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This Tropical City is a Gothic Body: The Urban Space as a Gothic Body in Anne Rice's Literature

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Abstract

The recent death of the American author of fantastic and horror literature, Anne Rice, has led us to revisit her legacy, rethinking her contribution to contemporary culture. Her writing was marked by supernatural entities such as vampires, witches and demons, transiting in urban and rural spaces of the United States of America. These creatures are built beyond the manichaeism of good and evil, they are complex entities just like human beings. They live beautifully, violently, passionately and intensely, a mirror of humanity in its tormented complexity. As intense and well-built as these beings are the spaces in which they inhabit and circulate. From the French Quarter to the swamps of Louisiana, the geographic locations chosen by the author are pulsating and vibrant, they are part of the construction of the story and the internal and external dynamics of the characters. In such a way, these spaces are more than just a setting, they become a central part of the narrative, a Gothic body in itself. Thus, this text will approach the urban space as a Gothic body in the books The Witching Hour (1995) and Merrick (2000).

Keywords: Anne Rice; Horror; Vampire; Witches; City.

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Anne Rice and her legacy

This study explores the hybridism of urban space within Gothic literature through Anne Rice's literature. It is focused on The Witching Hour (1995) and Merrick (2000). The objectives are to show how Geography and Literature can be mixed using Rice's fiction. The contribution of this research lays in situating supernatural entities on literary gothic works within the socio-historical and cultural fabric of New Orleans, Louisiana, reshaping the city as a Gothic body and an active subject within literature, thus expanding the possibilities of debating spaces in literary, geographical and transdisciplinary researches.

The year of 2021 was marked by the death of one of the most memorable and prolific contemporary horror and fantasy authors, the American Anne Rice. Having died at the age of eighty, the writer is part of a tradition of Gothic fictional literature, understood as a literary genre that began approximately two hundred and fifty years ago in Europe, starting from an aesthetic and political sense of questioning and tension in relation to the current social order, using the supernatural and horror as a tool that crosses the various literary elements (settings, dialogues, interpersonal relationships, narrative style, etc.) to explore and analyze various socio- cultural elements (Rata, 2014). Understanding her as one of the most powerful contemporary female voices within this genre, in the tradition of research on the author's work, it has already been pointed out that the literature produced by her has a peculiar characteristic of attracting everyone from the academic intelligentsia to the common reader, who has no familiarity whatsoever with the cultural production of Gothic, horror and the supernatural (Browne, Hoppestand, 1996). This attraction is generated by the peculiarity of Rice's writing: Navigating between the conventions of the Gothic canon, an engaging writing style and well-constructed characters, the author left us a vast cultural legacy in which witches, vampires and other supernatural entities are portals and bridges for readers to face and analyze their own humanity.

Browne and Hoppestand (1996, p. 4) define the power of the Gothic literature produced by Rice as precisely this factor: "The Gothic tales filled with vampires, witches and mummies are mirrors that reflect the prosaic everyday life of our humanity". The authors illustrate that the vampire Louis's search in Interview with the Vampire for the meaning of his macabre existence as a supernatural entity is directly related to each of our individual searches for the meaning of our lives; Rowan Mayfair's search in The Witching Hour for her own identity amidst the legacy of centuries-old witchcraft that she inherited has to do with the search for connection with our families and our ancestry; and the immortal Ramses's insatiable thirst for desire and passion is present in our relationships, where we want to feel needed by those around us (idem, 1996). Thus, we see that the author built a work based on using horror and fantasy as a way to

explore, understand and analyze the different spheres of humanity, in its socio-historical and psycho-emotional dimensions. In her pantheon of stories, Rice left us several books, published in multiple languages since 1976, when her first great success (Interview with the Vampire) was released. However, two sagas stand out: The Vampire Chronicles and The Witching Hour.

The first saga focuses on the immortal blood drinkers already famous in gothic literature. However, Anne Rice's vampires are much more related to Lord Byron than to Bram Stoker: They are seductive, passionate, lustful and rich, going through centuries of conflicts and interpersonal dramas while observing and mingling with humanity. The vampire Lestat stands out, a French man, a decadent nobleman from the Enlightenment era. Lestat becomes Anne Rice's most controversial and intense vampire: From waking the ancient vampire queen Akasha to drinking the blood of Jesus Christ, he knows no limits and unbridledly follows his instincts and passions. The Witching Hour tells the story of the Mayfair family, from medieval Europe to Revolutionary Haiti to modern Louisiana. Rice tells the story of women who have for centuries used the magic received from the Celtic entity Lasher to move between different spaces, resist persecution and shape and interfere in the reality around them, while their family builds bonds of affection and conflict, dealing with issues of material and magical heritage that permeate them.

Permeating this fantastic and gothic literature by Anne Rice, a specific place stands out: New Orleans. An entity omnipresent in her works almost as much as vampires, mummies and other monsters, the peculiarity of Anne Rice's New Orleans and the author's own relationship with the city need to be explored before we discuss the theoretical scope of this research and the analysis of the excerpts from the selected works.

The space of childhood memories: Anne Rice and New Orleans

Holditch (1997) tells us that the city of New Orleans had a profound impact on Anne Rice. The writer herself spoke extensively about her relationship with the city, always reporting how much the place had great emotional meaning, making her feel “more alive and less isolated” (idem, 1997) when she wrote about it. She always attested that it was a challenge to “capture the city (...) to do justice to the spell exerted on those who inhabit it” (idem, 1997, p. 38-39). Although it was not easy for her, New Orleans provided Rice with a setting, but also with history, mythology, legends, customs, spaces and the peculiar ambiance of one of the oldest cities with a unique identity in the United States (idem, 1997). Holditch (1997, p. 30) also points out some of the qualities that made New Orleans so attractive to the writer's literature: the

diverse and multicultural population (with emphasis on the immigrant neighborhoods; the Irish, Germans, French, Spanish, and the population called creoles of color - loosely translated as 'creoles of color' - a local term for African descendants originating from the enslaved communities brought to Louisiana), as well as the myths and legends related to certain figures of the city, places and regional customs. The researcher highlights some figures of New Orleans: the voodoo priestess Marie Laveau, a Spanish priest named Père Antoine, the prostitutes of Storyville, among so many musicians, writers, artists, politicians and criminals who profoundly marked the history of the city, whose lives were as interesting and intense as those of the supernatural beings created by the author. Anne Rice's fascination with the Garden District and the French Quarter (Le Quartier Français), the most central and elite part of the city (idem, 1997), stands out. Both places were used extensively by Rice in her stories as homes for her fantastical entities.

It is clear that New Orleans has unique elements that the author knew how to appropriate for her narratives. Amidst so many peculiarities in the socio-historical formation of New Orleans, it combines a strong regional identity with a rich terrain of real stories and local myths that make the vampires, witches and other creatures written by Rice not out of place in this context, but, in fact, seem like natural elements of this culturally diverse and unique setting.

Amador (2013) gives us more elements to think about the connection between Anne Rice and New Orleans. The researcher states that the author contributed profoundly to the “Gothicization” of the region, reinforcing that Rice used common elements of the natural and historical formation of the Louisiana region (the architectural style close to the European baroque, large plantations and large houses for the slave owners, the decadent aristocrats, the hot and humid climate), stylizing them, in a way that brings them closer to elements of American and European Gothic. Amador (2013) says that this approach taken by Rice makes her literature part of the subgenre classified as Southern Gothic, the one in which typical stories of Gothic literature are adapted to the context of the Southern United States. Based on the information and elements presented by Holditch (1997) and Amador (2013), we can see that Anne Rice's New Orleans ceases to be just an old tropical city and becomes a gothic setting, a place where the natural, social and cultural characteristics of the Southern United States are combined with supernatural elements of the Gothic, especially supernatural beings, along with tragic and Dantesque elements and situations associated with horror. However, more than just a place, it is necessary to understand how New Orleans also becomes a gothic body in Anne Rice's stories, as well as its vampires and witches, a supernatural entity with its own characteristics.

Therefore, in order to continue this research, the theoretical framework will be presented to better understand this approach during the analysis of the chosen works, The Witching Hour - vol. 1 (first volume of the story of the Mayfair Witches) and Merrick (seventh volume of the Vampire Chronicles).

The City, a Gothic Body: Literature Review

Regarding the theoretical framework of this research, we seek to address the perspective of the city as a Gothic body in Rice's work. Starting from the most basic idea for the development of this research, Reyes (2014) defines the body as central to the Gothic. The body becomes a place of vulnerability, where the reader/spectator becomes aware of their own fragility and embarks on a collective experience of horror (idem, 2014). The body is associated with sensations, fears, experiences and a visceral nature that makes it central to the construction of the Gothic as a literary and multimodal fictional genre (idem, 2014). Badley (1996) adds the perspective of the body as a place of madness, carnality, possessing its own frightening mentality, also using the metaphor of comparing the body to a "haunted house, whose groans trigger lust, misery and excruciating pain in the poor owner. A condemned construction" (Badley, 1996, p. 7). Badley's metaphor of the body as a construction helps us to think about the transmutation and expansion of the concept of body. While the authors previously explored think of the human body in its literal expression, I seek here to understand the city – an urban or hybrid territorial space – as a body. My proposal in this interpretative sense arises firstly from the fact that the city has no meaning without the collectivity of individual bodies that compose it, that travel through it and modify it, generation after generation. Secondly, we have the use that the author makes of the city. Just like the body in Badley's metaphor (1996), New Orleans becomes a space for lust, misery and pain, mixed with the supernatural and socio-historical tradition. Another important factor, to support the idea of the city as a body, is the synesthesia that Anne Rice brings to New Orleans; She translates "the spell" of this place through sounds, colors, and feelings that are provoked in the characters by the city's buildings, by spaces that become tormenting and intense, the stage for tragedies and misfortunes, as well as paths to salvation and redemption for the author's characters. Thus, the city ceases to be a setting and becomes a body within the narrative.

Some propositions of a subgenre within Gothic fiction called Urban Gothic help us to delve deeper into this idea, in which researchers have attempted to identify and discuss how urban settings are fundamental to Gothic narratives, especially contemporary ones.

Ancuta (2020) discusses Urban Gothic through a discussion of East Asian cities. The researcher argues that cities, in contemporary times, have become synonymous with normality and that these spaces shelter the living and the ghosts. According to her, the city and the supernatural are related to show us that the strange is often intertwined with the familiar. There is also an emphasis on how different geopolitical and economic moments influence the city's scenario and the supernatural entities that inhabit it.

Wisker (2020) also contributes to the perspective of the city as a central space for the Gothic and as a locus with its own dynamics:

> The city, its buildings, constantly renovated and remodeled, grand and dilapidated, hold stories that are publicly reconnected/reconstructed in museums and less publicly in private documents and in the bodies of those who have been silenced and buried within their past. Some of the darkest secrets are those of indentured laborers, of marginalized people, of oppressed and marginalized women, and of poorer and silenced cultural groups, (...) (Wisker, 2020, p. 206)

The author's vision of urban space helps us to think about Anne Rice's New Orleans; a place crossed by human and supernatural bodies, where the tension between the colonizer and the colonized exists and is staged in different ways. Where homosexual vampires and witches who fled from Europe interact with marginalized groups, often inhabiting the city center, but transforming and deforming it, just like a body, shaped to the will of the one who inhabits it.

The vision of Ancuta (2020) and Wisker (2020) contribute to thinking about the dimensions of urban space, which I connect to the idea of body. New Orleans becomes the stage for supernatural adventures and an agent of transformations in Anne Rice's supernatural creatures. It becomes a body endowed with its own characteristics, with sense, with a quasi-consciousness that affects its inhabitants, its streets and spaces being members that enable the living of experiences and emotions. The city becomes a body-territory, the central protagonist of the author's stories.

The City as a Gothic Body in Anne Rice: Analysis

Based on the previous contextualization and the theoretical framework presented, we will investigate the two chosen works. The first of them is the initial volume of The Witching Hour, vol. 1 (1995), the first part that tells the story of the Mayfair family, deeply involved with witchcraft and the occult.

The plot develops from Deirdre, a mysterious catatonic woman who silently lives in the grand Mayfair house in the Garden District neighborhood. Her mental condition is related to a dark family legacy in which her mother and grandmother also perished, due to the connection with the demon Lasher - an ancient Celtic entity. Deirdre's convalescent situation crosses several people in the city, who gradually reveal to the reader the complex mosaic of the life of the woman and her family. Also swept away by the mystique of the Mayfairs is the contractor Michael Curry, originally from New Orleans but living in San Francisco.

Despite being saved from drowning by a mysterious doctor, Curry has a brief experience of life after death, in which creatures from the other plane give him a mission, which is linked to an old house in his hometown. The house is that of the Mayfair family and Curry, without suspecting it, ends up connecting with the doctor who saved him, who is Rowan Mayfair, daughter of the convalescent Deirdre, also born in New Orleans, but with no memory of the city or her family, having been taken from there very young, in an attempt by her mother to spare her from Lasher's wrath. From the intertwining of their lives during the accident, Rowan and Michael are brought back to New Orleans, to complete their missions and unveil the legacy of the Mayfair witches.

As already explained in this brief summary of the work, New Orleans has a central place in the narrative and in the lives of the characters, although much of the action of the book also takes place in San Francisco. However, it is undoubtedly the southern city that stands out as the protagonist of the narrative, even when the characters are not physically there. From the first pages, we see how the city influences the flow of the narrative and how its physical space takes on an almost corporeal dimension, intertwining with the memories and feelings of the different characters:

> The doctor woke in a frenzi. He had been dreaming again of the old house in New Orleans. He had seen the woman in the rocking chair. He had seen the man with the brown eyes. (...) He thought again of the Englishman in the lobby bar. It was he who had awakened the memories - the fact that the Englishman had told the bartender that he had just come from New Orleans and that this was certainly a haunted city. (...) There was a calmness in the convention, and he liked this man, felt an immediate trust in him. Besides, the lobby of the Parker Meridien was a cheerful and pleasant place, full of light and movement and people. So far from that dark corner of New Orleans, that sad old city rotting with its secrets in its perpetual Caribbean heat. (Rice, 1995, p. 7-8)

In this excerpt, we can see the omnipresence and prominence that New Orleans has in the narrative. Based on the memories of one of the doctors who treated Deirdre Mayfair, Rice builds a specific scenario about the place. It is defined as "(...) a haunted city" (Rice, 1995, p. 7-8) and, in contrast to the effusive metropolitan agitation, has a morbid and mysterious nature, mixed with the tropical climate in the Caribbean style. The word "rotting" also stands out, which defines the decrepit state of the city - from the perspective of this specific character - and which can be associated with organic entities, reinforcing the idea of the city as a body, in this case specifically, in decomposition.

With regard to another character, Michael Curry, New Orleans brings other meanings. In the contractor of Irish descent, the city evokes feelings and memories, deeply mixed with the family past and the social and plural formation of Louisiana:

> Every now and then, especially after his mother's death, he would think of his past in New Orleans, which seemed increasingly strange and fantastic to him. People in California thought they were free, but how submissive they were, he reflected. (...) Back in his hometown, he might have left a city of intolerant people, but it was also a city of remarkable characters. (...) The memories came to him in the strangest flashes. He remembered the smell of linen napkins as his grandmother ironed them before putting them away in the deep drawers of the walnut sideboard. He remembered the taste of crab soup and okra, with crackers and beer; the frightening noise of the drums in the carnival parades. He would see the iceman coming quickly up the back stairs, with a gigantic block of ice on a pillow on his shoulder. And he would hear insistently those wonderful voices, which at the time had seemed so coarse to him, but which now seemed to possess a richness of vocabulary, a flair for dramatic expression, a passion for the very act of speaking. Stories of famous fires, of the famous riots caused by streetcar strikes, and of cotton loaders who had to bolt bales in the holds of ships with huge iron bolts, singing as they worked, in the days before cotton baling presses. In retrospect, it seemed like a fabulous world. (Rice, 1995, p.58)

In these paragraphs, it is observed that, just like a living body composed of limbs and organs, feelings and personalities, there are also different elements that make up New Orleans. These parts are the people, the memory, the history, which make the city a living and pulsating entity, always present in Michael's memories, who associates the urban space and the neighborhoods of the southern capital with his family (in the context of an individual past) and with the events of collective life (in terms of a public past). The synesthesia of smells and sounds can also be associated with a living body that emits smells and sounds, noises typical of the life inherent to that entity. Furthermore, it is highlighted that even without mentioning any supernatural event or creature, the city is associated with the fantastic and the bizarre.

Michael attributes a unique personality to New Orleans, which is especially noticeable when he compares it to San Francisco and California. This attribution of a personality corroborates the idea that the city within Rice's literature is much more than a setting, being a fundamental entity for the narrative. Continuing with Michael's memories, we see that the description of city scenes and spaces are also central to his affective memory:

> He used to remember the color of the twilight when he walked home late after football practice along Annunciation Street. How pretty the orange and pink lanterns were that poked out from between the little iron fences. Oh, could there be a sky as incandescent as the one that turned from pink to violet to gold above the roofs of the working-class houses? There could be no place so fantastic. And the Garden District, oh, the Garden District. His memories of it were so ethereal as to be suspicious. Sometimes he dreamed of it: a warm, luminous paradise where he found himself walking among splendid palaces surrounded by evergreen flowers and leaves of shining green. He would wake up and think, Oh, there I was, walking down First Street. I was back. But it couldn't possibly be like that, and he wanted to see it all over again. Certain houses came back to him: the huge sprawling house on the corner of Coliseum and Third, painted pure white down to the wrought-iron railings. And the two-lane houses with side aisles that he loved above all others, with their four front columns, their long flanks, and their tall twin chimneys. He even remembered people he had often glimpsed on his usual walks, (...) And that man, that strange man in the immaculate clothes, whom he had seen so often on First Street in the depths of that untended garden. He wanted to go back and check his memory against reality. He wanted to see the little house on Annunciation Street where he had grown up. He wanted to visit St. Alphonsus Church, where he had been an altar boy when he was ten. And St. Mary's Church across the street, with its Gothic arches and wooden saints, where he had also helped at Mass. (Rice, 1995, p. 58-59)

The detailed descriptions of the spaces, colors, moments and people that left their mark on Curry are constructed in such a way as to intertwine the reality of the city with the fantastic, so much so that the narrator uses words such as 'ethereal' and 'paradise' to define the way in which New Orleans is constructed within the character's mind. The detail and colors that permeate the description and stand out in Michael's thoughts, reconstructing the past, also make us think of the physical characteristics of characters that are sometimes highlighted in some narratives. However, instead of highlighting the color of the eyes, we have the emphasis on the color of twilight. The colors that predominate in the city also refer us to the description of skin tones on bodies. The description of the structure and architecture that constitute the city can also be associated withvphysical elements such as the description of limbs and specific parts of the bodies, as previously explained in the metaphor about the body as a construction (Badley, 1996).

These associations are being put forward here so that we can observe the construction of the embodiment of the city. Often in fictional narratives, even in Gothic literature, the physical space plays a supporting and complementary role. However, Rice subverts this logic. And with the same care that Edgar Allan Poe describes the cadaverous and frightening body of the lady in The Fall of the House of Usher or the fragile protagonist of Berenice (Reyes, 2014), Anne Rice describes New Orleans, thus transcending the idea of a mere setting to a body-territory in her narrative. In the case of the first volume of The Witching Hour, New Orleans is a distant and present body for Michael Curry, a mysterious body for Rowan Mayfair (who was taken from there at a young age) and a body-home for the Mayfairs, who fled the persecution of witches to the southern city of Louisiana.

Continuing the analysis, we will move on to the second work Merrick (2000). It is the seventh volume of the Vampire Chronicles saga. This volume is told from the point of view of David Talbot, a vampire recently transformed by Lestat, who seeks the help of a Mayfair witch, Merrick. Like Rowan, Merrick is part of the powerful clan of witches, but he is from a less wealthy part of the family and closer to the family's African- American heritage. Talbot seeks out Merrick with the intention of contacting Claudia, a child vampire who died centuries ago. Merrick's differences in relation to Rowan and Michael, white, wealthy characters who frequent a central part of New Orleans, allow us to see other parts of this body-territory of the American South:

> Although Aaron had prepared me for the old section of New Orleans we were headed for, I was still startled by the neighborhood of crumbling houses of all sizes and styles, nestled in untrimmed oleanders that bloomed luxuriantly in the humid heat, and even more startled by the old cottage on stilts that belonged to Great Nananne... And everywhere the weeds grew high in the gutters, which were really nothing more than open ditches; and the thickets of oak, cowpea, and cottonwood climbed all around us as we made our way to the residence that Merrick must now leave behind. We came at last to a high iron picket fence, and a house much larger than the others around it, and of much earlier date. It was one of those Louisiana houses that are raised on columns set on brick foundations, about five feet high, with a central wooden staircase leading to the front porch. (Rice, 2000, p. 127)

Talbot's description of the region where Merrick lives with his grandmother - Great Nananne, a priestess of African religion - differs greatly from the central region previously highlighted in Michael's memoirs. Thus, there is a lack of homogeneity in the settings of Rice's New Orleans. The poverty of this region stands out in Talbot's words. However, even with these divergent characteristics, magic and the supernatural transcend the structural and class differences in this body-territory constructed by the author:

> It was a brick building that rose from the floor to a high, wide altar on which special offerings might have been placed. Its upper part was filled with large plaster images arranged in rows to the left and right. I immediately saw Saint Peter, the Pope Legba of Haitian voodoo, and a saint on horseback who appeared to be Saint Barbara, representing Sobô de Xango in Candomblé, for which we had always used Saint George. The Virgin Mary was there in the form of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, representing Ezilie, a voodoo goddess, with heaps of flowers at her feet and perhaps the largest number of candles in front of her, all of them flickering in their tall glasses in the breeze that passed through the room. There was Saint Martin de Porres, the black saint of South America, with a broom in his hand, and next to him was Saint Patrick, looking down, his feet surrounded by fleeing serpents. They all had their place in the clandestine religions that slaves in the Americas had long cherished.The more I looked at this entire exhibit, the more I saw things like the haunting figure of the Black Madonna with the white Christ Child on her lap. There were many small bags tied tightly and kept there, as well as expensive-looking cigars still in their wrappers, perhaps for some future offering, I couldn't tell. At one end of the altar were a few bottles of rum. (Rice, 2000, p. 131)

The presence of African religiosity is highlighted by Talbot. At this time, the miscegenation and diversity of the socio-historical formation of New Orleans, deeply marked by African influence, stand out. In this sense, this territory is perceived as a multiple, diverse, heterogeneous body. In the same space where Michael Curry extolled the memory of Gothic architecture, the influence of African religiosity lives on, which mixes with supernatural entities, as in this scene where Talbot - a recently transformed vampire and student of the occult - goes to the house of an African-American priestess. It is clear that just as the human body is not homogeneous and has its distinct characteristics and specificities, the city of New Orleans also has its heterogeneities.

In addition to the change of scenery, there is a change of people in this space. The neighborhood where Merrick lives is much more diverse and mixed than the downtown area and the neighborhoods of European immigrants that mark the memories in Michael Curry's narrative. Also, when we explore the scope of Afro- descendant religiosity in the city through excerpts from Merrick (2000), we can metaphorically associate part of this religious expression of the city with the non-biological part of a body, with regard to what is psychological and even spiritual in individuals, which is materialized in characters such as Merrick, Grande Nananne and the space where they both live, which even contains a snake, cared for by both, which Talbot interprets as being an avatar of Damballah, an important deity of Haitian voodoo (Rice, 2000, p. 200). In addition to the neighborhood inhabited by Merrick and Grande Nannane, Talbot

narrates the way in which New Orleans accommodates vampires and the city's relationship with supernatural creatures, detailing for the reader the complex supernatural geography of the region:

> New Orleans soon opened its vulnerable spots to us, and we entered a run-down neighborhood not unlike the neighborhood in which I had so long ago met the Great Nananne of Merrick. But if there were any powerful witches about, I found no sign of them that night. Now let me say a few words about New Orleans and what it was to us. First of all, it was not a monstrous city like Los Angeles or New York. And though it has a considerable lower class of dangerous elements, it is still a small place. And when bloodsuckers are drawn to it in large numbers, the random lust for blood creates an unseemly commotion. (...) As with God and Satan, humanity is our subject. And so we prefer to spend our time immersed in the mortal world and its innumerable complexities. (...) And so New Orleans, in all its sleepy beauty, is home to only two of the Living Dead. Even so, we must be very clever. (Rice, 2000, p. 205)

Talbot's narrative, using the words 'vulnerable points' and the verb 'penetrate', once again refers us to the embodiment of the city, present in the language used by the narrator who associates it with a body. In this excerpt, Talbot also briefly explains how vampires live and how they organize themselves in the city, which, despite sometimes being inhabited by many bloodthirsty supernatural beings, at the time of the narrative, only has two active vampires hunting its streets. It is also worth noting that Talbot expected to find some powerful witch or priestess in the most vulnerable areas, indicating that the practice of Afro-Caribbean religion among the descendants of slaves in New Orleans remained strong in the outskirts of the American city.

This excerpt from Talbot also reveals the parallel geography of New Orleans, which encompasses ordinary human life and also the lives of the supernatural beings that inhabit and hunt there on a daily basis. This moment in Talbot's narrative is similar to the elements of the Urban Gothic, as proposed by Ancuta (2020) and Wisker (2020), where the authors evoke the city as a space that contains the human and supernatural elements in parallel, as well as discussing the internal socio-political and cultural dynamics of these spaces.

In this way, we were able to notice that New Orleans is more than just an urban setting within the two selected works. The city becomes a body-territory, at times almost a character as much as Michael Curry, Rowan Mayfair, Merrick and David Talbot, as Rice dedicates many pages to the city and its traditions and stories to detail it with precision. Thus, we see the urban space transmuted, it becomes a

space of lust, misery, spirituality, beauty and pain, sometimes pulsating and alive, sometimes decadent and haunting, like a body in constant transmutation.

Conclusion

In this article, we aimed to explore how New Orleans, the hometown of the late writer Anne Rice, transcends the level of geographic location and literary setting in the author's work to become a gothic body, a pulsating and mysterious body-territory that interferes in the narrative and influences the characters.

We also see that much of the Urban Gothic is present in Rice's narrative, since supernatural creatures and spiritual entities inhabit its streets as naturally as any city dweller. The author takes us through different parts of the city, like a coroner exploring the different parts of the body: From the pulsating heart-historic center to the most peripheral, but no less important, endings that lead us to less organic and more spiritual parts, revealing to us the multiple facets of New Orleans, a gothic body in the south of the United States, home to one of the most prominent voices in contemporary literature and its supernatural beings, sewn into the organic fabric of the city with the same intensity that Anne Rice's memory was sewn into the legacy of the history of her adopted home.

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