Southern Gothic is the name given to a literary movement with its roots in the Romantic and Gothic traditions of British literature. Authors that write in the Southern Gothic style borrowed the hyperaware, emotionally rich style of the Romantics and the Gothic interest in isolation and decay and applied these ideas to their region of the United States to develop a unique literary style.

Overlapping characteristics of Southern Gothic literature include:

* isolation and marginalization
* violence and crime
* sense of place
* freakishness and the grotesque
* destitution and decay
* oppression and discrimination

Significant Southern Gothic authors include Flannery O’Connor, Harper Lee, Truman Capote, Tennessee Williams, Carson McCullers but their cues are taken from predecessors like Ambrose Bierce and Edgar Allen Poe. We see the Southern Gothic style of writing even in the modern day through the works of authors like Phillip Roth and Cormac McCarthy.

Additionally these thematic concerns have made their way into music, TV, and film (some of which are adaptations of author’s work). These include movies like *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, TV shows like *True Blood,* *American Horror Story*, and *The Vampire Diaries*. Bands like Murder by Death have even introduced Southern Gothic themes into their music both in terms of style and subject matter.

Southern Gothic literature relies heavily on imagery and symbolism. Charles Reagan Wilson, Ph.D., Cook Chair of History and Professor of Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi says that, "In the Southern Gothic tradition, everything has meaning…The abandoned plantation house isn't there just to be spooky. It represents our fixation with history” (Southern Living). You will find rich symbolism throughout pieces in this literary tradition. For instance, in Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” the decaying home also alludes to the physical decay (and perhaps moral decay) of the Usher family.

It is common in Southern Gothic literature, to find innocence surrounded by cruelty and corruption. “When southern gothic authors examine the human condition, they see the potential to do harm. Morality is in question for many characters. A major theme for southern gothic writers hinges on innocence and the innocent’s place in the world— where they are often asked to act as redeemer” (Oprah’s Book Club). However, through the lens of these authors the question often becomes *can* this corrupt, tainted world even be saved? Can innocence be victorious? Conclusions vary according to author.

One of the most outstanding and noticeable characteristics of this classification of literature is its fascination with outsiders and characters that somehow veer from the social norm. These stories brim with aged characters, mentally and physically disabled characters, black characters, homosexual characters, the socially deviant, and the disempowered. In Southern Gothic stories you have characters like the simple, agoraphobic Boo Radley and African American Jim who is accused of a horrible crime. In O’Connor’s “Good Country People” you get backwoods girl Hulga in possession of both a PhD and a prosthetic leg. By assembling a collection of oddball characters, Southern Gothic authors often explore how these marginalized people can be misunderstood and taken advantage of.