

GOTHIC ELEMENTS IN JOHN WYNDHAM'S APOCALYPTIC NOVELS

John Wyndham's apocalyptic fiction combines elements of science fiction, social commentary, and a modernized Gothic tradition. Although his works do not belong directly to classical Gothic literature, they clearly exhibit characteristic motifs of the genre: fear, isolation, the destruction of the familiar world, and encounters with the unknown. Gothic elements in Wyndham's novels are transformed to fit the realities of the twentieth century: medieval castles are replaced by abandoned cities, ghosts by unknown life forms, and the source of anxiety is not the supernatural, but the fragility of human civilization.

One of the key features of the Gothic in Wyndham's writing is the atmosphere of gradual immersion into fear. In *The Day of the Triffids*, the catastrophe is not presented as an instantaneous apocalypse; instead, the reader experiences, alongside the characters, a gradual awareness of the tragedy's scale. This structure reflects the Gothic principle of suspense, where horror is built through anticipation and uncertainty. The blindness of most of humanity creates a sense of vulnerability, while the emergence of the triffids – carnivorous plants – renders the world a hostile space in which humans lose their dominant position. The motif of the unknown is also crucial: the characters do not understand the nature of the catastrophe, heightening tension and producing a sense of existential instability.

Equally significant is the motif of isolation, which has a clear Gothic origin. In classical Gothic literature, characters often find themselves in enclosed spaces – castles, monasteries, or remote estates. In Wyndham, such a space becomes the post-apocalyptic city. London, after the catastrophe, is silent, abandoned, and potentially dangerous. The absence of a familiar social order produces a feeling of psychological loneliness, giving the narrative a Gothic resonance. A similar effect appears in *The Kraken Wakes*, where the gradual descent of the world into crisis is accompanied by a sense of both global and personally experienced isolation. Humanity faces an unknown force emerging from the depths of the ocean, and the invisibility of the enemy amplifies the atmosphere of anxiety.

The Gothic dimension also manifests in the creation of monstrous figures. In classical Gothic tradition, the monster embodies fear of the "other" and the disruption of natural order. In Wyndham's novels, this function is preserved, though monstrosity takes on a science-fictional character. Triffids, unknown oceanic creatures in *The Kraken Wakes*, and children with extraordinary abilities in *The Midwich Cuckoos* serve as variations of the Gothic monster. At the same time, these figures are not entirely negative; they prompt a reconsideration of the boundaries of humanity and nature. Thus, monstrosity in Wyndham gains a philosophical dimension linked to a crisis of the anthropocentric worldview.

Another aspect of the Gothic is the motif of ruins and civilizational decay. In traditional Gothic literature, ruins symbolize the transience of human culture and the inevitability of historical decline. In Wyndham's post-apocalyptic novels, this motif is transferred to a modern setting. Abandoned cities, deserted roads, and desolate buildings depict a world that has lost its order. The ruins of modern civilization function as a modern Gothic stage on which the drama

of survival unfolds. This space is not only physically dangerous but also psychologically pressing on the characters, evoking a sense of lost stability.

Existential anxiety plays a crucial role in producing the Gothic effect. Apocalypse in Wyndham's work calls into question the moral and social foundations of human existence. Characters must make difficult decisions regarding survival, interaction with others, and the preservation of humanitarian values. This issue resonates with the Gothic tradition, in which fear is linked not only to external threats but also to internal conflicts of the characters. The author demonstrates that the greatest horror may arise not from monsters, but from the collapse of moral order.

Thus, Gothic elements in John Wyndham's apocalyptic novels emerge as a modernized form of the traditional genre, adapted to the realities of the twentieth century. They manifest through an atmosphere of the unknown, motifs of isolation, the monstrous, ruins of civilization, and existential anxiety. Wyndham transforms classical Gothic elements by combining them with science-fictional concerns, creating a distinct form of post-apocalyptic Gothic in which the primary source of fear is the instability of the modern world and humanity's vulnerability in the face of the unknown.

An analytical focus can highlight different modifications of the Gothic in Wyndham's prose, depending on the type of threat and the way it is represented. In *The Day of the Triffids*, spatial Gothic predominates, with the desolate city functioning as a territory of anxiety and uncertainty; in *The Kraken Wakes*, invisible-enemy Gothic develops, where the source of danger remains hidden and thereby intensifies the sense of fear; meanwhile, in *The Midwich Cuckoos*, social Gothic is evident, built on the motif of the "other" within the community. This differentiation allows Wyndham's apocalyptic fiction to be viewed as a multi-layered modern Gothic, combining spatial, existential, and socio-psychological dimensions of fear.

It is important to emphasize that Gothic in Wyndham's prose is connected not only to apocalyptic events but also to the psychology of the "ordinary person" facing an extreme situation. The author deliberately chooses characters without heroic traits – journalists, scientists, and ordinary citizens – and it is through their perceptions that the atmosphere of anxiety unfolds. In *The Day of the Triffids*, the protagonist experiences a gradual awareness of the catastrophe, heightening psychological tension; in *The Kraken Wakes*, events are presented through the experience of an ordinary couple witnessing a global threat; in *The Midwich Cuckoos*, fear emerges within the everyday life of a small community. Thus, the Gothic effect is shaped not only by the apocalyptic scale of events but also by the inner reactions of individuals confronting the breakdown of familiar perceptions of the world, bringing Wyndham's prose closer to psychological modern Gothic.

REFERENCES

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