

**THE EVOLUTION OF GOTHIC FICTION FROM ROMANTICISM TO MODERN  
HORROR LITERATURE. AN ANALYSIS OF ANNE RICE'S FICTION.**

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*Abstract : Horror. It seems to be an intimate topic, not entirely covered; no one would like to be scared all the time. But what if we were to try extreme states of fear just a little, like in a role-play? Present day mass-media gives us these thrills; new film productions are seen day by day, promising to surprise their fans with new in-depth analysis and techniques of suspense.*

*Anne Rice is in the line of authors that provoke and intrigue; her characters are monsters with crippled souls, left out by any hope, looking for a reason to stay alive. They reflect Rice's atheism and frustration as well as her despair in finding an inner balance.*

*The horror novel has its origins in the gothic fiction. Ghosts, vampires, monsters, abandoned castles are part of the setting in the gothic fiction of Romantic heritage; these creatures and places are present in the writings of Mary Shelley, M.R. James or Algernon Blackwood.*

*Dickens's works (David Copperfield, Great Expectations, A Christmas Carol), present gloomy settings, distance and lack of warmth between relatives. Characters must come a long way through disappointment and loss until they achieve fulfillment. Rice's vampires have the same feeling, like motherless children thrown into a world of rejection and ambiguity.*

*Works such as Wuthering Heights and Jane Eyre describe secluded households, dark secrets, mysterious past, passionate and ill-tempered characters; Rice's characters are quite the same, making irresponsible choices at times.*

*Edgar Allan Poe's characters act with suspicion and restraint. Fearful and anxious, they tend to become mad. Armand(The Vampire Armand) is a reminder of the butcher in The Tale Tell-Heart. Santino, who lives in the catacombs, first prisons Armand in a wall of bricks; later on he will trap Louis into a casket in order to starve him. In addition, the murderer in The Black Cat attempts to hide his dead wife in the cellar, behind an improvised wall of bricks.*

*The aim of this paper is to make readers more familiar with elements of gothic fiction. For, today, we witness an industry of horror literary genre. Stephen King or Dean Koontz don't cease to give us spine-tinglers. But this makes previous classics the more inspirational.*

**Keywords: gothic fiction, horror literature, Anne Rice, the gothic body, the uncanny.**

Chaos. Nowadays we live in a noisy environment in which excess is at hand. We listen to loud music, giving in to various distractions. We seem absent minded, failing to communicate appropriately one with the other. The tendency to exaggerate is observed in any way; in the flashy colours we wear, in the wild attitude we adopt at times. When it comes to books and exaggeration, most of us choose the best novels: ones that employ extreme reactions or rich imagery. Anything, as long as it encourages the reader's break from the mundane.

Horror literature involves the reader as much as possible. For, he/she is taken aback by the plot and the setting. We enjoy the tension in a thriller, be it book or movie. Horror novels set our mind free, managing to stir the imagination; to make us plan the perfect murder or revenge. Thoughts one would have never believed to encounter in his/her mind.

Horror novelist Anne Rice surprises readers with the energy in her books; she lives and thinks freely, encouraging her readers to do the same.

Horror literature has its roots in the gothic fiction. The first gothic novel was Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764); it was called gothic because of the medieval buildings in which the stories were set. Early gothic writings included authors E. T. A. Hoffmann (*The Devil's Elixirs*, 1815), [Clara Reeve](#) (*The Old English Baron*, 1778), [Ann Radcliffe](#) (*The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 1794), Matthew Gregory Lewis (*The Monk*, 1796).

The Romantic period included Samuel Taylor Coleridge (*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* 1798), John Keats (*La Belle Dame sans Merci*, 1819), Percy Bysshe Shelley (*Zastrozzi*, 1810), Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein*, 1818).

The Victorian period included Edgar Allan Poe (*The Fall of the House of Usher*, 1839), Emily Brontë (*Wuthering Heights*, 1847), Charlotte Brontë (*Jane Eyre*, 1847), Elizabeth Gaskell (*The Doom of the Griffiths*, 1858), Sheridan Le Fanu (*Uncle Silas*, 1864), Charles Dickens (*Oliver Twist*, 1837-8).

Twentieth-century gothic fiction include Algernon Blackwood, William Hope Hodgson, M. R. James, Hugh Walpole, Marjorie Bowen. Popular gothic authors in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s were Phyllis A. Whitney, Joan Aiken, Dorothy Eden, Victoria Hol. Examples of contemporary writers of gothic are Joyce Carol Oates, Alice Munro, Barbara Gowdy, Margaret Atwood. Examples of modern horror writers are Anne Rice, Stephen King, Thomas M. Disch.

We react strangely when reading horror novels; we enjoy the thrill. Frightened and maybe disgusted at the start, we still turn to reading scenes of extreme lust or cruelty. That's because we need to believe in supernatural worlds once in a while. A bit of dreaming keeps us moving on. Our repressed self comes to light.

Dreams, this way, have been proved to be useful, simplifying our day to day life. For example, if one has, permanently, a disturbing thought, the interpretation of his/her dreams can help at finding explanations. As a result, understanding the nature of his/ her thought and its source can provide solutions for the matter.

However, to what extent can there be a connection between dreams and the artistic territory? According to Sigmund Freud, famous medical doctor, the sub-consciousness influences literary creativity. Human psyche is divided into three structures: id, ego, superego. The id is the sub-consciousness, the dark, mysterious part of the mind. One often wonders why he/she makes statements he/she wouldn't normally make or has an attitude, outbursts he/she never knew of. It is one's true self that comes out sooner or later. "*The ego is the conscious part, the representation of awareness. The superego is the projection of the ego; it is outside the self.*"<sup>1</sup> What it tells us to do or think, we have learned from our parents, our schools or our religious institutions. The education in society controls our actions, telling us what to think or say. The thoughts and feelings we repress don't disappear, but remain stored in our sub-consciousness, leading ultimately to frustration, dissatisfaction. One can become, therefore, deeply confused, psychically unstable. The ego and superego try to repress the id; the result of repression is sublimation (the transformation of the id into something symbolic, codified). This antagonism leads to a deviation or a neurotic behaviour (the concept of "Uncanny"; unfamiliar, strange).

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<sup>1</sup> Freud, Sigmund, *Introductory lectures on Psycho-analysis*, trans. Joan Riviere. London: Allen, 1922.

In addition, we wish to free our minds and escape reality as often as possible. Reading SF, thriller or horror writings is a solution.

Involving the reader is the key to success. At least this is what M.R. James thought; an author of ghost stories, he always respected his writing plan: an old school/college as setting; use of antique objects, of implication and suggestion. It is the characters who come across by chance an antique object in an abandoned place, thus re-activating a curse or an evil spirit. Rice's Lestat (*Interview with the Vampire*) plays a loud tune at the guitar and wakes Akasha from her eternal sleep. He manages to meddle into the female vampire's business, providing the introduction of *The Queen of the Damned*.

Author Algernon Blackwood firmly believed in ghosts. His stories had the aim of discovering powers we don't know of; powers that laid in us. The extension of human faculty strengthens us the more. On the other hand, Rice firmly rebelled against God. She had a strict Catholic upbringing, believing one had to have a spiritual life. She gave up God at eighteen because she felt her belief was a burden; she wanted to break free from restraints, believing one has to put away God in order to grow up. A Christ-haunted person, Rice's rebellious nature and frustration are felt in her vampires. She struggles to re-discover faith in God. Initially, Marius (*The Vampire Armand*) believes that the answer to human pain and personal inquietude is reciprocated love; that people need people after all. But in his four hundred year old existence, he witnessed famine, world wars, and nuclear disasters. Therefore, he changes his perspective, believing man can only do wrong; that's why he turns young Sybelle and Benji into vampires, for their own good. Opposed to Marius, Armand sees his existence as a vampire wretched and reproachful. He condemns Marius for having created him and the two children. For, Armand believes in God's love for his people and that humankind will change for the better. Whereas, Santino and his coven ("Children of Darkness") view the Devil as heaven-sent. They are limited and merciless, living as an individual religious group in underground tunnels.

Abandoned characters are present in many Gothic writings. Mary Shelley's monster rebels against his creator just like vampires do. Newborns separate from their fathers in order to show them contempt and sorrow; these creatures feel they don't belong in the world, never being able to fit in. They runaway, having the sole purpose to be alone or to revenge on people. The monster kills Victor's loved ones. Armand (*The Vampire Armand*) feels abandoned by creator Marius and flees to lead a life of excess and ignorance. Lestat despises creator Lestat and wanders alone, feeling sorry for his ghost-like existence.

Victor is haunted by his destructive creature. This way, he must kill the monster he unfortunately created. Just like Victor, Captain Ahab is haunted by the white monster that crippled him. His obsessive quest of finding Moby Dick leads to the tragic loss of the crew.

Dickens's works (*David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations*, *A Christmas Carol*) present gloomy settings, distance and lack of warmth between relatives. Characters must come a long way through disappointment and loss until they achieve fulfillment. Rice's vampires have the same feeling, like motherless children thrown into a world of rejection and ambiguity. Works such as *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* describe secluded households, dark secrets, mysterious past, passionate and ill-tempered characters; Rice's characters are quite the same, making irresponsible choices at times.

Edgar Allan Poe's characters act with suspicion and restraint. That's because they are overwhelmed with grief after having lost a loved one. Otherwise they are careless and cruel, ruining other people's lives or getting into trouble; if not doing so, they imagine doing it. Fearful and anxious, they tend to become mad. Rice's character Armand butchers little Claudia, making a monster out of her; he does as such because she was standing between him and charming Louis. Armand is a reminder of the mad man who butchers the old man with the evil eye in "The Tale Tell-Heart". Santino, who lives in the catacombs, first prisons Armand in a wall of bricks; later on he will trap Louis into a casket in order to starve him. In addition, the murderer in "The Black Cat" attempts to hide his dead wife in the cellar, behind an improvised wall of bricks.

The material. This is what is emphasized in gothic writings. Creatures are not to share a spiritual life or hope in redemption. *The ruination of human subject, figured in the most violent, absolute and often repulsive terms is practiced insistently, almost obsessively in the pages of British Gothic fiction at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth*<sup>2</sup>. The gothic body offers the spectacle of a body metamorphic and undifferentiated; in place of the possibility of human transcendence, the prospect of an existence circumscribed within the realities of gross corporeality<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Hurley, Kelly, *The Gothic Body*, Cambridge University Press, Great Britain, 1996, p.3.

<sup>3</sup> Hurley, Kelly, op.cit., p.3.