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THE TRANSFORMATION OF VICTORIAN GOTHIC ARCHETYPES WITHIN THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF CONTEMPORARY HORROR

Victorian Gothic as well as contemporary horror is not merely about horrific circumstances, macabre plots and dark colours. Above all, it serves as a mirror of societal concerns. Through this genre it is possible to learn what troubled people in England at that time and what is now considered threatening and terrifying to humanity. It is worth mentioning the archetypes inherent in Victorian Gothic literature, which served as a basis for the antagonists created by authors of this period.

One of the main archetypes used in the creation of stories is the monstrous anti-hero, such as a vampire, a ghost, or an artificially created monster. The most common examples of such characters can be found in “Carmilla” (1872) by the British writer Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu and “Dracula” (1897) by Bram Stoker. Both authors portray vampires as blood-drinking creatures or beasts that feed on living humans. The former work is also noteworthy for its portrayal of a female antagonist. Mary Shelley’s creature in “Frankenstein” (1818), which is also depicted as a negative character, serves as an excellent example of a monster of that time. These characters reflected the fear people felt of being rejected by society, marginalised and treated with contempt.

Moreover, the texts have elements of the grotesque and the supernatural, complexity, duality, and a setting that conceals certain secrets. Manor houses are often depicted as gloomy and confusing, with locked doors and secret rooms, dark nooks (often cellars or attics) and a profusion of furnishings. People could associate the character’s state of mind with the interior and accessibility of their home, analyse the colours and lighting, and even the degree of neglect.

Contemporary horror has changed over time. Writers still use the same patterns, albeit for different purposes. As Borzova M. points out, “Themes of death, the afterlife, evil and the demonic, as well as creatures such as werewolves and witches “refuse to die” ... contemporary challenges ... and the emergence of psychoanalysis have prompted authors to explore new issues through the prism of reinterpreted Gothic terminology” [1, p. 18]. Indeed, contemporary works still feature the same otherworldly entities and paranormal phenomena, except now they serve to highlight the various challenges faced by the characters.

The focus now shifts from external threats to internal ones. Modern horror stories are disturbing since they suggest that it is impossible to escape one’s own

internal fears; the ghost is no longer a separate entity, but rather serves as a symbol of psychological trauma, a mere hallucination, or even a sign of a mental disorder. Furthermore, as society has become more progressive, women in horror have begun to be portrayed as strong characters on an equal footing with men, and there is an increasingly noticeable tendency for women to be depicted as independent antagonists.

Speaking of the social context, Victorians were most afraid of sins of the past, as well as the loss of status due to behaviour considered indecent at the time or the loss of property. Shyshkina K. states, "Another taboo of the Victorian era was the theme of death. In Victorian England, religion provided the reason not only for life, but also for death" [2, p. 84]. People were afraid of anything that might tarnish their reputation. An accidental death, for instance, could be interpreted as retribution for some heinous sin, which was in itself a dishonourable thing. The fears of modern Gothic literature are distinct. Nowadays, people dread the loss of privacy, of their own identity, the rapid advancement of technology, and the possibility of an apocalypse. The emphasis is on what is artificial, as this is what frightens people the most now.

Victorian Gothic resembles modern Gothic only at first glance; however, one can observe that much has been lost over the years, whilst other elements have taken on new meanings. Fears and anxieties, even the atmosphere within a house or its very appearance, differ and acquire new significance. In contemporary horror, Victorian Gothic is used not to intimidate the reader or viewer, but to impart depth and metaphorical richness to the work. Gothic archetypes are universal codes that do not diminish over time. They adapt to new realities.

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