# Towards a Theory of Whodunits

# Towards a Theory of Whodunits:

## *Murder Rewritten*

Edited by

Dana Percec

**Cambridge Scholars**
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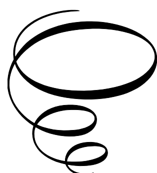

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# FOREWORD

*Towards a Theory of Whodunits: Murder Rewritten* is a book that continues a project initiated by a group of researchers in literature and cultural studies several years ago, attempting an apology, or a defense, of literary genres that have enjoyed great popularity with readers worldwide for two centuries, but which have dwelled on the margins of the canon. Rarely regarded by critics and theorists as highbrow, these genres have constantly negotiated their position, following and, at the same time, defying literary and aesthetic conventions. CSP has already published three collections of essays signed by this group of scholars, devoted to other "minor" genres: romance (*Romance: The History of a Genre*, 2012), fantasy (*Reading the Fantastic Imagination. The Avatars of a Literary Genre,* 2014), and children's literature (*A Serious Genre. The Apology of Children's Literature,* 2016). The present volume encourages readers to look at detective fiction in a new light. Tackling the best known authors in the genre as well as marginal, forgotten or eccentric names, discussing prose which fits perfectly in the pattern of the genre or texts which have been conventionally associated with other genres, moving from literary to film studies, proposing a pluridisciplinary approach and relying on genre theory and reader-response theory, the book measures the impact of whodunits and justifies their appeal among a very diverse readership.

In the first section (*Archetypes and Avatars*), the essays trace the origin of detective fiction back to the labyrinths of feeling characterizing Gothic fiction and its later development, the dark Romanticism. Francisco Javier Sánchez-Verdejo Pérez's introductory chapter, *The Gothic Genre as the Father of the Suspense in Detective Fiction*, discusses the context in which the Gothic gained popularity in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, responding to philosophical and aesthetic transformations and then focuses on how the Gothic revival merged with the budding detective genre, which responded less to an aesthetic reality and more to a social and scientific one. The chapter discusses the connection between the Gothic tradition and detective fiction in terms of continuities and discontinuities. The fight between good and evil, the suspense, the dramatic quality of the plot, the fear of the unknown, the clash between the past and the present are common features, while the supernatural is gradually replaced by the rational and the scientific.

Dana Percec's chapter, *Extraordinary Occurrences and Strange Cases*, takes its cue from the previous one and argues that the detective story is the result of a double permutation: first, it is the legitimate offspring of the Gothic. Secondly, Gothic fiction, a genre blooming in the late eighteenth century, with loyal and enthusiastic followers in the nineteenth, is born at a crossroads, after the dramatic clash between two ages and two worldviews: on the one hand, the old ways, with their irrational restlessness, on the other, the emerging rationalism and scientific advances. This clash was all the more dramatic since it was, by all appearances, final: the last push for the former and, for the latter, the first attempt to come into force. The chapter discusses three "cases" which deal in either fear or the sensational (the Newgate criminal biographies, accounts about vampires and witch trials), as non-fictional instances of the transition from the preternatural to the natural (even naturally deviant), predicting the emergence of genuine "cases", whose fictional accounts aspire to the standards of verisimilitude of the modern, rational mind.

From its onset crime or detective fiction was greatly indebted to the Gothic tradition. The chapter discusses the inherent similarities shared by the Gothic and the detective and how the former shaped the latter, later witnessing its cinematic transformation into the noir and the neo-noir. The Gothic has always been considered a rather unruly genre, difficult to contain within clear boundaries, but both genres try to reveal what is hidden and both explore transgressions, taboos and the thin line between everyday life and the criminal. As both are examples of sensational literature that thrives on the images projected by a dark, base counter-world, the similarities between the two are "uncanny": the same macabre atmosphere, the fascination with the evil and corrupted human nature, the dead body, both subject and object of obsessive scrutiny and the past that haunts the present. Ana Cristina Băniceru's chapter, *The Detective–The 'Uncanny' Avatar of the Gothic,* follows the emblematic figure of the detective, starting with Dupin, arguably the first detective, the European aristocrat, eccentric, sophisticated and reclusive, the high-born father of the hard-boiled detective and the precursor of the morally ambiguous detective of the neo-noir film. The criminal is in many cases the detective's Gothic double, his Doppelgänger. As the latter is hunting the murderer, he learns to think like him, identifying with him to complete annihilation of the self. Hence, the detective crosses the border between the normal and the deviant. This Gothic mixture of opposites makes its way into the detective genre, enabling the readers to see "to see the cracks and borders, lies and constructions in the ostensibly stable" (Wisker 2006, 179).

Chapter four by Marius-Mircea Crișan and Carol Senf establishes a connection between the vampire and the detective, both emanations of the nineteenth century, which, initially, seem to have little in common, with the former regarded as a haunting and mysterious figure from the past and the detective a hunter capable of taking advantage of modern technology within the heart of the contemporary urban environment. The emergence of vampires in detective fiction and even of vampire detectives is, though, quite common at the beginning of the twenty-first century, as indicated by novels and series such as *Blood Price* (by Tanya Huff), *Blood Hunt* (by Lee Killough), *The Last Vampire* (by R. A. Steffan and Jaelyn Woolf), or mashups by Seth Grahame-Smith and Fred Saberhagen.

The second section of the book, *Negotiating with Highbrow Genres*, includes chapters which start from the assumption that, as detective fiction gained more popularity, it has also striven to gain more prestige, seeking associations with canonical authors and texts. Writing in favour of an improved position of detective fiction in the literary canon, the second part of the book proposes two contemporary responses to classics, as well as an essay about subtle intertextual games that are part of a complex ontological debate. In Euripides and Seneca's plays Medea is depicted as a character who employs her magic art to exact revenge on her enemies and fulfill all her dark heart's desires. The true measure of Medea's evil nature is revealed in her decision to murder their children as a punishment for Jason's betrayal. Christa Wolf's *Medea* is a contemporary re-writing of Medea's myth, one which shockingly exonerates Medea of all her faults. The method, as Adriana Răducanu's chapter, *"The Unspeakable Mother?": Re-writing the Canon in Christa Wolf's "Medea",* argues for, is by re-casting Medea in the role of the detective, the lonely investigator whose horrible discoveries threaten to shatter the very foundations of mighty Corinth and question the fabric of its society. Thus Wolf re-writes both the role of the detective and the nature of the crimes and secrets being unveiled, by connecting them to more general issues of gender, class and colonialism. The narrative thus unfolds crimes which are derived both from the specificity of desire and greed of individual characters, and the corrupted nature of their respective societies.

Codruța Goșa's chapter, *There's Beauty in Decay: Responding to Jo Nesbø's Response–Macbeth,* chooses one of the novels in the Hogarth Shakespeare rewriting project, a novel proposed by the master of the Scandinavian noir, to investigate how the Jacobean tragedy can turn into a detective story. Shakespeare's shortest and darkest play is transported by Nesbø in contemporary Scotland, in a dismal post-industrial environment, where the protagonists become the victims of corruption and the ordinary

citizens are entrapped by drug addiction. The chapter also analyzes how students in English, who studied Shakespeare in their literature classes, respond to this rewriting, which has been both praised and condemned by critics.

Stepping out of the traditional conventions of the detective story and bringing it closer to postmodernist fiction and poststructuralist approaches of truth, self and language, the metaphysical detective novel finds new means of challenging our manner of reading–and in its case, re-reading–mystery stories, deepening the final enigma rather than solving it. Daniela Rogobete's chapter, *The Metaphysical Detective Story: Ontological Quests and Ambiguous Truths in Paul Auster's Fiction,* argues that, continuing the subtle metaphysical elements introduced by Poe and Borges in their works, Paul Auster is acclaimed as the author who brought the genre to perfection, transforming the detective's search for truth into a useless search for a sense of self.

If detective fiction is regarded by mainstream literary criticism as "minority", how does this alleged status contribute to the promotion of cultural, ethnic or religious groups that have been also regarded as minoritarian? The chapters in the third section, *The Mainstream and the Marginal*, attempt to answer this question, discussing detective fiction that conveys a message about African-American and Jewish-American culture, respectively about South-African culture.

Due to its easily recognizable structure, its status as a popular genre and its relation to the production of knowledge, detective fiction was a favorite source to recycle for postmodern writers. Recently, postmodernism has been understood as a purely academic event, specific for white males to the detriment of precisely the alternative knowledges it purported to support. Loredana Bercuci's chapter, *From the Anti-Detective to the Black Detective in Blind Man with a Pistol (1969) and Mumbo Jumbo (1972)*, analyzes Chester Himes' *Blind Man with a Pistol* (1969) and Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), two novels which use postmodern techniques but are almost never considered exemplary works of this literary trend. The conclusions seek to answer two important questions: How is the figure of the black detective in the 1960s and 1970s different from the postmodern anti-detective? What do these works reveal about African-American culture?

Cristina Chevereșan's chapter, *This Story Isn't Us": Pseudo-Detectives and Speculative Story-Telling in Philip Roth's The Ghost Writer,* focuses on Philip Roth's 1979 *The Ghost Writer*, wherein Nathan Zuckerman makes his debut as narrator and authorial alter-ego. The twofold reading of this layered masterpiece revolves around the storyteller's investigative

work. Acting as a private eye in both his fiction and his real life, Zuckerman plays detective and imagines an alternative destiny for the famous Anne Frank, in his immediate proximity. Simultaneously, his own recollections are built into a psychological mystery, in order to explore and expose problematic aspects of individual and communal identity, and revisit some of Roth's major themes: Jewishness and Jewish history, the crises of domestic life, the lure and torment of fiction writing as a way of dis-/ un-covering the self and the other(s).

A third essay included in this section provides a complementary reading to Roth's fiction. Gabriela Glăvan's chapter, *Mystery as Tragedy: Philip Roth's Nemesis*, focuses on Roth's final novel, a fictional account of an outbreak of poliomyelitis in the writer's native city of Newark, in 1944. A vivid example of allohistory, the novel recalibrates some of the writer's most frequently revisited themes and concepts–illness, Jewishness, death, relationships, memory and young age, against the backdrop of a massive public health crisis. Moreover, the novel is built on a fundamental mystery–that of a devastating disease that claims the lives of children; and that of its spreading agents, acting like invisible deadly messengers. The chapter reads *Nemesis* as a mystery novel with a plot that closely resembles a detective scenario.

The section concludes with a chapter about South-African detective fiction. Although it has been widely assumed that crime/ detective fiction has developed as a genre in South African literature only in the post-Apartheid period, the starting point of Luiza-Maria Caraivan's chapter, *The Development of Detective Fiction in South African Literature,* is Elizabeth le Roux's opinion (2013), who demonstrates that there is an older history of this popular genre. In this respect, the chapter examines various writings from the colonial and Apartheid periods in order to create a historical background for the twenty-first-century crime and detective South African writings.

A rewarding approach to the whodunit, proving its versatility, is the pluridisciplinary one, as the fourth section, *A Genre on the Move*, shows. How successful the transfer to other disciplines and media is can be seen in the adaptation of crime stories on the big (and small) screen, where the step from the written text to the audio-visual media has been successfully made as soon as the seventh art was invented. An example of how enjoying the whodunit can become part of a multimodal experience is Stephen Tapscott's chapter, *Rosebud, Citizen Kane, Detective Stories, and the Open Secret,* which focuses on Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane,* as an example of a story which mixes genres from literary history and from cinema and yet, paradoxically, is centrally a detective-story. Welles had

worked to dramatize several mystery-stories by Agatha Christie and Nicholas Blake in the months preceding his work on the film script, and his work on a version of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* reinforced the stylistic and epistemological model from the detective genre. Those lessons Welles adapted include the use of retrospective narration, the use of multiple narrators, and techniques of information-management that correspond to specific camera techniques (e.g., deep-focus shots). Finally, the detective model provided Welles a way to manipulate symbolic information, like "Rosebud," with overdetermined attention: Rosebud in the film is less a solution than a metaphor of ambiguity.

Science is known to legitimize real life as well as fiction. In detective stories, science plays an essential role, particularly through the highly technological equipment it efficiently employs, thus making the fictional narrative more realistic–at least in the eyes of the nonscientific viewer–and putting special emphasis to the value of truth related to the crime. However, in many TV series of the police procedural subgenre, truth is only proven by science but first glimpsed through all sorts of tricks pertaining to the ingenuity of the detective–or, more frequently, the police consultant–who usually shows a keen sense of observation and a refined understanding of human psychology. Police procedurals like *The Mentalist* (2008-2015) and *Lie to Me* (2009-2011) have enjoyed immense success and worldwide popularity over the years, mostly because of such police consultants who read facial expressions and follow their intuition but who, more often than not, stretch and bend the rules, assisting the more procedural (and often more narrow-minded) law enforcers in cornering the criminal and staging his/her confession. Focusing on the first and final episodes of the two cop shows mentioned above, Andreea Șerban's chapter, *Annoying the Truth out of People: Trickster Consultants and Power Dynamics in Police Procedurals,* aims to explore, on the one hand, the trickster figure of the detective consultant and his unorthodox methods. On the other hand, the chapter will look into the gender power dynamics between the consultant and the detective, whose interactions often skirt the limits of professionalism and ethics.

Eliza Claudia Filimon's chapter, *The Anatomy of Emotion in The Invisible Man* (2020), closes this section and the book, focusing on the film adaptation of H.G. Wells's famous novel, an adaptation which changes the perspective to that of the victim. The chapter looks at how the remake keeps the core of the source and infuses suspense at the same time. The film balances the viewers' expectations with a sense of anticipation, shedding new light on a story about science at the service of a human being's darkest manifestations.

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# PART I

# ARCHETYPES AND AVATARS

# CHAPTER ONE

# THE GOTHIC GENRE AS THE FATHER OF THE SUSPENSE IN DETECTIVE FICTION

FRANCISCO JAVIER SÁNCHEZ-VERDEJO PÉREZ

## The beginnings

The term “novel” comes from the Italian word *novella* (derived in turn from the classical Latin *nova*: “news”), which refers, originally, to a narration of a certain length. Every novel is nourished by the historical moment in which it is created and reflects it with greater or lesser accuracy according to the subject dealt with, as well as the environment in which the story unfolds.

There is a characteristic of the detective novel shared with its predecessor, the Gothic genre, and which several critics emphasize, as we will see in what follows: the new genre is not only faithful to the main theme of the original, but we can also distinguish one or several secondary plots or sub-themes that follow the same lines. They keep a close relationship with the main idea and whose goal is to create a context through which the reader will feel trapped inside the plot.

The medieval novella offers, along with short stories, new models of a specific extension such as the chivalric and the sentimental mode. In the nineteenth century, Romanticism rediscovers this noble ascendancy, with historic, poetic and social novels. It is thanks to the Gothic genre that the parallelism is achieved between the medieval romance and adventure, and the newly discovered taste for mystery, a parallel we can similarly determine between the Gothic and the whodunit: the treatment of the temporal sequence, the rupture of the history’s internal order, the analysis of the states and strata of consciousness and the unconscious, the interweaving of different language levels and the use of techniques later associated with the cinema (parallel narration, flashbacks, etc.).

From the Gothic to the detective novel, several important transformations have occurred. This is due to the fact that the subject and scope have

gradually broadened, with a greater interest in psychology, social and political conflicts. But let us bear in mind that the Gothic novel meant a time of conflict between pre-Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment ideas. Introducing new narrative and stylistic techniques, the Gothic has taken the study of the human soul as well as social relations farther than any other literary genre before.

## From Gothic to detective fiction

One of the iconic characteristics of the Gothic novel lies in the disturbing return of the past into the present, literally expressed as family secrets and ghosts. This later becomes the hauntings of classical detective fiction, in which crimes from the past threaten the social order in the present. Fred Botting (1996) argues that the Gothic novel, bringing the evil to the forefront, gives momentum to criminal behaviour, and the horror caused by endless transgressions is turned into a warning, with social and moral implications. The background of the Gothic novel, reminiscent of feudal order, tyranny and superstitions, erupts into the post-Enlightenment era with the force of old habits doubled by the modern need for law and order.

Paul Skenazy (1995, 114) confirms this by discussing the haunting feeling that comprises the structure of most detective narratives. Learning a secret from the past and solving a riddle are the steps necessary in the recreation of order. Explaining seemingly unintelligible events and bringing the rational side to the light are major characteristics of both Gothic romance and detective fiction. In the Gothic novel, as in detective fiction, the skeletons that come out of family closets are solemn reminders of social disintegration, which must be fought against at all costs.

Gothic stories and detective narratives are the ideal medium in which a mystery is solved. Though considerably recent genres, the interest in both detective fiction and Gothic productions is as old as humankind, given the natural attractiveness of the mysterious and the unknown. The origins of this tradition and interest go back to the ancient Greek world, where rather than associating evil with divine forces, human responsibility is already emphasized.

Both Gothic and detective fiction novels share the fact of having been two vaguely defined genres in the last decades of the twentieth century. However, they are among the most widely read and acclaimed novels by readers. For their themes, settings, characters and, especially for the awaited outcomes that keep readers in suspense, the two genres have been top of the reading lists, satisfying leisure and entertainment purposes,

though not exclusively, since the moralizing aims in the former are more than obvious, just as we intend to explain in the following paragraphs.

Hence, what do we expect from these two genres? Although more often than not, the answer is self-evident (e.g. a detective fiction novel is intended to make the readers enjoy the plot, forcing them to have doubts about the identity of the suspects, as well as providing an unexpected ending), it is not so easy to reach a conclusion about the genre's mission.

Additionally, authors stress the importance of the narrator, who undoubtedly plays an essential role. In fact, in these two genres, not only does the technique put a premium on the story teller, but it also serves as a device to increase suspense. Therefore, readers are inclined to fully rely on him/her, believing the story s/he is about to tell. We, as readers, assume that this authority and credibility will guide us to discover the truth. How this process works can be best grasped if we bear in mind that the origins of detective fiction are Gothic.

The Gothic developed during the English Enlightenment, when the rejection of the supernatural in everyday life also translated into an ironclad condemnation of its literary and aesthetic use. A series of writers (Horace Walpole, Clara Reeve or Sophia Lee, first and later Ann Radcliffe, William Beckford, Mathew Gregory Lewis or Charles Maturin, who set the generic conventions), however, in opposition to the other two influential subgenres of the time, whose birth we can consider parallel (the sentimental and the historical fiction), and as an act of rebellion, launched into the adventure of writing something new that would violate the rules established by the classicist and prescriptive aesthetic principles (López Santos 2018). Opposed to reason, they searched for the irrational and, facing the need for new inspiration sources and new audiences, they resorted to suspense, terror, the supernatural, which transgressed the strict literary rules, with the transposition and reflection of the corseted social conventions. In this endeavour, they picked up the inherited cultural baggage, and they applied to it a good dose of intriguing elements.

A great number of critics (Jackson 1981, Todorov 1982, Caillois 1970 or Roas 2001, 2003, among others) state that the Gothic originated around 1800, therefore *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) should be considered as the anticipated literary manifestation of this genre. Having this in mind, is it possible to consider that the detective fiction is an evolution of Gothic literature? Facing this question, we suggest a study based on the Gothic fiction and an analysis of the similarities between both literary genres, where we shall see that, though converging, the Gothic novel also presents its own characteristics, just as detective fiction.

In a wider sense, this generalist reflection on the Gothic novel as the predecessor of the detective genre was based on the former being the first literary movement to become aware that literature should be a means to represent the flaws of the society, something embraced by realist literature, culminating in France with the naturalism of Émile Zola, at the end of the nineteenth century. Gothic fiction underwent a profound change that can only be explained by virtue of the century in which it was developed. Indeed, the second half of the eighteenth century was characterized, under the philosophy of Neoclassicism, by the absolute reign of the laws of science and by a disproportionate cult of reason, which would eventually impose rationalism as the only way of understanding and explaining man and the world (Roas 2001, 24). The suspense in detective fiction and the Gothic genre share, in their beginnings, the fascination for the dark side of reality, both social and psychological. Reality, in detective fiction, resembles the reader's daily life, where the transgressor destabilizes moral and social limits and questions the validity of its rules. That is to say, they project a perfectly recognizable world so that the incursion into the supernatural–in the case of Gothic literature–and the sinister or the criminal–in the case of detective fiction–would engender the desired effect. Therefore, paraphrasing Roas, both genres share the need for a world as close to reality as possible (2001, 24).

Another feature that is shared by both genres refers to the fact that readers believe what is being narrated, mixing the areas of the near, the possible, the real, the legendary, the dark and the frightening. Not in vain, the maintenance of plausibility is one of the main concerns of the two genres. The intrinsic verisimilitude of Gothic fiction is achieved not by the reader's identification with the daily reality described (the authors make a considerable effort–often reviled–for the reader to believe facts that are logically and empirically impossible). Thus, for example, we observe that authenticity in the two Irish vampire masterworks, Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) is protected by the fact that the monster-protagonists are treated as real by the other characters, ensuring a sense of reality for the reader (Rodríguez Pequeño 1995, 134). In the case of detective fiction, the reader's identification with the fictional detective takes place (it is a rule in Agatha Christie's productions, for example), whenever it is not with the victim.

Indeed, the Gothic novel veracity hangs by a thread on many occasions; because the line that separates the credible from the incredible always remains diffuse, thanks to the fantastically forced explanation, imposed by logical, scientific and psychological factors. In the detective story, on the contrary, the final sequence reveals the facts in themselves,

their nature, and does not provide an exhaustive explanation, leaving readers sometimes to draw their own necessary conclusions. When facing a Gothic story, starting from psychological, social and cultural conventions, any reader, whether contemporary to the literary work or not, is predisposed to issue a plausible judgment before real events, on the one hand, and before the fantastic details, on the other.

Additionally, just as Gothic fiction cannot work without the presence of the supernatural (Roas 2001, 8), detective fiction does not provoke the desired effect if it does not count on the combination of suspense. Following Cuddon (1998, 882), suspense can be defined as “a state of uncertainty, anticipation and curiosity”. In both cases, a mechanism that transgresses the laws which organize the literary setting–and we can add, the real world–occurs.

Both Gothic and detective fiction go through the reason filter when in search for an exhaustive, rational and realistic explanation. We see, therefore, that what at first the reader considers *inexplicable* (what cannot be explained) ends up becoming *unexplained* (what can, but is not, explained), a procedure that clearly approximates the Gothic story to the detective fiction This point is confirmed by Hoveyda (1967, 19) who states that Gothic novels, also called black novels, which were very much in vogue at the end of the eighteenth century, have a special feature: they begin with the fear of the invisible and end with an explanation, thus preceding the technique of the police novel that will be born in the West during the next century.

In both genres, and within a supposedly rational world, irrationality bursts into the text through the transgressive element, understood as a unit that breaks the established order. In the context of the novel, this double tendency leads to the debate that emerged from respect and attack on the prevailing Illustration precepts and materialized in the conflict between rationalism and irrationality. In other words, there were two opposite poles whose literary struggle the Gothic novel illustrated in its pages, more than any other movement. This fight of rationalism, the mental challenge, the clash with reality and suspense will also inform detective fiction later. So the two genres’ theoretical basis is similar, despite the contrasting settings and chronologies. The essence, therefore, of both genres is the very game that, beyond the transgression, the author establishes with the protagonist and with the reader, by means of destabilizing the daily reality of both. Consequently, the destabilizing elements become an integral part, serving the literary architecture. At this point, as readers and updaters of the written text, we have fallen into the trap which the author has designed and prepared for us. In other words, we are a transposition of the victim

and their fears, sleeplessness, their need to explain what happened is ours. Therefore, the story has stopped being fantastic and has become possible, or even worse, real.

Thus, if the aim of any framed text in the detective fiction is to elicit in the reader a certain uneasiness or anguish because of the possibility that a fact outside the established order breaks into the everyday world, what characterizes every Gothic novel is fear. In fact, as Delumeau (1989, 31) confirms, fear and anguish are two basic manifestations of the humans in a world under constant threat. The menace–real or imagined–is part of both the Gothic novels and the detective stories.

In view of what we are explaining, it is evident that the detective fiction writers knew how to take advantage–with relative ease–of the paths already explored before by the Gothic narrators, so that evolution is patent and easily observed, opening the way to new components. To the wear and tear of the old formula, we must also add the change of vision of reality. In detective fiction, we will no longer find superstitions, the ghosts of the Inquisition and the importance of the Catholic faith. Even if the new vision of the world undermined the old order, there lingered a degree of residual ancestral beliefs. However, there was now solid proof that superstitions could not destabilize the new reader, because what escapes his logical understanding and need for order is promptly regulated by the new institutions.

Therefore, detective fiction, based on the coordinates and historical-cultural conventions of the moment, sought, in its evolution from the troubled eighteenth century to our twenty-first century, to isolate the transgression, abandoning terror in favour of the feeling of restlessness. There seems to be a thread in the evolution of the genre–from its origins in the eighteenth-century English Gothic novel–and that has been characterized by a progressive and endless search for new ways of communicating to the readers the repertoire of restlessness, destabilization, which are part of their horizon of expectations, from the initial terror to current unrest.

The Gothic novel, based on the marvellous and legendary and supported by the struggle between the pre-eminence of irrationalism or persistence in reason, was configured as a matrix genre capable of splitting into renewed literary genres. García Berrio and Huerta Calvo, in *Los géneros literarios* (1992, 237) point out, in this sense, that the genres are neither autonomous nor static, their features developing, vanishing, changing, mixing, working as frames for the birth of newer genres. This dynamism leads to border genres, as we can consider detective fiction.

Indeed, when the strict submission to enlightened reason met the cultivation of scientism, the detective genre was born, undoubtedly by the

hand of the great master Edgar Allan Poe, who knew, from his experience with Gothic fiction, how to give life to a new genre. Poe is considered the true driving force that caused the movement away from the Gothic tradition and the creation of something new: the police story, relying on the nineteenth century positivist scientism. For this reason, if detective fiction coincides largely with the Gothic, it is because, on the one hand, it inherited certain mechanisms that changed over time and, according to the logical evolution experienced by the genre, were relegated to a second level, in search of its own autonomy: horror, terror, the sublime architecture (magnificently anticipated by philosopher Edmund Burke, who, in the 1750s, wrote about the strong and delightful emotions arising from engagement with pain and danger), or the perceptible transgressor element (the ghost, the vampire, the monster). On the other hand, the police story reproduces the Gothic theme, adapting it to new tastes and, although some invariants remain, its significance evolves.

Gothic and detective writing shared the same evolutionary line, "with a change of scripts, numbers, and contexts" (Giardinelli 1996, 36). This idea is supported by Salvador Vázquez de Parga (1981, 17), who states that the use and assumption of foreign formulas is consubstantial with the literary factor and inherent in all art and, therefore, it would be absurd and idealistic to think of a literary concept in which each author invents a uniquely and brilliantly personal literary style, without external contamination. Irène Bessière (1974, 105-123) provides substantial evidence for the same idea.

Gothic, especially in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, was a fairly solid genre presenting a specific set of characters and motifs which formulaically appeared in a recurring way in the pages of its novels: the fainting damsel in distress exploring dark corridors, the corrupt and tyrannical villain plotting heinous murders, the unknowing heir being rightfully reinstituted to the throne. Its iconography, replete with haunted castles, ruined abbeys and cawing crows, has also become one of the most recognisable in the history of literature.

Even if most Gothic novels were written between the 1760s and 1820s, it is undeniable that their influence has been both intense and extense. Jarlath Killeen (2009) states that the themes of Gothic novels have been diffused in writings varying from Victorian ghost stories to children's literature, among others. The detective story has taken and adapted numerous Gothic features, which were acknowledged as the prototype for and the forerunner to the suspense in detective fiction.

Gothic trappings, easily recognizable by readers, include ruined castles which, in turn, harbour such stock devices as trap doors, deserted wings,

entangled passages, frightening galleries, magnificent towers, subterranean vaults and corridors, decrepit dungeons, tolling bells, and secret rooms. Mausoleums, churchyards and decaying abbeys are to be found in remote areas, on tops of mountains, in the middle of wild forests, or abandoned habitats– all of them enclosing and entrapping characters (preferably females).

As the Gothic novel evolved, medieval settings gave way to modern locations, so classic detective novels are set in Gothic-like, but newly built houses. Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu and Bram Stoker, on the one hand, and Arthur Conan Doyle or Daphne du Maurier, on the other, use Gothic-like buildings as essential contributors to the atmosphere of mystery in their writings. In all their works, there is an obvious tendency to locate the crime (in the broadest sense) in enclosed spaces, which the hero can hardly enter–nor the victim can leave, hence a total feeling of entrapment, deeply physical and real. As a consequence, the stereotypical identification between mystery writing and scary and macabre setting is clear for the reader. This scenario gives free way to infinite possibilities of committing the perfect crime.

Detective novels tend to be spun around mysteries and secrets, often connected with the past. “The knowledge of a dark secret”, observes Scaggs, “is the key to understanding the seemingly irrational and inexplicable events in the present, and it is this drive to make the unintelligible intelligible which characterizes both Gothic romance and crime fiction” (2005, 16). The past haunts and confuses the present, directing the plot in reverse chronological order. In this way, both genres rely on retrospection to solve the mysteries.

The atmosphere in the Gothic and the detective genre has been unanimously described as brooding and sinister, haunting ancient ambiances, such as Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Fall of the House of Usher*, being true continuers of Horace Walpole’s or Anne Radcliffe’s imaginary projections.

“Spectres, monsters, demons, corpses, skeletons, evil aristocrats, monks and nuns, fainting heroines and bandits” populate Gothic novels, evoking emotions such as “dread, horror, terror, and the uncanny” (Botting 1996, 2; Crow 2009, 2). Through suspense, detective authors come closer to realism by revealing and exploring the violent and the aberrant. Both genres show anxiety about the transgression of boundaries, whether moral or social and legal. Revealing the most obscure criminal impulses, Gothic and detective writers alike provide readers with an enhanced sense of reality even when they give the impression they escape reality. In Bayer-Berenbaum’s words, “Gothicism insists that what is customarily hallowed

as real by society and its language is but a small portion of a greater reality of monstrous proportion and immeasurable power" (1982, 21). Labyrinths and crypts "baffle our sense of direction and threaten to lead us out of the known and into the depths of another dimension" (Bayer-Berenbaum 1982, 24). The Gothic is, thus, a counter-narrative, highlighting "the underside of enlightenment and humanist values" (Botting 1996, 2). It brings to the forefront "what is hidden, unspoken, deliberately forgotten, in the lives of individuals and of cultures" (Crow 2009, 2).

## Detective fiction's finest hour

As seen so far, both genres share a list of characteristics. They present a narrative in which, through observation, analysis and logical deduction applied to a mysterious fact, the aim is to seek and discover the perpetrator of a crime, a culprit, a scapegoat, and to offer explanations for their motives. Both genres have been described as expressions of a lower gender, as mass culture products, whose only mission is to entertain. Both genres have been defined as belonging to a literature of evasion. In detective literature, as in Gothic, the puzzle is missing a piece, so both genres can be regarded as a game. In both, (re)search eventually triumphs. For that reason, in the novels of both genres perfect crimes cannot be found, because to describe them is to discover them.

Since the end of the eighteenth century, two opposing attitudes have been observed concerning human life. One of them, explaining facts by means of logic; and another one stating that there are some situations where feelings, intuition and the irrational will prevail over any other interpretation. The detective story surfaced as an expression of this confrontation and, at the same time, as a consequence of a certain reality: the shaping, formation and creation of large cities and the desire and search for justice. Thus, in literature, new characters and environments that are distinctly urban, including the police and security forces, were systematically organized at the beginning of the nineteenth century, favoured by scientific research. Detective and Gothic fiction are heterogeneous categories, as they feed on transgression, fantasy, crimes, escapes, searches and persecutions and, above all, they lay out a situation that must be resolved.

Critics tend to agree (Scaggs 2005, 7) the detective story begins with Edgar Allan Poe. As well as being a renowned Gothic writer, it was Edgar Allan Poe who invented the modern detective character. In fact, Poe established the pillars of the detective formula and the worldwide-known tradition, a definite influence for later writers' sub-genres. The detective

story has its idiosyncratic, specific characteristic such as an unsolved mystery and an investigation by which the former is solved. For Rzepka (2005, 10) there is another special point called "the puzzle-element"–the mystery is presented as an "ongoing problem for the reader to solve" by using their own reasoning abilities.

According to Botting (1996, 158) later, neo-Gothic writings, with their familiar forms, take their cue from earlier manifestations: the same cursed houses, the same obscure or occult pasts, the same primeval energies work their effects on human beings, always vulnerable, often unsuspecting, sometimes awe-stricken. These effects are the echoes of the Gothic settings which rely on a sense of claustrophobia (Williams 1995, 39), palpable in a classic tale such as Matthew Gregory Lewis':

> The castle, which stood full in my sight, formed an object equally awful and picturesque. Its ponderous walls, tinged by the moon with solemn brightness, its old and partly ruined towers, lifting themselves into the clouds, and seeming to frown on the plains around them, its lofty battlements, overgrown with ivy, and folding gates, expanding in honour of the visionary inhabitant, made me sensible of a sad and reverential horror. (Lewis 1977, 165-166)

In response, the detective story places the characters in settings where the sense of claustrophobia arises from darkness, shadows, and the strange reflections of light, where fear is enhanced by the insecurity and the unknown, a past (recent or distant) one is unaware of or which one cannot control (Day 1985, 123). Suspense is often unbearable, stemming from a mixture of pain and pleasure, experienced by fictional victim and reader alike, keeping all alert and expectant.

Like dreams, Gothic and detective fiction combine reality and fantasy. Nightmares soon reveal themselves to be reality, with a shadowy figure lurking in the background (Harris, 2008: 1). Omens, portents, and visions may acquire supernatural dimensions or may be part of the smoke and mirror, red herring scenarios of actual crime. The supernatural has dramatic value and is emotionally charged: walking ghosts, bleedings nuns, falling paintings and talking giants result from a blending of *the explained* and *the unexplained* supernatural, by reversing their proper order (Miles 2002, 53). The supernatural vanishes from the regular detective story, where such occurrences end up being given a logical, natural explanation (Harris 2008, 1). However, there are some famous examples where supernatural, omnipresent in the very genesis of the Gothic, is also manifest in detective fiction: Sheridan Le Fanu's Dr. Hesselius, whose purpose is to discover the vampire nature of Carmilla, John Silence,

Algernon Blackwood's psychic researcher, occultist Dion Fortune's Dr. Rhodes, a skilled reasoner who appeals to magic, Aleister Crowley's Simon Iff, both a detective and a necromancer, Seabury Quinn's Jules de Grandin, researcher and lycanthrope hunter, Manly Wade Wellman's John Thunstone and Judge Pursuivant, who resolve one or two poltergeists on the pages of *Weird Tales*, or Bram Stoker's Abraham Van Helsing. They all contribute to the dramatic enhancement of atmosphere by blurring the line between human-produced, natural, and supernatural events. In detective fiction, vile events defy explanation when they are presented as behavioural deviations. Only deviant personalities can account for monstrous deeds, serial crimes, mutilations and abuses.

The Gothic world could not exist without high and overwrought emotions. The narrative was usually overemotional, with men and especially women characters being allowed highly sentimental and uncontrollable emotions. Protagonists are often driven by anger, sorrow, surprise, terror and horror (remember, for example, Dr. Seward, especially when confronted with Mina's speeches and determination). Their nerves are weak and suffering is overtly manifested (Harris 2008, 1). The modern detective is also surrounded by people with strong emotions not far from Gothic ones, but he counteracts them all with his ratiocination. In his everyday world and tasks, emotions must be rejected as counterproductive, causing distraction and professional failure.

The Gothic novel's basic parameters and archetypal elements often rely on a gendered distinction: a woman (virginal, beautiful and young) without family (implicitly, father, husband, brothers) to protect and place her in a marriage (for respectability and economic security) travels from a distance to a mansion or labyrinthine castle, populated by virile, tyrannical and sadistic men. The woman is usually threatened by this powerful, impulsive, tyrannical male. One or maybe more than one male character holds – maybe unlawfully at times – the power, as lord, father, or guardian. The woman may be commanded to marry someone she does not love (it may even be the powerful male himself), or commit a crime. Kari Winter comments about the connection between the feminine Gothic and the vulnerability experienced on a daily basis by a woman in male-oriented society: "female Gothic novelists uncovered the terror of the familiar: the routine brutality and injustice of the patriarchal family, conventional religion, and classist social structures" (1992, 91). In detective fiction, this unequal gender balance is manifest in the threat of physical violation. The Gothic tyrannical male usually enjoys imposing his physical and socially guaranteed power on a weaker female character. In *The Monk*, which caused such controversy upon publication, that the book

had to be abridged and censored, Ambrosio threatens his sister thus: “You are imagined dead; society is for ever lost to you. I possess you here alone; you are absolutely in my power” (Lewis 1977, 60). As Helene Myers points out, “femicide–the killing of women–is a cultural convention” not only in literature, but in society in general (2001, 1). In detective stories, women’s inferior social position is stressed less dramatically, but they are still tyrannized by fathers, brothers, or husbands. They are weak but institutions work more democratically, when the male perpetrator of crime is finally identified and prevented from making further victims.

As in the crime novel, the Gothic plot axis is the pursuit of a truth implicitly forbidden in a dark and hostile setting. The Gothic novel often calls into question the principal subject’s mental health, as well as their capacities of reason and discernment, attributable, in other contexts, to the detective or trustworthy subject. Consequently, the reader’s relationship with this main character is structurally identical to the relationship with a Watson, with the only exception that the reader’s perspective is limited by a psychological or supernatural phenomenon instead of a social one.

The Gothic vocabulary was itself responsible for the creation of suspense and mystery, as well as making the reader feel pain and awe. Thus, Gothic metonymies were replicas of the supernatural, of horror and despair. According to Harris (2008, 1), the most common Gothic imagery includes howling winds which blow out candles, heavy rain with thunder and lightning, doors grating on rusty hinges, “approaching footsteps, sighs, moans, owls, eerie sounds, lights in abandoned rooms, clanking chains, characters trapped in rooms, ruins of buildings, crazed laughter, doors suddenly slamming shut, howling of distant dogs or wolves”. The detective story gives up the metonymy the real act of murder itself requires few, if any, figures of speech. The vocabulary of Gothic mystery included such tags as “diabolical, enchantment, ghost, haunted, infernal, magic, miracle, omens, ominous, prophecy, secret, sorcerer, spectre, spirits, strangeness, talisman, vision”. These concepts naturally entailed an equally long list of emotions, defined as “agony, anguish, apprehensions, commiseration, concern, despair, dismay, dread, fear, fury, hopelessness, horror, melancholy, mourning, panic, rage, sadness, scare, shrieks, sorrow, tears, terror, unhappiness, wretchedness” (Harris 2008, 1). Many of these words remain in the vocabulary of the detective story.

It is not surprising, then, that Edgar Allan Poe, master of terror and Gothic, is also the creator of a narrative form which, from its very origin, spread quickly due to its communicative effectiveness. E. A. Poe is commonly regarded as the father of horror. Indeed, poems like “The Raven” and “Annabelle Lee” and short stories like *The Telltale Heart* and

*The Black Cat* do prove and back this association. They turned out to be very popular productions from the beginning. As it happens, the Gothic novel and detective fiction hare a popular literary offspring: the famous penny dreadful. They appeared in England in 1830, as weekly publications sold at a low price. There were two categories of penny dreadfuls: magazines, which cost one penny, and were specialized in publishing popular novels in instalments; and the novels published in chapters, sold at one penny each, but aimed at an adult audience. In any case, it is obvious that, being so cheap, they reached a vast amount of readers. In general terms, the stories introduced really gruesome, horrifying creatures. In contrast with the penny dreadful, the classical police story demands, in addition to technical mastery, a rigorous plot ordering: the writer must create facts and link them in a logical way. Poe, most known for his horror stories and eerie poems, creates his first detective at the crossroads between the Gothic tradition, the popular demand for sensational cheap stories and the emergence of the new reality of the police and crime detection. *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, a short story published in 1841, along with *The Gold Bug* (1841), *The Mystery of Marie Roget* (1842), *Thou Art the Man* (1844) and *The Purloined Letter* (1845), combines certain Gothic trappings with the post-Enlightenment scientific rationalism, in an age when science was incorporated in the service of crime-solving. In these stories, the analytical and rational deductive ability solves a crime which seems inexplicable, setting the path for the crime fiction tradition which was to follow.

The story features Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, an amateur, introverted, but brilliant detective character who manages to solve crimes through an intricate process of logic. As the first detective in English literature, he is on a par with Holmes, Poirot and many others. Notwithstanding, there have been previous examples in Gothic fiction of characters trying to solve mysteries and unveiling ghosts. Poe also created the poetic device of the detective being accompanied and helped by a friend, a kind of witness and ally, perfected by Conan Doyle's Dr. Watson (but Van Helsing had such a partner, too).

Poe, followed closely by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, established the modern detective genre through the combination of horror and reasoning. Both Poe and Doyle took cues from their own periods, including real social anxieties. Their stories cause both fear of the unknown and relief thanks to the use of reasoning and logic within the same tale of mystery. Classified as both Gothic and detective, their writings blur the real and the imaginary.

Also at the crossroads between Gothic literature and detective stories is the genre rendered popular by magazines in the early twentieth century: the thriller. This new trend attempted to break down the barriers that separated detective fiction from other popular genres, such as intrigue and spy stories. Among the most prominent early creators of crime-based thrillers is Raymond Chandler, creator of Philip Marlowe, one of the most popular American detectives in the first half of the twentieth century.

Authors like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, and Raymond Chandler are well-known for mastering the art. But what makes these writers and their stories so successful?

Leaving aside the obvious pleasure provided by reading a detective novel, trying to capture the villain, longing for the feeling that justice prevails, these stories are not all about justice and morals. Detective fiction, just as the Gothic romance, contains the thrill of the chase, the narrow escapes, the at-times extreme violence. According to Kathy Prendergast, "the Gothic novel is generally understood to serve an essential human need, partly what Virginia Woolf called 'the strange human need for feeling afraid'" (Prendergast 2018). Similarly, noir novels also respond to the human desire to experience violence while sitting and feeling safe in the security of the armchair.

However, good mysteries go beyond the human desire to be entertained. They are a study of human behaviour, of social and psychological contexts. Every reader of Sherlock Holmes' exploits can identify the moralistic interest and dissemination of the ethics of living, motives shared by the most canonical writers (including Shakespeare and Miguel de Cervantes). In Gothic and detective stories, the irreversibility of evil seems to be an increasing tendency (at least at first sight). As the plot develops and evil grows and pervades the story, there is no turning back and forgiveness seems to be an unreachable aim rather than a possibility. Nevertheless, justice prevails over every single evil action and punishment is unavoidable: it seems to be the only way out. Consequently, both kinds of novels have their own morality.

Both the themes of justice restoring the peace and good overcoming evil are common in all these genres. The readers enjoy seeing criminals being punished, because it proves that our world order is restored, and they are relieved when the monster/ vampire/villain is destroyed. A good detective plot shares with the Gothic one its study of humanity and, at times, that journey into our essence may make us feel terrified. The way authors like Edgar Allan Poe, Bram Stoker, Mary Wollstonecraft, Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, and Raymond Chandler create their memorable mystery solvers or villains and develop unique and interesting

plots, is the key for success, as entertainment, as an insight to the human behaviour, and as a moralistic function. Both Gothic and detective fiction share the study of motivations and actions in general, and evil ones in particular.

As the professionalization of ratiocination continued, writings kept exploring the fears and anxieties of society, paying attention to the morbid and dark, with a twist. The public's fascination with horror and the macabre was still prominent, but the reality of a new science, criminology, also contributed to the establishment and success of the new genre. This is to say, the theme of crime raises interest in the application of science, and more specifically, in scientific thought. Criminologists began by researching on atavism and the born criminal–see, for example, the works by Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909), Alexandre Lacassagne (1843–1924), Hans Gross (1847–1915), Alphonse Bertillon (1853–1914), Havelock Ellis (1859–1939), Edmund Locard (1877–1966). These concerns coincided with the development of psychoanalysis and evolutionism (Sigmund Freud and Charles Darwin, respectively). Consequently, the public became more interested in law, crime solving, and the criminal nature. If Gothic literature focused on the supernatural monster, at this moment in time, a great deal of attention was paid to the evolution of the human species and the nature of man's psyche, trying to understand the criminal mind, and predicting future behaviour. Gothic monsters were abandoned and criminals replaced them, permeating every aspect of daily life, from the gentleman artist to the serial killer. We must not forget the deep impact caused in London by the murders of Jack the Ripper in 1888, a reminder that not every crime could be solved, despite all the advances. This caused a new type of horror, as well as an upsurge of interest in criminal behaviour, in *real* detective fiction. Monsters became real. The villains were no longer monsters created in a laboratory or vampires located in a distant castle (*Frankenstein* and *Dracula*). The so feared evil-doers were not just spectres, supernatural beings, ghosts of the past, but now existed in real life. If, in the Gothic tradition, the hero destroyed the monster and rescued the heroine, the new detective's mission is to identify the terrifying criminal.

Poe's C. Auguste Dupin used scientific reasoning to solve the most disconcerting and vile murders. Detectives such as Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes were conceived in the same vein. In *Dracula*, Doctor Van Helsing, like Holmes, is the only character who has access to the truth. The novel, at the same time that the events develop, and following the best traditional English detective fiction, is an account of the investigation of facts (the explanation of the weird events being caused by