The Foundations of 19th Century Literature are, not surprisingly, in the 18th century
English Literature through the ages

1. 1400’s Chaucer - verse
2. 1600’s Shakespeare – stage plays
3. 1720–1770 18th century classics - books
4. 1770–1800 18th century genre fiction - books
5. 1800–1900 19th century literature, books and periodicals
Some great 19th century literature

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<tr>
<th>Title</th>
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My discussion today of 18th century literature will be in 3 parts ...

1. The **context** of 18th century literature – what was happening in the world that influenced literature

2. Periodicals of the 18th century and their effects on printing and on novels

3. The **content** of 18th century literature – the topics and forms that evolved in literature
   a. The classic novels, 1720-1770
   b. The gothic romance novels, 1765-1800
Domestic English Economic Changes

• The industrial revolution, 1760 -1830, made sweeping changes to the English economy
• Spinning jennies took the spinning of wool (and cotton) from crofters to factories; looms powered by water wheels in those factories wove cloth, trains and canals moved finished product to cities and ports
• This industry created the first industrialists, increased English exports, and increased English imports
• And it created the working class – in mill towns, whose time and money became available to buy periodicals and books
Religious changes

• The Reformation, lead by Martin Luther, was initially a reaction to corruption in the Catholic church, particularly the sale of ‘indulgences’
  – Note: the printing of ‘indulgences’ was a lucrative part of the printing trade in the early days
• The Reformation created a demand for printed propaganda promoting all elements of this schism within Christianity
• Jacobism – the movement in England to place a Catholic king on the throne – also increased demand for printed propaganda
Political Changes

• The repercussions of the English civil war (1642) involved much printed material
• The French revolution of 1789-1799 involved the use of much printed material
• The American revolution (1776-1780) also involved much printed political material
• Authorities attempted to suppress civil unrest by direct censorship and by taxation of political literature – neither of which was successful
• Newspapers (and periodicals) flourished, and served the hunger of the populace for information
Social Changes (literacy)

• Compulsory, tax paid, primary education was not a part of the 18th century in Britain (or anywhere else)
• But news was now in print, so the demand for literacy grew
• That demand was filled by individual teachers-for-pay:
  – In a village, an instructor could be paid to teach reading skills to children too young to work the fields or the factories. For the wealthy, governesses taught reading.
  – Every family soon had one young member able to read, and that person would read (usually the bible or the newspaper) to the family in the evening. A change from telling stories.
Social Changes (human rights)

• The British Empire abolished slavery in 1833, but well into the 19th century women had essentially no rights and little access to paying jobs
• However writing novels was remunerative and respectable for women
Technological changes (books)

- Relatively inexpensive printing presses with moveable type replaced hand lettering and fixed-block lettering for printing all kinds of matter including books
- Paper making evolved from cotton base, to linen (flax) base, to pulp wood base
- Selling books evolved from print shops to lending libraries (and later to book and paper shops)
- Printer/publishers began purchasing manuscripts from authors, printing books at their own expense, then offering them for sale
Johann Gensfleisch zum Gutenberg
1394 – 1468

- Job printing began with the moveable type printing press
- As did uniform editions, proof-read text, and large quantities of books or pamphlets printed quickly
- Establishment of ‘standard’ fonts
- Resulting the fast spread of knowledge across political boundaries
- Loss of Latin as the linga franca of Europe among educated people
In England, moveable type printing presses were introduced by William Caxton

• Caxton was a successful businessman in Bruges and in 1471 started printing his own books
• In 1477 Caxton issued the first book printed in England
• During his lifetime Caxton published 90 books, 74 of which were in English, the rest in French, German, and Latin
• By 1500 his heirs had printed over 800 items, 40% of which were for grammar school students
Some unexpected changes

• Printed books and periodicals sustained regional languages *if books were printed in that language*. For example: Welsh survived, Cornish did not.

• Printed books standardized English grammar.
A hand operated moveable type printing presses
Paper trivia...

• cast-off clothing (made of wool and cotton) was the original base material for the paper onto which books, periodicals, and newspapers were printed

• *ragpickers could make a good living in 18th century Britain*
Periodicals played a central role in the literature of the 18th century, and an even greater role in the literature of the 19th century.
British newspapers

The first daily newspaper, The Daily Courant began Publication in London in 1702

Jonathan Swift and Daniel Defoe were ‘journalist publishers’ in the early 18th century

In 1720 there were 12 London Newspapers, by 1767 there were 53 newspapers publishing an incredible 11,000,000 copies annually (the population of Britain At the time was only 10,000,000)

*The London Times, begun in 1788, grew to become the most influential news source on the planet*
In the 18th century newspapers were not read once and discarded

- In cities, newspapers could be rented for an hour
- A copy of a newspaper might be read by four or five people over the course of a week, before it was discarded
- In remote areas, a newspaper might still be saleable weeks after publication since it was often the only source of news and entertainment
British newspaper trivia

• This is Times New Roman font

• It was invented by The London Times to aid legibility in the days of low tech printing
The *content* of English Literature evolved quickly in the 18th century

- 1721 – 1761 ‘the classics’: Defoe, Richardson, Smollett, Fielding, Sterne

- 1765 – 1790 the birth of gothic fiction: Walpole and Reeve

- 1790 -1800: The proliferation of gothic romances, epitomized by the novels of Ann Radcliffe
‘the classics’ of 18th century literature

(The Pilgrim’s Progress by John Bunyan 1684)

Robinson Crusoe by Daniel Defoe 1719

Clarissa by Samuel Richardson 1740

Roderick Random by Tobias Smollett 1748

Tom Jones by Henry Fielding 1749

Tristam Shandy by Lawrence Sterne 1761
The Birth of the Gothic Romance as a genre of literature

The Castle of Otranto, by Horace Walpole, published in 1765

The Old English Baron, by Clara Reeve, published in 1777
The gothic romance

• The first genre dominated by female authors
• Combined, history, travel, and romance with, for the first time, *the supernatural*
• Painterly scenery (often going on for pages while the story is on hold)
• They were usually: set in the past, in continental Europe, involving a moldering castle, a mysterious villain, evil priests, a hero, a virtuous, lacrymose heroine, and yes, at the end, **virtue was rewarded**
• Sir Walter Scott was a ‘romance’ writer though not a gothic romance writer (and he was a fan of Ann Radcliffe)
Terror

• The gothic novels were Romances, but they relied on **terror, and the supernatural**, for their suspense

The Reign of Terror, 1793 -1794, shook the monarchies of Europe more than the French revolution itself

In literature, terror is fear, often of the unknown or the supernatural, while horror includes revulsion
Horace Walpole

• His novel the *Castle of Otranto* provided the stage setting for virtually all gothic novels: the ancient castle, with secret passages, dungeons, torture chambers, ghosts with clanking chains, mysterious evil inhabitants and/or prisoners, deep forests, and craggy mountains, a shining hero, and virtuous heroine

• In the end, virtuous behavior is rewarded, and *reason overcomes superstition*
Clara Reeve said that she desired her books to include...

“…a sufficient degree of the marvelous to excite attention,

enough of the manners of real life to give it an air of probability,

and enough of the pathetic to engage the heart…”
‘novel’ versus ‘romance’

• The (primarily realistic) ‘novel’ had probability, truth, and authenticity, which the gothic romance did not have.
The Mysteries of Udolpho
by Ann Radcliffe

The most famous, and most influential, gothic romance of the 18th century

It has remained continuously in print since first published in 1794

Mrs. Radcliffe received 500 British Pounds for the manuscript – an unheard of figure for the day

Her book was favorably reviewed by critics including Sir Walter Scott, John Keats, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge
The Italian by Ann Radcliffe

Published in 1796, when she was 33 and at the height of her popularity, she was paid 800 pounds sterling for the manuscript.

It was her 5th book in 8 years and the last she published in her lifetime – although she lived 26 more years.

Set in southern Italy in 1750 a feudal area with a foreign king, and The Inquisition, but with the people ready for revolution and freedom.

The story is a defense of romantic love and, as always, Radcliffe explains the supernatural.
Radcliffe’s influence

As a child the young Fyodor Dostoyevsky was deeply impressed by Ann Radcliffe books. In Dostoyevsky’s *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions* (1863) he writes:

"I used to spend the long winter hours before bed listening (for I could not yet read), agape with ecstasy and terror, as my parents read aloud to me from the novels of Ann Radcliffe. Then I would rave deliriously about them in my sleep."

A number of scholars have noted elements of Gothic literature in Dostoyevsky's novels.
Radcliffe’s influence

• Jane Austen, of course. Northanger Abbey is a loving parody of Gothics in general and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in particular.

• Balzac’s novel of the supernatural *L’Heritage de Birague* (1822) follows the tradition of Radcliffe's style and parodies it.

• Edgar Allen Poe’s short story *The Oval Portrait* drew from *Udolpho* and mentions Radcliffe by name (somewhat disparagingly) in the introduction.
Radcliffe trivia

In the 2007 film *Becoming Jane*
Actress Helen McCrory plays Ann Radcliffe. The film depicts Radcliffe as meeting the young Jane Austen and encouraging her to pursue a literary career.
Clermont by Regina Maria Roche

Irish born, Mrs. Roche wrote 16 novels over the course of her long life, romances, gothics and, late in her career, regional Irish stories.

Her third novel The Children of the Abbey outsold Radcliffe’s Udolpho.

Today her best known work is Clermont, a gentle gothic romance. She, like Radcliffe, included didactic purpose, but unlike Radcliffe, left the supernatural unexplained.
From Regina Maria Roche’s obituary

“...this distinguished writer had retired from the world, and the world had forgotten her.

But many young hearts, now old, will remember the effect upon them of her graceful and touching compositions,

and acknowledge her loss with a melancholy feeling of regret...”

From Gentleman’s Magazine, July 1845
The Monk by Matthew Lewis

*The Monk* directly reflects the horrors of the French revolution and Robespierre’s Reign of Terror.

Matthew Lewis read both *Otranto* and *Udolpho*, but *The Monk* is much more graphic and violent than other gothic romances of the day.

Lewis complete *The Monk* when he was only 21 years old in 1796. It became an immediate best seller.

It describes the fall from grace of ex-monk Ambrosio and includes blasphemy, black magic, torture, rape, and murder.
Were Gothic Romances detrimental to more serious literature?

• No, because they built a readership that more serious literature needed to survive – for example, Jane Austen was not a best-seller
• Genre literature did not disappear in the 19th century - the ‘penny dreadfuls’ of the 1890’s were vastly popular
• ‘serious 19th century literature’ included tales of fantasy and terror that drew on the tropes of the gothics – Woman in White, Jekyll and Hyde, Dracula, etc.
Jane Austen’s first book marked the end of 18th century literature and the beginning of 19th century literature.

Everything changed in 1811.
In summary

• In the late 18th century, moveable type printing presses and the availability of paper, revolutionized the production of printed material
• The physical form, method of contracting for publication, and methods of distribution, of the popular novel were established in the late 18th century
• Periodicals and newspapers began their astronomical growth in the late 18th century
• Book content evolved very quickly from 1765 to 1800, culminating in the gothic romance novel, which established a large readership for all literature
• Women writers wrote the majority of the gothic romances
• 19th century English literature began with Jane Austen, whose roots were deep in 1790’s gothic romance
Two references

An old book, first published in 1932, but a fascinating survey of a very obscure topic

A 1955, very thorough, survey of the evolution of printing