

MONSTRUOSIDADE, PSIQUE E SOBRENATURAL: UMA ANÁLISE DA TRADIÇÃO GÓTICA DA LITERATURA INGLESA DOS SÉCULOS XVIII E XIX**MONSTRUOSITY, PSYCHE AND THE SUPERNATURAL: AN ANALYSIS OF THE GOTHIC TRADITION OF 18TH AND 19TH CENTURY ENGLISH LITERATURE****MONSTRUOSIDAD, PSIQUE Y LO SOBRENATURAL: UN ANÁLISIS DE LA TRADICIÓN GÓTICA DE LA LITERATURA INGLESA DE LOS SIGLOS XVIII Y XIX**

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RESUMO

Este artigo propõe uma análise crítica e comparativa da literatura inglesa de tradição gótica e de horror, por meio das obras de Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, Robert Louis Stevenson e H.P. Lovecraft. O objetivo principal é compreender como esses autores construíram, transformaram e influenciaram os principais temas do imaginário do medo, tais como a monstruosidade, a loucura, o duplo e o desconhecido, desde o século XVIII até os dias atuais. A metodologia utilizada baseia-se na análise textual, na contextualização histórica e na perspectiva interdisciplinar, com apoio do referencial teórico de Botting (1996), Punter (1996), e Lovecraft (2006 [1927]), entre outros. As obras analisadas incluem Frankenstein (1818), O Coração Delator (1845), O Médico e o Monstro (1886) e O Chamado de Cthulhu

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(1928), escolhidas por sua representatividade estética e ideológica. Espera-se demonstrar que, apesar de distantes no tempo, tais textos compartilham elementos estruturais que continuam a influenciar a literatura contemporânea, o cinema e a cultura pop. Além disso, o estudo busca evidenciar como as noções de identidade, ciência, moralidade e medo são representadas em diferentes contextos socioculturais, revelando a perenidade e a adaptabilidade do gênero gótico na tradição literária anglófona.

Palavras-chave: Literatura gótica. Terror psicológico. Horror cósmico. Cultura pop. Modernidade.

ABSTRACT

This article proposes a critical and comparative analysis of English literature of the Gothic and horror traditions, through the works of Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, Robert Louis Stevenson and H.P. Lovecraft. The main objective is to understand how these authors constructed, transformed and influenced the main themes of the imaginary of fear, such as monstrosity, madness, the double and the unknown, from the 18th century to the present day. The methodology used is based on textual analysis, historical contextualization and an interdisciplinary perspective, supported by the theoretical framework of Botting (1996), Punter (1996), and Lovecraft (2006 [1927]), among others. The works analyzed include Frankenstein (1818), The Tell-Tale Heart (1845), The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886) and The Call of Cthulhu (1928), chosen for their aesthetic and ideological representativeness. The aim is to demonstrate that, despite being distant in time, these texts share structural elements that continue to influence contemporary literature, cinema and pop culture. Furthermore, the study seeks to highlight how notions of identity, science, morality and fear are represented in different sociocultural contexts, revealing the permanence and adaptability of the Gothic genre in the Anglophone literary tradition.

Keywords: Gothic literature. Psychological horror. Cosmic horror. Pop culture. Modernity.

RESUMEN

Este artículo propone un análisis crítico y comparativo de la literatura inglesa de las tradiciones gótica y de terror, a través de las obras de Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, Robert Louis Stevenson y H.P. Lovecraft. El objetivo principal es comprender cómo estos autores construyeron, transformaron e influyeron en los principales temas del imaginario del miedo, como la monstruosidad, la locura, el doble y lo desconocido, desde el siglo XVIII hasta la actualidad. La metodología empleada se basa en el análisis textual, la contextualización histórica y una perspectiva interdisciplinar, con el apoyo del marco teórico de Botting (1996), Punter (1996) y Lovecraft (2006 [1927]), entre otros. Las obras analizadas incluyen Frankenstein (1818), El corazón delator (1845), El extraño caso del Dr. Jekyll y Mr. Hyde (1886) y La llamada de Cthulhu (1928), seleccionadas por su representatividad estética e ideológica. El objetivo es demostrar que, a pesar de su distancia temporal, estos textos comparten elementos estructurales que siguen influyendo en la literatura, el cine y la cultura pop contemporáneos. Además, el estudio busca destacar cómo se representan las nociones de identidad, ciencia, moralidad y miedo en diferentes contextos socioculturales, revelando la permanencia y adaptabilidad del género gótico en la tradición literaria anglófona.

Palabras clave: Literatura gótica. Horror psicológico. Horror cósmico. Cultura pop. Modernidad.



INTRODUCTION

English Gothic literature, which emerged at the end of the eighteenth century, consolidated itself as a space for exploring the fears, anxieties and dilemmas of Western modernity. Authors such as Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, Robert Louis Stevenson, and H.P. Lovecraft played an important role in this process, producing works that challenge ethical, scientific, and psychological boundaries. This article aims to analyze the contribution of these authors to the development of literary horror as a genre that seeks to provoke feelings of fear, terror and anguish in readers, as well as their permanence in contemporary culture.

Thus, it is proposed as its main objective to understand how the Gothic elements, such as the double, madness, monstrosity and the unknown, are mobilized in the analyzed texts, and how these representations dialogue with social and philosophical issues of their respective historical contexts.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Fred Botting (1996), in his work *Gothic*, points out that the Gothic genre is built from social and aesthetic tensions, using fear as a structuring force of narratives. The Gothic, according to him, is a symbolic response to modern anxieties, especially those related to the Enlightenment, reason, and scientific progress (Botting, 1996, p. 3).

Punter (1996) complements this reading by stating that Gothic literature often articulates conflicts between tradition and modernity, order and chaos, establishing a critique of rationalist certainties. H.P. Lovecraft, in his essay *The Supernatural Horror in Literature* (2006 [1927]), states that "the oldest and strongest of human feelings is fear, and the oldest and strongest of fears is the fear of the unknown" (Lovecraft, 2006, p. 15).

In relation to Brazilian literature in the nineteenth century, the tone, the bundle of rhetorical artifices and the predominant set of themes of our fantastic literature are predominantly governed by the influence of the Gothic as the dominant aesthetic. Therefore, our fantastic, our science fiction and our horror are often gothic. Thus, national literature follows the trend that we observe in European, Latin American or North American literatures of the same period (...) (Aguiar, 2023, p. 24).

This theoretical basis guides the reading of the selected texts, understanding the Gothic as a form of representation of moral, scientific, identity and other crises that remain relevant to the present day.



INTRODUCTION TO LITERARY GOTHIC

The term "Gothic", initially associated with medieval architecture, came to designate, from the end of the eighteenth century, a literary current that was characterized by gloomy atmospheres, decadent environments and plots centered on mystery, the supernatural and moral transgression. The founding milestone of the genre is usually attributed to *Horace Walpole's novel The Castle of Otranto* (1764), a work that inaugurates a narrative tradition centered on ruined castles, corrupted nobles, persecuted heroines, and ambiguous supernatural elements.

This model was developed by authors such as Ann Radcliffe - a pioneer of the Gothic novel; Matthew G. Lewis – also known as "Monk" Lewis, for the success of his Gothic novel *The Monk* (1796); and the Irish Protestant clergyman, playwright, and novelist Charles Maturin, author of *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) who explored the moral, religious, and political anxieties of England and Europe in a period of rapid social change.

The Gothic, at this time, emerges as a symbolic response to the crises provoked by the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and the industrial and urban changes that redefined ways of life in the West.

Fear is the central element that structures the universe in this genre. It manifests itself not only as an emotion, but as a cultural force that translates collective anguish. The imaginary of the Gothic articulates invisible forces, ruins of the past, specters of the unconscious, and liminal figures, such as the monster, the madman, the vampire, or the transgressive scientist who represent threats to the modern rational order.

According to Fred Botting (1996), the Gothic differs from other narrative forms by placing the emotion of fear above reason, subverting the notions of progress, purity and stability that marked the Enlightenment discourse. "The Gothic becomes a field in which the obscure, the occult and the transgressive can be explored as symptoms of cultural and subjective conflicts" (Botting, 1996, p. 4).

The supernatural, in this context, does not function only as a fantastic element, but as a metaphor for the unconscious forces or repressed by the dominant culture.

The emergence of Gothic coincides with a period of instability and profound social transformation. The eighteenth century marks the advance of rationalism, science, and secularism, but also the rise of anxieties about the limits of this progress. Gothic literature works as an escape valve and symbolic criticism of this excessive rationalism, exposing the dangers of knowledge detached from ethics, a theme that will be deepened by Mary Shelley in *Frankenstein* (1818).



In the nineteenth century, with the Industrial Revolution, the growing urbanization and the moral repression of the Victorian era, the Gothic reinvented itself. He began to explore themes such as fragmented identities, mental disorders, the double and urban decadence, just like what is observed in the works of Poe, Stevenson and later Lovecraft. These authors not only maintain the formal elements of the genre, but expand it to new problematics, connecting fear to psychological interiority and modern existentialism.

MARY SHELLEY AND THE BIRTH OF SCIENCE FICTION

Published anonymously in 1818, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* is considered by many scholars to be the founding work of modern science fiction. Written by Mary Shelley (1797-1851) at the age of 18, the novel combines elements of the Gothic with the nascent scientific imagery of the nineteenth century. The story of scientist Victor Frankenstein, who gives life to an artificial creature and then abandons it, is structured as a meditation on the ethical limits of knowledge, scientific responsibility and the dangers of unbridled ambition.

Victor Frankenstein embodies the archetype of the "Promethean scientist", who seeks to master the forces of nature and surpass human limits. According to Botting (1996), "Shelley associates the monster with the excess of scientific rationalism and the dehumanization caused by the rupture between science and morality" (p. 92). The creature, in turn, becomes a symbol of social exclusion and the suffering generated by the absence of empathy, a theme that resonates deeply with contemporary issues.

The first edition of *Frankenstein*, released in 1818, presented a more critical and ambiguous narrative regarding the role of Victor Frankenstein. The 1831 edition, revised by Mary Shelley herself, softens some passages and emphasizes fate as a justification for tragic events, aligning itself more with the Victorian sensibility of the time.

Contemporary critics initially received the work with ambivalence, sometimes praising its originality, sometimes condemning its "excesses" and "immoralities". Over time, however, *Frankenstein* was elevated to the status of a classic, being read as a multifaceted allegory about creation, otherness and the failure of modernity.

As Anne K. Mellor (1988) observes, Shelley constructs a critique of patriarchal science and the absence of affective values in the Enlightenment project: "Mary Shelley offers, in *Frankenstein*, a feminist warning against creation without love, without care and without responsibility" (Mellor, 1988, p. 39).

Frankenstein's *legacy* transcends literature and extends to the fields of bioethics, genetic engineering, and artificial intelligence. The fundamental question of the work: "what



does it mean to create life?" reverberates in current debates about gene editing, such as CRISPR technology - a tool that allows editing the DNA of living beings with precision, cloning, and the frontiers of machine autonomy.

According to bioethicist Leon Kass (1998), Shelley's novel should be read as "a classic warning about the dangers of seeking scientific power without moral wisdom" (Kass, 1998, p. 11). The myth of the scientist who loses control over his creation has become a widely used metaphor to reflect on the risks of technoscience, especially when disconnected from ethical principles.

In addition, contemporary works such as the films *Ex Machina* (2014) and *Blade Runner* (1982) continue to dialogue directly with the ethical dilemmas that Shelley anticipated: the consciousness of the machine, the responsibility of the creator and the right to exist of the creature.

EDGAR ALLAN POE AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF TERROR

The American writer, poet, and critic Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849) is widely recognized as one of the masters of horror literature and psychological suspense. His short stories and poems delve into the depths of the human mind, exploring themes such as paranoia, guilt, madness, and melancholy. In *The Revealing Heart* or *The Informing Heart* (1843), the narrator confesses to a murder motivated by a "vulture's eye", revealing himself to be increasingly unstable. Obsession and guilt lead him to self-destruction, creating a portrait of psychological deterioration.

In *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839), the physical decay of the Usher mansion functions as a symbolic extension of the mental degeneration of the characters. The claustrophobic atmosphere and classic Gothic elements, such as death, illness and ruin, make up a scenario where reality and hallucination are confused. As Punter (1996) points out, "Poe does not limit himself to creating external fear - he dissects the structure of internal fear, of the mind taken by guilt and rational collapse" (p. 104).

In the poem *The Crow* (1845), the mourning and anguish for the loss of Lenore are manifested in the symbolic figure of the crow which, with its hypnotic refrain - "Nevermore", accentuates the narrator's pain and reinforces the theme of obsessive repetition and poetic delirium.

In addition to his gothic and fantastic works, Poe is considered the forerunner of the modern crime genre. The short story *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841), starring detective Auguste Dupin, introduces the figure of the rational investigator who unravels



mysteries through deductive logic. This model would directly influence authors such as Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie.

Dupin is not just a crime solver, but a mind reader – an interpreter of the subtle signs of human behavior. According to Eco (2009), "with Poe the rationalization of mystery is born, logic as a structure for reading apparent chaos" (ECO, 2009, p. 66). Thus, Poe manages to unite psychological horror with analytical logic, creating a new literary paradigm.

Poe's own life reflects many of the themes present in his literary output. Orphaned from an early age, marked by tragic losses, poverty and alcoholism, the author lived an existence permeated by emotional instability and social marginalization. His writing often reveals a desire to escape pain through imagination, but also an obsession with death, grief, and decay.

According to Silverman (1991), "Poe was both a meticulous craftsman and a spirit tormented by visions of dissolution and emptiness—a man torn between reason and delusion" (Silverman, 1991, p. 184). This duality between structure and emotion, method and madness, marks his style and relevance.

Poe's originality lies in the way he explores fear as an internal phenomenon — the result of repressed desires, traumas and obsessions. It anticipates Freudian psychoanalysis by projecting onto the characters the struggle between life and death drives, and is therefore widely read also in a psychological and symbolic key.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON AND THE STUNTMAN

Published in 1886, *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* became one of the most iconic texts of nineteenth-century Gothic literature, particularly for its exploration of Victorian identity and social hypocrisy. The plot revolves around the respected Dr. Henry Jekyll, who, by developing a chemical formula, transforms himself into Edward Hyde - the embodiment of his hidden desires and violent impulses.

The work is a powerful metaphor for the moral and sexual repression that marked British society in the Victorian period. In a context dominated by rigid behavioral norms, Jekyll represents the individual who lives under the façade of respectability, while Hyde embodies what is socially denied. As Hogle (2002) points out, "Stevenson offers a sharp critique of the duplicity of Victorian morality, highlighting the dangers of institutionalized psychological repression" (Hogle, 2002, p. 181).

The narrative also reflects modern anxieties about science and the body: Jekyll, like Shelley before him, pushes the ethical boundaries of science by manipulating human nature, making room for degradation and violence.

The figure of the "double" or *Doppelgänger* is a recurring motif in Gothic and Romantic literature, symbolizing the split of the self and the struggle between opposing internal forces – morality and instinct, rationality and desire, consciousness and shadow. From Edgar Allan Poe's William Wilson (1839) to Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), nineteenth-century literature explores the existence of an "other" that inhabits the subject himself.

In psychoanalytic reading, especially from Freud and Otto Rank, the double represents both the narcissistic ideal and the threat of the return of the repressed. Freud, in his essay *The Stranger (Das Unheimliche)*, 1919, states that the double causes anguish precisely because it embodies what should remain hidden in the unconscious. "The double is the bearer of everything that the ego needs to repudiate in order to maintain its social cohesion" (Freud, 1919, p. 11).

In this sense, Hyde is the return of the repressed Jekyllian - the monster that emerges when the civilized mask is removed. The tension between Jekyll and Hyde reflects the fragmentation of the modern subject, a theme that resonates to the present day, including in contemporary psychology and psychoanalysis, multiple personality analysis, and identity studies.

H.P. LOVECRAFT AND THE COSMIC HORRORS

H.P. Lovecraft (1890–1937) is recognized as the main exponent of what is conventionally called *cosmic horror*, a type of narrative that shifts traditional fear from the Gothic to cosmic and metaphysical spheres, in which humanity is reduced to a position of insignificance in the face of incomprehensible entities and vast forces of the universe.

In the short story *The Call of Cthulhu* (1928), Lovecraft presents the cult of a sleeping ancestral creature, whose awakening would bring the destruction of human rationality. The story is structured as a fragmented investigative account, and stands out for its construction of its own fictional myth, the Cthulhu Mythos, composed of ancient gods, forbidden books such as the *Necronomicon*, and occult knowledge. As Joshi (2001) observes, "Lovecraft replaces traditional supernatural horror with the dread of the cosmic and irrational unknown, forging a new paradigm of literary horror" (JOSHI, 2001, p. 174).

Tales such as *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (1936) and *The Colour Out of Space* (1927) follow this same logic, where terror is born not from violence or the presence of the



monster itself, but from the knowledge of its existence - from the rupture of sanity in the face of what cannot be explained by human parameters.

Despite his undeniable influence on contemporary literature and culture, Lovecraft's legacy is permeated by deep racism, both in his personal life and in his writings. *The Call of Cthulhu itself* associates cults with "primitive" populations from different parts of the world, represented as barbaric, degenerate, and threatening.

As Paul Gilroy (2004) argues, Lovecraft's fear of the other is often racialized, reflecting white supremacist anxieties about miscegenation, immigration, and cultural decay. Such questions led to a critical reevaluation of the author in the twenty-first century. For example, the *World Fantasy Award* stopped using Lovecraft's bust as a trophy in 2015, following protests from black writers such as Nnedi Okorafor and Victor LaValle.

Even so, scholars such as Houellebecq (1991) argue that "it is necessary to recognize Lovecraft's literary value without ignoring his ethical flaws – he is simultaneously a monumental creative figure and a man of his time, impregnated with prejudices" (Houellebecq, 1991, p. 52).

The universe imagined by Lovecraft transcended the limits of literature and became an aesthetic language of its own, influencing cinema, comics, video games, and role-playing games. Films such as *Alien* (1979), *The Thing* (1982), *The Mist* (2007), as well as more recent productions such as *The Lighthouse* (2019), drink directly from his conception of existential horror, oppressive environments, and formless creatures.

In video games, titles such as *Bloodborne* (FromSoftware, 2015), *Call of Cthulhu* (Cyanide, 2018), *The Sinking City* (Frogwares, 2019) and *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* (Frictional Games, 2010) incorporate elements of Lovecraftian myths, such as shaken sanity, forbidden knowledge and cosmic horror. The RPG *Call of Cthulhu* (Chaosium, 1981) is one of the longest-lived in the genre and helped consolidate the mythology as a shared universe, open to adaptations and reinterpretations.

In addition, the series *Lovecraft Country* (HBO, 2020), based on the novel by Matt Ruff, proposes a critical and Afrocentric rereading of the author's legacy, confronting Lovecraftian racism with the black experience in the United States. Such a move indicates that, although controversial, Lovecraft continues to fuel debates and recreations in multiple cultural languages.

CONTEMPORARY REINTERPRETATIONS

The works of Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, Robert Louis Stevenson and H.P. Lovecraft have crossed generations not only as literary texts, but as inexhaustible sources

of adaptation and reinvention in the most diverse media. The novel *Frankenstein* (1818), for example, has been adapted dozens of times for the cinema, from James Whale's silent version in 1931 to modern reinterpretations such as Kenneth Branagh's *Frankenstein* (1994) or *Victor Frankenstein* (2015), which try to update the ethical dilemmas of science and creation.

Similarly, *The Doctor and the Beast* has given rise to multiple film versions and cultural retellings that explore the idea of the "double" in contemporary contexts, including as a metaphor for personality disorders and social repression.

Edgar Allan Poe, in turn, is often evoked in psychological horror cinema. Films such as *The Raven* (2012) and the 1960s adaptations directed by Roger Corman are examples of the plasticity of his work. Lovecraft, though less directly adapted due to the complexity of his mythology, inspired works such as *The Thing* (1982), *The Mist* (2007), and *The Endless* (2017), which update cosmic horror for contemporary audiences.

Recent television series have been dedicated to intertextualizing these classic works, creating narrative universes that not only adapt, but expand the legacy of Gothic authors. The *Penny Dreadful series* (Showtime, 2014–2016) reimagines characters such as Victor Frankenstein, Dorian Gray, and vampire figures in a stylized Victorian London. The postmodern proposal of the series allows for the fusion of different literary myths and their reading through a contemporary lens, including debates on gender, sexuality, and trauma.

Lovecraft Country (HBO, 2020), based on the novel by Matt Ruff, goes further by making a critical appropriation of Lovecraftian aesthetics. The series uses cosmic and supernatural horrors to narrate experiences of racism in the United States in the 1950s, subverting the xenophobic discourse present in the original author's work. As cultural critic Kinitra Brooks (2020) argues, "the series makes horror a tool for racial affirmation, in a gesture of resignification of the Lovecraftian tradition" (Brooks, 2020, p. 89).

In addition to cinema and series, the presence of these authors is felt in music, visual arts, games and contemporary literature. Rock and metal bands such as Iron Maiden, Metallica, and Cradle of Filth make explicit reference to Poe and Lovecraft in lyrics, videos, and album covers. In literature, authors such as Stephen King, Neil Gaiman, Caitlín R. Kiernan, and Victor LaValle assume direct affiliations with these classics, either by aesthetic influence or by criticism and reinvention.

In the field of games and RPGs, the Lovecraftian universe has become a true subgenre, present in games such as *Call of Cthulhu*, *Bloodborne*, *Elden Ring* and *Amnesia*, which incorporate mechanics of sanity and fictional mythology. Mary Shelley, for her part,



has often been reinterpreted as a symbol of speculative feminism, and *Frankenstein* is reread in light of debates about artificial intelligence, transhumanism, and bioethics.

This multifaceted presence of gothic authors in *pop culture* reveals the vitality and versatility of their legacies, capable of dialoguing with contemporary fears and conflicts through new supports and languages.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

English horror literature, far from being a phenomenon limited to its time, has revealed itself to be an expressive form deeply rooted in the contradictions of modernity. By exploring the boundaries between reason and madness, science and ethics, human and inhuman, authors such as Mary Shelley, Poe, Stevenson, and Lovecraft have helped shape horror as an aesthetic genre that challenges the reader not only with fear, but with thought.

Gothic elements remain current because they continue to offer an effective symbolic language for dealing with contemporary fears—be they technological, existential, or social. In this sense, the Gothic not only survives: it reinvents itself as a way of understanding what it means to be human in an increasingly complex and frightening world.

The central themes of these works remain alive in current productions, such as series (Penny Dreadful, Lovecraft Country) and films (Ex Machina, The Doctor and the Beast, The Shape of Water). These reinterpretations attest to the resilience of Gothic narratives and their ability to adapt to new cultural and technological contexts.

In addition, contemporary horror literature (e.g., Paul Tremblay, Mariana Enríquez) continues to explore themes such as fragmented identity, fear of the unknown, and social critique—direct legacies of the Gothic tradition pioneered by Shelley, Poe, Stevenson, and Lovecraft.

The literature produced by Shelley, Poe, Stevenson and Lovecraft is fundamental to the constitution of the modern imaginary about fear. His texts, in addition to revealing the dilemmas of his own times, continue to offer tools for thinking about the present. The Gothic, as a symbolic and aesthetic language, remains a fertile field for social criticism, literary experimentation and philosophical reflection.



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