

## The Trinity Killer, the Doomsday Killers and *Dexter* as Suburban Gothic

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**Abstract:** The city of Miami seems an unlikely setting for the Gothic. Like the global capital that has made Florida the fastest growing US state, it is all ephemeral present, with glittering surfaces that reflect appear to be too new to harbour the ghosts of the past. This is the setting for Showtime's television series 'Dexter' (2006-2013) about a blood spatter analyst who works for the metropolitan police and is a serial killer. This paper explores two key story-arcs in the series. Punter (1998) argues that ghosts arise on the site of vanished cultural territory, and in 'Dexter' Miami's extraordinary growth has left many such spaces behind, but what kind of ghosts are possible here? Nelson (2012: xi) claims that gothic narrative in the 21st century has outgrown its 'heritage of dark supernaturalism', and yet the trimmed lawns and flowerbeds of season 4 hide a monster known as the Trinity Killer, who forces Dexter to confront his own horrific past in a devastatingly literal bloodbath and by season 6, in the story arc of the Doomsday Killers, Dexter's monstrous double life is exposed to the one person he loves and fears above all others: his sister Debra. A complex series of doppelgängers, characteristic of high gothic narrative, concludes with Dexter's attempts to lay to rest all the ghosts of the past that torment him, and to save the remains of his family by constructing his own death.

**Key words:** Miami. *Dexter*. Florida. Suburban Gothic. *Doppelgänger*.

The story-arc for Season 4 of the Showtime television series about a serial killer *Dexter* (2006-2013) focuses on Dexter's pursuit of his most sinister double in the eight-season series up to that point: the Trinity Killer (played by John Lithgow). Dexter is a blood spatter analyst who works at Miami Metro homicide division. Although his job is to help the police hunt killers, Dexter in fact kills them if he can get to them before the police do.

The name 'the Trinity Killer' is given to this particular killer by FBI agent Frank Lundy, who has been tracking the man's crimes across the United States for thirty years, and

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has identified a repeated pattern of killing in threes. Season 4 opens with a confronting image: the ritual slaughter of a young woman in her bathroom by a naked middle aged man. He positions her between his legs, embraces her from behind, then opens her femoral artery and chokes her to death, so that her body will be found in a bath of her own blood. In the second killing he talks a mother into jumping to her death, and in the third killing he kills a father with a hammer. The man who Dexter and his colleagues at Miami Metro come to refer to almost affectionately as ‘Trinity’ is a polite church-goer, who can’t bring himself to put a deer out of its suffering when he accidentally knocks it over on a drive through the forest. He is returning from a mission to cut down a tree, which he will mill at home and make into a coffin.

Dexter is shocked to discover that this killer, Arthur Mitchell, is married with children and lives in a neat suburban house surrounded by a rose garden. There have been pretty suburban houses earlier in the series, such as the one he moves into when he marries his girlfriend Rita, and sparsely furnished share houses, such as the one with closed blinds that hide the drug dealer Freebo and Assistant District Attorney Miguel Prado’s brother in Season 3. But it is Mitchell’s house that positions the series firmly in the suburban gothic tradition:

The Suburban Gothic is a sub-genre concerned, first and foremost, with playing upon the lingering suspicion that even the most ordinary-looking neighbourhood, or house, or family, has something to hide and that no matter how calm and settled a place looks, it is only ever a moment away from a dramatic (and generally sinister) incident (MURPHY, 2012, p. 2).

As Dexter inveigles his way into Arthur Mitchell’s life, the Trinity Killer’s carefully controlled mask slips and reveals the true horror behind this closed door, and by implication, countless others like it. When Dexter is invited to share the family’s Thanksgiving dinner, he notices that Mitchell’s teenage daughter Rebecca has been locked in her room. Her brother Jonah suddenly appears to have two fingers bandaged: they have been broken by his father in a high-five that turns quietly violent as they watch the football match on television. Everyone joins hands around the dinner table to say what they are thankful for before the turkey is carved. When no one is thankful for Arthur, he points this out to them, and his wife Sally rushes in to smooth the moment over by saying she is so very, very thankful for him. Arthur cuts through the air with one of the truly shocking moments in this series by snapping at her, ‘Shut up, cunt!’ The word is such an assault on this perfectly groomed, softly spoken mother – played by former ‘Wonder Woman’ star Linda Carter – that the physical violence which follows hardly seems as bad.

Mitchell destroys his own family, and spreads the destruction to another family when he kidnaps a young boy, Scott Smith, from an amusement arcade and imprisons him in the basement of a building site managed by a charity called Four Walls One Heart. It builds houses for homeless people across the country and is headed by – of course – Arthur Mitchell. Though far darker in tone, the unsubtle irony here is familiar from other suburban Gothic series such as *Desperate Housewives* and *Six Feet Under*. What agent Lundy hadn't noticed in his meticulous tracking of the Trinity Killer is that there was always a fourth crime: the disappearance of a ten-year-old boy.

Mitchell insists on calling his young victim 'Arthur' and dressing him in old-fashioned pyjamas; he tempts him with junk food and invites him to play with his electric train set. Scott bravely tries to resist this terrifying regression and travesty of parenting, but in fear of his life he eventually succumbs to Mitchell's story of his own childhood. At Scott's age he was peeping at his older sister Vera, who was in the shower, he slipped, fell through the glass screen and shattered it. A shard of glass pierced her artery and she bled to death. When he hears this story, Scott softens towards Mitchell, accepts his offer of food, not suspecting that he has been drugged. Mitchell zips his body into a bag and buries it in wet cement, but is saved by Dexter.

When Mitchell eventually ends up on Dexter's killing table, he tells Dexter that this endless game of serial killing is already over. As part of his ritual, Dexter lines the room with plastic sheeting and binds his victim to the table with the sort of plastic wrap that is used to contain freight on a palette. It is also the kind of wrap used in suburban kitchens and its very ordinariness is a trigger for horror. Dexter confronts the Trinity Killer with his crimes, but no doubt because he recognises Mitchell as a doppelganger, he accedes to a request to run the train set around the table and play Vera Mitchell's favourite song, Frankie Avalon's 1959 hit 'Venus' as he kills him. In his apron, gloves and mask, and with his slow stylised movements, Dexter is like a priest of his own cult. An essential element of his ritual is to first take a drop of blood from his victim and deposit it on a lab slide, where it spreads to a large circle that he holds up to the light. It is reminiscent of the Host in the Mass, and he keeps these slides in a box which he stows in the air conditioner. As he gently lifts the plastic grille off the air conditioner at eye level, either to return or retrieve his box of blood slides, it appears as a secular monstrosity, the most carefully guarded possession in Dexter's apartment.

After killing Trinity, he plans to join his wife Rita, who has gone on ahead to the Florida Keys for their postponed honeymoon, but when he goes home to grab his luggage for

the trip, he is totally numbed by the scene in their bathroom. Rita is slumped dead in a bath overflowing with blood, and their baby son Harrison is crying in a pool of her blood on the floor. The truth of Mitchell's words, that the game is already over, is finally driven home.

This unbearable scene is the catalyst for a major change that determines Dexter's actions for the rest of the series. Season 4 is known as the Trinity Killer story, but the label is ambiguous. Who is the killer, and which Trinity does it refer to? At the literal level, the answer is obvious, as this discussion has shown. Arthur Mitchell is the killer and he kills in threes, so he is the Trinity Killer. But in taking Trinity's life, Dexter is the Trinity Killer. Although he recognises that he is Mitchell's double, many of Dexter's victims are not like him. He makes that point forcefully in the first killing of Season 1. He stalks and garrottes the pastor and choir master Mike Donovan and forces him to drive to an isolated cabin in the Everglades, where he makes him look at the bodies of young boys who Donovan has tortured and raped. Dexter has exhumed them and cleaned them up, so Donovan can see in detail how they suffered.

At this early point in the series Dexter is surprisingly aggressive. He barks at Donovan, 'Open your eyes and look at what you did!' and threatens to slice off Donovan's eyelids if he refuses to look. Donovan begins to recite the Rosary, 'Hail, Mary, full of grace...' and Dexter cuts him off, shouting, 'Stop! That never helps anybody!'

After Rita's death, when Dexter accepts that he can no longer please himself as he has been doing, but needs to take responsibility for his toddler son Harrison, he makes an appointment to see the nun who is principal at a Catholic preschool that has been recommended by Dexter's Cuban friends. During the interview Dexter tells the nun that he has no religious faith and, when pushed, says that he believes only in a set of rules for good behaviour. His sister Deb can't understand this. She tells him that believing in a set of rules sounds like something that you would use to train a puppy. The analogy is unintentionally significant, because the first sign of Dexter's future path as a serial killer was his killing of a puppy when he was a child. It was this act, and the admission that it was not an isolated incident, that persuaded his father Harry to teach him the Code. Harry realises that Dexter's need to kill cannot be eliminated, so he must teach him to manage the need and to survive. The first rule of the Code is don't get caught; the second rule, don't kill innocent people.

In confessing to the nun that he has no religious belief, Dexter is then, in another sense, the Trinity Killer – the killer of the Trinity – who denies the tripartite object of Christian worship: God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. As if to mock the gullibility

of those believers who read life for signs of a supernatural power, when Harrison is rushed to hospital with a ruptured appendix, Dexter goes for a coffee to distract him from the fear that his son might die. He puts a coin in the vending machine, but no paper cup drops down. Dexter leans on the machine, gives it a thump, and finally in desperation whispers a promise that he will do whatever God wants, if only Harrison is allowed to live. A paper cup drops down and is filled with coffee. Momentarily, it seems that Dexter's lack of faith is misplaced.

If Arthur Mitchell's death and the death of Rita confirm that Dexter is both literally and metaphorically the Trinity Killer, there are secular trinities throughout the eight seasons of the series, created by the doubling of characters that is a distinguishing feature of the gothic tradition. The unlikely premise for the series is that Dexter Morgan can live his double life undetected: by day helping the police in their forensic work, and by night killing the perpetrators who slip through their fingers. Dexter and the audience saw back and forth across eight seasons, worrying at the question of whether his behaviour is determined by forces beyond his control, or whether he himself is responsible. Dexter is both Frankenstein and his monster: the maker and the made.

Dexter has always thought he was made by circumstances, and by his adoptive father, Harry Morgan, a highly respected police officer. In repeated flashbacks we learn that Harry finds three-year-old Dexter and his brother Brian, sitting in a shipping container in a pool of their mother's blood three days after her death. They have witnessed her being executed with a chainsaw by her drug suppliers, who discover that she is a police informant. Harry and his wife adopt Dexter, but not his brother. Brian is so shattered by the experience that he is beyond their help and is institutionalised, while Dexter is brought up with Harry's daughter Deb. So here in Season 1 is the trinity that Dexter believes made him a serial killer. It is the first of many tableaux in the series that he keeps returning to, as if they are icons that will help him to understand his path in life: in this case a slaughtered mother and her two little sons, crying in a pool of her blood. The death of his biological mother also creates two further trinities that determine Dexter's actions. Most importantly, the adoption creates a trinity with Harry the father at the apex and, worshipping him, Dexter the adopted son and Deb. The two are complete opposites. Deb is rebellious, gregarious, excitable and a motor-mouth with low self-esteem. She is a police officer, like the father she idealises and from whom she craved the attention he always showered on Dexter. Dexter on the other hand is intellectual, taciturn and unable to commit to appointments – let alone relationships – or to express love. It is only at the moment of Deb's death in Season 8 that Dexter can whisper in her ear the words she is

now beyond hearing: 'I love you.' Despite these differences, each of them has always been the other's strongest supporter.

Dexter's brother Brian, abandoned and institutionalised, also becomes a serial killer. He returns as Rudy Cooper, the handsome prosthetist, unrecognised by Dexter who has not seen him since he was three, and unknown to Deb, who doesn't realise he is the Ice Truck Killer she pursues with Dexter's help in Season 1. Rudy/Brian charms her and in a candlelit tableau on his boat, he asks her to marry him, just before he tries to kill her. Treated differently, in a lighter series such as *Desperate Housewives* this extravagant plotting of coincidence would be laughable, but here it is deadly serious. To save Deb, Dexter must kill his own brother – the one person in their toxic trinity who might have truly understood him, because as an orphan and a serial killer, he is on a similar journey. Brian appears as a revenant at critical moments later in the series to taunt Dexter with the reminder that he killed his blood brother to save an adoptive sister.

Although Nelson (2012, p. xi) argues that the Gothic in the twenty-first century 'is showing signs of outgrowing the dark supernaturalism it inherited from its eighteenth century ancestor' the past haunts this series in repeated flashbacks, in the return of Brian's tortured spirit, and in the constant presence of Dexter's dead father, Harry. Reminiscent of the dead father's ghost in *Six Feet Under*, Harry is a backlit shade in his police uniform, who serves as Dexter's conscience and guide in most episodes, expressing his fear for Dexter's safety and drawing his attention to the Code. Harry's constant presence forms yet another trinity, with Dexter and what he calls his 'Dark Passenger'. Dexter says in Season 1 that he feels empty, except for his deep need to kill, which is always with him. This is what he calls his 'Dark Passenger'. At times it seems to merge with the Code, or the voiced over interior monologues that Dexter uses to seduce the audience into conspiring with him; at times it carries the dark unvoiced desire of the society generally, which sees Dexter as a service provider, taking out the human trash that its institutions appear unable to handle. Harry's ghost anticipates the potentially catastrophic convergence of the paths his detective daughter and his serial killer adopted son are on, and tries to prevent it, but at the end of Season 6 Deb sees Dexter perform a ritual killing, and is eventually destroyed by the consequences of that experience. It is in Season 6 that the tacit religious iconography of the Trinity becomes explicit. The Season opens with a bizarre street performance of the four horsemen of the apocalypse from the Book of Revelation, including a mannequin on horseback with severed human body parts attached to it. On the horse's head is painted an Alpha/ Omega symbol. Then a body is washed up with

elaborate wounds on its torso stitched in the shape of the same symbol. As Deb and her colleagues try to make out its meaning, seven baby black water snakes emerge from the disembowelled cavity. In one of several references in the series to Shelley's classic Gothic novel, Deb yells, 'Holy Frankenfuck!' before someone explains that it is an apocalyptic image from the Bible. The grotesque symbols are a warning from two antagonists who become known as the Doomsday Killers; a retired academic Professor Gellar and a young fine art restorer from the Miami Museum, Travis Marshall, who appears to be his disciple. They are leaders of a cult that is bringing on the end of the world and they are based in an abandoned stone church.

In *Gothic Pathologies: the Text, the Body and the Law*, David Punter (1998, p. 1) argues that the spectres which are among the distinctive features of gothic narrative 'arise...on the site of vanished cultural territory'. Whereas there is a long Native American history in Florida, the swamps and waterways such as St John's River have an undisturbed primeval quality about them, and St Augustine in the north dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the state of Florida as constructed in popular culture is Fort Lauderdale, Orlando, Cape Canaveral, Miami and the vast Disney properties in central Florida. It would not seem, then, to be a promising site for the Gothic: most of the cultural territory presents as too new. Reproduced history, seen in the Disney-developed city of Celebration, or precincts such as Park Avenue in Winter Park, central Florida, only emphasises the newness, although for Dines (2012, p. 963) suburbanisation can act as a catalyst for the individual to refocus attention on the past.

Record population increases of 37.1 per cent in the 1960s, 43.6 per cent in the 1970s and 32.7 per cent in the 1980s have slowed now to around a relatively modest 20 per cent, but that level still makes Florida the fastest growing state in the US with a population predicted to overtake that of New York state in 2014. Home to major theme parks such as Walt Disney World, EPCOT, Sea World and Universal Studios, and seemingly endless outlet malls and gated communities, in the popular imagination Florida is sunshine, fast cars, dazzling high rise towers with marinas, and investment and retirement money from the north. Add to these factors other kinds of investment from the south, through the gateway city of Miami, and Florida appears a hastily constructed celebration of its own importance – all there on the surface:

Miami's rise seems almost accidental. It owes a great deal to its advantageous location, the weather, and its multicultural population. If Miami's success was in part based on the large-scale immigration of Cubans

and others, it should be remembered that none of that was planned (in fact it met with considerable local resistance) (NIJMAN, 2007, p. 104).

The flow of money and drugs, the constant shifting and sometimes strange juxtaposition of Miami's population of retirees, the young, tourists and immigrants has attracted television and film makers just as Los Angeles has. The Miami of *Dexter*, however, is completely different from the glamorous resort city of *Surfside Six* (1960-1962) or *Miami Vice* (1984-1990), which Arntfield (2011, p. 84) argues is a 'nostalgic deluge of artificial images and people that mimic the dreamscape of the music video' or the fast paced *CSI Miami* (2002-2012) where technology takes precedence over the characters and their insights. In these series, Miami is a paradigm of the glittering surfaces of global capital and the ephemeral present.

The Latino/a community in Miami-Dade County is 64 per cent of the population and although there are references in *Dexter* to the Haitian and Venezuelan communities, the Cubans are the Spanish speaking community featured most frequently throughout the series and, at 35 per cent of the total Miami-Dade population, the largest. The success of those Cubans within the glass walls of Miami Metro is the result of long hours, hard work, and knowing how to play the system. The success of those Cubans in the city streets and suburbs beyond Miami Metro is constructed as being due to poverty and corruption. Like other series such as *The Wire*, *Breaking Bad* and *Homeland*, *Dexter* is about a divided America at war with itself (MARTIN, 2013, p. 87).

Given the light that is reflected off all the new glass and metal surfaces and off the water that envelops the city of Miami, the only possibility for the gothic darkness to emerge is at night, and in the derelict and abject spaces that are the underbelly of the glittering globalized city. Those dark spaces can include the suburban houses and remote cabins of those living outside the law, but more often they are the empty warehouses, the scrap metal yards, idle docks and shipping containers, and in Season 6, the abandoned church. When Lieutenant LaGuerta attends a lonely memorial service out of duty to support the victim's partner, she says it is the first time she has been inside a church in ages. The Spanish mission architecture of the empty church suggests that, like the appeal of the Sacred Heart imagery of Jesus, the religious faith that helped to get many members of the Latino/a community to Miami, proved less useful in their drive for success once they arrived at their destination.

The Doomsday Killers have made this stone shell of the past their headquarters. On the walls juxtaposed with the still beautiful stained glass windows are grotesque apocalyptic

paintings of tableaux they have planned. At first it appears that the calm Professor Gellar is the mastermind of the operation. But, dressed in his benign suburban shawl-collared cardigan, he hardly looks like the scourge sent to punish a godless world. His disciple Travis is edgy, never at peace, with a temper that flares in contrast with Gellar's self-control. When Dexter tracks the pair to the church, and goes down into the crypt to find Gellar, what he sees there causes him and the audience to revise everything they have thought about the Doomsday Killers. In a freezer cabinet is Professor Gellar's frost-covered body. He has been dead for years.

The audience has been duped by the camera just as Dexter has been. Whereas the camera makes us always aware that Dexter's father is either a ghost or a figment of his imagination, we see Travis outside the church for the first time arguing with a Professor who isn't there. It is a macabre and almost comic revelation – almost, if not for the branding irons, the chains, the swords, the poison and other instruments of torture which confirm that Travis must be killed. He, not Professor Gellar, has been the mastermind all along.

Dexter drugs Travis and when he comes to, he is bound to the altar in the middle of the church, which has become Dexter's killing table. Travis looks up to the ceiling and into the familiar face of a towering crucifix. As he says sleepily, 'Hello, Jesus', Dexter moves into frame so that his face displaces that of Jesus. With outspread arms, Dexter pronounces a parody of the Christian Benediction: 'I am the Father, I am the Son, the Serial Killer.'

At the exact moment he raises his knife high above Travis's body and plunges it into his chest, Deb steps out from the shadows, where she has been waiting to arrest whoever the killer turns out to be. Dexter fumbles an explanation, which she appears to accept, but such a skilled detective eventually realises that her own brother has been the killer whose avatars she has been hunting throughout the series. Ultimately although she reconciles with Dexter briefly, the revelation destroys her. Dexter realises that he is utterly alone, and the only reason he might try to avoid execution and create a future is for his little boy, Harrison – and the one woman he never has to pretend with, because she has been a killer too, Hannah. The ultimate trinity of Dexter's search for a family: the Father, the Mother and the Son.

In the final season, number 8, Dr Evelyn Vogel is brought in to the homicide division to help solve a case in which a serial killer is surgically removing a section of each victim's skull and scooping out the part of the brain that relates to empathy. These body parts begin to appear gift-wrapped on Dr Vogel's porch. She tells Dexter that she was in fact the one who invented the Code that he has adhered to all his adult life; his father Harry merely added some

details. When Harry saw Dexter revelling in the death of his first human victim, he could not face what he had helped to create, and took his own life, although Donnelly argues (2012, p. 16) that the series affirms rather than subverts conservative ideals of morality. Since Harry's suicide, Dr Vogel has been controlling Dexter's life through the Code, without his knowing.

Although Dr Vogel says she had two sons but that they are dead, Dexter discovers that one is still alive. Her son Richard drowned in a pool, and when she learned that this was her other son Daniel's doing, rather than an accident, she sent him to a psychiatric institution. As a specialist in psychopaths, she believed the professionals there could help him. But when a fire broke out and some of the children including Daniel died, she felt she had failed as a mother. Dr Vogel appears to be the only one who doesn't see, as the audience sees, that this fire was started by Daniel. He escaped and is the serial killer who has come back to taunt her with the gift of his victims' brains.

Played with chilling warmth by Charlotte Rampling, Dr Vogel approaches even a family chat over dinner as an opportunity for clinical observation. If Dexter is born symbolically for a second time as a toddler in his biological mother's blood, the man and serial killer has been created by this woman who calls herself his 'spiritual mother'. When she is brutally killed in front of him by her estranged son Daniel, Dexter feels abandoned yet again. Drenched in blood, as he cradles her limp body in his arms like a travesty of the Pieta, he realises that her experiment with his life has failed. Here, then, in the final season is a second slaughtered mother with her two serial killer sons: one her executioner, the biological son who feels that she abandoned him, and the other her 'spiritual' son, who she showered all her attention on. This second trinity of mother and sons would convince Dexter that he is truly alone, but he has made plans to leave the country and follow his partner Hannah's teenage dream of creating a new life for herself in Argentina. In this final trinity, for the first time Dexter is not the Son, but the Father. But as Santaularia (2010, p. 65) points out in Season 4 Dexter also says: "Monsters come in all shapes and sizes. Sometimes they are the people who should protect us: a policeman, a father, a blood spatter analyst".

The overriding irony of Dexter's journey is that, whereas Frankenstein's monster was created whole out of body parts, Dexter butchers his serial killer victims into severed body parts, bags them in plastic and dumps them into the ocean from his boat, *Slice of Life*, where they drift on the tides of the unconscious and are now and then cast back onto the shore to indict him. By fragmenting the wholeness of his doppelganger victims, Dexter attempts to make himself feel whole and alive, and Green (2012, p. 580) notes the strange eroticism of the

body in the series, beginning with the display of fitness in the actor who plays the lead, Michael C Hall. As the tropical storm gathers in the final scenes, Dexter buries Deb at sea, where she may or may not rest with his other victims, and steers straight into the storm – presumably having decided to take his own life, rather than join Hannah and Harrison in Argentina. It is no coincidence that the spate of television series featuring men who operate as vigilantes outside conventions and the law emerges in the wake of 9/11: *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad*, *Graceland*, *Homeland* and *Dexter* among them. Haunting images of the fragile union on which American capital is constructed feature with a regularity bordering on obsession in the daily news from three sites: the collapse of the Twin Towers, the hollowed out facades of Detroit, and the swathes cut across a land by hurricanes, littered with building timbers that look like matchsticks. They are images of disintegration to be interrogated with the question: who is to blame?

After the remains of Dexter's boat are found when the storm passes, the final episode fades to black. Has he succumbed to random circumstances? Is his disappearance an act of God? Or is it another lie and an act of will? Then as a coda the audience sees a logging site on the edge of some unidentified forest and a heavily bearded Dexter enter a cabin and sit staring out the window. From the setting it appears he has rejected the glittering globalized city and its suburbs altogether – for a life with his 'Dark Passenger'? He turns to the camera, looks straight at the audience, and silently closes his eyes in some sort of peace. It is an ending that disappointed those who wanted either to see Dexter caught, or once again get away with his crimes. However low key, though, it is fitting. Dexter gives life to the other members of his new family trinity – Hannah and Harrison – by consigning himself to a symbolic death so they are free of him. Whether he has also created a life for himself is undetermined.

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### O "Trinity Killer", os "Doomsday Killers" e *Dexter* como Góticos Suburbanos

**Abstract:** A cidade de Miami pode parecer um cenário improvável para o gótico. Como toda cidade que o capital global transforma, a Flórida se tornou uma das metrópoles americanas que mais crescem e tudo nela é uma espécie de presente efêmero. Sua geografia artificial e

cintilante a faz aparentemente um ambiente moderno demais para abrigar os fantasmas do passado. No entanto, é este o cenário da série televisiva da produtora Showtime, *Dexter* (2006-2013). Seu protagonista é um laboratorista criminal da polícia metropolitana de Miami e também um *serial killer*. Este artigo explora dois elementos-chave do enredo da série. Punter (1998) argumenta que os fantasmas surgem em territórios culturais evanescentes, mas a Miami de crescimento econômico extraordinário retratada em *Dexter* recusa esses espaços tradicionais. Deste modo, que tipo de fantasmas habitam ali? V. Nelson diz que a narrativa gótica do século XXI superou a herança de um supernaturalismo sombrio. Os gramados bem cortados e os jardins floridos da temporada 4 escondem um monstro conhecido como “Trinity Killer”, que força Dexter a confrontar seu próprio passado de horror em um banho de sangue literalmente devastador. Na história-chave da temporada 6, com os “Doomsday Killers”, a dupla vida monstruosa de Dexter é exposta à única pessoa que ele ama e respeita, acima de todas as outras: sua irmã, Debra. Uma série complexa de duplos, característica da alta narrativa gótica, nos mostra um Dexter que procura calar os fantasmas do passado que o atormentam na tentativa de salvar o que resta de sua família, o que o leva a planejar sua própria morte.

**Key words:** Miami. *Dexter*. Florida. Suburban Gothic. *Doppelgänger*.

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