



The occultist Hercule Poirot: Jules de Grandin and the end of a weird era

Vanessa Cianconi

Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro (RJ), Brasil.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1175-4919>

E-mail: vcianconi@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Weird Tales is a pulp magazine with a huge publication in the first decade of the 20th century in the United States of America internationally launching known names like H. P. Lovecraft, Robert Bloch, and August Derleth. Curiously, Seabury Quinn, one of the most famous pulp authors of the time, has fallen into oblivion in the contemporary world. Creator of the occult and supernatural French detective Jules de Grandin, Quinn was considered a minor short story writer, his stories were marginalized by specialized critics for being uncreative and too marketable. This paper intends to demystify Quinn as someone who, strongly influenced by World War I and its trenches of horror, created monstrous characters that between the years 1925 and 1933 haunted the American wasteland, reinforcing historian W. Scott Poole's theory that the Great War gave rise to modern horror. The stories here analyzed show as the images of the war shape the storytelling in the wasteland, the one that did not only remain in T. S. Elliot's imagination with its mutilated bodies, the dead coming back to life and the incessant noise of primal desires for destruction joins Eric Hobsbawm's *Age of Extremes* which, in fact, was an age of horror that seems today like an insistent and feverish reenactment of the Great War that gave birth to our world.

KEYWORDS: Crime literature; Seabury Quinn; Occultist sleuth; *Weird Tales*; War.

O Oculista Hercule Poirot: Jules de Grandin e o fim de uma era estranha

RESUMO

Weird Tales é uma revista *pulp* com enorme publicação na primeira década do século XX nos Estados Unidos da América, lançando nomes internacionalmente conhecidos, como H. P. Lovecraft, Robert Bloch e August Derleth. Curiosamente, Seabury Quinn, um dos autores *pulp* mais famosos de então, caiu no esquecimento no mundo contemporâneo. Criador do detetive francês ocultista e sobrenatural Jules de Grandin, Quinn era considerado um contista menor, logo, suas histórias foram marginalizadas pela crítica especializada por serem pouco criativas e muito mercadológicas. Este trabalho pretende desmistificar Quinn como alguém que, fortemente influenciado pela 1ª Guerra Mundial e suas trincheiras de horror, criou personagens monstruosos que entre os anos de 1925 e de 1933 assombraram a terra desolada estadunidense, reforçando a teoria do historiador W. Scott Poole de que a Grande Guerra deu origem ao horror moderno. Os contos aqui analisados demonstram como as imagens da guerra moldam o contar de histórias na terra devastada, aquela que não ficou somente no imaginário de T. S. Elliot, com seus corpos mutilados, mortos que voltavam à vida e o ruído incessante de desejos primais pela destruição, juntando-se à "Era dos Extremos", de Eric Hobsbawm, que, na verdade, foi uma era de horror que parece hoje como uma encenação insistente e febril da Grande Guerra que deu origem ao nosso mundo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Literatura de crime; Seabury Quinn; Detetive ocultista; *Weird Tales*; Guerra.



*The 20th century was a period of intense and unprecedented violence,
marked by two world wars and numerous regional conflicts.*

(Eric Hobsbawm)

*The human capacity for both great evil and great resilience was
on full display in the events of the 20th century.*

(Eric Hobsbawm)

1. *The Age of Extremes, the World War and the weird detective tale*

Eric Hobsbawm called the period that opened in 1914 and closed in the 1990s the *Age of Extremes*. The 20th century, or the most terrible of centuries, according to the historian, is a time of wars and the predominance of ignorance and fear. Military conflict before the Great War, Hobsbawm noted, had specified objectives which, once achieved, usually resulted in peace through concessions. The Great War introduced the idea that conflicts between nations should be fought for unlimited ends. Nations started wars with no foreseeable conclusions, and the unconditional surrender of an enemy became the only possible outcome. Today, the traditional concept of surrender is no longer in vogue. The background to this unsustainable state of affairs can be traced in two ways. First, the depersonalization of combat; second, the notion that the annihilation of the enemy represents the only legitimate end of war. The first new vision of war legitimized the second, or at least, made it much more palatable. For the historian, there is no way to understand the 20th century without understanding the war for it was marked by it, by its initial era of collapse and catastrophe. In other words, the Great War reimagined the military conflict, ushering in an era of lost illusions.

Therefore, an era of extremes. But, in fact, an era of horror in which the haunting of the wasteland remained not only in the imagination of T. S. Elliot with his mutilated bodies, the dead coming back to life and the incessant noise of primal desires for destruction, but of many post-war horror writers such as the notorious H. P. Lovecraft and the forgotten Seabury Quinn. The image of the wasteland is macabre, apocalyptic, as are the characters and settings of Quinn's detective stories. Professor Jules de Grandin, a French police officer working in the USA, is not a "mere" detective, he is a supernatural detective. The crimes he solves go beyond the usual murder in a hotel room or supermarket parking lot, de Grandin solves cases involving mysterious creatures such as ghosts, vampires, demons, and non-humans in general (which is not our most common definition of animal). The definition of the monster in history (or

literature) is extensive and not something to be discussed in such a few pages, but it can be said that it is the monsters (the imaginary and the not so imaginary) from the past that come to haunt the detective's present. In fact, many of the young men of the Great War learned that a bayonet in the belly could be as impersonal as a bomb falling from the sky. Hobsbawm is right, after all, that incinerating hundreds of thousands of men, women and children proved to be as easy as shooting and gauzing them.

When the magazine *Weird Tales* first appeared on newsstands in early 1923, there was nothing quite like it - it really was "The One Magazine". Part of its attraction was that it became a place for new forms of storytelling to emerge. *Weird Tales* published stories that today we would describe them as horror, fantasy and science fiction when these genres were still evolving, but at a time when there were no such labels. The weird tale itself did not begin with the magazine - it had its roots in the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Mary Shelley, Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and many others. But it was in the *Weird Tales* and the works of its most influential contributors, such as H. P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, Robert Bloch, and Seabury Quinn, that the threads of these many literary antecedents were woven into something new. Although the magazine may not have been very popular, it served to rapidly spread this kind of literature to the horror and fantasy fandom. It could be said that almost everyone who read it created their own magazine or fan club or started writing their own "weird fiction" - Lovecraft's term for the kind of supernatural horror he produced for several decades.

2. Seabury Quinn and his supernatural detective

Curiously, Seabury Quinn, one of the most famous pulp authors of the time, has fallen by the wayside in the contemporary world. Creator of the occult and supernatural French detective Jules de Grandin, Quinn was considered a minor short story writer, and his stories were soon marginalized by critics for being uncreative and too commercial. Today it is very difficult to find any academic work written on his works. What little can be found about him online is on science fiction websites, and even then, not very recognized.

This article, therefore, aims to look at Quinn, not only as the creator of a supernatural detective with undeniable similarities to Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot, but as someone who, strongly influenced by World War I and its trenches of horror, created monstrous characters that haunted the American wasteland between 1925 and 1951, reinforcing historian's W. Scott Poole's theory that the Great War gave rise to modern horror. T. S. Elliot's wasteland joins Eric Hobsbawm's "age of extremes" which, in fact, was an age of horror that seems today like an insistent reenactment of the Great War that gave birth to our world.

Seabury Quinn's short stories appeared in more than half the issues of *Weird Tales* and, curiously, most of the 93 cases investigated by supernatural detective Jules de Grandin took place in the small town of Harrisonville in New Jersey. His last 5 stories, written between 1947 and 1951, are gathered in volume 5 of the collection entitled *The Complete Tales of Jules de Grandin*, published by Night Shade Books in 2019. It is clear to contemporary readers that his

later tales follow the same pattern as his first stories published in the *Weird Tales* in the early 1920s. The Second World War and its political implications within American society, as well as the First World War for his first post-war stories, served as the backdrop for his latest narratives. However, the decline in narrative quality is also evident.

Claire de Lune (1947), *Vampire Kith and Kin* (1949), and *The Ring of Bastet* (1951) have a common thread: the fact that they all return in some way to the fears of the Victorian century. Nineteenth-century anxieties have always had a special place in fear literature in general: the threat of science to myth, otherness (or the unknown) and the possibility of phantasmagorical hauntings were recurring themes in Quinn's final stories for the magazine. Added to these are the damaging (and very real) consequences of the two world wars. The graphic description of horror and visceral scenes of mutilated bodies, very common to war, was something very close to people's hearts in the post-war period when the *Weird Tales* was launched in 1923. In his first tales of the supernatural detective in the pulp magazine, Quinn brought stories that graphically described mutilations, psychological torture and the continued distrust of science as the cause of all evil (after all, scientists and doctors were the ones who committed the greatest atrocities). The present after 1914 had changed, so what frightened people had also changed. Horror became, according to Poole, the fundamental way in which people approached the world and, in addition, their reality, which had been changed by the horror of war itself. The piles of corpses and a land devastated by so much blood inconsequentially spilled gave rise to this new reality.

In *Claire de Lune* (1947), de Grandin and Dr. Trowbridge encounter a mysterious woman, the famous actress Madelon Leroy, who de Grandin claims is very familiar to him. Her delicate complexion and frail, almost tissy physical appearance are reminiscent of the old victims of vampire stories, but her true essence lies in her mature eyes. Something in Madelon's eyes, the eyes that, in superstitious biblical tradition, are the mirrors of the soul:

She should have been completely charming, altogether lovely, but there was something vaguely repelent about her. Perhaps it was her slow and rather condescending smile that held no trace of warmth or human friendliness, perhaps it was the odd expression of her eyes – knowing, weary, rather sad, as if from their first opening they had seen people were a tiresome race, and rather worth the effort of a second glance. Or possibly it might have been the eyes themselves, for despite her skillful makeup and the pains obviously taken with her by beautician there was a fine lacework of wrinkles at their outer corners, and the lids were rubbed to the sheen of old silk with a faintly greenish eye-shadow, certainly not the lids of a woman in her twenties, or even in her middle thirties (Quinn, 2019, p. 391).

Having been hired for yet another medical case, the detective and his sidekick arrive at Mazie Schaeffer's house, after being called by her mother, to check on the young woman's state of health, which has rapidly deteriorated after a few tea dates with Madelon Leroy. The image of the malnourished and worn-out bodies of trench warfare has never left Quinn's imagination, and so did his characters who also remembered having seen this kind of bodily degradation before:

If it weren't that we saw her horse-strong and well fed as an alderman less than two weeks ago, I'd say she is the victim of primary starvation. I saw causes showing all these symptoms after World War I when I was with the Belgian Relief (Quinn, 2019, p. 395).

De Grandin also reminds the reader of something said by Voltaire before him, still in the middle of the 19th century. Variations on the theme of the repetition of history appear alongside debates about its attribution. It was the Spanish philosopher George Santayana who said: "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (2011, p. 172). The fear of history repeating itself, or its dialectical notion of the past in relation to the events of the present as a way of making the present intelligible in relation to the past, is not used lightly by de Grandin, history has repeated itself and in the worst possible way. The Second World War inaugurated the use of the most lethal weapon produced by human beings: the atomic bomb. The nuclear weapon served as a backdrop to end the conflict when the US dropped the second bomb, now on Nagasaki, in 1945. The French philosopher Voltaire believed in the possibility of history repeating itself, but the phrase credited to him by de Grandin was actually written by Alphonse Karr in the magazine *Les Guêpes* in 1948. The dialectical repetition of history is hugely present here, when the ghosts of the past come to haunt the detective's present:

'Do you remember the quotation?' he countered: 'Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose?' I thought a moment. 'Isn't that what Voltaire said about history' – 'the more it changes, the more it is the same?' 'It is,' he agreed with another sober nod, 'and never did he state a greater truth. Once more I damn think history is about to repeat, and with that tragic consequences none can say.' (Quinn, 2019, p. 393).

It was first in the *Communist Manifesto*, in 1848, that Marx used the image of the spectre as a metaphor for history when he stated at the beginning of his manifesto: "A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism." (Marx, 2010, p. 14) The image of the ghost as the frightening being that brings something fearful from the past, but which repeats itself, becomes clear in Marx's text when he states that history is cyclical, because events from the past are reproduced in the present in much the same way. Although it is only in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), that he states: "Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce." (Marx, 1852), it is clear that this terrifying return to a past that should have been over, is in fact not over, but it persists by continuing to haunt the living in the present. For Marx:

The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language (Marx, 1852).



And Marx adds:

Thus the awakening of the dead in those revolutions served the purpose of glorifying the new struggles, not of parodying the old; of magnifying the given task in the imagination, not recoiling from its solution in reality; of finding once more the spirit of revolution, not making its ghost walk again (Marx, 1852).

The problem is that the ghost is walking again. The revolution is neither exalted nor its spirit rediscovered, quite the opposite. What remains is the wreckage of the war, the shattered bodies and the misplaced hope. History and de Grandin's detective stories perpetuate themselves through a repetition of apparitions.

The 19th century comes back to haunt the detective.

Now, let us see what we have. It may not amount to proof, but at least it is evidence: Larose, Larue, Leroy; the names are rather similar, although admittedly not identical. One Madelon Larouse who is apparently about to die of some strange wasting malady – perhaps old age – makes contact with a vigorous young woman and regains health and apparent youth while the younger person perishes, sucked dry as an orange. That is in 1867. A generation later a woman called Madelon Larue who fits the description of Larose perfectly is stricken ill with precisely the same sort of sickness, and regains her health as Larose had done, leaving behind her the starved, worn-out remnant of a young, strong, vigorous woman with whom she had been associated. That is in 1910. Now in our time a woman named Madelon Leroy - (Quinn, 2019, p. 398).

An interesting detail about Madelon Leroy is that she refused to be photographed. Dr. Trowbridge recalls that the camera lens is much sharper than the human eye, and perhaps because of this precision, Madelon – a woman who was considered beautiful – did not like having her photograph taken. In *The Vampire Book: The Encyclopedia of the Living Dead* (1995), by J. Gordon Melton, it is explained that it was originally Bram Stoker in *Dracula* who popularized the idea that vampires have an aversion to mirrors. For the vampire, mirrors are objects of human vanity and therefore unnecessary. It seems that, according to Stoker, there is a folk lore that places mirrors as revealing the alter ego of individuals. This is where we learn about the existence of the soul and the idea that breaking mirrors would mean seven years of bad luck, as breaking mirrors would damage the soul. It is then speculated that the vampire had no soul, so he would not reflect in the mirror. This non-reflection extends itself to the camera, that is, the vampire would not appear when the photographs were developed. (Melton, 1995, p. 270-271) Leroy's beauty was what kept her alive. For de Grandin, "she was egotism carried to illogical conclusion, a being whose self-love transcended every other thought and purpose" (Quinn, 2019, p. 404). Leroy's self-centeredness led to her death.

Elizabeth Bathory was the countess who tortured and killed several young women in the 16th century. At a time when cruel and arbitrary behavior by those in power was accepted as normal, Elizabeth delighted in inflicting punishments to torture and kill her victims. She was accused of draining the blood of her victims and bathing in it to retain her youth, a possible inspiration for Quinn's character who used power (seduction through her beauty) to drain the lives of these young women into her. According to de Grandin:

(...) Then I knew that we faced something evil, something altogether outside usual experience, but not necessarily what you would call supernatural. She was like a vampire, only different, that one. The vampire has a life-in-death, it is dead, yet undead. She were entirely alive, and likely to remain that way as long as she could find fresh victims. In some ways – only the good God and the devil know how – she acquired the ability to absorb the vitality, the life-force, from young and vigorous women, taking from them all they had to give, leaving them but empty, sucked-out husks that perished from sheer weakness, while she went on with renewed youth and vigor (Quinn, 2019, p. 403).

In *Vampire Kith and Kin* (1949), de Grandin and Trowbridge are called in for a case very similar to the previous one. Anastasia Pappalukas is dying and there is no earthly reason for it. When they visit Pappalukas' family home, they discover that the disease she is suffering from is only diagnosed in Greeks, Turks and Amerindians. Dr. McCormick, the young woman's doctor at the time, reports that her only symptoms are loss of appetite, consequently weight loss, paleness, a slight headache in the mornings and a lot of fatigue. According to the doctor, she also suffers from nightmares and an irrational dread of going to sleep for fear of something she cannot name, but calls "them". De Grandin decides to hypnotize the girl in order to find out what is happening to her. The detective suggests that what is afflicting her is a disease called 'The Angel's Disease' (Quinn, 2019, p. 413), a disease with symptoms similar to tuberculosis, but the result of demonic possession. However, he believes more in the power of suggestion than in possession itself. Greeks, according to de Grandin, are very superstitious and believe in local legends. Anastasia's fiancé, Timon, committed suicide and blamed the girl for his death. Anastasia, in her naivety, believed that the suicide would turn into a *vrykolakas*. *Vrykolakas* are like vampires, they are disembodied spirits who suck the vitality out of their victims (just like Madelon Leroy in *Claire de Lune*). It is interesting to examine here how de Grandin combats Anastasia's unjustified belief with a ritual from the same superstitious level. De Grandin puts *Mandragora autumnalis* (a hallucinogenic plant) into a bottle and explains to his science friend (who obviously mocks the detective) that it is possible to lure the devil into the bottle.

The constant underlying clash between myth and science is present in all of the detective's stories, even when he denies the presence of this dispute. The conflict between science and religion somehow overlaps or intertwines, according to the detective:

'In Greece, as elsewhere in the near and Middle East, the person o' modernity is only a thin coating laid upon an ancient culture. For the most part their physicians have been trained at Vienna or Heidelberg, great scientific institutions where the god of words has been enthroned in the high place once sacred to the Word of God. Therefore they believe what they see, or what some Herr-professor tells them he has seen, and nothing else. The priesthood, on the contrary, have been nourished on the *vin du pais*, as one might say. They remember and to some extent give credence to the ancient beliefs of the people. [...] The priests contend the malady is spiritual in origin; the doctors hold that it, like all else, is completely physical. Left to themselves the papas would have attempted treatment by spiritual means, but they were not allowed to do so. And so the patients died. You see?'

'You mean it was another instance of conflict between science and religion? 'Mais non; by no means. There is no conflict between true science and true religion. It is our faulty definition of the terms that breeds the conflict, my friend. All religions are things of the spirit, but all things of the spirit are

not necessarily religious. All physical things are subject to the laws of science, but science may concern itself with things not wholly physical, and if it fails to do so it is not entirely scientific.’ (Quinn, 2019, p. 407-408).

The “exorcism” is complete and by the end of the story Anastasia is free of the obsessing spirit. De Grandin prepares for the religious (or magical) act by surrounding himself with possible ritualistic materials to rid the girl of the spirit that neither of them was sure possessed her body. But when in doubt, it was better to surround themselves on all sides. When questioning de Grandin about the possibility of the existence of the supernatural, Dr. Trowbridge asks if the psychopathological illness already studied by psychologists would not be enough for the case to be set up, since his subjection to the supernatural had already been established.

He took a deep breath, swallowed once, and began again, speaking slowly ‘You were sure she suffered a psychoneurotic condition; I was not convinced of it. Undoubtedly a good case could be made for either hypothesis, or both. She was neurotic, beyond question, she was extremely suggestible; she had been dominated since infancy by the naughty Kokinis person. Also, she had been brought up on Greek folklore, and knew the legends of the *vrykolakas* as English children know the rhymes of “Mother Goose” or French children their *contes de fées*. She might have scorned and derided them, but what we learn to believe in childhood we never quite succeed in disbelieving. *Bien. Très bon*. It were entirely plausible that she should have been impressed by self-murder and the curse he put on her, that she should be haunted and deprived of life by a *vrykolakas*. Yes, of course. (Quinn, 2019, p. 418).

The detective, somehow, brings in Freud’s psychoanalytic studies by explaining Anastasia’s spasm not as female hysteria, but as something supernatural. Repression, according to the psychoanalyst, occurs when a thought, memory or feeling is too painful for an individual. Therefore, the person unconsciously pushes the information out of their consciousness, affecting their behavior. However, the person who has repressed the thought is completely unaware of its existence or effect. In the girl’s case, the only way to get this information out was through sleep.

Very well. The spasm she suffered when she was about to tell us of this Kokinis person was another link in the chain of evidence. It was a nervous blocking of consciousness, a refusal to talk on a painful subject – what the psychiatrists refer to a complex; a sort of mental traffic jam caused by a series of highly emotionally accented ideas in a repressed state. (Quinn, 2019, p. 418-419).

But it is only at the end of the story that de Grandin pulls out a book written by Montague Summers and published in 1928, entitled *The Vampire, His Kith and Kin*. Summers was a clergyman and teacher of English. Ordained an Anglican deacon in 1908, he converted to Roman Catholicism and began calling himself a Catholic priest. Known for his eccentric personality and interests, Summers played a key role in importing French Satanism to England and it is rumored that at the beginning of his religious life, instead of ordinary masses, he officiated “black masses”. He became a well-known figure in London society because of the publication of his *The History of Witchcraft and Demonology* in 1926. This work was followed by other studies on witchcraft, vampires and werewolves, all of which he professed to believe in. Summers also

produced a modern English translation, published in 1929, of the *Malleus Maleficarum* (or the *Hammer of the Witches*).

And it is through Summers' theoretical look on vampirism that the detective "proves" to the doctor that there is a technical way (probably based on science) to annihilate a vampire by trapping it in a bottle (rather like trapping the saci¹ in Brazilian folklore):

There is yet another method of abolishing a vampire – that of bottling him. There are certain persons who make a profession of this; and their mode of procedure is as follows: The sorcerer armed with a picture of some saint lies in ambush until he sees the vampire pass, when he pursues him with his ikon; then the poor Obour takes refuge in a tree or on the roof of a house, but his persecutor follows him with the talisman, driving him from all shelter in the direction of a bottle specially prepared, in which is placed some of the vampire's favorite food. Having no other resource, he enters the prison, and is immediately fastened down with a cork, on the interior of which is fragment of the ikon. The bottle is then thrown into the fire, and the vampire disappears forever. (Quinn, 2019, p. 419-420).

It is no surprise that in the 1940s, the decade of the Manhattan Project and the Second World War, the fears of American society did not subside. Scott W. Poole argues in *Wasteland* (2018) that the World War I and its dire consequences gave rise to modern horror. I dare say that it was with the Second World War that this horror really took root. But it was Freud (or science) who reflected on the path the world was taking in his writings. It is in *Writings on War and Death* (1915), that the psychoanalyst states:

We cannot but feel that no event has ever destroyed so much that is precious in the common possessions of humanity, confused so many of the clearest intelligences, or so thoroughly debased what is highest. Science herself has lost her passionless impartiality; her deeply embittered servants seek for weapons from her with which to contribute towards the struggle with the enemy. (Freud, 1957, p. 275).

But it was only in *Mourning and Melancholy*, published two years later, that he developed the possibility that a specific type of sadness could be so real: a ghost that would never be extinguished. Seeing yourself as the possibility of a dead body became a legacy of the war. Suicide would be the gateway to the sadness of trauma. The end of the war made Freud think about the nature of fear, the fear invoked by the return of the dead. His 1919 essay was his answer. In *The Uncanny*, the psychoanalyst traced the root of the word through the idea of the unfamiliar, being in an unfamiliar territory, but nevertheless with memories of what is known. The frightening in the uncanny is instilled in us when we are confronted with strangeness, and we experience a shock in the midst of everyday life. We look at something that is totally different from us, but which behaves like us. Dread can also work the other way around, when the familiar becomes strange, when our expectations of the world not only prove to be wrong but

¹ Saci is a character in Brazilian folklore. He is a one-legged black man, who smokes a pipe and wears a magical red cap that enables him to disappear and reappear wherever he wishes. Considered an annoying prankster in most parts of Brazil, and a potentially dangerous and malicious creature in others, he nevertheless grants wishes to anyone who manages to trap him or steal his magic cap.

are distorted into unrecognizable geometries. Freud's reflection on the nature of horror makes only one reference to war, but I believe its presence hovers behind his writings. He chooses to illustrate the idea of the uncanny, this feeling of existential homelessness, by reflecting on the idea of the *doppelgänger*. This phantasmagorical double envisions a world full of dead bodies and the most frightening possibilities of the uncanny manifested on a global scale. The double ends up being a representative of our own death. It is an agent of horror, a reminder that we are bodies destined to become dead. All bodies. Perhaps that is why Quinn chose an undead character for his latest stories. The vampire does not have a living body *per se*, the vampire is nothing more than the double of death, he delineates in all these stories a past that is about to repeat itself, he is in fact a phantasmagorical double, he is the memory (or perhaps a repository) of the past. I believe this is where Freud and Poole meet. Thus, it is possible to use the same logic as Freud for the Second World War and, consequently, that of Poole. The First World War gave rise to modern horror, but it was with the Second World War that this horror was established, therefore shaping Quinn's stories. And the issue of the double never leaves his stories. At the end of the story, Trowbridge once again makes fun of the detective's pseudo-science; as it continues, for the man of science, to be impossible to grasp any argument based on fantasia.

Quinn's last short story published in *Weird Tales* was "The Ring of Bastet" in September of 1951. Two years had passed since the last publication by the pulp magazine's most prolific author. The final story begins with an engagement toast in a restaurant and when the bride, Jacobina Houston, puts on her engagement ring, she loses the strength and movement in her legs. The ring, whose heritage was unknown, had an Egyptian mummy encrusted in a precious stone. From that moment on, the girl, who had a complete aversion to cats, saw a huge cat take shape in front of her. According to the boy, Scott Drigs, the ring belonged to his father, who worked as assistant curator of Egyptology at the Adelphi Museum in Brooklyn. In 1898 his father was sent to the Nile and from there he went to Tel Basta, where the local people worshipped Ubasti and Pasht (other names for the goddess Bastet), the goddess of sex and fertility. This goddess appears in the form of a black and gold cat. Bastet was once associated with the goddess of war (Sechmet) and represented with the head of a lioness. In Ancient Egyptian mythology, the goddess Bastet was one of the deities who possessed the Eye of Ra, as she was the daughter of the sun god, Ra. But it was because of her connection with Anubis, who was responsible for guiding the souls of the dead to the underworld, that Bastet was considered a solar deity. De Grandin's association with fire came from this initial belief in the goddess. The girl leaves at dawn and the hunt for her begins. The detective knew that the goddess of sex could only have gone to her fiancé's house:

We shall not find her there, my friend. She will be at Monsieur Briggs' unless I am far more mistaken than I think. When the cat goes mousing one goes to the mousehole to find her, *n'est pas*? I shook my head. This talk of cats and mice seemed utterly irrelevant. (Quinn, 2019, p. 463).

It is interesting to notice how Trowbridge always questions de Grandin's superstitious ideas in his own way. The constant clash between science and myth becomes increasingly clear as we move towards the end of the publication of his short stories in the *Weird Tales*. Quinn, in my

opinion, makes it very clear that even though we are now in the 1950s, the questioning of the usefulness of science is still valid. After all, science has created the greatest horrors in history. The atomic bomb, nuclear weapons of mass destruction have formed a world in which new fears are being shaped. The war as a catalyst for modern horror is present in his 1951 short story; Sechmet, goddess of war and destruction, mixes with the powerful and sexual Bastet who, ready to attack her future husband, is interrupted by the detective when he uses another kind of magic, religion, to remove the powerful ring from her finger. De Grandin knew about her religiosity and used it as a means of combat. In his last story, Quinn returns to his old formula, superstition combats belief. The phantasmagorical (and in this case, warlike) double is repeated as an affront, in the naked torso of Jacobina Houston.

But how changed! She wore a night-gown of sheer silver blue crêpe, knife-pleated from the bosom, and flaring like an inverted lily-cup from the waist, but she had torn the bodice of the robe, or turned it down, so bust and shoulders were exposed, and she was clothed only from waist to insteps. Her straight-cut uncurled black hair hung about her face like that of some Egyptian woman pictured on the frescoes of a Pharaoh's tomb, and as we stepped across the sill she turned her face towards us. Involuntarily I shrank back, for never on a human countenance had I seen such a look of savage hatred. Although her lids were lowered it seemed her eyes glared through the palpebrae, and the muscles round her mouth had stretched until the very contours of her face were altered. There was something feline – bestial – about it, and bestial was the humming, growling sound that issued from her throat through her tight-closed lips.

The glance – if you could call it that – she threw in our direction lasted but a second, then she turned toward the man on the bed. She moved with a peculiar gliding step, so silently, so furtively that it seemed that she hardly stepped at all, but rather as if she were drawn along by some force outside herself. I'd seen a cat move that way as it rushed in for the kill when it had finished stalking a bird (Quinn, 2019, p. 463-464).

It is worth remembering that the historical moment here is also different. The 1950s saw a society very much rooted in those macho ideals of yesteryear (or now?), not that this changed when women entered the workforce, also because the feminist movement was still in its infancy. But now, in 1950, women are reclaiming their place back into the kitchen. Jacobina is somehow empowered by having her spirit invaded by that of Schemet's. The fire inherent to the goddess of war is confused in the detective's words. The idea of the goddess of war, plague and chaos, I believe, is not gratuitous. World War II ended in 1945, but it left a legacy of destruction never imagined. The world of suffering leaves a legacy of ruin even greater than that left by the First War, the world could not be the same after the weapons of mass destruction. Something that terrifies us to this day, and even more if we stop to look at the planet in 2024.

3. But the ghosts always return

To conclude, what is the point of this return to the past, to the superstitions of the past? Quinn, in his latest short stories, three of which are analyzed here, hits on the same theme: how does

the past or its ruins repeat themselves as figures that frighten us? In *On the Concept of History*, theses on which Walter Benjamin records the last thoughts of a mind disturbed by the political conjuncture, as well as by what he understood to be the philosophical origins of that nefarious context: the concept of history. This set of theses was entirely dedicated to the concept of history as the origin of modern spiritual and political misery. It is in the seventh thesis that he states: “there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism” (Benjamin, 1997, p. 256). The barbarism that is established in the post-World War II world is perhaps a reflection of what is narrated in these tales about the constant clash between science and myth. Quinn did not offer a solution, and perhaps he did not intend to. But even with the noticeable decline in the narrative quality of his short stories, the reader is still certain that his fiction has been forever touched by the horrors of war. The undead body or the body possessed by an evil spirit, likewise, brings the figure not only of the double, but of a phantasmagorical double who clearly shows the significance of the consequences of the horrors of war. W. Scott Poole recalls the small vulnerable bodies that Benjamin referred to as what was left under the clouds in a force field of destructive explosions. For the historian, these small vulnerable bodies were transformed by history’s first killing machines into lifeless bodies.

Weird Tales stopped being published three years later, in September 1954, putting a dead end to a 31-year long road of scaring its readers.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

REFERENCES

- BENJAMIN, Walter. **Illuminations**: Essays and Reflections. NY: Schocken Books, 2007.
- DERRIDA, Jacques. **Specters of Marx**. FL: Routledge, 2006
- FANTASTIC Fiction. Online: < <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/q/seabury-quinn/>>. Access: 08/21/2020
- FREUD, Sigmund. Thoughts for the Times of War and Death. In: **On the History of Psycho-Analytic Movement**: Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works. Vol. XVI. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1957.
- FREUD, Sigmund. **The Uncanny**. Online: <<https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/freud1.pdf>>. Access: 07/06/2024
- HOBSBAWM, Eric. **A era dos extremos**. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1994.
- MARX, Karl. **Communist Manifesto**. Online: <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>>. Access: 07/06/2024.
- MARX, Karl. **Eighteen of Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte**. Online: <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm>>. Access: 07/06/2024.



MELTON, J. Gordon. **O livro dos vampiros**: A enciclopédia dos mortos-vivos. São Paulo: Makron Books, 1995.

POOL, W. Scott. **Wasteland**: The Great War and the Origin of Modern Horror. CA: Counterpoint, 2018.

QUINN, Seabury. **The Complete Tales of Jules de Grandin**. Volume 1 - 5. New York: Night Shade Books, 2017.

ROSICRUCIAM EGYPT MUSEUM. Online: <<https://egyptianmuseum.org/deities-sekhmet>>. Access: 08/28/2023.

SANTAYANA, Georges. **The Life of Reason**: Introduction and Reason in Common Sense. MA: MIT Press, 2011.

SELLERS, Charles et al. **Uma Reavaliação da História dos Estados Unidos**. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor, 1990.

THE ENCYCLOPEDIA of Science Fiction. Online:<<https://sf-encyclopedia.com/>>. Access: 08/05/2023.

THE PULP Magazine Project. Online: <<https://www.pulpmags.org/>>. Access: 05/05/2023.

WEIRD Tales. Online: <<https://www.weirdtales.com/>>. Access: 05/05/2023.