and Languages at the University of Stirling, Scotland. I am Dr Dale Townshend [and I am Dr Peter Lindfield], and together, we'll be guiding you through a six-week exploration of the curious cultural phenomenon that we call 'Gothic'. Encompassing an overview of Gothic literature, architecture, interiors, and visual arts in British culture of the long eighteenth century – that is, the years, roughly, between 1700 and 1850 – this free, online course provides a thoroughly interdisciplinary introduction to some of the major exponents and cultural manifestations of the Gothic aesthetic of the period. By 'interdisciplinary' we mean that we're going to be looking at a lot more than Gothic literature in this MOOC; we hope that exposing you to some of the other forms that the Gothic Imagination took in the period will help you to consider literary Gothic, the form of Gothic with which most of us are already familiar, in a fresh and new light. We're delighted to have you on board, and hope that you find this course as rewarding to complete as we have to write it.

This MOOC is generously funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK), and is part of the broader, Stirling-based project entitled *Writing Britain's Ruins: The Architectural Imagination, 1700–1850*, an interdisciplinary research project dedicated to exploring the connections between Gothic architecture and literature in the long eighteenth century.

Before we get started, let us tell you a little bit about the structure of course, its various components, and how we envisage your involvement in it. Including this Introductory session, the MOOC comprises 6 sessions, as outlined on the screen.

Week 1: Introductory Session: 'What is Gothic?'

Week 2: The Gothic Literary Aesthetic I

Week 3: The Gothic Literary Aesthetic II

Week 4: Gothic Architecture

Week 5: Gothic Interiors

Week 6: Gothic Visual Art

I'll be responsible for the running of the first 3 sessions, and Peter Lindfield will be responsible for the final three. We'll release one new session per week, and we anticipate that each session will take up no more than one hour of your time. The commitment on your behalf, then, is relatively minimal, although, as with any learning experience, the benefits that you derive from this course will be directly proportional to the work that you put in during your own private study-time. In other words, while

there will be one hour of formal instruction per week, you are also encouraged to read broadly around the topic of each week's session in your own time. We hope that this won't be a chore for you, but that, once your appetite has been whetted, you'll set to reading numerous texts of Gothic interest, most of them available free online, in preparation for, or in response to, any particular topic covered. There is plenty of scope built into the course for peer-discussion, and we hope that you'll use this opportunity to explore the Gothic more fully with an online community of like-minded learners. The usual rules of online etiquette apply: please remain civil and polite and all times, and show respect towards your fellow students and tutors. Discussion-threads will be monitored, and a number of suitably-qualified scholars of the Gothic working tirelessly behind the scenes will attempt to respond to queries raised in the discussion threads as far as this is possible. Please bear with us, though: the high demand for this course means that we will probably not be able to respond individually to all learners. We will, however, aim to formulate our responses in relation to broad, general issues that come up in the discussion sessions.

So that you gain the most from this experience, we will be available for an hour per week via a live 'chat' function. Through this medium, we hope to answer any queries that you might have, and perhaps even explore relevant topics of interest that are only tangential to those covered in the course.

Right! Let's get started, with a deceptively simple Question: What is Gothic? One of the challenges that we face in working on the Gothic, particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is the plurality of meaning of the term itself. In order to illustrate this plurality, I want us to think about the slide, currently on the screen. It comes from the most recent edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and it glosses or defines the term 'Gothic' as follows:

[Slide on screen]

Gothic, *adj.* and *n.*

Forms: 16 Gotic, Gotiq(ue, Gothicke, Gottic, Gothiq, 16–17 Gothique, 16– Gothic.

A. *adj.*

1. **a.** Of, pertaining to, or concerned with the Goths or their language.

†2. Formerly used in extended sense, now expressed by TEUTONIC *adj.* and *n.* or GERMANIC *adj.*¹ and *n.*

3.

†**a.** Belonging to, or characteristic of, the Middle Ages; mediæval, 'romantic', as opposed to classical. In early use chiefly with reprobation: Belonging to the 'dark ages' (cf. sense A. 4). *Obs.* [Compare French *les siècles gothiques.*]

b. A term for the style of architecture prevalent in Western Europe from the twelfth to the sixteenth century, of which the chief characteristic is the pointed arch. Applied also to buildings, architectural details, and ornamentation. (Also *transf.* of the wing of an aeroplane).

c. *nonce-use*. Concerned with Gothic buildings.

4. Barbarous, rude, uncouth, unpolished, in bad taste. Of temper: Savage.

5. *Writing and Printing.*

†a. Used for some kind of written character (? resembling black letter).

b. In England, the name of the type commonly used for printing German, as distinguished from roman and italic characters. (Formerly, and still in non-technical use, equivalent to *black letter*.)

DRAFT ADDITIONS 1993

Of or pertaining to goth music or its followers

DRAFT ADDITIONS DECEMBER 2007

Of or designating a genre of fiction characterized by suspenseful, sensational plots involving supernatural or macabre elements and often (esp. in early use) having a medieval theme or setting.

Now, what you see on the slide is only a selection of the meanings of the term 'Gothic' listed in the Oxford English Dictionary, but already, you can see the point that I am getting at: the term 'Gothic' now, as when it first gained currency in English, has a range of different meanings. In order to simplify this for you, we may summarise the major meanings of the term 'Gothic' as follows:

- 1) That which is concerned with the Goths, an ancient Germanic tribe
- 2) That which is related to the Middle Ages, or what we today describe as the 'medieval'
- 3) A form or style of medieval European architecture
- 4) A style or type of old print
- 5) The name for a modern cultural sub-type or grouping, and the music and fashion-style associated with it
- 6) A term descriptive of a certain strand of horror and terror in literature, from the eighteenth century through to the present day.

We'll be exploring most of these meanings in the course of this MOOC, and hopefully, by the end of it, your understanding of the term 'Gothic' and its various meanings in the period will be greatly enhanced.