The Gothic tale has been with us for over two hundred years, but this collection is the first to illustrate the continuing strength of this special fictional tradition from its origins in the late eighteenth century. Gothic fiction is generally identified from Horace Walpole's Castle of Otranto and the works of Ann Radcliffe, and with heroes and heroines menaced by feudal villains amid crumbling ruins. While the repertoire of claustrophobic settings, gloomy themes, and threatening atmosphere established the Gothic genre, later writers from Poe onwards achieved an ever greater sophistication, and a shift in emphasis from cruelty to decadence. Modern Gothic is distinguished by its imaginative variety of voice, from the chilling depiction of a disordered mind to the sinister suggestion of vampirism.

This anthology brings together the work of writers such as Le Fanu, Hawthorne, Hardy, Faulkner, and Borges with their earliest literary forebears, and emphasizes the central role of women writers from Anna Laetitia Aikin to Isabel Allende and Angela Carter. While the Gothic tale shares some characteristics with the ghost story and tales of horror and fantasy, the present volume triumphantly celebrates the distinctive features that define this powerful and unsettling literary form.
The Friar's tale. Raymond: a fragment / Juvenis. The parricide punished. The ruins of the Abbey of Fitz-Martin. The vindictive monk, or, The fatal ring / Isaac Crookenden. The astrologer's prediction, or, The maniac's fate. Andreas Vesalius the anatomist / Petrus Borel. Lady Eltringham, or, The castle of Ratcliffe Cross / J. Wadham. The fall of the house of Usher / Edgar Allan Poe. A chapter in the history of the Tyrone family / Sheridan Le Fanu. Rappaccini's daughter / Nathaniel Hawthorne. E. Nesbit's "The Hursts of Hurstcote" is only one of the many stories found in The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales, the first anthology of this spine-tingling genre. Though Gothic fiction has generally been identified with Walpole's "Castle of Otranto" and the works of Ann Radcliffe, these thirty-seven selections compiled by Chris Baldick provide a unique look at the genre's development into its present-day forms. We see standard gothic elements of incest, murder, and greed in "The Poisoner of Montremos," a late eighteenth-century story by Richard Cumberb