

## Old stories, new Gothic: Clive Barker's Books of Blood

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The English writer Clive Barker began his literary career in 1984 with the publication of an anthology of 'horror' stories divided in three volumes, which were titled Books of Blood. The work was first published in the United Kingdom and did not receive much attention. A year after, in 1985, the anthology was released in the United States. The reception there was a lot more enthusiastic. Both critics and readers seemed to agree there was something new in the realm of horror fiction. Stephen King, who was then regarded as the sovereign of the genre in the English language, was among the first to recognize Barker's contribution; he is said to have declared that he had seen the future of horror, and its name was Clive Barker. But was what was it that the American readership found in his stories that they found so disturbing and horrific? Before answering that question, as well as introducing the term New Gothic as defined by Ramos 2001, I will first offer a brief overview of Gothic, both as genre and mode.

In terms such as 'gothic', 'gothic revival', and 'new gothic' it is possible to trace certain common traits; however, they comprehend works which are so diverse that one would have to make an effort to put them under the same cover. But then again, why call them all 'gothic works'? Why Gothic? In the following lines, I will try to show what is common to the different works that are generally referred to as gothic, and the main distinctions between Traditional Gothic and New Gothic. First, the word 'Gothic'.

At the root of the word gothic, one has a direct reference to the Goths, an ancient Teutonic people that, from the third to the sixth century A.D. proved an important power in the Roman world. Of all Germanic peoples, the Goths were the first to take on Christianity. As the 6<sup>th</sup>-century Gothic historian Jordanes reports, the Goths came from Sweden across the Baltic Sea to the basin of the Vistula River. By the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD they had migrated as far south as the lower Danube, around the Black Sea. During that century, Gothic armies and fleets wreaked havoc over Thrace, Dacia, and cities in Asia Minor and along the Aegean coast. They attacked Athens in 267 to 268, and

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threatened Italy. For about one hundred years, wars between the Roman emperors and the Gothic rulers devastated the Balkan territory and the region to the northeast of the Mediterranean.

However, the Gothic that became famous – that of art and architecture – had no direct connection with that ancient people mentioned above. Or rather, the connection is established in the derogatory connotation that the use of this term implies. The word gothic was originally used by Renaissance writers to refer to all art and architecture of the Middle Ages, which were regarded by them as comparable to the works of the Goths, that is, of the barbarians. Since then, the term has been restricted in use to the last major medieval period, the one that immediately follows the Romanesque. Ironically, the Gothic Age is now considered one of Europe's outstanding artistic periods. By Gothic art and architecture, one means both religious and secular buildings, sculptures, stained glass, and illuminated manuscript and other kinds of decorative arts that were produced in Europe between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, the latter part of the Middle Ages.

Gothic as in 'Gothic novel', is a comparatively recent notion. It entered the literary word as a derivation from the subtitle Horace Walpole gave to his work: *The Castle of Otranto, a Gothic Tale* (the first editions of 1764—65); later editions would feature *Gothic Story* as subtitle. Horace Walpole is credited as having created the genre, although it is possible to perceive Gothic features in Tobias Smollet's *The Adventures of Ferdinand, Count Fathom*, which was published in 1753. Walpole was aware of his position as the creator of a new genre, as a quick reading of the preface to the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto* attests. In his time, the word 'Gothic' still bore much of the value the Renaissance people attributed to it; it still meant 'wild', 'barbarous' and 'crude' (Kuiper, 1995). It becomes clear that the qualities that were looked down by the Renaissance society were reassessed by some members of the emerging Romantic school, who not only found those qualities 'attractive' but also took to themselves to cultivate them. Those qualities could be used as a reaction against the norms imposed by the Neoclassicism of earlier 18<sup>th</sup> century culture. Traditional Gothic romances were usually set in the past and in a foreign country. The chosen past was the Middle Ages, and, frequently, the foreign countries were the Catholic ones from Southern Europe.

Galli-Mastrodonato and Grassin propose a definition that is at the same time comprehensive and limiting: "[the Gothic novel] is an internationally adopted term unifying

different and often diverging critical tendencies which nevertheless share the basic genetic assumption of a peculiar literary genre” (2000).

The Gothic *topoi* can be compacted into the list Patriarche-Morfee uses to trace the continued influence of the first-phase Gothic, as she calls it, on later works. This includes a predilection for the historical (often medieval); an unusual emphasis on the past life-histories of the characters and on the shaping or misshaping force of the past within their textual world; an explicit anchoring to Christian practice, and deviancy from its precepts; mystery narratives; maximal exploitation of the monstrous and the spectral; over-determined architectural presence; labyrinths, both mental and physical; a lively concern for and trenchant exploration of gender and sexual roles; and more nebulously but importantly a certain macabre atmosphere and general writing of terror (Patriarche-Morfee, 2000).

However, the Traditional Gothic *topoi* in the list above did not disappear from subsequent literary works. It is said (*Gothic/ New Gothic*) that the new writings that followed that period, for example, the domestic novel and the sentimental novel, displayed “markedly Gothic influences”. This applies to most authors of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – Charlotte Brontë, Jane Austen and Charles Dickens, for instance – who made use of Gothic motifs. This fact leads some scholars to extend the span of the traditional Gothic up to the 1860s. Patriarche-Morfee says that after the 1860s, instead of talking of a continuation of the first Gothic flame, it seems to me more adequate to regard the literary production that featured the Gothic *topoi* as a Gothic Revival. I would mention Thomas Love Peacock’s satire *Gryll Grange* (1860), Joseph Sheridan LeFanu’s *Carmilla* (1872), and Jules Barbey d’Aurevilly’s *Les Diaboliques* (1874) as examples. ‘Decadent Gothic’ is what Patriarche-Morfee calls the works produced with the *fin de siècle* literary Gothic resurgence of the 1890s. She ascertains that that kind of Gothic is related to the original Gothic through its themes and symbolism. The word ‘decadent’, however, seems misleading to me, since what the authors of the period do is basically take hold of their age’s free-floating anxieties and give them the shape of stories, and feed them into an ever-hungry audience, even though I am aware the authors want to make reference to the Decadent artists of the turn-of-the-century England like Oscar Wilde. The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the appearance of works that would later on help understanding the Victorian phobias. Works like Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), H.G. Wells’ *The Island of Dr.*

*Moreau* (1896), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) readdress the question of appearance and transformation made (im)/popular by *The Monk*, over a century before. On top of that, the Victorian reader is invited to reflect on the degeneration of the character of a people that saw itself as superior to virtually all people from past ages. What made these pieces popular was ultimately the fact that they found resonance in the end-of-the-century Britain, even if the resonance came as terror and negation to what ought to be seen as true about their society.

Progressively, the traditional Gothic *topoi* began to lose space to a literature whose primary goal was, more and more, to arouse the reader's fears in general; hence the substitution of 'Terror' or 'Horror' for 'Gothic'.

How about the gothic literary production? With the popularisation of horror literature, is it still possible to talk about a gothic school in sense of a Radcliffe or Lewis? A possible solution for those like me who persist in the use of the 'gothic' nomenclature and its pervasiveness would be to treat it not as a literary genre but as a mode – an a-temporal mode:

Since the original Gothic of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century there have been only brief periods when the literary field did not sustain a vigorous Gothic strain. Indeed many argue Gothic literature follows cycles, reviving in times of social chaos to exploit social fears that fuel its narratives of terror. Because of this perdurance through time and its transmutations across genres, numerous critics now unsurprisingly consider Gothic as an a-temporal mode. (Patriarche-Morfee , 2000.)

Patriarche-Morfee says that, in a restrictive sense, New Gothic opens in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The same author points out that in the 1960s, Gothic fiction proliferates in a way not seen since the 1790s. It is possible to say that that proliferation has not yet stopped. Depending on the subject matter chosen or the emphasis given by the author, one may talk in terms of several different New Gothic branches. For example, Urban Gothic, Post-Modern Gothic, Cyber-Gothic, and New American Gothic, to quote some of the most prominent. .

This shift from a bound literary genre to an a-temporal literary mode may be responsible for the difficulty in clearly separating the Gothic from the 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Gothic Revival, and the New Gothic. However, the notion of an a-temporal mode would explain the power of resurgence that the Gothic has and why works as different from one another as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Joyce Carol Oates's *Expensive People* both fit under 'Gothic'.

Besides that, I see two other basic reasons for the survival and the maintenance of the word Gothic in literature: an Appolonian reason and a Dyonisian one. The former is known and supported by editors and publishing houses because they are the ones who live on producing (when not counterfeiting) genre fiction and, hence, need and “provoke” this kind of name-linking. For the publishing market it is pivotal to force into the reader’s mind the notion of a Gothic fraternity: Dean Koontz depicts horror in his works in a style that resembles Stephen King, who is responsible for the resurrection of a genre much appreciated in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century America, when Edgar Allan Poe’s imagination gave birth to stories that would have appealed to Matthew Lewis and also (some of them, at least) to Ann Radcliffe. Following this reasoning, the linking would take us to *Beowulf*’s gleemen. If one walks along the aisles of any good bookstore and spends some time examining the spines of the books under “horror”, s/he will find instances of the name-linking I have mentioned. From Dragons & Dungeons writers to H.P. Lovecraft; from Stephen King to Clive Barker. If one reader is fond of King, let us say, he might as well try one of the other “related” authors. Even prolix authors like Joyce Carol Oates need several months to write a new book. Therefore, what the publishing houses do is offer, in the *mean*-time, the readers works written by “read-alikes”. Those works will soothe -- if not quench – those readers’ hunger for new horror/Gothic titles. That keeps the money flow, and some publishing houses seem to possess an everlasting supply of such goods.

The second reason supports the notion that there are indeed some basic characteristics in the fiction produced by different authors in different periods. The inclusion of authors so varied and different as Peter Straub, Angela Carter, Robert Coover, Jamaica Kincaid, Janice Galloway, to mention a few, in anthologies like the one edited by Patrick McGrath and Bradford Morrow, which not by chance (for my purposes, at least) received the title *The New Gothic*, should lead to grouping of those authors’ texts because of their recognisably Gothic or Gothic-esque elements:

Gothic fiction, in its earliest days, was known by the props and settings it employed, by its furniture. Dark forests and dripping cellars, ruined abbeys riddled with secret passages, clanking chains, skeletons,

thunderstorms, and moonlight – from such materials did the first Gothicists frame their tales. (MAcGRATH 1993)

This is how the editors of that anthology open their introduction -- calling the reader's attention to the fact that Traditional Gothic pays a lot of attention to its furniture, to the external state of things, to the world without. Overlooking Charles Brockden Brown, who is a follower of the Ann Radcliffe school and its explainable supernatural, it is with Edgar Allan Poe that the focus on the furniture – the external elements in the narrative – began to shift to the inner landscapes and give room to more subtle pieces that compose an entropic internal world. With this, the Gothic furniture receives new tinges and is more than ever connected to the psychological universe of the characters:

In Poe's work we encounter minds and souls haunted by the urge to transgress and do evil, crippled with distortions of perception and moral sense, and obsessed with death and morbidity. With Poe the Gothic turns inward, and starts rigorously to explore extreme states of psychological disturbance (p.xi).

Poe<sup>1</sup>'s exploration of 'new extreme states of psychological disturbance' is probably his best contribution to the subsequent generations. The way he subverted a genre that is subversive in its origin is, perhaps, the message people like Anne Rice, Stephen King, and Clive Barker, among others, felt was their duty to show that they had received and *understood*.

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<sup>1</sup> As a terror/horror writer, Edgar Allan Poe enjoyed somewhat in his time the kind of success that pulp fiction authors of today do. He would be elevated later on to the American Literary Olympus. H. P. Lovecraft, on the other hand, in spite of the attempt of scholars such as S.T. Joshi to rescue his literary relevance, seems mostly relegated to an audience of genre fiction readers. A possible reason for this is the fact that Lovecraft wrote exclusively about what he called "cosmic horror" and his most famous attempt at theorization of the literature, the essay "*The Supernatural Horror in Literature*" is, oftentimes, frustrating with his attempts to prove the omnipresence of horror in literature, especially when he makes use of mainstream authors to illustrate his point. It is possible to say that from the 1930s with Lovecraft and some imitators, until the mid-1970s, with the beginning of the Stephen King phenomenon, terror/horror fiction 'webs out' to the margins. This does not mean to say there were not noteworthy terror/horror writers or works in between. Robert Bloch published *Psycho* in 1959 and his first novel, *The Scarf*, is from 1947, but it was only with Stephen King that terror/horror would gain access to a larger readership. A legion of copycats would follow King's breakthrough.

## Old Stories, New Gothic

A horror story used to be a lot simpler in the days when it had only two parties – the good and the evil ones. There were those who suffered and those who inflicted pain. In the stories of authors like Clive Barker, there are those who are not strictly bad or good, they simply are. Most of those characters ground their existence on the aesthetics of the grotesque, on the apology of pain for the sake of it. That may be representative of the second half of the last century, a century that questioned the quest(ion) itself and used the critique to criticise itself. Dying entities can cling desperately to the memory of life and, maybe, the New Gothic represents the spasms of the dying century, with all its contradiction, uncertainties, shallow victories and lasting failures. And, once again, maybe, it is not an ordinary spasm but the contractions of an epistemological mother who swallowed the things that characterised it to nourish and strengthen a child that, although born in the 20th century, is to grow up and mature in the next. Let us turn now to *Books of Blood* and the the New Gothic fiction that it represents.

The original 1984 *Books of Blood* contains sixteen stories, plus the triggering tale that explains what/who the book(s) of blood is(are). Although each story can be read separately, reading the “books” as parts of a whole literary *body* proves to be the best. The autonomy of the tales works to reinforce the different facets of the reports. Each tale is in itself a ‘book of blood’. These books tell about violent deaths and those who suffered or inflicted them. The fact that a book of blood is another metaphor for the body, as Barker’s epigraph makes clear --“everybody is a book of blood; wherever we’re opened, we’re red” -- may show his desire to utilize a perfect caveat: the content of the stories cannot be attacked because the dead cannot be judged. His dead can state their cases and talk about the unspeakable ‘posthumously’. The *Books of Blood* are memoirs bluntly and despairingly written on the flesh of the living, for the living by the deceased. The dead do not aim at simply bemoaning their fate – they want to teach. Each story stands for a “book” that was ‘re(a)d’ and each time the readers opens the book and read one of the stories, they become accomplices of the horrors that are reported. After all, no one and nothing forces the reading – it is an act of free will. Of the universe of stories in *Books of Blood*, I selected two to illustrate the distinctive elements found in Barker’s fiction. I will star with a longer analysis of ‘In the Hills, The Cities’, and then proceed with a shorter appraisal of ‘New Murders in the Rue Morgue’.

### In the Hills, The Cities

Going into the wilderness seems to be a motif in Gothic fiction (Maybe, a motif in Romantic literature in a broad sense). The notion that leaving the civilised city and getting to the rustic but authentic countryside leads to a meeting of souls is an old one. The characters in “In the Hills, The Cities” share that urban belief that to be able to cope with the stressful reality of a metropolis one has to spend his/her vacations in the most desolate of places possible. On top of that, there is also implicitly the notion that contact with the uncivilised will make one more ready for their day-to-day tasks.

The plot can be briefly outlined like this: two lovers from Western Europe go visiting Eastern European regions on a love vacation. They end up finding more than the ‘unusual atmosphere’ tourists expect to find in remote areas. They meet the marvellous and are forever changed. The one who can adapt to the new experience and “go with it” survives; the other, who simply cannot accept what his senses are informing, perishes.

Barker’s new Gothic rendition of the traditional “bucolic quest” bears some peculiar differences. “In the Hills, the Cities” features two English gay men as protagonists. They are, so it seems at first, “honeymooning”, but like many things in Barker, a closer look shows that their trip, in fact, is a kind of farewell excursion into the unknown (in the broadest sense of the word). As Hoppenstand (1994) points out, these two lovers, Mick and Judd, are representative of the intellectual division between politics and art. Judd is a journalist and is “wired up” to the world around him. He is aware of the world around him and is incapable of understanding Mick’s “Je m’en fiche” approach to life. For Judd, one has got to care: care about what happens with the taxes which are paid, care about the war in the middle-east, the famine in Africa, the growing of AIDS, etc. Knowledge means the end of innocence. And here is a point linking a queer newsman and the town preacher. (Although the former believes that once you know something you cannot “unknow” it and should, therefore, do something with that knowledge, while the latter clings to the Old Testament fable of the fruit of knowledge and its intrinsic sinful consequences.) Mick, in his turn, is more interested in visiting the places he read about in famous art magazines or heard mentioned in chic T.V. travelogues. He is in it for the old paintings and for the ancient Yugoslavian statues and monuments. Again, one of the first assumptions which the reader can make is that one (Judd) stands for reason and the other (Mick), for passion.



A lot of the Traditional Gothic fiction is about someone going/moving (temporally) to an alien setting (*The Mysteries of Udolpho*; *The Italian* and other titles by Radcliffe can illustrate that). Likewise, much of the horror fiction exploits the formula of the unexpected found in the least likely of places. In the former case, the alien helps to build up the sublime (as in Edmund Burke's treatise) of the scenery; in the latter, it is used to create terror. For nothing (some believe) is worse than learning that what looks like a bucolic and innocent village is in fact a hell spawn place. "In the Hills, the Cities" tells us about Podujevo and Popolac, the two "ambulatory" city-giants which are constructed of the interlocking (living) bodies of their inhabitants. Consciously or not, Barker, with his giants made of thousands of people interlocked together offers the reader icons that personify the Burkean sublime.

Gary Hoppenstand states that the story is a representation of the imagination (Ipsis; p.62), of how far mankind can go in building their dreams and fantasies. The same author likens Barker to Poe in that both convey the message/notion that "imagination is the great single achievement of humanity"(p.62). At the same time, he reminds us that a price, a terrible price should be paid for that achievement. Hoppenstand's view is tempting. However, a closer look reveals it (the view) as not only tempting but easy. It is almost a re-heating of the old logocentric litany found in some biblical texts: there are limits to the extension people should stretch their power of imagination – they are to exercise what God gave them without trying, in the process, to equal themselves to their Creator. It does not matter if in other parts of the biblical text (e.g. Genesis), they are said to have been made to His image.

I think it is easy to see the Podujevo/Popolac festival-ritual as Tower of Babel revisited. Easy -- and misleading. Barker does portray imagination in the story. Imagination to accept transformation. Judd cannot change and accept the sublime personified by the deranged city-giant at the end of the story (Popolac goes insane after having seen his twin Podujevo disintegrate and tumble in pieces to the ground because one of his "cells" died, causing a fatal chain-reaction). He, therefore, must die. Mick, who is the one attuned to his times and society and as the more art-oriented of the two lovers, not only survives the encounter with the miraculous but becomes one with it. In the end, we are left with one lesson, if any: Those whose imagination is lulled and whose senses are deadened and incapable of adapting are the ones who die -- maybe because those are dead to many aspects of life from the start. On the

other hand, those who can accept the different and even relate to it secure the right to live. This story was written just a few years before Yugoslavia tore itself apart in civil war.

#### New Murders in the Rue Morgue

In New Murders in the Rue Morgue, Lewis Dupin, a seventy-three year old American, goes to Paris during a bleak winter, when the sister of an old friend summons him urgently to assist her in helping her brother, who was accused of butchering a young woman. Lewis, as his last name indicates, is a distant relative of C. Auguste Dupin who 'inspired' Edgar Allan Poe to write some of his famous detective stories. One story in particular is echoed in the title chosen by Clive Barker for his own story: The Murders in the Rue Morgue (1841). Although knowledge of Poe's tale is not a prerequisite for understanding Barker's, it is certainly an interesting exercise to contrast the techniques used by the authors to accomplish their goals. In Poe's time, an orangutan was a creature so exotic and distant from the reality of the average citizen that it was one and the same with legends like the Big Foot. His readers could easily believe that such creature, which none of them had seen, could assault and slaughter a person. An orangutan was something utterly alien then. The author just need to take that and weave a tale of the weird. Poe makes use of a cosmopolitan setting to explore the sense of alienness on which he builds his story. In a city full of 'aliens', that is, people who are not from France but from other countries, the hollering of the creature was heard as a foreign language. Character after character declares that he or she heard someone shouting in another language – a language that they did not speak but knew was foreign, that is, alien. However, to attempt to explore alienness in the end of the Twentieth Century to disturb the sensibilities of his audience was not an easy task for Clive Barker. What could he use? An exotic animal? People watch the Discovery Channel – they would not be that impressed no matter which creature he tried to pass as the perpetrator of the crimes in his story. Left with almost no options, he decided to parody Poe's story, but offer to creature a happier ending.

As orangutan would not inspire much fear in present times, Barker chooses a different primate: a gorilla. The animal, like his counterpart in the 1841 story, was also raised to imitate human behaviour and attitudes. His owner and Lewis best friend, Philippe teaches him everything, including the pleasures of flesh. Philippe shares with the ape his predilection for

young red-headed women, a predilection that the primate will carry on even after his owner's suicide in prison.

'New Murders' can be read as a twilight of man-type story. The main characters are elderly and have already reached the winter of their lives. The setting is Paris in the Winter. But the twilight is not for all types of men. Lewis Dupin is not only an elderly man, he is also a man who finds it difficult to deal with changes and face the strange. These two characteristics are death certificates for characters in the universe of Clive Barker's New Gothic. The readers learn that it was the Red-headed young woman who seduced the ape and not the animal who forced its animality onto her. This is what makes Philippe, Lewis's old pal, to commit suicide. Similarly, it is the discovery that other -- younger -- people can find it acceptable that a gorilla teaches himself to walk in upright position and shaves himself to become more sociable, associated with the fact that the creature can be more human than most 'people' who were born that way that leads Lewis to jump into the dirty and ice-glogged waters of the Seine and kill himself. So it is life for the 'monster' that embraced change and represents the new and death for the old and narrow-minded characters.

The story ends with the creature fully dressed as a man walking with his girlfriend in the streets of Paris as the weather finally changes and a sunny day heralds coming of spring. As New Gothic terror stories go, this is very much like a happy end.

In a New Gothic text, more specifically, in Barker's New Gothic text, evil is divided into three basic categories: intrinsic evil, floating evil and attributed evil. The first represents the evil found in characters like Eugene in 'The Skins of the Fathers' (*Books of Blood II*). Eugene is evil because of his bigotry. He seems to possess the knowledge that Aaron is not really his son from the beginning of the story – the boy was begot by nether world creatures who saw Lucy, Aaron's mother and Eugene having sex in an open field and decided to take the lead: Eugene was literally thrown away while the creatures pleased themselves with the woman. She, far from being shocked or even disgusted, ended up enjoying their contact. In spite of their appearances and the hugeness of their members, the creatures wanted to make love to her; they wanted her to be the mother of their collective son. Above all, somehow Lucy felt that there was a kind of deference in the act, so that the scene which for an outsider would look like rape was more like gratification of a fantasy. For appearance's sake and for fear as

well, after all, he was dealing with preternatural things, Eugene allowed the world, the people in his small dusty town, to believe the boy was his “own flesh and blood (p. 173)”; he himself wanted to believe it. Aaron, his “son”, is abused in words and in acts almost daily. To add to his misery, his general behaviour is far from what a small town bully like Eugene would classify as “masculine” and that serves only to increase the bully’s wrath and bitterness towards him. The evil in Eugene is rooted in the fact that he clearly takes pride in being a bigot and is ready to do whatever he can to prove his intolerance justifiable. Although bigotry and intolerance are not new elements in the Gothic continuum and seem to have been used prodigally in the Traditional Gothic fiction (See the Marchesa in Radcliffe’s *The Italian*), these two negative characteristics denote, or better, stand for the source of all other evils. If the evil nature of the Marchesa (Radcliffe’s *The Italian*) showed itself through her class prejudice and vanity, it was apparent that they were only two manifestations of a soul that had many other sins. In Barker’s New Gothic, bigotry and intolerance are more than manifestations of evil natures – they mirror a character’s inner world and the outer world (here not only the fictional world but ultimately the non-fictional world that serves as parameter for the construction of the fictional one) reflects its malignity in that character’s assessment of his world.

The mouldy manuscript of Traditional Gothic novels resurface in Barker’s stories as something fresh, or better, it is *flesh*. The dead take control of the living and use them as a means to tell the stories -- their stories and their truth. The blood in the *Books of Blood* belongs to the guilty and to the innocent; the blood of the tiger and the blood of the lamb are blended to provide the ink that is used to record the stories. The autonecrogographical narratives just crave to be told, and because that is the first and probably the last opportunity afforded to the dead to speak<sup>2</sup>, they desire to tell everything and not to spare any minute detail. The mouldy manuscript of yore is a device used to address certain taboo subjects; in Barker’s short stories, the fact that the stories are told by murdered victims and/or the assassins themselves is used as a disclaimer for graphic violence. As the dead no longer care about the pre-conceptions of the living, they ‘talk’ matter-of-factly about sex and sexuality without fretting over the reaction of the more conservative members of their audience. That is Clive Barker’s disclaimer for the gender troublesome passages in the *Books of Blood*.

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<sup>2</sup> Notice that, traditionally, the dead are silent or, if they talk, they are not given to circumlocution. *Hamlet’s Ghost* is a good example.

In the introduction to their anthology, McGrath & Morrow write that Edgar Allan Poe recognised the possibilities of the combination between the historical elements that defined the Gothic genre and his personal motivations as a writer in order to amalgamate more subtly the geography of madness and the depths of spiritual derangement. For McGrath & Morrow that was the starting point for the New Gothic writing:

The new Gothicism would take as a starting place the concern with *interior entropy* – spiritual and emotional breakdown – and address the exterior furniture of the genre from a contemporary vantage. Night remains dark as ever, but the streets we walk, the houses we live in could not be more different.” (1991, P.xii)

The New Gothic as found in the literary works of Clive Barker questions pre-established concepts such as good and evil, ugly and beautiful, and other similar dichotomies. Judgments based on appearance and unwillingness to adapt very often lead to oblivion, and that is well portrayed by the way the main characters of the two stories studied here meet their fates. What is more horrendous: a gorilla that learns to be a man or man that cannot accept that and chooses suicide? For the author of *Books of Blood*, the option is quite apparent.

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