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Teaching the Victorian Gothic Through Screen Adaptations: The Undying Power of Bram Stoker's Dracula

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Introduction

> What *is* Gothic? The answers offered […] are manifold, and that seems entirely apposite. It is apposite because any genre surviving over several centuries will undergo change and development; but it is also apposite because of the peculiar nature of the Gothic as a parasite. I mean by this to suggest that Gothic exists in relation to mainstream culture in the same way as a parasite does to its host, and that Gothic writing can often be seen as a perversion of other forms, albeit a perversion which, as perversions do, serves to demonstrate precisely the inescapability of the perverse in the very ground of being. But I also mean to suggest that it is, in fact, impossible to see this relation as merely one-way: the parasite supports the host as much as vice versa, as the pragmatic daylight world survives only in its infolding of the spectral world of desire. Gothic represents, then, a cultural knot: entirely unsusceptible to purgation, it constantly demands that we reject the narrative of cultural cleansing and engage instead with a textual and psychic *chiaroscuro* where plain sight is continually menaced by flickerings from other worlds.[1]

Declining empires, threatening monsters, blurred sexualities, invading 'others', technological developments, uncertainty, doubts, fears: these are only some of the ingredients which make the Gothic a relevant topic to be studied within a school environment, for, as Botting points out, this genre is the embodiment of the intrinsic perversion and inescapability of human nature, two features which nurture, and are, in turn, nurtured, by this fascinating genre. Understanding the literary Gothic and its features therefore helps individuals gain a better understanding not only of the historical context in which the Gothic flourished, but also of their own context and of their own selves, for the essence of the Gothic lies in its ability to bring to the surface issues and emotions which humans often tend to repress and internalise. In this thesis, I have made the choice of exploring the Gothic genre precisely for this reason: for its nature allows to get acquainted with aspects of human existence which are part of contemporary life as much as they were part of the Victorian environment – the time in which the Gothic developed and flourished. *Dracula* has been chosen among the many texts which are representative of the Victorian Gothic for, as will be demonstrated throughout this thesis, it perfectly embodies the themes and moods of this literary genre, and it may well be considered the as the quintessential Gothic novel.

[1] D. Punter (1999). *Introduction: of Apparitions.* In G. Byron, D. Punter (eds.) *Spectral Readings: Towards a Gothic Geography,* Basingstoke: Macmillan, pp. 1–8, p. 3

As the Victorian Gothic is an important part of the ESL curriculum for the Italian secondary schools known as *licei*, I have chosen to explore one of the approaches which can be adopted in order to bring this literary genre to the classroom: the inclusion of filmic adaptations within a teaching unit. My aim is to provide a theoretical framework which serves as a tool to prove the utility of adopting such integrated method with the purpose of enhancing students' interest in the subject, their understanding of it, their motivation levels, and their language abilities. Moreover, I plan to promote a cooperative mode of interaction between students and educators which is aimed at the cyclical improvement of the quality of teaching, a model which encourages students to develop their critical thinking skills both in terms of content elaboration and in terms of their ability to understand *why* a given topic is chosen as part of their curriculum, pushing them to reflect on the effectiveness of teaching methods and on the reasoning behind their structure.

Before reading this paper, it is important to keep in mind the context for which it is designed: the structuring of an ESL teaching unit within an Italian, secondary school environment. For this reason, I have made the choice to centre my analysis within a framework that mainly includes texts and articles of reference which have been written within a Western context, and therefore respond to the needs and perspectives of the Western world and of the curriculum of the selected institutions. This choice, however, should not be perceived as exclusive of other possible perspectives, but should instead be seen as a starting point for the development of a more inclusive model, which can be further expanded and improved with the addition of other perspectives, which may be built in synergy or in contrast with the presented one. The purpose of this analysis is to outline the pivotal aspects to be taken into account concerning the historical and literary contexts and the novel, and to offer examples of how to approach the analysis of adaptations and the structuring of a teaching unit: however, it needs to be kept in mind that the perspectives and contents of this analysis are open to being adapted to other contexts, for its purpose is not to provide one dogmatic interpretation, but rather to design a framework from which educators can select relevant materials to be used within their classrooms – and such materials can be explored from a perspective which may differ from the one proposed in this analysis.

Equally important in order to avoid any possible misreadings is understanding that this analysis is a detailed, but *theoretical* proposal of how to approach the teaching of the

topic of choice – a proposal which has yet to be empirically tested. This work has the limitation of not having been tried within a classroom environment – which could potentially be an interesting source of inspiration for further research. The limits of a purely theoretical approach are evident when it comes to designing practical activities; however, my intent is to draw on existing pedagogical practices, effectiveness of which has already been proven, in order to design a model which may respond to the needs of both students and educators, and which contains guidelines that may be adopted for designing other teaching units – in the same context, or in different contexts. Among the guiding principles which have accompanied the unfolding of my analysis is the idea that teaching should be an inclusive process, a process in which educators should be able to fulfil the learning needs of their students to the best of their ability, and in which the teaching of literature should not only be perceived as a language exercise, but also as a source of individual and group development. The reason why I have chosen to approach this topic in this fashion is that, in my own personal experience, I have found that teaching is too often perceived as a merely prescriptive practice, in which students assume a passive role and are not able to express their own opinions, leading to their being deprived of the possibility of developing critical thinking skills, which I believe are among the most important skills which the school environment should push students to acquire.

In the first chapter, I provide a general overview of the historical framework in which the Gothic as a literary genre flourished: the British Victorian era. The aim of the chapter is to explore the complexities of this historical setting and the contradictions which characterised it, with particular emphasis on the issues of imperialism, scientific and technological development, and the changing role of women within society, which are all relevant aspects for gaining a better understanding of the Gothic genre. British Imperialism, flourishing during Queen Victoria's reign, faced a prolonged struggle for recognition among the British population. Despite initial expansion attempts, the Empire started deteriorating due to growing anxieties prevalent in late-Victorian society. Fears related to reverse colonization and the decline of the Empire were fuelled by both immigration from the colonies, and the economic growth of Germany and the United States, thus contributing to a sense of impending decline. Furthermore, the chapter delves into the religious, superstitious, and scientific debates characterizing the mid-Victorian period. This era witnessed the rise of new scientific theories and an intensifying religious

discourse, with the Church of England organized into three branches – Evangelical, High, and Broad – each with distinct perspectives. Rationalist movements, like Utilitarianism, began to challenge religious thought, reflecting the evolving intellectual landscape of the time. Finally, I argue how the changing role of women in the late nineteenth century was essential in challenging traditional gender norms, and how such challenge constituted another intrinsic contradiction of a Victorian society which was divided between the idealisation of women as the "Angels in the House", and their emancipation. In analysing the influence of these societal contradictions on the literary works of the era, the chapter emphasizes the vital role of understanding Victorian society in order to comprehend and analyse the literature produced during this period, positing that the contradictions which existed within Victorian society provided fertile ground for the creation of complex and multilayered literary works that grappled with the societal shifts and anxieties of the time.

The topic of Gothic literature, with particular attention to the Victorian *fin de siècle* Gothic, is further analysed in the second chapter, in which a bridge is built between the anxieties which characterised the Victorian era and the development of this literary genre. Moreover, the second chapter serves as a tool to clearly identify some of the issues which make this literary genre relevant for the contemporary reader: sexuality and gender, the encounter with the 'other', the fear of what is unknown, and the exploitation of horror and degenerations as tools to channel cultural anxieties. Overall, the chapter provides insights into the origins and development of the Gothic novel, addressing its emergence in the eighteenth century and its evolution in the Victorian era. It highlights how the Gothic provided a platform for exploring emotions, individual psychology, and the darker aspects of human experience. The Gothic's revival amid an age characterized by scientific rationality underscores its role as a counterbalance to prevailing intellectual and cultural movements. This overview sets the stage for understanding the continued relevance of the Gothic genre and its enduring appeal to contemporary readers.

In the third chapter I delve deeper into the analysis of the novel which I have selected as a tool to teach the Victorian Gothic: Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. In the first section, I analyse the origins of the novel through an overview of its predecessors, as well as by providing readers with a better understanding of the figure of the vampire and of its relevance within the given historical and cultural contexts. This chapter, both in the first section and in those which follow – and explore, respectively, the pivotal themes and

characters of the novel and the latter's critical readings – performs the function of identifying in what ways the novel reflects the previously analysed historical and literary contexts, and it also provides an overview of *Dracula* criticism, with particular emphasis on three main waves of criticism which have dealt with the text: psychoanalytic criticism, new historicism, and post-colonial criticism. This overview may aid educators in the identification of pivotal themes and readings of the novel which can be discussed within the classroom in order to support the enhancement of students' critical thinking skills.

The fourth chapter deals with the second, pivotal tool which I have selected for the structuring of the teaching unit: the novel's filmic adaptations. By providing an overview of such adaptations I plan to demonstrate how they can become useful tools within a classroom environment in order to achieve a set of learning objectives by providing students with multiple means – other than the written text – to approach, understand, and appreciate the relevance of both the novel and the study of literature. In this chapter, I have chosen to emphasise how adaptations, similarly to the adapted texts, are influenced by the historical and social context in which they are produced, and I discuss their evolution and their cultural role. The chapter delves into the significance of film adaptations such as *Nosferatu* (1922) and Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931), showcasing how they reflected the anxieties and societal fears of their respective periods. Moreover, it explores the impact of Francis Ford Coppola's 1992 adaptation in shaping the iconic image of Dracula, and it touches on two more filmic renditions of Stoker's novel, *Van Helsing* (2004) and *Dracula Untold* (2014), which are examples of, respectively, a blend and re-conceptualization of Gothic classics, and an origins story. Moreover, I have chosen to include serial adaptations of Dracula in this analysis, and have focused my attention mainly on *Penny Dreadful* and *Dracula* (2013), while also dedicating an entire section to Netflix's *Dracula* (2020), as it is the adaptation of choice for the teaching unit which I propose in chapter five.

In the fifth and closing chapter, I will provide readers with a detailed theoretical example of teaching unit designed to teach the Victorian Gothic through *Dracula* and its adaptations, a teaching unit which aims to be as responsive as possible to students' needs, inclusive, meaningful and motivating. By providing this example, I hope to outline a model of how to approach the structuring of a teaching unit which may also be adopted in other environments.

Chapter One
Understanding the Victorian Era and Its Contradictions

Ranging from the late 1830s to the early 1900s, the years of the reign of Queen Victoria roughly correspond to what is known to most as the Victorian Era. While this period of British history is mainly remembered for the great economic, scientific, and social growth that characterised it, many were the contradictions which came into existence within British society, as often happens during times of progress and cultural and political hegemony. The changing role of women in society, the advent of evolutionary theories, the territorial expansion of the Empire: those were all reasons for both enthusiasm and scepticism in the minds and hearts of the British subjects, who experienced a turmoil of feelings in the face of change. The aim of the following chapter is precisely to try and gain a better understanding of Victorian society and of its contradictions in order to provide us with some of the necessary tools to understand and analyse the literary works which were produced within such context.

1.1 The Age of British Imperialism and the Fear of Its Decline

Blooming during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901), the notion of British Imperialism lived a centuries-long struggle to gain full recognition among the British population, mainly due to American success in gaining independence – and, consequently, British failure in retaining the thirteen American colonies –, and to the spread of Adam Smith's liberal economic doctrines, which, by promoting the existence of free trade between all countries, inherently outdated the need for territorial domination by annulling its economic advantages.[2] Early expansion attempts, initially motivated by Queen Elizabeth's wish to gain the Pope's recognition as the legitimate heiress of King Henry VIII, had been fairly successful during the Golden Age; however, it was not until Queen's

[2] A. Ireland. (1901). *The Victorian Era of British Expansion*. The North American Review, 172(533), pp. 560–572, p. 561.

Victoria Golden Jubilee in 1887, over three centuries later, that the idea of the Unity of the Empire started to get a foothold in the minds and hearts of the British subjects, who began to see their destiny as that of "the world's great colonizers".[3] Paradoxically, the time of greatest expansion for the British Empire was also the time in which it began to deteriorate: while in terms of territorial gains the Empire kept growing up until 1920, the fear of its demise began to spread towards the end of the nineteenth century due to the many anxieties which came to pervade late-Victorian society.[4]

When it comes to the colonial perspective, the most relevant of the above mentioned fears was what Stephen Arata defined as the "anxiety of reverse colonization".[5] As will be covered in later sections, in the literary context such fear was largely explored in the Gothic genre; however, its roots lie in the fraught encounter between the culture of the colonizer and that of the colonized, latter of which was often viewed as distant, exotic, and potentially dangerous to the survival of the hegemony of British dominance. The growing phenomenon of immigration from the colonies towards the British Isles was one of the main triggers of such anxiety: for many Britons, perceiving themselves as the ones to be colonized rather than being the colonizing entity was a thoroughly unsettling thought, and the encounter with the foreign cultures of the "invaders" sparked the fear of a possible reversal of roles.[6]

Another crucial element which must be explored in order to gain a better understanding of British anxieties when it came to the issue of political and economic hegemony was the incredible growth of the emerging capitalist powers of the United States of America and Germany.[7] Norman Etherington's account of Imperialist theories[8] is particularly useful in order to get a better understanding of the issue, in spite of having its focus on the origins of World War I rather than on explaining colonialism. Mostly analysing socialist theories, Etherington enables us to identify the capitalist growth of Germany and the United States – which occurred in Germany after its unification in 1870, and in the United States was embedded in the very principles of its foundation – as an

[3] *Id*. p. 562.
[4] J. Höglund, (2012). *Catastrophic Transculturation in Dracula, The Strain and The Historian*. Transnational Literature 5(1), pp. 1-11, p. 1.
[5] S. D. Arata, (1990). *The Occidental Tourist: Dracula and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization.* Victorian Studies, 33(4), pp. 621–645.
[6] *Id.*, p. 623.
[7] *Id.*, p. 622.
[8] N. Etherington, (1982). *Reconsidering Theories of Imperialism*. History and Theory, 21(1), pp. 1–36.

inevitable source of anxiety for an already established colonial Empire; to put it in his words, "Japan, Germany, and the United States had almost no colonies but did possess burgeoning economic power. There were no longer any "free" lands on the frontier or in the tropics. So the capitalist associations of the rising powers began poaching on the decaying powers".[9] Among those decaying powers was Britain, which, in spite of being on the verge of reaching the peak of its territorial expansion, was already beginning to see the ghost of its inevitable decline.

Leninist theory has often been associated by historians who focus their attentions on Victorian imperialism with the "facts of Victorian colonial expansion",[10] even though its development was chronologically subsequent to the Victorian Era, and its purpose was providing an explanation for the Second World War in socio-economic terms rather than identifying an association with the historical events which led to the genesis and affirmation of British colonial imperialism. However, the emphasis placed by both Leninist theory and Victorian imperialism on the importance of capitalism, of the exploitation of resources, and of the power relationships among the international actors, makes it possible and arguably legitimate to draw a parallelism between the two. Although Etherington ultimately advocates for the separation between the study of economic theory and historiography in this context, he also identifies a pivotal similarity between Lenin's predictions concerning the end of economic capitalism and the reality of the dawn of Victorian imperialism which apparently contradicts his main argument. Indeed, when focusing on Lenin's idea of the form in which the liberation from capitalist imperialism would eventually occur, Etherington states that "Abroad, as capital developed the underdeveloped parts of the globe, it would call into being its antithesis, a class-conscious proletariat and an impoverished peasantry who would combine to wage wars of national liberation against imperialism".[11] This reversal of fortunes for capitalist imperialism is yet to find its confirmation in the test of history, as socialism never managed to become a viable alternative to the capitalist mechanism that has largely been governing the world for over a century; however, this prophecy of doom for capitalist imperialism could easily be transposed into a prophecy of doom for colonial imperialism. Indeed, as colonial powers increased their wealth by exploiting their imperial dominions,

[9] *Id.*, p. 3.
[10] *Id.,* p. 36.
[11] *Ibid.*

they also produced a growing malcontent among the indigenous populations, who began to rebel against foreign rule and to seek economic and political independence as they gained consciousness of the potential of their resources. Concerning this issue, the first signs of weakness of the British Empire could be identified with the "early stirrings of nationalism in India and other parts of the Empire".[12] The first signs of unrest in the British colonies were reason enough for both enthusiasts and critics of British Imperialism at home to begin questioning the ability of the Empire to resist the colonies' strive for independence stemming from long years of exploitation of their lands and of their people. Spreading fears of a potential decline of the colonial Empire made the above-mentioned presence of a growing number of immigrants who came from the colonies even more troublesome in the homeland. However, when dealing with British Imperialism, the analysis cannot be limited to Britain's far overseas dominions: much closer to the homeland, Ireland is in fact considered to have been the first British colony, and the long and controversial history of internal colonization which led to its domination on the part of the British is deserving of a more in-depth analysis.

1.1.1 Internal Colonization and the Irish Question

The history of Irish colonization has its roots in the 12th and 13th centuries, a time in which Britain was yet to become a political entity, and the two kingdoms of England and Scotland were still separate. Although the history of Anglo-Irish relations is a long and troubled one, on which much has been written and which is still being written up to this day, this section will only focus on a few selected defining moments which are relevant in order to understand the nature of such relationship and the psychological implications it had on the Victorian mind. The main idea is that, whether one chooses to regard Ireland as a British colony or not, the very existence of a territory which had experienced centuries of political, economic, and religious domination, exploitation, and oppression on the part of Britain, as well as its extreme geographical proximity to the motherland, was matter of concern in a time in which, as has been seen, the ghost of "reverse colonization" was starting to take shape in the minds and hearts of the British population. Moreover, the long Irish struggle for political autonomy and religious self-determination

[12] P. Brantlinger (2012). *Imperial Gothic*. In A. Smith, W. Hughes, (eds.) (2012), *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, pp. 202-216, p. 205.

did nothing but increase the feeling of unrest at home, especially when combined with the growing ferment in the more distant colonies.

While up until the 16th century English rule over the Irish territories had not been formally recognized in the form of incorporation into the Kingdom of England, such annexation was made official by the Irish Parliament in 1541, when King Henry VIII was bestowed the title of "King of Ireland".[13] However, the country only "began to shift from being an 'English', to becoming a 'British' domination, with the Union of the Crowns in 1603 and the establishment of joint English-Scottish colonising ventures in Ireland".[14] In spite of the many ambiguities and historical complications and implications which have led critics to question the idea of Ireland being identified as a British colony, reverting to the very definitions of colony and colonialism, as has been done by Gibney, seems to successfully help in clarifying the issue.[15] Mirroring Gibney's practice, we can see that *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines colony as "a country or area under the full or partial political control of another country and occupied by settlers from that country"[16] and colonialism as "the principle, policy, or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country and occupying it with settlers".[17] Gibney's choice of definitions also included the concept of economic exploitation of the colonized country, which makes the inclusion of the Irish experience in the category of colonization even less questionable. If definitions were not enough, Gibney also dwells on various aspects of the Irish experience as analysed by numerous scholars, and points out how "the scale of the radical and often brutal transformation of Irish society carried out by British settlers, […] the specific plantation ventures undertaken by the settlers, […] and the regional colonization of Cork and south Munster and its integration into the British Atlantic world"[18] can be seen as clear indicators of the status of Ireland as a British colony, at least in the early modern period.[19]

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[13] E. Cavanagh (2013). *Kingdom or Colony? English or British?: Early modern Ireland and the colonialism question*. Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History 14(2), p. 2-2, p. 2.
[14] S. Howe (2000*). Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 21.
[15] J. Gibney (2008). *Early Modern Ireland: A British Atlantic Colony?,* History Compass 6(1), pp. 172-182, p. 173.
[16] "*colony*, n., sense I.3.a.", Oxford English Dictionary, September 2023, retrieved on January 3, 2024, at: https://www.oed.com/dictionary/colony_n?tab=meaning_and_use.
[17] "*colonialism*, n., sense 1", Oxford English Dictionary, July 2023, retrieved on January 3, 2024, at: https://www.oed.com/dictionary/colonialism_n?tab=meaning_and_use#8917586.
[18] Gibney, (2008). *Early Modern Ireland: A British Atlantic Colony?*, cit., p. 176.
[19] *Ibid*.

The exploitation of Irish land and people was not the only contributing factor in triggering, in 1641, the first Irish Rebellion. One of the main catalysts of conflict in Ireland throughout its history has been religion: a predominantly Catholic country, Ireland has, for centuries, been the victim of forced attempts at conversion to Protestantism on the part of Britain. First of such attempts was made by King Charles I, who sent out to Ireland Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, in the hope of reforming the Irish Catholic Church on the model of the British Anglican Church. Needless to say, the attempt not only failed, but caused an uprising among the Irish Catholics which began with the rebellion of 1641 and became known as the Irish Confederate Wars, which was only brought to a formal end with Oliver Cromwell's conquest of the Irish territories in 1652. Religious concessions were gradually made over the centuries, reaching a peak with the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, achieved thanks to the leadership of Daniel O'Connell. However, the existing friction between the Irish Catholic and Protestants never ceased, and instead became pivotal in the definition of Anglo-Irish relations over the course of the 20th century.

Another crucial event in Irish history which put Anglo-Irish relations to the test was the famine which struck Ireland in the years 1845-46. The passing of the *Act of Union* in 1800 had meant the dissolution of the Irish Parliament and the full incorporation of the Irish territories in what became known as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Ireland, however, was still seen as a somewhat separate entity, and reaching some achievements on the religious front thanks to the leadership of Daniel O'Connell with the *Catholic Emancipation Act* of 1829 only proved to be a small success for the Irish population. Absent landlords and the colonial exploitation of the Irish land, which had been turned it into a single-crop nation in order to maximise economic gains for the Empire, were among the primary causes of what is known as the Great Famine, which caused around a million deaths by starvation and malnourishment among the Irish population, as well as the fleeing of around two million Irish men, women, and children.[20] Carl Griffin rightly pointed out that "as historians of the famine have noted, crop failures do not themselves make famines. Social, cultural legal, and political systems do. In the context of 1840s Ireland, it was arguably the interplay between three interrelated colonial

[20] C. J. Griffin, (2014) *The Great Famine in Colonial Context: Public Reaction and Responses in Britain before the "Black '47"*, Historical Geography, 42, pp. 111-129, p. 111.

systems that turned scarcity into famine".[21] Indeed, the initial reaction of the British government was non-existent, and mild at best over the following few years, thus contributing to the further degeneration of the situation in Ireland and leading to the above-mentioned disastrous consequences for the entire country.[22]

When it comes to the Victorian era, there is evidence of strong migration flows which reached Britain and originated from Ireland.[23] The history of Irish natives migrating to England was often a history of poverty and lack of integration, mainly due to the stigma which surrounded the Irish and often labelled them as ignorant and primitive; ironically, those who were to blame for the very poverty which caused the migration from Ireland in the first place were also those who turned the early Irish experience in Britain, for the most part, into an experience of discrimination, isolation, and extreme poverty.[24] Swift identified four main reasons behind the discrimination which the Irish suffered in British territory: poverty, nationalism, race, and religion.[25] In this context, it is worthy to explore what he states concerning Irish nationalism. While he does affirm that the threat posed to the Empire by Irish nationalism was, at the time, overly exaggerated, he also notes that:

> Certainly, the Irish nationalist members of parliament after 1829 formed and often discordant element in English political life, and different aspects of the Irish question helped to defeat the tory party in 1846 and to destroy the liberal party in 1886. And Irish agitation for the repeal of the act of union during the 1840s and for home rule after 1880 did seem to many Englishmen to threaten the destruction of the empire at its very heart.[26]

This statement perfectly sums up the argument of this section, namely that in Victorian times there was a widely spread belief that, more than any other colony, Ireland could present a threat, both abroad and at home, to the stability of the British Empire. Such threat was the direct consequence of the turbulent history of domination and exploitation of the Irish land and population which had been perpetrated by Britain. It was perceived as stronger than the threats coming from the further away colonies, due to the fact that it was palpable in the very heart of the Empire thanks to the vast presence of Irish

[21] *Id*., p. 114.
[22] *Ibid.*
[23] R. Swift (1987). *The Outcast Irish in the British Victorian City: Problems and Perspectives*. Irish Historical Studies, 25(99), pp. 264–276, p. 264.
[24] *Ibid.*
[25] *Ibid.*
[26] *Id*., p. 260.

immigrants who were living and working in British cities and in direct contact with British people.

1.2 The Late Victorian Struggle Between Religion, Superstition, and Science

The Mid-Victorian Period (1847-70) was a time characterised not only by technological progress and economic prosperity, but also by the affirmation of new scientific theories and by a growing debate concerning religion.[27] The three branches in which the Church of England were organised at the time were the Evangelical, the strictest and most focused on the spiritual aspects of the life of the individual, the High Church, which had its primary focus in traditional rituals and in the authority of the institution, and the Broad Church, characterised by higher levels of open-mindedness and inclusivity.[28] Moreover, even prior to the second half of the 19th century, rationalist movements such as Utilitarianism had begun to debate over the utility and up-to-dateness of religious thought on the basis of the idea that in a world in which every human action was perpetrated following the principle of maximising pleasure and minimising pain, the moral compass which should guide men was that of acting in a way that "provides thee greatest pleasure to the greatest number".[29]

While it had previously been subject to very little questioning, mostly on the part of the Utilitarians, during the course of the Victorian Era the reading of the sacred texts underwent a drastic and unprecedented moment of revision, shifting from a literal interpretation of the then undisputable 'truths' of the Bible to the reflection on such 'truths', which led to an update in their interpretation.[30] The continuous development and evolution of theology, as well as its increasing availability in print towards the end of the XIX century, made the shift in religious interpretation almost inevitable; while there were still those who firmly believed in the infallibility of the Bible, namely a small portion of the Anglican community, various levels of revisionism were taking a foothold among the British population, with the Secularist movement taking the lead.[31]

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[27] S. Greenblatt, M. H. Abrams, et. al. (eds.) (2006). *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Vol. 2: The Romantic Period through the Twentieth Century*, 8th edition, London: W. W. Norton & Company, p. 984.
[28] *Id*., pp. 985-986.
[29] *Ibid*., p. 986.
[30] J. Stevens, (2010). *The Historical Jesus and the Literary Imagination 1860-1920*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, pp. 9-10
[31] *Id.,* pp. 11-13

Such an important shift in perspective concerning religious thought was undeniably influenced by the groundbreaking scientific discoveries of the time, most revolutionary of which was Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory. In line with what was stated by Turner, it could be argued that "antagonism may arise because the naturalistic explanations of science dispense with the metaphysical presuppositions of theology, or because particular scientific theories contradict the literal reading of passages of the Bible, or because religious dogma and authority interfere with scientific research".[32] It comes as no surprise that in September 1869 Thomas Henry Huxley coined the term 'agnostic', to describe "one who professes that the existence of a First Cause and the essential nature of things are not and cannot be known".[33] This perfectly sums up the extent to which the moment of crisis for religion was striking Britain, first and foremost its intellectual community.[34]

As above mentioned, one of the scientific theories which shook the foundation of a rigid and well-established religious system was Darwin's evolutionary theory, "a new factor in the science-religion relationship which has been viewed as a critical turning point. Darwin, so to speak, threw a monkey wrench into the previously harmonious relationship between science and religion typified by natural theology".[35] In 1859, with his *On The Origin of Species*, Darwin first laid out his theory of natural selection, through which he affirmed that "all species have changed, and are still slowly changing by the preservation and accumulation of successive slight favourable variations".[36] At a time in which the most widespread belief was that men and women had been created as perfect beings by the almighty hand of God, Darwin's theory came as a thunderstorm by thoroughly explaining, in 490 pages, how humans, as well as all other species existing or extinct, were merely the product of a slow process of adaptation to their environment and their survival needs, thus mining the very foundations of religious thoughts on creation. Moreover, the association made between humans and other species by assimilating the

[32] F. M. Turner, (1978). *The Victorian Conflict between Science and Religion: A Professional Dimension*. Isis, 69(3), 356–376, p. 357.
[33] "agnostic, n.", *Online Etymology Dictionary*, retrieved on January 3rd, 2024, at: https://www.etymonline.com/word/agnostic.
[34] B. Lightman (2001). *Victorian Sciences and Religions: Discordant Harmonies*. Osiris, 16, 343–366, p. 344.
[35] *Id*., p. 343.
[36] C. Darwin (1859). *On The Origins of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. London: John Murray. Available online in its original version at: http://darwin-online.org.uk/converted/pdf/1859_Origin_F373.pdf

two in terms of evolutionary processes incredibly undermined the privileged role which men had attributed themselves for thousands of years: if they were the slow and steady product of evolution, how were they different from all other animals? This question became even more relevant when, in 1871, Darwin published a second treatise, *The Descent of Man*, in which he referred multiple times to men's progenitors as being "ape-like progenitors",[37] thus further blurring the lines between the human and the animal kingdoms.[38] As Kathleen Spencer rightly points out, such blurring of boundaries brought by a number of speculations as to whether mankind could devolve as well as evolving, and such speculations found ground in the theories of anthropologists such as Cesare Lombroso, who claimed that the traits of habitual criminals more closely resembled those of men's primitive ancestors, apes, thus apparently granting some level of scientific grounding to the newly born fear of degeneration.[39]

Biology and criminal anthropology were not alone in the list of sciences which contributed to the growing anxiety of the Victorians. While Galileo and Copernicus had been the first to question the Ptolemaic model of the Universe – which had put mankind at the centre and had gone unchallenged for over one thousand years –, thus casting the first stones towards the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church,[40] the discoveries made in the field of astronomy over the course of the XIX century were also capable of dazzling the minds of the public. For some, discoveries such as the spectroscope and astrophotography were nothing but instruments that made it possible for men to observe the great and humbling beauty of God's creation;[41] for others, understanding the immense vastness of the universe when compared to the relatively minuscule space allocated to men within it was nothing but a catalyst for questioning the very role of mankind when looking at the bigger picture.[42] Similarly to what astronomy was able to do in terms of space, geology was a field of science which allowed men to reflect on the smallness of

[37] C. Darwin (1871). *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*. London: John Murray, available online at: http://darwin-online.org.uk/converted/pdf/1889_Descent_F969.pdf
[38] Greenblatt, Abrams, et. al. (eds.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Vol. 2,* cit., p. 987.
[39] K. L. Spencer, (1992). *Purity and Danger: Dracula, the Urban Gothic, and the Late Victorian Degeneracy Crisis*. ELH, 59(1), pp. 197–225, p. 204.
[40] B. Lightman, *Victorian Sciences and Religions: Discordant Harmonies*, cit., p. 343.
[41] *Id.,* p. 361.
[42] Greenblatt, Abrams, et. al. (eds.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Vol. 2*, cit., p. 987.

their existence in terms of time by comparing their own lifespans to the millions of years of life on Earth.[43]

The pivotal role which natural science came to obtain over the course of the nineteenth century was definitely a source of anxiety for the Victorians, as it highlighted how the seemingly indestructible castle of philosophy, religion, and social structure which had been built in order to provide certainty and rigor to their whole society, and which for so long had acted for them as a security blanket, could crumble under the weight of science and fall as easily as a house of cards. The most terrifying thought, as far as the British Empire is concerned, was linked to the idea of degeneration and devolution of both individuals and nations alike: "such concerns underlay the tremendous public anxiety at the end of the century about the condition of the British Empire and the warnings that, like its Roman predecessor, it could fall, and for what were popularly perceived as the same reasons – moral decadence leading to racial degeneration".[44]

In addition to the Victorian struggle between science and religion, it is worth mentioning another phenomenon, namely the Victorian obsession with "the task of recording superstitions".[45] This practice, which saw its peak in the course of the Victorian and Edwardian years, was mainly triggered by two determining – and diametrically opposed – perspectives within the British population: on the one hand were those who saw folklore as a refuge from the time of change and scientific innovation in which they were living; on the other, those who firmly believed that recording the existing superstitions was a way of attempting to exorcise them from a society which had clearly moved past its age of irrationality.[46] Superstition and folklore were therefore a third way for the Victorians to approach the world, alternative but at the same intrinsically intertwined with both science and religion, as "in many ways, these debates intersected with the much wider intellectual and theological controversies over the meanings of the terms 'supernatural' and 'natural law', the plausibility of biblical miracle and the bearing of the claims of 'moder science' on other Cristian teachings"[47]

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[43] *Ibid.*
[44] Spencer, *Purity and Danger*, cit., p. 204.
[45] A. Walsham (2008). *Recording Superstition in Early Modern Britain: The Origins of Folklore, Past & Present*, 199(3), pp. 178–206, p. 178.
[46] Id., pp. 179-180.
[47] R. Noakes (2004) *Spiritualism, Science and the Supernatural in Mid-Victorian Britain*. In N. Bown, P. Thurschwell, (eds.) (2004), *The Victorian Supernatural*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 23-43, p. 28.

The term "folklore" was coined in 1846 by antiquarian William J. Thoms as a replacement for the term "popular antiquities", and it designated the "traditional beliefs and customs of the common people".[48] Once again, it comes as no surprise that the term was coined in the course of the Victorian Era: the mystery surrounding customary traditions and superstitions of the various peoples of the Empire was so alluring for the Victorians that it led to the founding, in 1878, of the Folklore Society, granting a quasi-scientific status to the study of superstition.[49] Moreover, at a time of geographical expansion and cultural hegemony for the British Empire, the investigation of popular beliefs could not be limited to the homeland: while there was an undeniable interest in the "parallels observed between the 'animistic' and 'irrational' culture of the peasantry in the […] villages of England, Scotland, and Wales",[50] the fascination also grew with the superstitions "of 'backward' and 'savage' tribes in 'uncivilised' parts of the globe".[51] Folklore collections had a strong focus on the popular tales which had references to all kinds of supernatural phenomena: witches, vampires, ghosts, and many others, were, unsurprisingly, the protagonists of this Victorian obsession. Part of such obsession was due to the resurgence of the fascination with the romantic, but the underlying element which, for so long, had kept such phenomena close to the hearts of the public was the Protestant fixation, inherited by their Catholic predecessors, with the idea of "a moralized universe in which God and the devil intervened to punish sin and try the faith of the godly".[52] Witches, ghosts, and the various creatures of the night, were born as a reflection of sin within a society which, for centuries, had had its heart set on the idea that it was destined to be tried for its transgressions in the afterlife, and that the only way to achieve salvation was the rejection of all evil over the course of its earthly experience.

Folklore tales were not the only expression of the Victorian obsession with the supernatural. It was on 14 November, 1849, at the Corinthian Hall in Rochester, that the American sisters Kate and Margaret Fox, the founding mothers of the spiritualist

[48] "folklore, n.", *Online Etymology Dictionary,* retrieved on January 3, 2024, at: https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=folklore.
[49] Walsham, *Recording Superstition in Early Modern Britain: The Origins of Folklore, Past & Present*, p. 179.
[50] *Ibid.*
[51] *Ibid.*
[52] *Id*., p. 206.

movement, held their first demonstration of spirit communication in Britain.[53] Over the course of the Victorian Era, spiritualism – the belief in, and practice of, an exchange of messages between the living and the dead – became a very significant phenomenon in both the United States, where it originated, and in Britain, becoming comparable with an out-and-out religious cult.[54] Of course, since the Victorian Era was a period of heavy focus on the sciences, in spite of the apparent impossibility of linking the practice of spiritualism with rational thought, at the time there were also those who "upheld the possibility that such manifestations might derive from 'natural causes', whether these were well-known mental mechanisms, new forces associated with the body, or intelligences from the spirit world".[55]

The dubious validity of a practice which, as argued by most of the scientific community of the time, was in such striking contrast with the characterising traits of the Victorian period – an age dominated by the advancement of scientific thought and by the idea that supernatural agencies and divine acts were nothing but mere superstition – was often overlooked by the bulk of the British population, which continuously attempted to make sense, either scientifically or in religious terms, of Spiritualism.[56] Therefore, while many Victorian scientists believed that "Spiritualism had to be banished from the natural enquiry because it threatened the rapid progress of the sciences and the intellectual edifice on which the scientific profession based its claims for professional authority"[57], many advocated for the experts in the fields of psychology, physics and physiology to incorporate spiritualism in their fields of studies, and many others found that the link between biblical apparitions and spiritual apparitions was a solid base to regard spiritualism as a religious practice.[58] Overall, touching on the three phenomena so central in Victorian thought, the argument of this section could be summarised as follows:

> Disputes about evolutionary science, like the disputes about religion, are a reminder that beneath the placidly prosperous surface of the mid-Victorian age there were serious conflicts and anxieties. In the same year as the Great Exhibition, with its celebration of the triumphs of trade and industry, Charles Kingsley wrote, "The young men and women of our day are

[53] S. Natale, (2016*). Supernatural Entertainments: Victorian Spiritualism and the Rise of Modern Media Culture.* University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, p. 1.
[54] *Id*., p. 2.
[55] R. Noakes, *Spiritualism, Science and the Supernatural in Mid-Victorian Britain.* In N. Bown, P. Thurschwell, (eds.), *The Victorian Supernatural*, cit., p. 23.
[56] *Id*., pp. 23-32.
[57] *Id*., p. 24.
[58] *Id.,* pp. 26-31.

> fast parting from their parents and each other; the more thoughtful are wandering either towards Rome, towards sheer materialism, or towards the unchristian and unphilosophic spiritualism".[59]

1.3 Victorian Femininity: A New Woman or an Angel in the House?

In an age in which capitalism was arrogantly stepping into the economic and political spheres of the western world, it became increasingly difficult to reconcile the Christian ideals of love and charity, which had long governed British society, and the ruthless competition which was at the basis of a capitalist economic system.[60] In order to try and achieve balance between the 'immorality' of capitalism and the moral values of Christianity, a sharp division between the public and the private spheres was created, resulting in the birth of a real "cult of domesticity, an idealised version of home and family, a vision that perceived the family as both enfolding its members and excluding the outside world".[61] Such a sharp separation between public life and domesticity had inevitable consequences on the perception of the role of women in the Victorian world, as the woman became associated with the domestic sphere, and her essence reduced to that of the 'good wife' or 'good mother'. Coventry Patmore's poem *The Angel in the House* (1854-62) became the epitome of this Victorian perception of the 'proper' role of women, which emphasised purity and selflessness as fundamental qualities that a woman should possess, and attributed her the duty of creating "a place of peace where man could take refuge from the difficulties of modern life"[62] and saving "Man from his own baser instincts and lead him toward heaven".[63] In late-Victorian life, marriage was therefore meant to "tame the sexual impulses of husbands",[64] impulses which were completely inappropriate for a healthy and properly educated Victorian woman, who should under no circumstances fall victim of sensual desire.[65]

Patmore's work was not the only foundation of the myth of the Angel in the House as many others, at the time, supported the philosophy of 'separate spheres' which had been adopted for defining the separate roles of men and women within Victorian society. Another prominent example of such philosophy came from John Ruskin, who was a

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[59] Greenblatt, Abrams, et. al. (eds.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Vol. 2*, cit., pp. 987-988.
[60] D. Gorham, (1982). *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*, (2013 ed.), London: Routledge, p. 4.
[61] *Ibid.*
[62] Greenblatt, Abrams, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature,* Vol. 2, cit., p. 992.
[63] Spencer, *Purity and Danger,* cit., p. 205.
[64] *Ibid.*
[65] *Ibid.*

supporter of the separate spheres and who believed that women belonged in the home, that they should have been strong motherly figures, and that some of the essential qualities which should have characterised their behaviour were chastity and leadership when it came to the family life.[66] In spite of the unequivocable alignment of Ruskin and Patmore with the most prominent opinions of the time on the matter, their stance is also intrinsically ambiguous, as elevating the woman to a higher position to that of men, even if such superiority was only limited to the domestic sphere, put emphasis on "women's 'power' and men's vulnerability", confirming "the female niche in the role of a strong maternal figure, whose merits even exceed those of the male counterparts in protecting the household".[67] The submissive position which women were supposed to assume within society in relation with their male counterparts was thus inherently subverted by the very assertion of their position of power in one of the two spheres which, combined, defined life as a whole: the private sphere was the dominion of women, and, incidentally, it was also the one aspect of life to which the highest moral values were associated. It could then be affirmed that, by asserting female superiority in the domestic sphere, their moral superiority could be inferred as a direct consequence.

Another issue which became a quasi-obsession within British society, and which is not unrelated to the sphere of domesticity and family reputation, was etiquette and, more in general, what was considerate 'proper' and 'appropriate'. As society became increasingly mobile thanks to the industrial revolution, middle-class concerns with etiquette, which was considered a necessary tool in order to construct a 'proper' identity for the people of their social extraction, grew.[68] The books and manuals on etiquette and manners which spread during the mid-Victorian period had at best little to do with the courtesy or conduct books which had previously dominated the scene when it came to the topic of discerning what was 'proper' from what was not: while the latter focused on the internal values of the individual, such as morality, honesty, fortitude, and fidelity, the former indulged the reader with detailed descriptions of the extent to which behaviour could influence the perception of social status, and were therefore mainly targeted

[66] P.-W. C. Kao, (2014). *From Incapable "Angel in the House" to Invincible "New Woman" in Marlovian Narratives: Representing Womanhood in "Heart of Darkness" and "Chance."*, The Conradian, 39(1), pp. 116–129, pp. 118-119.
[67] *Id.,* p. 118.
[68] E. Langland, (1992*). Nobody's Angels: Domestic Ideology and Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Novel*. PMLA, 107(2), pp. 290–304, p. 293.

towards a middle-class audience, as nobility had little to prove when it came to the affirmation of social status.[69] Class-specific concerns with manners and etiquette were nothing but a confirmation of the Victorian fixation with appearances which, in this case, could be attributed to both a desire for recognition and affirmation within society of those who had distinguished themselves in the economic sphere and wished to gain the same level of recognition in terms of social status, and to the anxiety of having to project to the outside world an image which adhered to the standards of the time.

This idea of the Angel in the House was in striking contrast with a new and swiftly emerging line of thought, which advocated for more rights for women in all aspects of life and for a change in the perception of the very nature of women. Women in Britain had mostly been excluded from the great progress which had been made in legislative terms during the first half of the 19th century: women did not enjoy the right to vote, nor were they allowed to hold political office; they could not own or handle their property when they were married, nor were they entitled to the right of divorcing their husbands for adultery, unless it was "combined with cruelty, bigamy, incest, or bestiality",[70] eventually, their ability to access education, and especially higher education, was considerably smaller than that of their male counterparts. The debate which arose around such striking inequalities was the basis of what came to be known as the "Woman Question", a discourse on the social role of women within Victorian society which, in spite of being mainly "conducted by the middle classes about middle-class women",[71] eventually brought about a number of achievements for all women alike, regardless of class.[72]

The already-present feminist movement was among those who advocated for "egalitarian marriage and comradeship between the sexes, improved working conditions for women, and political and legal enfranchisement".[73] A legal landmark concerning the progressive emancipation of women was reached, for instance, in 1857, when the *Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act* made divorce a civil matter other than a religious one, on top of granting women the possibility to apply for the lawful retention of their properties

[69] *Ibid.*
[70] Greenblatt, Abrams, et. al, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. 2, cit., p. 990.
[71] *Ibid.*
[72] *Ibid.*
[73] J. S. Elford, (2015). *The Late-Victorian Feminist Community*. Victorian Review, 41(1), pp. 32–35, p. 32.

with a protection order when going through a divorce.[74] Concerning education, while college was little more than a dream for women at the start of the 19th century, by the beginning of the 20th century they had earned themselves the right to attend and graduate from no less than twelve universities across Britain and to study at both Oxford and Cambridge, in spite of not being able to obtain a degree in either of the two.[75] What may seem a small achievement for today's women was a truly remarkable one at the time: gaining access to higher education was essential in order to build a strong base of educated women who could advocate for their own rights and raise their voices against the injustices and discriminations which were being perpetrated against them. While it is true that, for a long time, the discourse on women's rights was limited to the higher spheres of society, the very presence of a higher number of educated women within British society was the first step towards the possibility of widening the debate on the topic and of gaining equal rights for all women, regardless of their social background, a struggle which has not ceased to exist even in present times. Education was not, as has been mentioned, the only field in which women managed to gain improvements in terms of access and conditions: employment was another matter of concern, especially for the middle and lower classes – even though the reasons behind such concern were radically different.

When it comes to employment opportunities for women, the main preoccupation for those who belonged to the middle and upper classes was that rather than being required to work they had to fill up their time with trivial activities, as "no middle-class girl or woman could raise her own status through effort in the world of work, because earning money, for a girl or woman, meant loss of caste".[76] Many were the female writers who complained about this particular side of middle-class women's life: names such as Charlotte Bronte, Elizabeth Barret Browning, and Florence Nightingale were all united against the vacuity of the trifles which filled up the lives of the average middle and upper class woman.[77] When it came to the lower classes, the concerns were entirely different: the industrial revolution, which had brought wealth and progress to the British Empire, was also a bearer of bad news for the lower-class worker, as the working conditions in industrial and mining environments were, to say the least, appalling.[78] In spite of the

[74] Greenblatt, Abrams, et. al, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. 2, cit., p. 991.
[75] *Ibid.*
[76] D. Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*, cit., p. 8.
[77] Greenblatt, Abrams, et. al, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. 2, cit., p. 991.
[78] *Ibid.*

Factory Acts (1802-78), which mildly improved the working conditions of both men and women in factories and mines – and ended up banning women from mine work –, the living conditions of the poorest strata of society remained extremely challenging.[79] Moreover, ironically but probably not surprisingly, since the women of the lower classes had very few other occupational prospects at the time, and that the role of the proper middle-class wife and of the lady enforced a lack of sensual desire, thousands among the poorest women were drawn into the practice of prostitution.

What in the 1840s was known as the Woman Question became, towards the *fin de siècle*, the New Woman Question, a much more dangerous and destabilising one for the fixed roles of Victorian society. As Spencer points out, "it has been argued that never in western society have gender roles been more rigid or more distinct (at least in the middle classes) than in the late nineteenth century";[80] the character of the New Woman thus "arrived on the scene, wanting higher education, striving to enter the learned professions, and ever more frequently working outside the home for money",[81] challenging the Victorian balance which had assigned precise and separate roles to men and women throughout the entirety of the 19th century. The 'New Woman' became central in the struggle for female emancipation, as she 'came to challenge the way in which women "were regarded, and regarded themselves, as members of society",[82] by breaking the "implacable association between womanhood and domestic purity".[83] The sciences of the time were also an obstacle to overcome along the path of equality:

> Victorian science, especially Victorian medicine, lent the weight of its prestige to the position that the physical distinctions between women and men were absolute, and absolutely determinate. In their very nature and essence, said the doctors, women were unlike men; and this difference explained their limitations – physical, moral, and intellectual – and justified their legal and social disabilities.[84]

According to science, then, the inferiority of women and their subservient position within society, if compared with the position of their male counterparts, were intrinsically justifiable by the analysis of the physical characteristics which, as scientists believed,

[79] *Ibid.*
[80] Spencer, *Purity and Danger*, cit., p. 205.
[81] *Id*., p. 206.
[82] Greenblatt, Abrams, et. al, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. 2, cit., p. 993.
[83] N. Auerbach, (1982). *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, p. 69.
[84] Spencer, *Purity and Danger*, cit., p. 205.

defined the nature of both sexes, and created an unbridgeable gap between men and women.

'Hysteria' was another plague which festered the lives of Victorian women. A term which was coined in 1801 to describe "a neurotic condition peculiar to women and thought to be caused by a dysfunction of the uterus",[85] hysteria was initially thought to be curable with the "adherence to wholesome living suited to the feminine temperament", which consisted in "rigorous conformity to the Victorian ideal of femininity".[86] Among the first to "treat hysteria as a knowable neurological disorder"[87] was neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, who was incredibly famous at the time for his studies on hypnosis, and for the 'performances' he assembled every week for his Tuesday lessons at the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris, where he showcased some of his patients, the majority of whom were women labelled 'hysterical', and discussed their symptoms in front of a crowd.[88] Charcot's studies sparked Freud's interest in the "psychological origins of neurosis".[89] Following Charcot's footsteps, Freud began his study of hysteria, and treated it as a neurological/psychological disease, initially relying on hypnosis as a means through which he could cure it, and claiming that through its use he was able to regulate a patient's menstrual periods.[90] Overall, both hypnosis and hysteria were phenomena connected to the existence of a weakness within the individual affected by them; "only defective individuals could be hypnotised, in other words".[91] Logic can only lead to the inference that, as hysteria was a disease which presented itself in women, and the subjects of clinical hypnosis were mostly hysterical women, at the time women were considered weaker than men, and more defective.

The status quo achieved during the early years of the Victorian Era, which allowed Victorians to find refuge in an alleged stability deriving from the separation of the public and private spheres, and the identification of the latter with the dominion of the angel-like ideal of Victorian femininity, was shaken to its foundations during the course of the

[85] "hysteria, n.", *Online Etymology Dictionary*, retrieved on January 3, 2024, at: https://www.etymonline.com/word/hysteria.
[86] Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*, cit., p. 89.
[87] K. Cambor, (2009). *Freud in Paris*. New England Review, 30(2), pp. 177-189, p. 17.
[88] *Ibid.*
[89] *Id.,* p. 185.
[90] N. Auerbach, (1981). *Magi and Maidens: The Romance of the Victorian Freud*. Critical Inquiry, 8(2), pp. 281–300, p. 283.
[91] K. Hurley (2012). *Science and the Gothic*. In Smith, Hughes, (eds.), *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, pp. 170-185, p. 175.

19th century. The ‘proper’ balance between the roles of men and women had, up until that point, been providing a sense of security and certainty when it came to the definition of what the individual’s life should look like, and of what was expected from him or her as a consequence of their gender and social extraction. The loss of that balance became another cause for anxiety for the late Victorian society. While most men wished to maintain the early-Victorian status quo, aided by the sciences, which continuously implied – both explicitly and implicitly – the inferiority of women to men and their unsuitability towards certain occupations, the New Woman was tireless in her attempt to subvert stability, making undeniable steps forward in her quest for gaining access to equality.

Chapter Two
An Overview of Gothic Literature

Prior to the Gothic revival of the 18th century, the usage of the term bore little association with any form of literary phenomena, as it was mostly associated with the barbaric populations which inhabited Central and Northern Europe, who had no written literature and art of their own to be transmitted to later generations.[92] Indeed, "through history, the word "Gothic" has always been chiefly defined in contrasting juxtaposition to the Roman, and a constant factor in its various uses, perhaps the only constant factor, has continued to be its antithesis to the Roman or the classical".[93] It was precisely the revival which the Gothic underwent over the course of the century that created the link between this term and literature, setting the foundations for the development of a genre which, over the past few centuries, has met the favour of the public to the point of becoming a favourite of scholarly writing and debate. The aim of the present chapter is to understand how the genesis of the literary Gothic occurred, to provide the reader with an understanding of the evolution of the Gothic in the Victorian context, and to finally provide a link between the first Gothic and today's, in an attempt to establish a parallelism between the two which can allow us to comprehend the relevance of the genre in the eyes of today's readers.

2.1 The Birth of the Gothic Novel: A Sublime Response to the Age of Enlightenment

The eighteenth century was a time of revival and positive re-evaluation of what was Gothic: up until the advent of the Romantics, the term Gothic had always assumed a negative connotation, as it had been associated with everything that was barbarous, medieval, and distant. It was precisely thanks to the Romantics and, more in general, to sentimentalism, that the Gothic became conceivable in a context which had long been dominated by the rationality of the Enlightenment and, before that, by the exaltation of

[92] R. Sowerby (2012). *The Goths in History and Pre-Gothic Gothic*. In D. Punter, (ed.) (2012). *A New Companion to the Gothic*, Chichester: Blackwell, pp. 25-37, p. 26.
[93] *Ibid.*

the classics which had been brought about by the Renaissance. As Punter rightly points out, "the Gothic could not have come into being without a style of this kind, for it is in this style that we begin to glimpse the possibility of the balance and reason of the Enlightenment being crushed beneath the weight of feeling and passion".[94] It is undoubtable that the focus of this new literary phenomena, which was an essential contribution for the popularisation of the novel, was to be placed on the individual's feelings and interior life and psychology, rather than being centred on the rationality of science and fact. Indeed, the "popularity of the sentimental novel demonstrates the contradictions in taste of the eighteenth-century bourgeoisie. It also shows, more precisely, the area in which these contradictions were most strongly felt: the area of the passions, of the emotional life".[95] Therefore, during an age in which the principles of science and reason seemed to guide the development of society, the novel as a literary form seemed to provide shelter for the exploration of the emotions which the very structure of society tried to suppress.

In order to better grasp the shift in taste which was at the basis of the genesis of the Gothic as a literary genre, and which determined the re-evaluation of the power of emotions as opposed to rational thought, it is useful to look into the writings of philosopher and politician Edmund Burke, whom, in his *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), provided readers with a distinct separation between what was beautiful and what was sublime by stating that

> In comparison there appears a remarkable contrast. For sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small; beauty should be smooth, and polished; the great, rugged and negligent; beauty should shun the right line, yet deviate from it insensibly; the great in many cases loves the right line, and when it deviates, it often makes a strong deviation; beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and gloomy; beauty should be light and delicate; the great ought to be solid, and even massive. Ther are indeed ideas of a very different nature, one being founded on pain, the other on pleasure; and however they may vary afterwards from the direct nature of their causes, yet these causes keep up an eternal distinction between them, a distinction never to be forgotten by any whose business it is to affect the passions.[96]

[94] D. Punter (1996). *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*, Vol. 1, *The Gothic Tradition*. London & New York: Routledge, p. 26.
[95] Id., p. 27.
[96] E. Burke (1764). *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, With an Introductory Discourse Concerning Taste, and Several Other Additions*, 4th ed., London: R. & J. Dodsley in Pall Mall, pp. 237-238.

In his treatise, Burke thus introduced a distinction which associated the idea of the beautiful to the ideals of the Enlightenment, opening up a new window into something wider, the sublime, which couldn't be fully linked with what could be explained through science and nature – the line which demarcated the separation between the two could be blurry at times, although this ambiguity could not imply the assimilation of the two concepts into one – and had its roots in the fear and terror inspired by the vastness, magnificence and grandeur of objects which were cause of tension within the individual.[97] To Burke, "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a fource of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling".[98] Therefore, it could be affirmed that the growing importance attributed to feelings and emotions, the force that the Enlightenment ideals had to start reckoning with towards the end of the eighteenth century, can – at least partly – find its roots in Burke's philosophical thought.

Slowly and steadily, the fascination with what was able to inspire such feelings of awe and terror grew stronger and stronger, leading to the above-mentioned re-evaluation of everything Gothic: architecture, popular traditions, religion, and many other aspects of what had, until then, been considered barbaric and worthy of being dismissed, became the objects of some sort of nostalgia of a past which needed to be brought back to life rather than forgotten and disdained. While the Gothic revival can certainly not be attributed to Burke's philosophical enquiries, it can be asserted that his work was among the first examples of a "shift in cultural values",[99] and that his positive outlook on the sublime, which could be associated with the "archaic, the pagan, that which was prior to, or was opposed to, or resisted the establishment of civilised values and a well-regulated society"[100] was a representation of the spreading sentiment that these qualities, which were attributes of the Gothic "possessed a fire, a vigour, a sense of grandeur which was sorely needed in English culture".[101]

It was precisely in this context that the first Gothic novels appeared on the literary scene, and the genre became immensely successful among the reading public, dominating

[97] *Ibid.*
[98] *Id.,* pp. 58-59.
[99] D. Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, cit., p. 5.
[100] *Ibid.*
[101] *Ibid.*

the market and, towards the end of the century, surpassing in popularity the realistic fiction of authors like Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding, which had been the most popular during the first half of the century.[102] Although it is precisely to the realists that we owe the birth of the modern novel, the first Gothic novel is to be attributed to Horace Walpole: indeed, in the preface to the second edition of his *The Castle of Otranto,* subtitled 'A Gothic Story' and published in 1764, Walpole himself affirmed that he had "created a new species of romance",[103] even if "it certainly was not the only factor in the development of the Gothic Novel".[104] *The Castle of Otranto* was, first and foremost, a novel, and a very popular one among its contemporaries: thanks to the elements of the supernatural and the fantastic which characterised it, to some of the peculiar traits of the romance, to the presence of Shakespearean inspirations, and to its adherence to the narrative structure of the realist novel, *Otranto* was reprinted around 115 times since its first edition, thus becoming one of the pillars for the revival of romance in prose literature, as well as one of the founding pillars of the literary Gothic.[105] Although the setting of Walpole's novel is far from being the dark scene which would normally be associated with the Gothic and terror, he was a firm believer in the idea of using the latter as a powerful tool which would awaken the reader's interest: Walpole thus set his novel in medieval times, a reality which was incredibly distant from eighteenth-century England, with its fairy tale princes and princesses and, most of all, with a haunted castle which was to become a classic trope for many Gothic novels to come. Otranto was the first celebrated representation of the union between what was old and what was new, what was distant and what was known, "combining the realism that was the hallmark of the up-to-date eighteenth-century novel with the imagination that had flourished in medieval romance and that this realism had suffocated".[106] Walpole was the initiator of this new genre, which reached its peak in popularity in the last decade of the 18th century, a time in which the political and cultural anxieties derived from the fear of foreign invasion led the reading public to the search for

[102] *Ibid.*
[103] H. Walpole (1764). *The Castle of Otranto*. Gothic Digital Series @UFSC, 2015, https://repositorio.ufsc.br/bitstream/handle/123456789/173243/The%20Castle%20of%20Otranto.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, p. 10.
[104] M. Summers (1969). *The Gothic Quest. A History of the Gothic Novel*. London: The Fortune Press, p. 162.
[105] D. Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day, Vol 1, The Gothic Tradition*, cit., pp. 44-45.
[106] Greenblatt, Abrams, et. al. (eds.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. 2, cit., p. 579.

an escape which would still enable it to engage with its present-day problems, precisely thanks to the temporal and spatial displacement which so often occurred in Gothic novels.[107] The haunting of the castle, the treachery, the spectre of religion were thus all elements providing "a very intense, if displaced, engagement with political and social problems"[108] which haunted British society towards the end of the eighteenth century.

Aside from Walpole, two other incredibly influential Gothic novelists of the late eighteenth century were Ann Radcliffe, with her most celebrated novels *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797), and Matthew Gregory Lewis, with *The Monk* (1796).[109] Although it could be argued that Lewis took much inspiration from Radcliffe's *Udolpho* for his *Monk*, the two novels created two very distinct Gothic moods, the latter eliminating the "delicacy of sentiment" and "lily-white sensationalism" which Radcliffe managed to create in her work.[110] It is certainly interesting to note how both diverging paths became, each in its own way, source of inspiration for many novelists to come, who feasted upon the "theme, characters, incidents"[111] provided by Radcliffe and Lewis, although often not managing to compare with their predecessors in terms of quality and popularity. As Miles rightly points out, the main difference between the works of Radcliffe and Lewis lays in the interpretation of the sublime portrayed in their novels: while Radcliffe's "Gothic of sublime terror"[112] is rooted in the mind and the imagination, Lewis makes terror tangible and explicit, thus turning it into horror.[113]

Following the footsteps of the above-mentioned pioneers of the Gothic novel, many were those who, over the course of the early nineteenth century, made this genre flourish. Authors such as Mary Shelley, with her novel *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818), and Charles Maturin with his *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), brought the early Gothic novel to some of its qualitative peaks, which was followed by a slight decline in popularity until the *fin-de-siècle* return of the new Victorian Gothic. Shelley was notoriously responsible for bringing science into the mix of ingredients which became

[107] D. Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day, Vol 1, The Gothic Tradition*, cit., p. 54.
[108] *Ibid.*
[109] *Id.,* p. 55.
[110] L. Fitzgerald (1993). *Gothic Properties: Radcliffe, Lewis and the Critics.* The Wordsworth Circle, 24(3), 167–170, p. 167.
[111] M. Summers, *The Gothic Quest. A History of the Gothic Novel*, p. 233.
[112] R. Miles (2012). *Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis.* In D. Punter (ed.), *A New Companion to the Gothic*, 93-109, p. 93.
[113] *Id.*

recurring constituents of the Gothic novel: with her tormented scientist, and the monster which he brought to life, Shelley's work is often considered not only a Gothic story, but also the first example of modern science-fiction; *Melmoth the Wanderer*, on the other hand, faintly evokes Marlowe's *Faustus* and his pact with the devil, as well as its tragic epilogue. Both novels share their predecessors' choice in terms of setting, distant in place and time, full of elements of terror and horror, but at the same time add both complexity and intricacy to the narrative structure, as well as new elements which are representative of the evolution of the genre over the course of its first period of fame, leading into the Victorian Era.

2.2 The Victorian Gothic: Literary Representations of an Anxiety-Ridden Era

The Victorian Era, a time in which cultural and social anxieties dominated the bulk of British society, was indeed fertile ground for the growth of a genre which was capable of simultaneously entertaining and expressing such anxieties in literary form. Gothic has become a word which is often associated with Victorian, as it "permeates Victorian culture in a complex way which evades any attempt to categorise it through the application of formal aesthetic criteria".[114] However, Smith and Hughes also point out that "critics have agreed that there are a number of themes, issues and aesthetic considerations which characterise the form".[115] The argument they put forward is that fiction written during the second half of the 19th century brings back issues typical of the early Gothic tradition, as well as introducing "engagements with science, art and degeneration",[116] which can be described as a distinctive feature of late-Victorian Gothic novels.[117] Moreover, elements of the Gothic can also be found in the incredibly popular Victorian novels written by the Brontë sisters or by Charles Dickens which are, according to Warwick, expressions of the two main settings of the Victorian Gothic novel: the "bourgeois domestic setting, and […] the urban environment",[118] the latter becoming characteristic of an evolving world, in

[114] A. Smith, W. Hughes (2012). *Introduction: Locating the Victorian Gothic*. In A. Smith, W. Hughes, (eds.), *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, 1-14, p. 2.
[115] *Id.*
[116] *Ibid*., p. 3.
[117] *Id.*
[118] A. Warwick (2007). *Victorian Gothic*. In Spooner, C. & McEvoy, E. (eds.) (2007). *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 38-48, p. 30.

which the metropolis became more and more central as opposed to the rural, remote settings of the early Gothic.[119]

Interestingly, going back to the previous chapter and to the association which was made during the Victorian Era between what was female and domesticity, and what was male and public life, it is worth pointing out that the authors responsible for the initial development of the bourgeois domestic setting are, indeed, female, while the urban setting became increasingly central in late 19th century fiction following the footsteps of a male writer. Concerning the domestic setting, Warwick argues that, on top of drawing from the traditional models of the late 18th century, which often portrayed women in danger and confined,

> The Brontë's distinctive contribution is to create claustrophobic psychological dramas that represent sadomasochistic relations between men and women. In contrast to the emphatic Victorian development of the idea of the home as a place of peace, safety and protection, the Brontës' domestic spaces, and the state of marriage or family life that the spaces embody, are terrifyingly ambiguous. […] The heroines are modern women seeking a place for themselves in a world that is hostile to them. […] The language of Gothic, of sensation, terror, shock, and its characters are translated into a bourgeois domestic arena.[120]

The setting of the Gothic was therefore displaced, moved from the distant and exotic to the known and familiar, exacerbating the discomfort, as well as the interest, which arose from the narration: bringing the Gothic into the bourgeois home-made terror feel more real to the Victorian reader, who no longer seemed to be thoroughly satisfied with the geographical and temporal displacement which characterised the early Gothic fiction, and came to prefer realistic settings that could more easily become relatable for the wider public.

The bourgeois home, however, was not the only setting of choice for the early Victorian novel. Dickens, one of the greatest novelists of the time, seemed to prefer the urban setting for his narratives: his 'humanitarian novels', which were mainly aimed at identifying the social problems which afflicted British society, made the adoption of a urban setting essential, as it enabled him to realistically portray the most pivotal issues of a society which was more and more drawn towards the great metropolis. In spite of their realism, Dickens' novels are full of Gothic devices, which were expertly used in order to fabricate a dark and grim mood, setting the undertone for most of his narratives.[121] Indeed,

[119] *Ibid.*
[120] *Id.*, pp. 30-31.
[121] F. Botting (1996) *Gothic*. London, New York: Routledge, p. 82.

many of Dickens' stories showed the "violence and cruelty lurking just below the surface of acceptable Victorian reality",[122] mixing Gothic and realistic elements in order to create "vacillation between real and supernatural dimensions".[123] Surely, the early Victorian novel was more concerned with realism than it was with the supernatural; however, the presence of elements of the supernatural lay the grounds for the great return of the Gothic of the end of the 19th century and, while it would be restrictive to define Dickens as a Gothic writer, "the prevalence of claustrophobia in Dickens, the foreclosure of escape from institution or destitution, the grotesque exaggeration of character and location, are all recognizably "Gothic" features".[124]

The Victorian Era was also a time of popularity for the ghost story, which oxymoronically became a specialised form of literature during this period of scientific obsession, prospering among a public whose fascination with the supernatural and spiritual grew stronger and stronger towards the end of the century.[125] Indeed, the ghosts of the Victorian tradition "have tended to be treated as metaphors or ciphers for a 'spectrum of social anxieties of the day' that include the decline of the Cristian faith, the contested political, social and legal position of women, and the increasing invisibility of financial exchange",[126] once again leading back to the crisis of values which permeated Victorian society. Certainly, the presence of ghosts in literature can be traced back in time way prior to the appearance of the Gothic on the literary scene, as spirituality in all its various forms has been part of human life for thousands of years, pre-dating the birth of Catholicism. Some of the most famous ghosts in literary history definitely belong to the Shakespearean tradition, which boasts supernatural presences such as the ghost of Hamlet's father, Banquo's ghost in *Macbeth*, or the spirits of Richard III's victims coming to haunt him about his imminent misfortunes. The early Gothic tradition went back to the figure of the ghost, partly drawing directly from Shakespeare, such as Walpole did with the ghost of Alfonso in *Otranto*, and partly associating the ghostly presence with religion, an example of which may be found in *The Monk*, where the ghost of a nun haunts the

[122] *Ibid.*
[123] *Ibid.*
[124] D. Punter (2012). *Introduction: The Ghost of a History*. In D. Punter (ed.) (2012), *A New Companion to the Gothic*, pp. 1-10, pp. 1-2.
[125] S. Brewster (2020) *The Genesis of the Victorian Ghost Story*. In A. Wright, D. Townshend (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Gothic. Volume 2: Gothic in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 224-245. P. 224.
[126] *Ibid.*

Castle of Lindenberg. However, in spite of drawing elements from its predecessors, the Victorian ghost tradition truly began with *A Christmas Carol*, where Dickens used the ghostly in order to explore some of the issues of his contemporary society, creating an ambiguous form of spiritual, purpose of which was to both instruct, avenge, make it possible for the characters to obtain redemption, and to frighten.[127]

Worthy of mention, before reaching the apex of the Victorian Gothic revival with the British Gothic Renaissance, is the development of a new overseas streak of Gothic, in which many American writers, fascinated by the tales of the initiators of the genre, contributed to the development of some innovations which would prove crucial in shaping the British *fin-de-siècle* Gothic. As well as the introduction of some crucial elements for the further development of Gothic fiction, the choice of including the American Gothic in this section is mainly due to the fact that its genesis in the novel form mainly occurred in the early Victorian period, a time in which American writers were trying to build their own literary identity, which inevitably drew part of its inspiration from the European literary tradition, as their relatively new country could not count on a strong tradition of its own. Indeed, as pointed out by Lloyd Smith, "Without a feudal past and those relics so convenient for the European Gothicist, castles and monasteries and legends, the American landscape seemed an unlikely place for such fictions":[128] American writers were thus forced to find new elements to insert in their narratives in order to develop a separate, unique identity. Therefore, on top of the existing Gothic tropes, to which American novelists did not renounce, "four indigenous features were to prove decisive in producing a powerful and long-lasting American variant of the Gothic: the frontier, the Puritan legacy, race, and political utopianism".[129]

The first real example of American Gothic, however, pre-dates the Victorian Era, and is to be found in Washington Irving's short stories, among which are the renowned *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* and *Rip Van Winkle*, both written while Irving was staying with his siter in Birmingham. Irving made it a point of setting his tales in the United States and was the first to create an association between the Gothic and colonialism, placing his narratives in the American colonial past and inserting elements of folklore which he drew

[127] *Id.*, pp. 226-227.
[128] A. L. Smith (2012). *Nineteenth-Century American Gothic*. In D. Punter (ed.), *A New Companion to the Gothic*, 163-175, p. 163.
[129] *Ibid.*

from the tradition of the Dutch settlers. Entering the Victorian period, two were the great writers who really came to represent the assimilation and reformulation of the Gothic in American fiction: Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Of the two, the most innovative was surely Poe, whose combination of novels and short stories, which attempted to distance themselves from the original Gothic, "are noted as remarkable precisely for a certain kind of artificiality […]; his very distance from the mainspring of Gothic brought him an added degree of self-consciousness, the appearance of which was to herald alterations in the entire tradition".[130] Poe's settings and characters range from the more traditional Prince Prospero of *The Masque of the Red Death*, who tries to refuge the local nobility, as well as himself, in a castellated abbey, to the mad murderer of the *Tell-Tale-Heart*, which is most likely and ordinary man situated in an urban setting. However, the most striking element of Poe's fiction is the incredible psychological depth of the narration, where madness is a recurring theme, bias induces the reader to doubt its reliability, and its progressive intensification is able to hook anyone in.[131] Punter perfectly summarizes Poe's relevance in the evolution of the Gothic in his commentary of *The Fall of the House of Usher*, by stating that

> Poe's story points both forward and back: back to Walpole and Radcliffe, forward to another whole constellation of Gothic at the end of the nineteenth century, exemplified particularly in Wilde and in Bram Stoker, when decadence, engaged in picking over the bones of aristocratic modes of life, starts to travel again in vampiristic circles, but with the benefit of the kind of supra-narrative symbolism which Poe himself inaugurated.[132]

At the other end of the Atlantic, as the reign of Queen Victoria entered its last decades, a new mood began pervading Victorian society, and became central in the development of the themes of what is known as *fin-de-siècle* Gothic: an ambivalence which characterised most aspects of British existence, which was stuck between the thrill of modernisation and the uncertainty for the future, a growing Empire and the fear for its decline, increasing wealth and new levels of misery and deprivation, a rigorous morality and a crisis of values, a respectable façade and a promiscuous reality. [133] Indeed, as pointed out by Margree and Randall, "Major themes of the Gothic fin de siècle include the growth of the

[130] D. Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day, Vol. 1*, cit., p. 185.
[131] *Id*., pp. 176-177.
[132] *Id*., p. 180.
[133] V. Margree, B. Randall (2012). *Fin-de-siècle Gothic*. In A. Smith, W. Hughes, (eds.) (2012), *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, 217- 233, pp. 217-218.

city and the rise of an urban poor, challenges to older Victorian ideologies of gender and sexuality, doubts about the validity and stability of Empire, and fears about immigration";[134] last but not least, they include among the ranks the Victorian preoccupation with scientific development, which has thoroughly been discussed in the previous chapter, but needs to be underlined in this context, as it was one of the main ingredients behind both the Gothic monster of the end of the 19th century and the late Victorian obsession with the possibility of the degeneration of man.[135] The intricate web of Victorian anxieties was eloquently addressed in literature by a copious amount of writers, most of whom were exponents of the Gothic genre.

Among those who mainly focused their narratives on the imperial motif, two prominent names were surely Rudyard Kipling and Joseph Conrad. Born in British India, Kipling, whose stories are mainly set in his native territories, became famously associated with the idea – dominant in the Victorian Era – of the inherent superiority of the white man compared to the indigenous people who inhabited the colonies due to one of his poems, *The White Man's Burden* (1899). In Kipling's fiction, the alienation experienced by the white colonizers who found themselves trapped between an indigenous culture with which they did not identify and the British metropolitan view of India is explored in the form of a "self-conscious ambiguity",[136] and the Gothic is used as a tool to perform such exploration.[137] Conrad's criticism towards the imperial practice, on the other hand, was incredibly sharp: his best known novel, *Heart of Darkness* (1899) is "undoubtedly the masterpiece both of imperial Gothic fiction and of the realist critique of turn-of-the-century European imperialism"[138], and its Kurtz's iconic last words, "The horror! The horror!"[139] would come back eighty years later in another unforgettable critique of imperialism, Francis Ford Coppola's masterpiece *Apocalypse Now* (1979), loosely based on Conrad's novel. In the novel, Marlow's words following Kurtz's death, "Since I had peeped over the edge myself, I understand better the meaning of his stare that could not

[134] *Id.*, p. 218.
[135] *Ibid.*
[136] A. Smith (2020). *Gothic Imperialism at the Fin de Siècle*. In A. Wright, D. Townshend (eds.) (2020), *The Cambridge History of the Gothic. Volume 2: Gothic in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 463-481, p. 476.
[137] *Ibid.*
[138] P. Brantlinger, *Imperial Gothic*. In A. Smith, W. Hughes, (eds.), *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, cit., p. 209.
[139] J. Conrad (1899). *Heart of Darkness*. In R. Kimbrough (ed.) (1988). *Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness: An Authoritative Text, Background and Sources, Criticism*. Third edition. New York London: W.W. Norton & Company, p. 68.

see the flame of the candle but was wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness",[140] are the perfect example of something greater, simultaneously inspiring awe and leaving men helpless in the face of their minuteness, a contemplation of something which cannot be fully understood, of death itself, for "perhaps all the wisdom, and all truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible".[141] Both Kipling and Conrad are thus examples of how Gothic fiction of the *fin de siècle* often focused its attention on the theme of colonialism, functioning as a tool to express the widespread anxiety deriving from it and the criticism against its inhumanity, both of which surrounded the topic in late-nineteenth century England.

Science and degeneration are the focus of many Gothic novels of the end of the 19th century, among which Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), and H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) stand out. The two novels are set in diametrically opposed environments, the former being placed in Victorian London, and the latter on an island of the South Pacific; however, both explore the limits of science and the dangers of attempting to modify human nature via scientific experimentation. Both novels certainly draw inspiration from Shelley's *Frankenstein*,[142] but are not limited to its themes, bringing in other, problematic issues which were more strongly felt at the end of the century. *Jekyll and Hyde*, for instance, employs science as a tool to explore the duplicity of human nature and surpass the limits imposed by the law: the desires produced by the very prohibitions of the law are what emerge when Jekyll's evil side, Hyde, is called upon, but the ambivalence lies in the fact that it is Jekyll who creates a means through which he can unleash his illegitimate desires, disclosing "horrors and questions concerning human nature and sexuality in terms of law and science".[143] Wells, on the other hand, plays with *Moreau*'s predecessor, *Frankenstein*, by recuperating the figure of the scientist who patches up "monstrous experimental creatures",[144] this time, however, "performing a strange variation on Darwinian theory"[145] which is also reminiscent of the

[140] *Id.*, p. 69.
[141] *Ibid.*
[142] P. Brantlinger (1980). *The Gothic Origins of Science Fiction*. NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction, 14(1), pp. 30–43, p. 32.
[143] F. Botting, *Gothic*, cit., p. 93.
[144] *Id.*, p. 105.
[145] *Ibid.*

practices of anthropologists who went to remote island to study indigenous populations, and addresses one of the most prominent anxieties of Victorian culture: degeneration. Wilde and Hardy are also worthy of being mentioned in this overview of *fin de siècle* Gothic, for they deal with two aspects of Victorian society which are recurrent within the context of late-nineteenth century Gothic. Indeed, Hardy often explores the role of women within Victorian society, in novels such as *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) or *Jude the Obscure* (1895). Wilde, on the other hand, brings up the theme of the double with his decadent and hedonistic Dorian Gray, a "degenerate, queer, hyper-sexualised"[146] character who embodies some of the most blatant contradictions of Victorian society and exposes its superficial nature by pointing out the relevance it attributed to status and beauty at the expense of pleasure and of the expression of sexuality.

Often labelled as the most quintessential Gothic novel, however, is Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), which manages to create a synthesis of all the above mentioned themes and recurring Victorian anxieties: a "dreaded queer monster who threatens sexual 'conversion', hysteria, and even death",[147] the investigation of religious and spiritual issues, the ambiguous role of science within society, the changing role of women personified in the characters of Mina Harker and Lucy Westenra, the fear of degeneration, of the colonization of the 'other' and of the decline of the Empire. The incredibly vast array of themes which populates the pages of *Dracula* makes this novel one of the most effective didactic literary tools to be employed in the classroom for teaching the Victorian Gothic both in literary and cultural terms, as well as sparking the debate on the surprising timelessness of the discourses which can be extrapolated from it.

2.3 An Everlasting Genre: What Makes the Gothic still Relevant?

After the success of the late nineteenth century, the Gothic as a literary genre began to lose the affection and fascination of the public, and it nearly became forgotten until the advent and development of two crucial phenomena: film and psychoanalysis.[148] While Spooner focuses her argument around the fundamental role that these two phenomena

[146] C. M. Davison (2012). *The Victorian Gothic and Gender*. In A. Smith, W. Hughes (eds.) (2012), *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion,* cit., pp. 124-141. p. 138.
[147] *Id*., p. 136.
[148] C. Spooner (2021). *Introduction: A History of Gothic Studies in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries.* In C. Spooner, D. Townshend (eds.) (2021), *The Cambridge History of the Gothic. Volume 3: Gothic in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-21, pp. 2-4.

assumed in determining the return of the Gothic in the first half of the 20th century, as well as the genesis of the literary criticism of the genre, which has, since then, continuously abounded, I would argue that these two means have also been essential for the survival and success of the Gothic genre up until the present day.

As rightly pointed out by Varna in his *The Gothic Flame* (1923), "The fantastic in literature is the surrealistic expression of those historical and social factors which the ordinary chronicle of events in history does not consider significant. Such 'fantasia' express the profoundest, repressed emotions of the individual and society";[149] the fantastic thus functions as a tool for the writer to exorcise what lies beneath the surface of society: the deepest fears, anxieties and social dilemmas, often neglected by the historical narrative, are brought to life through the sapient use of imagination, enabling the reader to gain a deeper, fuller understanding of any given historical context. The fantastic, a term which can easily be applied to many kinds of tales, Gothic tales included, is considered here as a "literary mode, which can appear in works of any period";[150] Spencer, in defining the fantastic, outlines two elements essential in order to establish a given reality while simultaneously disrupting it: the actual occurrence of the impossible event, and the "initial disbelief, and (usually) horror"[151] which characterise the narrative tone when the event occurs.[152] This mood can only be achieved when the overall tone of the narrative follows the conventions of realism, as the violation of fictional reality should be perceived as a violation of the reader's own reality in order to achieve maximum impact with the fantastic element.[153]

The first to reach the maximum potential for the fantastic were, therefore, the Gothic novelists of the Victorian *fin-de-siècle*, as they managed to successfully merge the supernatural and the real, thus enabling the reader to fully experience the fantastic. Going back to Varna's point, however, it becomes clear that this intersection between reality and fiction can become a powerful tool to bring out the deepest and most repressed emotions, fears, and anxieties which characterize any given era: the cultural relevance of the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic thus transcends the expression of Victorian cultural anxieties, and can be applied to any later period, so long as its example led writers to use the Gothic mood as

[149] D. P. Varma (1923). *The Gothic Flame*. London: Baker, p. 216.
[150] K. L. Spencer, *Purity and Danger*, cit. p. 198.
[151] *Id.*, p. 199.
[152] *Ibid.*
[153] *Ibid.*

a channel for the exteriorisation of the psychological and cultural torments of their time. Therefore, the psychological dimension of the Gothic becomes essential in the survival of the genre throughout the years, up until the present day, as the Gothic mode can be employed in the most disparate settings and, if intertwined with the fantastic, it will produce similar effects on the reader.

The merit of film, on the other hand, has been its ability to bring Gothic stories to an incredibly large public, contributing effectively to the popularisation of the genre. Moreover, the visual representation of the Gothic elements of horror and terror has been able to generate an even deeper fascination with the genre; in this respect, I would argue that film has been a particularly useful tool because it brings the reader even closer to the narratives, as it is can provide a more immediate and easily accessible image of fictional reality. Indeed, cinematic adaptations of Gothic novels, full of elements of horror and terror, have abounded over the years, some of them contributing to the building of near-myths around fictional characters such as Frankenstein's monster, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Dorian Gray, and, among the most revived characters of all time, Bram Stoker's vampire, Dracula.

In my view, some of the elements which allow the Gothic genre to transcend boundaries imposed by culture, epoch, and geography are: the relation between the Gothic, sexuality, and transgression; the fascination with horror and with the idea of degeneration – both in physical and abstract terms –; the irrational, instinctual fear of what is alien. These elements often intersect and intertwine in fiction, and the purpose of this section is to highlight how each of these aspects has allowed the Gothic to survive and prosper over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, especially thanks to the two phenomena which have been previously identified as catalysts of the Gothic moving forward from the Victorian Gothic Renaissance: film and psychoanalysis.

In order to perform this analysis, it is essential to understand at least one aspect of psychoanalytic theory, which Freud investigated in his short study *The Uncanny* (1919): the uncanny element. According to Freud's study, the uncanny is "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar";[154] moreover, he asserted that

[154] S. Freud, (2003). *The Uncanny*. Edited by D. McLintock, & H. Haughton. Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 124.

> If psychoanalytic theory is right in asserting that every affect arising from an emotional impulse – of whatever kind – is converted into fear by being repressed, it follows that among those things that are felt to be frightening there must be one group in which it can be shown that the frightening element is something that has been repressed and now returns. This species of the frightening would then constitute the uncanny […]. In the second place, if this really is the secret nature of the uncanny, we can understand why German usage allows the familiar (das Heimliche, the 'homely') to switch to its opposite, the uncanny (das Unheimliche, the 'unhomely'), for this uncanny element is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed. The link with repression now illuminates Schelling's definition of the uncanny as 'something that should have remained hidden and has come into the open.[155]

This aspect of Freudian theory is often associated with the Gothic as a literary genre, especially with late-Victorian Gothic, as the latter continuously explores the duality of human nature by expressing the ambiguities and contradictions which characterise it. Because of its usage of devices such as split personality, monsters, spiritual beings, the fear of what is alien, enhanced sexuality, and many others, the Gothic lends itself to a wide array of psychoanalytic interpretations, which flourished over the course of the 20th century thanks to the spread in popularity of Freudian theories. In this regard, Hogle refers to Kristeva's studies in attempting to identify a "process underlying uncanny projection: 'abjection' […]. There the human subject, seeking the illusion of a clear identity without anomalies that could make it other-than-self within itself, throws off (ject+ab) into a seemingly absolute and grotesque 'other' the most anomalous aspects at the very foundation of its being".[156] Indeed, the Gothic often creates a channel through which the uncanny is brought to life and takes the shape of the grotesque and monstrous, which in turn assume various connotations depending on the aspects of reality which they ought to exorcise.

2.3.1 Sexuality and Gender: Transgression and the Blurring of Boundaries

Approached in different ways depending on the social and cultural background of the time, yet always present in literature – and very insistently in Gothic literature – is surely the issue of sexuality, as it explores a facet of human reality which is connected with a primordial need for survival and reproduction that never ceases to exist, regardless of context. As has been mentioned while analysing the historical and cultural reality of Victorian culture, the relationship between the 'male' and 'female' spheres and the

[155] *Id.*, pp. 147-148.
[156] J. E. Hogle (2020). *The Mutation of the Vampire in Nineteenth-Century Gothic*. In A. Wright, D. Townshend (eds.) (2020), *The Cambridge History of the Gothic. Volume 2: Gothic in the Nineteenth Century,* pp. 65-84, p. 70.

controversial discourse over homosexuality were among the pivotal causes of anxiety for an evolving society, in which the shift in roles assumed the form of cultural obsession, as it challenged the established societal norms of clear separation between the sexes, and of association between homosexuality and abnormality, both of which found ground in the incredibly popular pseudo-sciences of the time.

However, the concern with sexuality in relation with the Gothic is not limited to Victorian times: indeed, "All Gothic appears in some way to register sexual anxieties and tensions",[157] and "Sexuality, as it comes to us though a history of Freudian, post-Freudian and queer thought, is nothing short of Gothic in its ability to rupture, fragment, and destroy both the coherence of the individual subject and of the culture in which that subject appears".[158] In today's society, the importance of a fertile discourse on sexuality lays in its ability to encompass a wide array of identities and experiences; when connected with the Gothic, it allows us to explore the boundaries of normative sexual behaviour by challenging societal norms and expectations. Thanks to the previously mentioned process of 'abjection', the Gothic is able to associate anything that is considered forbidden or taboo – within a given context – to a fictitious 'other', and therefore makes use of the uncanny to explore the complexities and contradictions inherent in human nature.

Many are the examples of both Victorian and pre-Victorian Gothic literary texts which feature sexuality as one of their main ingredients. Among the countless novels which lead us back to the theme of the uncanny, of repressed inclinations which find the light although they allegedly ought to remain buried in the shadows, we may name a few which also portray it in sexual terms: Shelley's *Frankenstein* explores the complex relationship between the scientist and his creature, potentially providing a representation of repressed desires and the consequences of bringing them to life; Stoker's Dracula embodies both feelings of terror and homoerotic and erotic allure; Wilde's Dorian Gray leads a life of immorality whose effects become visible in his double, the portrait which bears the signs of aging and shows the consequences of his immoral actions; Le Fanu's *Carmilla* portrays a homosexual relationship between a female vampire and a young woman, exploring the dangers of indulging in repressed sexual inclinations.

[157] S. Bruhm (2006). *Gothic Sexualities.* In A. Powell, A. Smith, (eds.) *Teaching the Gothic*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 93-105, p. 93.
[158] *Ibid.*

Initially it was mainly feminist criticism which focused on Gothic sexualities, reading "issues of gender in the Gothic as explorations of power inequities",[159] but the emergence of queer theory allowed an even more inclusive approach, focused on all types of sexualities and able to open up "discussions of sexual pleasure that were eclipsed by feminist considerations of power inequities",[160] allowing for "the very idea of "power" in sexuality to be rethought".[161] As argued by Westengard, "the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have seen the development of queer culture that responds to and challenges traumatic marginalization by creating a distinctly gothic rhetoric and aesthetic".[162] Examples of queer explorations in 20th and 21st century Gothic literature may be, among many others, *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) by Anne Rice, *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) by Shirley Jackson, or *Plain Bad Heroines* (2020) by Emily M. Danforth. The novels by Rice and Jackson are also examples of how film has helped in spreading the popularity of Gothic fiction: the former was turned first into a celebrated Hollywood blockbuster scripted by Rice herself and starring Tom Cruise, Brad Pitt, Antonio Banderas and Kirsten Dunst, and then into a successful – and still ongoing – television series produced by AMC Networks; the latter was modernized and adapted by Netflix into a miniseries in 2018, receiving raving reviews on the part of critics and viewers. Queer easily emerges in the Gothic narrative and aided by the ever-so-powerful means of film and television, it helps "continue the unfinished business of expanding the socio-political horizons of possibility for LGBTQ individuals and communities".[163]

Even though it offers fertile ground for the exploration of queer sexuality, Gothic and Gothic-inspired fiction is surely not defined altogether by queer theory, as it also lends itself to the exploration of 'traditional' sexualities and taboos. Examples of such exploration can be found, for instance, in two quintessential works of postmodern American literature, which are both proof of how the Gothic not only survived, but also prospered throughout the twentieth century: Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). In Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin's

[159] *Ibid.*
[160] *Id.,* p. 94.
[161] *Ibid.*
[162] L. Westengard (2019). *Gothic Queer Culture: Marginalized Communities and the Ghosts of Insidious Trauma.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, p. 3.
[163] A. J. Owens (2020). *Queer Gothic*. In M. Wester, X. A. Reyes, (Eds.), *Twenty-First-Century Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*. Edinburgh University Press, pp. 33-45, p. 44.

incestuous desire towards his sister Caddy, as well as her overall promiscuity, are both examples of how 20th century Gothic literature indulges in classic sexual taboos and does not simply delve deeper into the queer world. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* features a ghost which comes back to haunt Sethe, her mother-murderer, and repeatedly engages in sexual intercourse with Paul D, Sethe's partner; it also features a rape scene, in which a pregnant Sethe is abused by her white masters, driving her husband Halle, unwilling witness of the abuse, permanently insane. Rather than queering the Gothic, both Morrison and Faulkner – however different their narratives and scopes may have been – used sexuality as a tool to explore power dynamics: Caddy, the promiscuous daughter, is disowned by her family; Sethe, the slave, is both psychologically and physically scarred, so much so that she ends up murdering her own child in order to save her from the abuses she has had to suffer and to reclaim her power. Interestingly, all the above-cited male figures come out of the narrative as somehow emasculated: Quentin's obsession with his sister's virginal purity – and lack thereof – is among the causes which lead him to commit suicide; Paul D is lured into a helpless sexual relation with a hypnotizing vampire-like ghost who feeds on his sexual fluids; Halle's trauma deriving from his lack of ability to come to Sethe's rescue while she is being raped leaves him mentally unstable. Both these literary works are thus illustrious examples of the perdurance of the exploration of traditional sexual taboos, which has continued in the twentieth century in spite of a growing interest in the exploration of queer sexualities in association with the Gothic.

Sexuality, an issue which is ever-so-relevant in present-day society, is thus used in Gothic fiction as a tool to carry out a number of functions, and I would argue that among its main purposes are: the exploration of power dynamics between sexes; providing an outlet for the expression of the repressed instincts inherent in human nature; "wrenching non-normative sexualities from the margins to the mainstream"[164] by both reinterpreting Gothic classics and giving more and more space to Gothic queer narratives in both modern literature and film.

[164] *Id.*, p. 33.

2.3.2 Monstrous Reflections: Horror and Degeneration as Tools to Channel Cultural Anxieties

In order to fully understand a term, it usually useful to revert back to its origins: in the case of the term 'monster', looking at its etymology takes us back directly to the Latin

> Monstrum "divine omen (especially one indicating misfortune), portent, sign; abnormal shape; monster, monstrosity," figuratively "repulsive character, object of dread, awful deed, abomination," a derivative of monere "to remind, bring to (one's) recollection, tell(of),; admonish, advise, warn, instruct, teach".[165]

This explanation of the origins of the term is highly significant in the context of the Gothic, as it is precisely within this context that the monstrous comes to "serve an increasingly moral function";[166] indeed, "by providing a visible warning of the results of vice and folly, monsters promote virtuous behaviour".[167] The monster thus becomes a tool for the writer to give tangible form to repressed fears and anxieties, supplying the reader with a means through which such fears can be exorcised – once again circling back to Freud's enlightened definition of the uncanny.

The association between the monster and its underlying moral function, however, makes it necessary to adopt a "narrative strategy characterized by a predictable, if variable, triple rhythm",[168] as the reader needs to be reassured of the elimination of the monstrous threat once the moral lesson has been learnt. This is why, as Craft points out, "Each of these texts first invites or admits a monster, then entertains and is entertained by monstrosity for some extended duration, until in its closing pages it expels or repudiates the monster and all the disruption that he/she/it brings".[169] The monstrous becomes a way in which readers or viewers are able to see a reflection of their own selves, and of what they could become if they gave in to their lower impulses and fears; defeating the monster is essential, as it allows the sublimation of the repressed and the return to the adherence to the standard norms which govern society and are perceived as virtuous. In this section the monster is thus mainly seen under two lights: first, as a representation of the fears which pervade society, its anxieties and repressed desires, as a symbol of the dark and

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[165] "monster, n.", *Online Etymology Dictionary*, retrieved on January 5, 2024, at: https://www.etymonline.com/word/monster#etymonline_v_17474.
[166] D. Punter, G. Byron (2004). *The Gothic*. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 263.
[167] *Ibid.*
[168] C. Craft (1984). *"Kiss Me with those Red Lips": Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's Dracula.* Representations, 8, pp. 107–133, p. 107
[169] *Ibid.*

hidden aspects of human nature and a reflection of the collective unconscious, bringing to the surface uncomfortable truths about the individual and the society in which the individual is placed; second, as a reflection, by contrast, of the values, conventions, and norms which govern society by disrupting the status quo and pushing the readers to question their assumptions while simultaneously allowing a consequence-less return to normality without having to leave the boundaries of commonly accepted morality. As argued by Asma,

> After Freud, monster stories were considered cathartic journeys into our unconscious – everybody contains a Mr Hyde, and these stories give us a chance to "walk on the wild side". But in the denouement of most stories, the monster is killed and the psyche restored to civilized order. We can have fun with the "torture porn" of Leatherface and Freddy Krueger or the erotic vampires, but this "vacation" to where wild things are ultimately helps us return to our lives of quiet repression.[170]

As the monster is seen as the living (or un-dead) representation of repressed fears, if we revert to the previously mentioned distinction between terror and horror, which saw in the horrific the concrete representation of the terrifying, we could thus infer that the monster is one of the ingredients which bring horror to the Gothic. Having established a connection between the monstrous and its ability to express and, to a certain extent, exorcise societal and individual anxieties, it could thus transitively be argued that horror is an element which helps in channelling cultural anxiety. Moreover, seen as the monster is often imbibed with traits of physical, psychological, and cultural degeneration, it becomes evident that the fear of degeneration is one of the key issues which cause anxiety within existing societies. Indeed, not only the Victorian fears of degeneration have not ceased to exist, but they have also not ceased to populate Horror and Gothic fiction.

While monsters evolve, changing their shape and some of their traits, the metaphor of the monster as a reflection of societal anxieties is still widely present in fiction. The classic Victorian and pre-Victorian monsters, such as Frankenstein's creature, Dracula, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, and so on, have become a source of inspiration for countless novels and filmic adaptations, but the fear of degeneration has also come to assume new forms throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. Aliens, viruses, a possible zombie apocalypse, gory serial killers, dystopian futures: these are only some of the new representations of the threat of degeneration which continuously haunts humankind. The

[170] S. T. Asma (2020). *Monsters and the Moral Imagination*. In J. A. Weinstock (ed.), *The Monster Theory Reader*, Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 289-294, p. 290.

incredible success earned by many of these narratives – especially in their filmic versions, whether they be originals or based on literature – is testament of the relevance of their function within society and of the fascination they hold on to the individual.

2.3.3 Encounters with the "Other" and the Fear of the Unknown

Another function which monsters deploy within the Gothic context is providing the readers with an incarnation of the "other", that is to say an embodiment of the outsider or marginalized individual or group within a given society. In doing so, the monstrous comes to highlight the issues of prejudice, discrimination, and inequality that exist within our society, and it can either push the receivers of the text to either empathize with the monstrous creature or alienate the marginalized even further.[171] As observed by Hogle,

> The otherness in the 'foreign' figure can prompt repulsion in the observing subject (us) because it recalls by displacing our deep otherness-from-ourselves within ourselves, because of which each subject 'projects out of itself what it experiences as dangerous or unpleasant in itself, making of it an alien double, uncanny and demoniacal' – hence foreign (1991:183–4).[172] The process of abjection now reaches for Kristeva beyond 'personal archaeology' to become collective, cultural, interpersonal […] as a means by which threats of anomalies that are widely shared – such as the anomalous birth-state we all seek to throw off, but also our springing from heterogeneous mixtures of classes and races, as well as sexes – are turned into diametric differentiations that intensify a pervasive social antagonism simmering at all times, whether we or not we consciously act on it.[173]

The 'other' is thus an expression of the differences and oppositions inherent in every context and society, whether based on sex, race, class, religion, or physical appearance. By transferring the characteristics of the 'other' to the figure of the monster, the individual – or a collective of individuals – is therefore able to entertain and explore his or her anxieties, which may be more or less latent. Finally, the previously mentioned tripartite structure of the Gothic text in relation to the monstrous presence (admission, entertainment, expulsion),[174] enables the recipients of the narrative to safely dismiss the cause of their anxiety, in spite of having allowed them to explore it more closely throughout the entertainment phase.

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[171] D. Punter, G. Byron, *The Gothic*, pp. 265-266.
[172] Here Hogle cites J. Kristeva (1991) [1988], *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press.
[173] J. E. Hogle (2019). *Abjection as Gothic and the Gothic as Abjection*. In J. E. Hogle, R. Miles (eds.), *The Gothic and Theory: An Edinburgh Companion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 108-125, pp. 11-112.
[174] C. Craft, *"Kiss Me with those Red Lips": Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's* Dracula, p. 108.

While the figure of the monster has been analysed in the previous section, in this context it is interesting to provide some examples of 'otherness' which have been explored within Gothic and Horror literature and film and are perfect examples of the double and explorative nature of the monstrous. 'Other' by nature, the classic Gothic monster is an almost obvious example. Frankenstein's creature, a mysterious patchwork of body parts, is surely the quintessential 'other': capable of feeling human-like emotions and constant victim of rejection due to its horrific looks, the creature is the embodiment of man-made abjection and social isolation. Mr Hyde and Dorian Gray's picture, arguably the best-known doppelgängers in Gothic fiction, have the idea of otherness embedded in their DNA, as their very existence relies on the opposition between them and the character from which they originate – namely, Dr Jekyll and Dorian Gray. Not to mention Dracula and his literal foreignness, which makes him even more 'other' in the context of Victorian Britain – in case being a vampire was not 'other' enough. These classic monsters, as well as others, have been re-written and re-adapted countless times, so much so that, to this day, they still serve as inspiration for both literature and film. There are, for instance, hundreds between films and television adaptations which feature Dracula – or Dracula-inspired figures – among their lists of characters.[175]

Classic monsters, however, are not the only monstrous depictions of 'others' present in today's fiction. While aliens and vampires are still incredibly popular when it comes to the realm of the supernatural, 'real' monsters have become an increasingly prominent alternative, serial killers and viruses leading the way. Hannibal Lecter, probably the best known fictional serial killer of all times, is surely identifiable as 'other' for his cannibalistic, murderous, and psychopathic habits; however, before being exposed for his deviancy, he is considered a respectable member of society. While clearly paying homage to Shelley's *Frankenstein* through the character of Buffalo Bill, *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) is pervaded by a kind of horror which enters the familiar, which brings the deviant 'other' into ordinary life as well as in the minds of the other characters, who constantly seem to be hypnotised by his ability to empathise with their past and present experience. It has been explored in previous sections how deviancy becomes more and more

[175] Not as a scientific source, but just to have a visual idea of the amount of films which feature Dracula as their protagonist – not even as one among many characters or as an inspiration for a character – it is interesting to have a look at https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dracula_nella_cinematografia (retrieved on January, 7, 2024), which provides a comprehensive list of such films, spanning between both cinema and television.

compelling as it gets closer to reality, as its existence within a realistic setting makes it more relatable for the reader/spectator; indeed, these serial killer stories, especially those based on true facts – an example of which may be one of Netflix's most watched series of all time, *Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story* (2022) – have achieved resounding success in recent years. Viruses, on the other hand, are a more subtle enemy: they are the 'other' that invades a human's own body and come to possess it, causing its inevitable decay unless it is stopped – one could argue that a virus is similar in concept to a spiritual possession which needs to be exorcised. Movies like *Contagion* (2011), an all-star cast medical disaster thriller, have come to be considered as almost prophetic following the global COVID19 pandemic, a tragic event in contemporary history which has once again revived the association between horror and science.

Classic or reinvented, ancient or modern, the monster remains the central figure through which the element of horror is conveyed, both in the Gothic and in other genres. The quintessential monster, however, does belong to the Gothic literary tradition, and it is the ultimate synthesis of all the anxieties which pervade society, from Victorian times to the present day. The fear of what is 'other', in all its facets, the fear of degeneration, the element of horror, the expression of sexual promiscuity: these are all primary features of the un-dying Count Dracula.

Chapter Three
Under Dracula's Skin: The Novel and Its Critical Aftermath

Among the monsters made immortal by the test of time, the vampire is surely one of the most revisited, reinvented, and revived – and among vampires, the un-dead *par excellence* is undoubtedly Bram Stoker's Count Dracula, who has become, over the years, the standard against which all other vampires must measure up to. There is little doubt that the deep complexity of the character is a decisive contributing factor when it comes to its appeal over the minds of readers and audiences alike. The blending of human emotions, desires, thirsts – for blood, for power, for control – is part of what makes Dracula's hypnotic gaze so captivating that it becomes able to lock the readers in while simultaneously unleashing their imagination. Playing with darkness, seduction, and fear triggers the power of the uncanny, allowing for Dracula to become a symbol for sexual desire, as well as a metaphor for societal anxieties. This chapter aims to identify the origins of the *Dracula* myth, to provide an in-depth analysis of the themes and the pivotal characters of the novel – necessary preliminary work, as the overall purpose of this thesis is developing well-structured didactic units, which cannot disregard nor overlook this aspect, although seemingly banal – and, finally, to examine three among the main critical readings which have been proposed for the novel.

3.1 The Origins of the Myth

Bram Stoker's iconic character, Count Dracula, has been captivating readers for over a century; however, the origins of this immortal vampire extend beyond the pages of Stoker's novel, and are rooted in the folklore and myth which inspired his creation. Indeed, Dracula originates from a combination of cultural legends, historical figures, folk superstitions, and literary precedents which helped the Irish author in shaping his own personal version of the vampire, straddling modernity and tradition. Tracing its roots from ancient folklore and Easter European superstitions, Stoker's vampire was a carefully researched character, which drew on a tapestry of influences, including literary works like

John William Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) and Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872). This section aims to provide some insight into the origins of the vampire as a literary and folkloric monster, exploring its roots and allowing readers to gain a better understanding of the background which has been the basis for the creation of Stoker's villain.

As mentioned in previous chapters, the 18th and 19th centuries were times of revival for folklore and superstitions, and such revival was among the causes which led to the genesis of the Gothic as a literary genre. However, as William Patrick Day points out, folklore tales were not the sole responsible for the development of the vampire story; indeed, in his view, "the advent of vampire stories in modern popular culture has its roots both in the recovery of traditional folklore, which began in the eighteenth century, and, paradoxically, in the rise of scientific investigation of strange phenomenon".[176] Science set out to investigate the veracity of the popular legends circulating at the time concerning the figure of the vampire and its potential existence and, although such folk-inspired scientific research was bound to find no ground in the real world, its relevance is tied with its ability to provide vampire tales with "a new life in urban middle-class culture".[177] Although vampires are often assimilated with every other monstrous creatures, they are indeed very different from many of the classic monsters – demons, spirits, ghosts, or other forms of un-dead – as they "were effectively discovered, and for that reason they have a definable history and significance".[178] Vampirology, an emergent field among the sciences of the Enlightenment in Europe, examined vampires as if they were physical creatures whose tangible evidence consisted of the corpses of both perpetrators and victims; this is why "vampires are not returning primordial demons from ancient days, but creatures of the Enlightenment: their history is rooted in the empirical approaches of the developing investigative sciences of the eighteenth century, in European politics and in the latest thinking".[179] Vampires can thus be considered as modern monsters, the product of the encounter between 18th-century science and centuries-old folklore tales, the expression of the human needs of both finding rational roots for the irrational and using the supernatural to explain the apparently inexplicable aspects of reality.

[176] W. P. Day (2002). *Vampire Legends in Contemporary American Culture: What Becomes a Legend Most*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, p. 13.
[177] *Ibid.*
[178] N. Groom (2018). *The Vampire: A New History*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, p. 4.
[179] *Ibid.*

When it comes to the genesis of the word "vampire", it is important to understand that its evolution was a complex process, which involved contributions from various linguistic and cultural sources. While its first appearances in the English language date back to the early 18th century, its origins are often associated with German and Slavic influences, where earlier variations of the term were already circulating.[180] Four are the main theories which aim to explain its etymology, although its history is not fully clear: first, Miklosich and his followers suggest a Turkish derivation of the word and of its Slavic synonyms, which would have supposedly evolved from the term "uber", meaning witch; second, some propose that the Greek verb "inr", meaning "to drink", could be the source of the word "vampire"; third, the origin of the word could be Hungarian, but this line of thought does not seem to be as valid as the others, as the Hungarian term post-dates other occurrences in Western languages by over a century; fourth, and most widely accepted among the theories concerning this issue – supported by Kluge, Falk-Torp, Wick, Vaillant, and the Grimm brothers – is the thesis which attributes Slavic origins to the term "vampire", whose root noun could be the Serbian "ВАМПИР".[181] Interestingly, the geography of the term's development goes hand in hand with the geography of the folklore tales associated with the blood sucking creatures of Eastern European mythology, contributing to a "further orientalising stereotype in the 'mental mapping' of the Enlightenment period"[182] and to a transformation of the vampire's significance "in the era of Romanticism and Nationalism into a Slavophobe cliché".[183] While instances of blood-sucking monsters are present in folklore tales from the Far East to Latin America, and date as far back as Mesopotamian, Sumerian, and Greek mythologies, the modern vampire is a child of the European border, functioning "As an imperial category in the sense of a cultural code that could be applied anywhere";[184] it is "A border phenomenon, situated on the margins of the multinational empires or in the grey zones of the Western hemisphere".[185]

[180] "vampire, n.", *Online Etymology Dictionary,* retrieved on January 10, 2024, at: https://www.etymonline.com/word/vampire.
[181] K. M. Wilson (1985). *The History of the Word "Vampire*." Journal of the History of Ideas, 46(4), pp. 577–583, pp. 577-579.
[182] T. M. Bohn (2019). *The Vampire: Origins of a European Myth*. New York: Berghahn Books, p. 3.
[183] *Ibid.*
[184] *Id.*, p. 2.
[185] *Ibid.*

Historically speaking, McNally and Florescu argue that it is possible that part of Stoker's inspiration for the figure of the Count came from the author's visits to the British Museum in the early 1880s, where, as records show, the Lübeck pamphlet of 1485, which described the 'real' Dracula's atrocities, was displayed in an exhibition on Eastern Europe.[186] Consensus is however not unanimous as to whether the historical character known as Vlad the Impaler was the primary source of inspiration for Stoker in the making of Dracula: indeed, Miller argues that while it is likely that Stoker did research at the British Museum, there is no further evidence that such research was conducted on the figure of Vlad the Impaler, and that many of the assumptions made by McNally and Florescu on this matter could be reduced to mere speculation.[187] In her analysis, Miller puts forth a number of interesting arguments refuting many of the speculations which are – in her opinion – often made in association with Bram Stoker's Count, but the most relevant to this section are those revolving around the association made between Dracula and Vlad. Miller warns us against the assumption that the information available to Stoker in the 1890s was as detailed and copious as the information available today, especially following McNally and Florescu's in-depth research over the figure of Vlad the Impaler.[188] What Miller does affirm we know for certain is that in 1890, according to his own notes, Stoker had already set out to write a vampire novel, whose protagonist was to be named Count Wampyr.[189] Moreover, the author's own notes prove that the name "Dracula" was found by Stoker in *An Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia* (1829), by William Wilkinson; of particular relevance for Stoker was one of the book's footnotes: "DRACULA in Wallachian language means DEVIL".[190] Wilkinson's text seems to be the only certain source consulted by Stoker which refers to "Dracula".[191]

Whether one chooses to align with those who claim that the Wallachian prince Vlad V Dracula was indeed the main source of historical inspiration for Stoker's vampire or not, what is certain is that "Bram Stoker fused the historical information and confounded

[186] R. T. McNally, R. Florescu (1994). *In Search of Dracula: The History of Dracula and Vampires.* Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, p. 146.
[187] E. Miller (1999). *Back to the Basics: Re-Examining Stoker's Sources for "*Dracula*."* Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts, 10(2 (38)), pp. 187–196, pp. 191-192.
[188] *Id.,* p. 190.
[189] *Ibid.*
[190] *Ibid.*
[191] *Ibid.*

it in such a way that it is not possible to unravel the various sources".[192] In the novel, Stoker repeatedly hints to the Count's origins, both directly – from Dracula's own words – and indirectly – from Harker's commentaries on the peoples he encounters during his journey to Castle Dracula. When speaking of the nationalities he encounters while travelling through Transylvania, Harker notes in his shorthand diary:

> In the population of Transylvania there are four distinct nationalities: Saxons in the south, and mixed with them the Wallachs, who are descendants of the Dacians; Magyars in the west; and Szekelys in the east and north. I am going among the latter, who claim to be descended from Attila and the Huns. This may be so, for when the Magyars conquered the country in the eleventh century they found the Huns settled in it. I read that every known superstition in the world is gathered into the horseshoe of the Carpathians, as if it were the centre of some sort of imaginative whirlpool; if so my stay may be very interesting.[193]

This is not the only mention of the Transylvanian populations made by Harker throughout the first chapters of the novel; however, the significance of this particular mention lies in the association which Harker creates between the Count and the Szekely people, alleged descendants of Attila – association which is later confirmed by Dracula himself, when he states:

> We Szekelys have a right to be proud, for in our veins flows the blood of many brave races who fought as the lion fights, for lordship. […] Here, too, when they came, they found the Huns, whose warlike fury had swept the earth like a living flame […]. What devil or what witch was ever so great as Attila, whose blood is in these veins?' He held up his arms. 'Is it a wonder that we were a conquering race; that we were proud […]? And when the Hungarian flood swept eastward, the Szekelys were claimed as kindred by the victorious Magyars, and to us for centuries was trusted the guarding of the frontier of Turkeyland; […] we of the Dracula blood were amongst their leaders, for our spirit would not brook that we were not free. Ah, young sir, the Szekelys—and the Dracula as their heart's blood, their brains, and their swords—can boast a record that mushroom growths like the Hapsburgs and the Romanoffs can never reach. [194]

The repeated reference to a "whirlpool" of European races, the claim of being a descendant of the King of the Huns, Attila, the tie with the Szekely people, the recurrent use of the plural in referring to himself and his ancestors: these are all elements which place Stoker's Count within a specific geographical and historical context while simultaneously allowing him to transcend space and time and morph with a number of different populations. The fictional Dracula praises himself and the achievements of his kin, as well as the role they played in the defence of the Austro-Hungarian Empire's

[192] G. Nandris (1966). *The Historical Dracula: The Theme of His Legend in the Western and in the Eastern Literatures of Europe.* Comparative Literature Studies, 3(4), pp. 367–396, p. 375.
[193] B. Stoker, (2011). *Dracula*. Ed. By R. Luckhurst Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 6.
[194] *Id*., pp. 30-31.

borders, and his continuous references to both himself and his kin in the plural make it "Impossible to tell whether what is at stake is Dracula's personal longevity or his total identification with his line".[195] Whether *Dracula* is indeed inspired by the historical Prince Vlad or not, what is certain is that, in the context of the novel, "The dominion of the sword is replaced by the more naked yet more subtle dominion of the tooth; as the nobleman's real powers disappear, he becomes invested with semi-supernatural abilities, exercised by night rather than in the broad day of legendary feudal conflict".[196]

Moving away from the historical and folkloric perspectives, and towards the literary precedents which inspired Stoker's vampire, two are the 19th century texts which immediately come to mind: John William Polidori's short story *The Vampyre* (1819) and Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872). Polidori's tale saw the first appearance of the vampire in English fiction; while vampires had already made their debut in English literature, up until 1819, their presence had been limited to the poems of the Romantic era.[197] Initially, the tale was conceived as part of a ghost-story competition which took place during the summer of 1816; the participants were Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley, and Polidori himself. Polidori's tale emerged as a distinct departure from traditional gothic fiction, introducing a new, seductive, aristocratic vampire, which bore a much closer resemblance to Stoker's Dracula than the vampires of folklore.[198] According to McGrath, Polidori's vampire, Lord Ruthven, likely inspired by the figure of Lord Byron. "Shares as many characteristics with Dorian Gray, the soulless monster created by Stoker's friend Oscar Wilde, as he does with Dracula":[199] Ruthven's figure lies at the heart of *The Vampyre*: a charismatic and enigmatic aristocrat whose seductive powers conceal a darker, predatory nature, he represents the archetype of the Byronic vampire, paradoxically drawing his victims into a fatal dance of charm and menace. The tale not only explores the superficial allure of aristocracy but also delves into the moral consequences of succumbing to such charismatic figures, laying the

[195] D. Punter (1996). *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day, Vol. 2, The Modern Gothic*. London & New York: Routledge, p. 17.
[196] *Id*., p. 18.
[197] B. M. Marshall (2010). *Stoker's* Dracula *and the Vampire's Literary History*. In J. Lynch (ed.) (2010). *Critical Insights:* Dracula. Pasadena: Salem Press, pp. 23-37, p. 25.
[198] D. Long Hoeveler (2012). *Victorian Gothic Drama*. In A. Smith, W. Hughes, (eds*.), The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, pp. 57-71, p. 59.
[199] P. McGrath (1997). *Preface: Bram Stoker and His Vampire*. In C. M. Davison (ed.), *Bram Stoker's* Dracula*: Sucking Through the Century 1987-1997*, pp. 41-48, pp. 42-43.

groundwork for subsequent vampire narratives. Indeed, Ruthven becomes the representation of a decadent aristocracy – decaying but still living – which, in a growingly bourgeoise world, has assumed the shape of a myth; as Punter points out, Ruthven is "Dead yet not dead, as the power of aristocracy in the early nineteenth century was dead and not dead; he requires blood because blood is the business of an aristocracy, the blood of warfare and the blood of the family".[200] Interestingly, Polidori's tale portrays a vampire who "is capable of winning",[201] while his kin of the *fin-de-siècle* is "defeated by the assorted forces of science, rationalism and ethical conformism",[202] possibly signifying the fall of the aristocratic myth. Polidori's work not only contributed to the transformation of the vampire figure but also set the stage for the later development of the vampire genre, anticipating the romantic and seductive qualities later associated with vampire protagonists. The story set a precedent for the melding of gothic elements with the figure of the vampire, shaping the narrative conventions that would be further refined, for instance, in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Polidori's tale is a testament to the enduring appeal of the vampire motif, demonstrating its capacity to evolve and captivate across diverse cultural and historical contexts.

Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* also holds a significant role in vampire literature, departing from traditional vampire narratives and exploring female sexuality, forbidden desires, and the mysterious allure of supernatural entanglements. One of the main legacies of *Carmilla* was surely the introduction of a "very strong sensual dimension to the figure of the undead".[203] In this sense, Bram Stoker's novel owes much to Le Fanu's, especially if we consider the figure of the female vampire: Carmilla, like the three vampire ladies encountered by Harker at Castle Dracula, simultaneously generates in her victims feelings of attraction, sexual arousal, and fear, turning the vampire into an ambivalent sexual threat, whose kisses are both longed and dreaded. The vampirized Lucy Westenra, the "bloofer lady",[204] is another example of a vampire woman who "uses her

[200] D. Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day, Vol. 1, The Gothic Tradition*, p. 104.
[201] *Id.,* p. 105.
[202] *Ibid.*
[203] B. H. Leblanc (1997). *The Death of Dracula: A Darwinian Approach to the Vampire's Evolution*. In C. M. Davison (ed.), *Bram Stoker's Dracula: Sucking Through the Century 1897-1997*, pp. 351-372, p. 359.
[204] B. Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 182.

attractive looks to help her to gain her prey".[205] Carmilla "was slender, and wonderfully graceful. Except that her movements were languid – very languid – … Her complexion was rich and brilliant; her features were small and beautifully formed; her eyes large, dark, and lustrous; her hair was quite wonderful, I never saw hair so magnificently thick and long";[206] similarly, the vamped Lucy has a "languorous, voluptuous grace",[207] and a week after her death "She was, if possible, more radiantly beautiful than ever; and I could not believe that she was dead. The lips were red, nay redder than before; and on the cheeks was a delicate bloom".[208] The beauty of the female vampire in both Le Fanu's and Stoker's stories is not shared by their male counterpart: Harker's description of Dracula upon their first encounter at the Count's castle is anything but flattering:

> His face was a strong—a very strong—aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils; with lofty domed forehead, and hair growing scantily round the temples, but profusely elsewhere. His eyebrows were very massive, almost meeting over the nose, and with bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion. The mouth, so far as I could see it under the heavy moustache, was fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth; these protruded over the lips, whose remarkable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality in a man of his years. For the rest, his ears were pale and at the tops extremely pointed; the chin was broad and strong, and the cheeks firm though thin. The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor. Hitherto I had noticed the backs of his hands as they lay on his knees in the firelight, and they had seemed rather white and fine; but seeing them now close to me, I could not but notice that they were rather coarse—broad, with squat fingers. Strange to say, there were hairs in the centre of the palm. The nails were long and fine, and cut to a sharp point. As the Count leaned over me and his hands touched me, I could not repress a shudder. It may have been that his breath was rank, but a horrible feeling of nausea came over me, which, do what I would, I could not conceal.[209]

In spite of his repellent looks, Dracula's hypnotic force enables him to still exercise a mixture of disgust and attraction within his victims, and the strength of his sexual drive charges his vampiric kisses – and their reversal, as in the case of Mina Harker drinking the vampire's blood – with unmatched erotism. However, as great as Stoker's debt may be to both folklore and literary precedents, what is undeniable is that the Irish author borrowed from all these various traditions and created a synthesis which allowed him to explore an extremely wide number of societal and individual anxieties. In *Dracula*, Stoker managed to create a vampiric melting pot, a complex weaving of characters and myths,

[205] B. M. Marshall, *Stoker's* Dracula *and the Vampire's Literary History*, in J. Lynch (ed.), *Critical Insights: Dracula*, p.30.
[206] S. Le Fanu (1872). *Carmilla*. In A. Williams (ed.) (2003), *Three Vampire Tales*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 86-148, pp. 102-103.
[207] B. Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 197.
[208] *Id.*, p. 186.
[209] *Id.*, p. 20.

history and imagination, folklore and scientific realism – so it comes as no surprise that this vampire novel became the standard against which all others had to measure up to.

3.2 Dissecting the Novel's Themes and Pivotal Characters

The clear understanding of the novel, I would argue, – not so much of its plot, but more so of its themes and of the way in which the various characters come to embody such themes – is of paramount importance when it comes to building a teaching unit around any given work of literature. Moreover, when the primary didactic tools, along with the novel, are the novel's adaptations, it becomes even more essential to deepen such understanding. Understanding, however, does not mean dwelling on the issue of fidelity of the adaptation to the novel, an analytic criterion which, in spite of being the most instinctive choice for students when it comes to debating the quality of an adaptation, has been demonstrated as inadequate and inefficient,[210] but it has to do with the ability of students to critically analyse the choices made in the context of the adaptation, its whys, the essence of the literary work which has been captured and transposed into film (adaptations are not limited to the filmic form, but for the purpose of this analysis I will only refer to those, as they will be the didactic tool used in the context of the teaching units presented in the last chapter).

Precisely due to its being a patchwork of Victorian anxieties, Dracula deals with a wealth of themes, which range from the very cross-cultural and cross-temporal obsession with sexuality to the very age-specific concern with a decaying aristocracy. In this section, I will mainly refer directly to the text of the novel in order to investigate how the various characters come to embody its themes, without engaging in an in-depth analysis of the themes as such, as I have presented them in detail throughout the previous chapters. The purpose of this passage is therefore to provide the reader with a link between the context, which has thus far been discussed, and the novel, before delving deeper into three of the main critical approaches which have been adopted throughout the years as keys to the reading of *Dracula*.

First and foremost, among the main representatives of the novel's themes is surely the Count himself: he is the foreign other which penetrates the weaving of an – almost

[210] A. Hudelet (2014). *Avoiding 'Compare and Contrast': Applied Theory as a Way to Circumvent the 'Fidelity Issue'*. In D. Cartmell, I. Whelehan (2014), *Teaching Adaptations,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 41-55, p. 45.

entirely – unsuspecting British society, threatened by his very presence and yet oblivious of the imminent danger; he is the devilish allure of sexual pleasure; he is the un-dying proof of the limits of science and technological development; he is the epitome of degeneration; he is the ultimate, soulless, expression of damnation; he is the symbol of an irreversibly decaying aristocracy. Most of the references to Dracula's 'otherness' in terms of his being a foreign threat wishing to penetrate within the throbbing heart of Britain – the city of London –, and to disguise itself among the local population, come early in the novel, namely at the time of Jonathan Harker's stay at the Count's Castle among the Carpathians. Indeed, it is as early as the second chapter that Dracula, referring to the vast amount of English books, newspapers, and magazines in his library, says to Jonathan "In excellent English, but with a strange intonation"[211]:

> Through them I have come to know your great England; and to know her is to love her. I long to go through the crowded streets of your mighty London, to be in the midst of the whirl and rush of humanity, to share its life, its change, its death, and all that makes it what it is. But alas! as yet I only know your tongue through books. To you, my friend, I look that I know it to speak.[212]

Only twenty pages in, Dracula is already expressing his desire to become a predator among the streets of London, foretasting the copious amounts of blood that he would manage to find in the metropolis – for if "The blood is the life",[213] then his desire to share London's life could be translated into the expression of his desire to share its blood. One of the purposes of Harker's visit, then, becomes his critical role in enabling Dracula to learn to speak the language well and to thus be able to blend in, to not be identifiable as foreign by the local population. Proof of this statement can once again be found in the words of Dracula himself:

> Well I know that, did I move and speak in your London, none there are who would not know me for a stranger. That is not enough for me. […] I am content if I am like the rest, so that no man stops if he sees me, or pause in his speaking if he hear my words, to say, "Ha, ha! a stranger!" I have been so long master that I would be master still—or at least that none other should be master of me.[214]

Language and culture thus become the means through which the invaded becomes the invader, through which Dracula can hope to retain his status of 'master' even once he has

[211] B. Stoker, *Dracula*, cit., p. 18.
[212] *Id.*, p. 21.
[213] *Id.*, p. 132.
[214] *Id.*, p. 23.

entered a foreign land – and which will serve him as a means through which he can discretely implement his plan of turning the entire British population into a mirror of his degeneracy. Going back to the previously mentioned Victorian anxieties, Dracula thus becomes a clear embodiment of the fear for the decline of an Empire which was already showing the first signs of collapse, as well as becoming an embodiment of the means through which such collapse could occur – Britain becoming the victim of its own will to model its colonies in its image and likeness. Originally, the link between Harker and the Count is purely economic, and the nature of this relationship is in itself a display of the power dynamic between Britain and its colonies: Harker is in Transylvania – not a British colony, but a far-away land in the East which can easily be associated with many British colonies – in order to complete a transaction to the economic advantage of his, British, firm; however, as he discovers, this very transaction could become the trigger for the destruction of his homeland. Indeed, while allowing Dracula access to Britain may represent an immediate economic advantage, it does not take long for Harker to discover the downside of the deal: the Count could become the scariest threat his homeland has ever had to face. When he finds Dracula resting in his coffin, gorged with the blood of his victims, Harker notes down in his diary:

> Then I stopped and looked at the Count. There was a mocking smile on the bloated face which seemed to drive me mad. This was the being I was helping to transfer to London, where, perhaps for centuries to come, he might, amongst its teeming millions, satiate his lust for blood, and create a new and ever widening circle of semi-demons to batten on the helpless. The very thought drove me mad.[215]

The Count, the foreign 'other', laying "like a filthy leech, exhausted with his repletion"[216], seems to mockingly smile at the helplessness of Jonathan Harker, who only then realizes that his business will potentially expose his homeland to this demonic threat.

This threat, however, is not the only one posed by the Count: his vampiric kisses – both given and received – are not only described by Stoker in a very sexual fashion, but they are also inherently sexual due to the idea that, by biting them, Dracula is penetrating his victims, while at the same time creating a bond between them through the exchange of blood. Indeed, when Mina witnesses one of the Count's encounters with her friend Lucy Westenra, she writes in her diary: "There was undoubtedly something, long and

[215] *Id*., p. 51.
[216] *Ibid.*

black, bending over the half-reclining white figure. I called in fright, 'Lucy! Lucy!' and something raised a head, and from where I was I could see a white face and red, gleaming eyes".[217] The long figure, bending over Lucy's half-reclining body, penetrating her, and feasting on her blood is definitely an image which recalls sexual intercourse – if not sexual violence. Similarly, but in an even more pronounced manner, Dracula also violates the body of Mina, not only by biting her, but also by forcing her to drink his blood, in a scene which exudes forceful sexuality:

> Kneeling on the near edge of the bed facing outwards was the white-clad figure of his wife. By her side stood a tall, thin man, clad in black. […] With his left hand he held both Mrs Harker's hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man's bare breast, which was shown by his torn-open dress.[218]

In this passage, Dracula forces Mina onto him, obliging her but in a non-traditional non-normative fashion! to drink his blood while she is under his hypnotizing, vampiric spell. This act of drinking the vampire's blood, reciprocating – even though involuntarily – his kiss, creates a bond between the vampire and his victim which goes beyond the mere vampirization of Mina: indeed, as becomes evident later in the novel, after drinking his blood Mina becomes able to sense the Count, developing a psychic link with him. Moreover, following her encounter with Dracula, Mina asserts that she must no longer touch nor kiss her beloved husband, Jonathan, for by drinking the Count's blood she has become "unclean",[219] almost implying that she had betrayed Harker by engaging in a promiscuous, extra-marital exchange. In the words of Dr Seward, we find confirmation that both he and Jonathan were horrified by Mina and Dracula's encounter: "his nostrils twitched and his eyes blazed as I told how the ruthless hands of the Count had held his wife in that terrible and horrid position, with her mouth to the open wound in his breast",[220] says Seward of Harker's reaction to his account of the events, emphasising their dismay.

As I discussed in the previous chapters, among Victorian anxieties was also the changing and ever-more prominent role which science had been assuming throughout the 19th century. The concern lay both in the dichotomy between science and religion, as the

[217] *Id.*, p. 87.
[218] *Id.*, p. 262.
[219] *Id.*, p. 264.
[220] *Id.*, pp. 264-265.

former was slowly corroding the prominent role which the latter had held for centuries, and in the fear of the unclear implications of the growth of scientific development. The supernatural essence of Dracula pushed both buttons: on the one hand, science and reason proved insufficient in defeating the monster; on the other, Dracula could be read as a metaphor of the threat of degeneration brought to light by Darwinian evolutionary theories. Referring back to the text of the novel, there are multiple instances in which the issue of scientific development and of its limits is brought up, mainly by Abraham van Helsing. At this point, it seems natural to include here the function of Van Helsing within the novel: he is the antithesis of Dracula, the leader of the Crew of Light, the one who knows the ways of science but is also capable of admitting its limits, the one who is able, thanks to his knowledge of both the scientific and the supernatural, to ultimately lead his band of evil-fighters to prevail over Dracula's monstrous threat. It is precisely thanks to the opposition between Dracula and Van Helsing that the issue of science comes to life within the novel: Dracula is the mystery which needs to be solved, and Van Helsing is the human who goes beyond science in order to solve the unsolvable. While discussing Lucy's vampirization with Dr Seward, Van Helsing invites him "To believe in things that you cannot",[221] as "It is the fault of our science that it wants to explain all; an if it explain not, then it says there is nothing to explain".[222] In turn, Dr Seward finds it hard to believe in Van Helsing's theories, not so much because he does not believe Van Helsing makes a good case for his hypothesis, but more so due to his own disbelief in the possibility of the supernatural to exist in nineteenth-century London; indeed, his reply to Van Helsing's mention of a bat able to do to humans what Dracula had done to Lucy is nothing shy of startled: "Good God, Professor!" I said, starting up. "Do you mean to tell me that Lucy was bitten by such a bat; and that such a thing is here in London in the nineteenth century?".[223] Dr Seward, the embodiment of rational, scientific thought, with his phonograph diary and his studies on the mentally diseased, in spite of his student-like mind, trying to absorb the teaching of Van Helsing, finds it hard to place a supernatural threat at the heart of modernity. For Seward, as was for the majority of the science-obsessed Victorian minds – and as had been in literature, as has been pointed out in the previous chapter – the supernatural was to be associated with distant places and times,

[221] *Id.,* p. 180.
[222] *Id.*, p. 178.
[223] *Id*., p. 179.

which allowed to dim the imminence of the threat. Dracula, on the other hand, is the supernatural penetrating the heart of the rational, the monster which makes the threat feel all the more real through his arrival in the British homeland.

While science surely holds a dominant position within the novel, Dracula's nature makes it necessary to also evoke another aspect of the 'supernatural', which is constituted by the insistent references to religion, to the will of God, and to the sacrality of the mission of the Crew of Light: destroying the evil personified by Dracula. Van Helsing is, once again, the one who asserts the sanctity of the mission on which the Crew has embarked on. While Lord Godalming opposes the desecration of Lucy's tomb and (un)dead body, Van Helsing powerfully asserts that it is his duty to eliminate the threat posed by Dracula's creation, and he shall do his duty in God's name: "I, too, have a duty to do, a duty to others, a duty to you, a duty to the dead; and, by God, I shall do it!".[224] Moreover, at the time of Lucy's staking, he instructs Arthur as to how to perform the deed, adding: "Then when we begin our prayer for the dead-I shall read him, I have here the book, and the others shall follow-strike in God's name, that so all may be well with the dead that we love and that the Un-Dead pass away",[225] and once again reinforcing the idea that what they do, they do in the name of God, and in order to achieve salvation for Lucy's soul, which would have otherwise been damned – like Dracula's. The sacred nature of their mission is made even more evident later on in the novel, when Van Helsing looks for his companions' will to partake in the quest which would lead to the destruction of Dracula's evil:

> My friends, this is much; it is a terrible task that we undertake, and there may be consequence to make the brave shudder. For if we fail in this our fight he must surely win; and then where end we? Life is nothings; I heed him not. But to fail here, is not mere life or death. It is that we become as him; that we henceforward become foul things of the night like him-without heart or conscience, preying on the bodies and the souls of those we love best. To us for ever are the gates of heaven shut; for who shall open them to us again? We go on for all time abhorred by all; a blot on the face of God's sunshine; an arrow in the side of Him who died for man. But we are face to face with duty; and in such case must we shrink?"[226]

Defeating the Count means preventing humanity from never being able to reach salvation, it means allowing every soul not to be tainted by an evil force which would irreversibly

[224] *Id.*, p. 192
[225] *Id.*, p. 201.
[226] *Id.*, p. 221.

corrupt it; the Crew of Light's quest is not a matter of life and death, it is a matter of integrity of the heart, of the conscience, of the body, and of the soul.

Finally, Dracula is also the expression of an aristocracy in crisis, increasingly supplanted by a growing bourgeoisie. The link between the vampire and aristocracy is made evident by the Count's title and by the pride he takes in his noble ancestry, defining himself as master among his people – both aspects have been thoroughly discussed in the previous section. However, the Count's castle show the signs of decay, for the times of splendour of his aristocrat heritage are nothing but a past dream: on top of Harker's detailed descriptions of the mysterious castle throughout the first chapters, in the closing pages of the novel there are two references to Castle Dracula which are reminiscent such decay: first, right after Dracula's death, it is noted that "The Castle of Dracula now stood out against the red sky, and every stone of its broken battlements was articulated against the light of the setting sun.";[227] then, at the time of the Harker's return to Transylvania, "The castle stood as before, reared high above a waste of desolation".[228] In both instances, not only there is a reference to the end of the threat posed by the monster, but the returning image of the castle, desolate and broken, also mirrors the dawn of the power of aristocracy, whose only remains seems to be some ancient, abandoned ruins.

As many of the characters have inevitably been brought up throughout the exploration of the Count, to conclude this section I would only add one more point of analysis: the characters of Mina Murray (then Harker) and Lucy Westenra in relation to the issue of Victorian gender roles. Starting with Lucy, throughout the novel she is always portrayed as a helpless, beautiful, pure creature – even though some of her statements and behaviours seem to thoroughly contradict this apparent innocence and compliance with Victorian gender norms, bringing to the surface the ghost of repressed sexuality. Indeed, upon receiving three marriage proposals in one day, while she charges herself with heresy for her thoughts, maintaining the appearances of purity and devotion, in one of her letters to Mina she does ask "Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?".[229] This latent promiscuity is then exacerbated when she is turned into a highly sexualised vampire, preying on her would-have-been husband Lord Godalming in an attempt to dissuade him from fulfilling his duty: "Come to me, Arthur.

[227] *Id.,* p. 352.
[228] *Id*., p. 354.
[229] *Id.,* p. 56.

Leave these others and come to me. My arms are hungry for you. Come, and we can rest together. Come, my husband, come!".[230] It is only in death – real death – that Lucy returns to her virginal purity; in the words of Dr Seward, "There, in the coffin lay no longer the foul Thing that we had so dreaded and grown to hate that the work of her destruction was yielded as a privilege to the one best entitled to it, but Lucy as we had seen her in her life, with her face of unequalled sweetness and purity".[231]

When it comes to Mina Murray, on the other hand, the facet of the gender issue which most frequently comes to light is her identification with the Victorian ideal of womanhood: Mina is devoted to her husband, she is intelligent, helpful, and pure; in the words of Van Helsing:

> She has man's brain— a brain that a man should have were he much gifted-and a woman's heart. The good God fashioned her for a purpose, believe me, when He made that so good combination. […] We men are determined- nay, are we not pledged? -to destroy this monster; but it is no part for a woman. Even if she be not harmed, her heart may fail her in so much and so many horrors; and hereafter she may suffer -both in waking, from her nerves, and in sleep, from her dreams. And, besides, she is young woman and not so long married; there may be other things to think of some time, if not now.[232]

This passage beautifully sums up the Victorian outlook on womanhood: women should be clever, kind, devoted, but also excluded from public affairs which could be harmful for them and for the private life of their families, as the strain of public life could exercise its toll on a woman's nerves – which ought to be occupied by more important thoughts, such as the care and development of the home and of her marriage. Mina, however, is not merely the ideal Victorian woman, for she does have some of the traits of the New Woman: she is brave, she is independent, she takes initiative, she works, she can write in shorthand, and she is a member of the emerging bourgeoisie. In this blend between the old and the new, Mina's character could certainly be considered as the embodiment of the existing tension between the (then) future of womanhood and the rigidity of its past. Mina is definitely one of the – if not the – most positively portrayed characters in the novel: she is consistently resourceful, and her aid becomes essential to finally overcome Dracula's evil. Throughout the entire narration, the male characters of the novel do nothing but praise her, but she is mostly praised for the traditional values which she comes to embody, while, I would argue, her most resourceful qualities are those which project her into

[230] *Id.,* p. 197.
[231] *Id.*, p. 202.
[232] *Id.*, pp. 218-219.

modernity rather than those which keep her anchored to the strict rigidity of Victorian norms.

3.3 Reading through the Lines: *Dracula*'s Critical Responses

In this section, I will provide a brief overview of three among the main streaks of criticism which have provided keys to reading and interpreting Stoker's most celebrated novel. The aim is to put together a collection of thoughts belonging to experts of the field which could serve as the basis for a critical analysis of the novel to be carried out with students, in order to help both them and educators in finding inspiration for further discussion. Certainly, seeing the wealth of material which has been written over the years on the topic of *Dracula*, these short summaries will not do justice to all the viewpoints, nor list all the authors which have dealt with the novel; however, having an idea of the critical discourse which has, for decades, accompanied the affirmation of this piece of literature among the works of the literary canon, is nothing but useful in an educational context – especially for those who are not overly familiar with it.

While the novel has never been out of print since its first publication in 1897, and up until the late-1970s it reached an even wider popularity, partly thanks to its early cinematic adaptations, experts of the guise of Punter and Seed noted, as late as the 1980s, that the critical discourse surrounding *Dracula* was, at best, insufficient, and that the novel deserved to be re-evaluated in the eyes of scholars due to its enormous, unexpressed potential.[233] Indeed, *Dracula* criticism only began in the late 1950s, and up until the 70s it mainly concentrated on Freudian interpretations of the novel, which strongly rejected any other possible reading, arguing that the vampire was "Nothing more than the coded expression of a repressed, unspeakable sexuality".[234] However, criticism of *Dracula* flourished upon the novel's inclusion in the literary canon, and in spite of its often self-referential nature, it has managed to include many different viewpoints in the analysis of this intricate and multi-layered piece of literature, spanning from feminist and post-feminist readings – pushed by the strong development of gender studies – to new-historicist readings – in vogue in the 1990s.[235] As argued by Hughes, however, in spite of the various facets which *Dracula* criticism has come to assume throughout the years

[233] *Id.*, p. VII-VIII.
[234] W. Hughes (2009). *Bram Stoker's* Dracula. London, New York: Continuum, pp. 28-29.
[235] *Ibid.*

thanks to the different viewpoints of the critics, most of their critical analyses have stemmed from a few, pivotal scenes within the novel – obviously approached differently, depending on the standpoint from which they were being considered.[236] In Huges' view, these scenes are:

> The depiction of face of Count Dracula, as observed by Jonathan Harker (chapter 2); the attempted 'seduction' of Harker by the three female vampires (chapter 3); the staking and 'death' of Lucy Westenra (chapter 16); the Count's attack upon Mina Harker (chapter 21); and –more disparate, in that it is scattered across the extent of the novel – the cohesion of the coalition against Count Dracula.[237]

While it is true that a lot of the critics have focused a lot of their work around these five scenes, and I would personally agree that they do offer a wide range of points for reflection and interpretation, it seems slightly simplistic to reduce the work of the critics to these points only, as there has been much criticism which has focused on other aspects of the novel, while always keeping in mind these pivotal moments. While Hughes' statement can be considered a somewhat true, many readings seem to give great space to other scenes as well as those mentioned in the above passage, privileging the spatial and temporal dimensions and focusing on the issues of colonialism, imperialism, and more in general, expanding on the novel's Victorian context. Personally, I would argue that none of the various Dracula criticisms should be read on its own, as none should be considered exhaustive when it comes to uncovering all of the novel's nuances: *Dracula* deserves to be explored in all its dimensions in order to be better understood, and even a thorough reading of all existing criticism would probably leave room for further analysis. In this context, I have chosen to further explore only three of the main streaks of criticism which have dealt with *Dracula*, mainly because they seem to me most relevant in relation with the purpose of my work.

3.3.1 Psychoanalytic Readings: *Dracula* as a Mirror of Victorian Sexuality and Gender Issues

As previously mentioned, the consolidation of the popularity of psychoanalytic theory throughout the 20th century meant the proliferation of psychoanalytic criticism when it came to the interpretation and analysis of 19th century novels, mainly due to their being imbued with the anxieties and suppressed fears of the late-Victorian age. Welsch points

[236] *Id.*, p. 30
[237] *Ibid.*

out that "The psychoanalytic strain often explores issues of sexuality, homoeroticism, and desire, with marked differences between male and female sexual desire",[238] paying "particular attention to gender relations and what they revealed about the characters and the society in which they are set".[239] These aspects are precisely what psychoanalytic criticism of Dracula identified within the novel and, in addition to the binary distinction between male and female, this streak of criticism also explored its connections with queer.

First and foremost, it is important to always remember the context in which the novel was written and set: as previously mentioned, the changing role of women within Victorian society, especially the Victorian society of the *fin de siècle,* was one of the pivotal sources of anxiety in a context which had for long been used to the subordinate position of women in the public sphere. The New Woman and her newly acquired social independence meant that the figure which had been associated with domesticity and with the hearth was now reclaiming her right to receive an education, to freely choose who – and whether – to marry, to have control over how many children she should have, and to pursue her own goals and dreams, regardless of the opinion of the men which surrounded her in her life.[240] Moreover, a new surge in overtly and covertly homosexual lifestyles – as well as a strong opposition towards this kind of sexual behaviour – was seen by a large portion of the population as a consequence of the "Unbecoming moral and sexual conduct of the New Woman".[241]

Some of the work carried out by the critics who belong to the psychoanalytic streak has indeed been focused on the latent presence of homosexuality and queerness within the novel. Among the most prominent critics who approached the novel under such light is surely Christopher Craft, who "explored the novel in terms of gender roles and queer theory".[242] While Craft concludes that, in *Dracula,* "Desire, despite its propensity to wander, stays home and retains an essentially heterosexual and familial definition", [243] he also acknowledges the existence of a "displaced homoerotic union"[244] among the members of the Crew of Light, which finally assumes the form of Mina and Jonathan's

[238] C. Y. Welsch (2010*). A Look at the Critical Reception of* Dracula. In J. Lynch (ed.) (2010). *Critical Insights: Dracula*. Pasadena: Salem Press, pp. 38-54, p. 41.
[239] *Id.*, pp. 42-43.
[240] *Id.*, pp. 41-42.
[241] *Ibid.*
[242] *Id.,* p. 44.
[243] C. Craft*, Kiss Me with those Red Lips,* cit., p. 129.
[244] *Id.,* p. 130.

son, Quincey Harker. Quincey Harker thus becomes the expression of an apparent restoration of traditional order and binary separation between male and female, being the product of a fully functional, Victorian family; however, his very existence relies on the – according to Craft – homoerotic bond which had previously tied the male members of the Crew through the transfusion of blood, a transfusion which lives on in the veins of both Mina and her son.[245] Similarly to Craft, Talia Schaffer attributes a certain degree of sexual ambiguity to the male characters of the novel, equating Dracula with the representation of the Victorian perspective concerning male homosexuality, and attributing to Harker an often self-directed hatred and fascination deriving from such a view of homosexuality, which imprisons and terrifies him.[246]

Kuzmanovic, on the other hand, focuses his analysis on the figure of Jonathan Harker, and it could be argued that he reads the novel as a coming of age story in terms of Harker's affirmation as a man and as Mina's husband.[247] Kuzmanovic notes that Harker is "the only character who is both an object of the vampire's seduction and an agent of his destruction",[248] and chooses to "stress work and the rise of professions as equally important in the narrative",[249] dismissing the more radical Freudian readings as insufficient in order to explain the restructuring of Harker's ego throughout the novel.[250] Indeed, while Harker starts out in the novel assuming the role of the damsel in distress, held captive in the Count's castle and seduced by the vampires which inhabit it, he then turns into one of the members of the Crew of Light, and he is the one who finally cuts Dracula's throat, allowing the band to destroy the monster once and for all. While following Harker's captivity it is Mina who acts as Harker's saviour, after their wedding and Harker's promotion in the workplace the roles seem to shift, allowing Harker to gradually become "the kind of man who can protect England's future and the kind of husband whose family's well-being symbolizes the promise of that future",[251] and ultimately leading him towards a "proper, mature masculine identity".[252] The presence of

[245] *Id.*, pp. 129-130.
[246] C. Y. Welsch, *A Look at the Critical Reception of* Dracula, cit., p. 45.
[247] D. Kuzmanovic (2009). *Vampiric Seduction and Vicissitudes of Masculine Identity in Bram Stoker's* "Dracula". Victorian Literature and Culture, 37(2), pp. 411-425.
[248] *Id*., p. 411.
[249] *Ibid.*
[250] *Id.*, p. 412.
[251] *Id*., pp. 421-422.
[252] *Id*. p. 422.

Dracula's blood in the veins of Mina and Jonathan's offspring, however, "maintains the possibility that the man of the next bourgeois generation might have to struggle with his own masculine-identification all over again",[253] this threatening, once again, the full re-establishment of the Victorian status-quo.

Concerning the role of women within the novel, some critics, such as Fry, have painted both Mina and Lucy as mere innocent victims of the sexually aggressive monster; others, such as Roth, have identified an ambivalence between the pre-vamping female character, who is innocent and pure, and the post-vamping female character, who becomes a terrifying, sexualised being, who threatens the stability and order of Victorian society – perhaps as a mirror of the New Woman.[254] All in all, it could be asserted that "the most enduring focus of Dracula criticism […] is gender":[255] from the early Freudian readings, it has now reached the centre of the critical establishment, and it has proven its ability "to be critically productive in Queer studies",[256] as it has been in many other critical domains.

3.3.2 New Historicist Readings: Historically Framing *Dracula*

Particularly interesting for this analysis are surely New Historicist readings of the novel. New Historicism has emerged in the context of literary criticism in the late 20th century, and it emphasises the interconnection between the literary text and its historical context, viewing the former as a product of the latter.[257] Critically reading the novel thus becomes an immersion into the socio-political, cultural, and historical dynamics of its time – in this case, of the Victorian Era. I would argue that, in terms of completeness of the analysis, this standpoint is among those which give more room for well-rounded interpretations, as it does not reduce the elements of fiction to mere abstract symbols, but it is able to root them within their context while simultaneously not excluding the possibility to widen the discourse and engage in further comparative explorations – with other epochs, other context, other reference values. Indeed, when it comes to Dracula, this kind of criticism offers nuanced insights into power dynamics, anxieties about modernity, and societal transformations, leaving room for intersection with other strands of criticism, which do

[253] *Ibid.*
[254] C. Y. Welsch, *A Look at the Critical Reception of* Dracula, cit., p. 43.
[255] W. Hughes, *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, cit., p. 100.
[256] *Id.,* p. 103.
[257] C. Y. Welsch, *A Look at the Critical Reception of Dracula*, cit., p. 48.

not univocally aim to analyse the novel within its historical context but inevitably end up doing so, as context is a fundamental element for insightful interpretation.

One significant area of research for New Historicist critics is the exploration of power dynamics and imperialism within the novel. Among the most prominent critics who have privileged this approach is surely Stephen Arata, whose analysis leads to the identification of the character of Count Dracula with Victorian fears of invasion and cultural destabilization: indeed, Arata suggests that Dracula's foreign identity, his being an outsider who penetrates within English society and preys upon it, symbolizes anxieties about the vulnerability of the British Empire to external threats.[258] In Arata's words, Dracula "is in effect his own species, or his own race, displaying in his person the progress of ages. Dracula can himself stand in for entire races, and through him Stoker articulates fears about the development of those races in relation to the English":[259] by examining the novel's portrayal of Dracula as a figure who disrupts established power structures, challenging the Victorian notions of English superiority, Arata offers insight into the ways in which Stoker's narrative reflects broader concerns about imperialism and national identity in late nineteenth-century Britain. Moreover, Arata identifies in the American Quincey Morris another threat: the economic and political growth of the United States, which, seen as America was "about to emerge as the world's foremost imperial power, threatens British superiority as surely as Dracula does".[260] Arata, solidly associated with New Historicism, mentions in his *Occidental Tourist* a number of critics who do not strictly belong to a the same strand of criticism as he does, but that according to him "have begun to place Dracula in the context of late-Victorian culture, useful complementing the traditional psychoanalytic readings of the novel":[261]

> Carol A. Senf sees Stoker reacting to the phenomenon of the "New Woman" of 1890s fiction; Charles Blinderman relates Dracula to aspects of Darwinian materialism; Ernest Fontana sees most of the novel's characters, including the Count himself, as types of Lombroso's criminal man; Mark M. Hennelly, Jr., argues that the novel's British characters are engaged in a gnostic quest to redeem the late Victorian "wasteland"; Christopher Craft relates the novel's "anxiety over the potential fluidity of gender roles" to late Victorian discourses on sexual "inversion";

[258] S. D. Arata, *The Occidental Tourist*, cit., p. 640.
[259] *Ibid.*
[260] *Id.,* p. 642.
[261] *Id.,* p. 621.

> and Franco Moretti sees Dracula as a "metaphor" for monopoly capitalism that late Victorian bourgeois culture refuses to recognize in itself.[262]

While, as indirectly pointed out by Arata, her critical work should not be primarily considered as New Historicist, the fact that Carol Senf establishes a link between the novel's attitudes towards gender and desire and the Victorian historical context can be considered proof of the versatility and cross-referentiality of New Historicism. In her essay *"Dracula": Stoker's Response to the New Woman,* Senf argues that Stoker's depiction of women within *Dracula* is a direct consequence of "a topical phenomenon – the New Woman".[263] Senf then engages in a detailed analysis of *Dracula*'s female characters – especially Mina – in relation with this historical phenomenon, concluding that the novel exudes Stoker's ambiguous feelings in regards to this issue, as he seemingly "Tries to show that modern women can combine the best of the traditional and the new"[264] in building Mrs Harker's persona. Also not strictly New Historicist, but overtly rooting her analysis in the Victorian context, is Judith Halberstam with her *Technologies of Monstrosity*: in this essay she reasons on various aspects of the novel, among which stands out Dracula's association with "stereotypical anti-Semitic nineteenth-century representations of the Jew";[265] moreover, she openly states that

> The otherness that Dracula embodies is not timeless or universal, not the opposite of some commonly understood meaning of "the human"; the others Dracula has absorbed and who live on in him take on the historically specific contours of race, class, gender and sexuality. They are the other side of a national identity that in the 1890s coincided with a hegemonic ideal of bourgeois Victorian womanhood.[266]

New Historicist interpretations of *Dracula* also consider the novel's engagement with scientific and technological advancements, two key themes that were central to the Victorian era's ethos of progress and enlightenment. There are many examples of critics who have dealt with this aspect of Victorian culture, Fontana among those cited by Arata – since Lombroso's theories were, in the Victorian setting, considered wholly scientific. Another example of critical readings which assess the links between Dracula and

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[262] *Ibid.*: For a full list of references for the works cited by Arata in this passage, see the same page cited in this note.
[263] C. A. Senf (1982). *Dracula: Stoker's Response to the New Woman.* Victorian Studies, 26(1), pp. 33–49, p. 34.
[264] *Id.*, p. 49.
[265] J. Halberstam (1993). *Technologies of Monstrosity: Bram Stoker's "Dracula".* Victorian Studies, 36(3), pp. 333–352, p. 333.
[266] *Id.*, p. 335.

Victorian scientific development may be Sandy Feinstein's *Dracula and Chloral Chemistry Matters*, where she ultimately concludes that "Stoker repeatedly reminds his readers of the inadequacy of relying on any one language or authority – be it literary or scientific, journalistic or poetic, magical or engineered – to survive the challenges of a world that does not always unfold according to strictly human assumptions",[267] and to reach such conclusion she engages in an exploration of the links between the novel and the sciences of the late 19th century, especially chemistry.

New Historicist interpretations of *Dracula*, while often used as complementary to other readings, offer rich insights into the novel's engagement with the historical, cultural, and ideological contexts of the late Victorian Era and, by exploring themes such as power dynamics, sexuality, scientific progress, and social class, provide nuanced analyses that deepen our understanding of both the novel and the historical period it reflects, illuminating the ways in which *Dracula* serves as a lens through which readers can explore the anxieties, conflicts, and transformations of late 19th-century England, offering valuable insights into the cultural and social dynamics of the Victorian era.

3.3.3 Post-Colonialist Readings: The Geopolitical Vampire

Similarly to New Historicism, Postcolonial criticism is a theoretical framework that emerged in the latter half of the 20th century, focusing its analyses of literature and culture on the issue of colonialism and its legacies, with the purpose of unveiling how colonialism has shaped societies, identities, and power dynamics, as well as how these influences manifest in literature and other cultural forms. Postcolonial critics thus examine the ways in which colonialism has impacted both colonizers and the colonized, exploring issues such as imperialism, cultural hybridity, resistance, and the construction of racial and cultural identities. In the context of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, postcolonial criticism offers valuable insights into the novel's engagement with themes of power, domination, and cultural exchange: while *Dracula* is not explicitly about colonialism in the traditional sense, it can be read as allegorical in its exploration of invasion, otherness, and the clash of cultures. The Count, a Transylvanian nobleman who infiltrates and preys upon English society, can be interpreted as a symbol of the foreign 'Other', embodying Western fears

[267] S. Feinstein (2009). Dracula *and Chloral Chemistry Matters*. Victorian Review, 35(1), pp. 96–115, p. 109.

and anxieties about the unknown and the exotic. Postcolonial critics also analyse how *Dracula* reflects broader Victorian anxieties about empire, race, and national identity, portraying Dracula as a threat to English society via cultural contamination and erosion of British hegemony. Precisely due to its nature, the links with New Historicism become evident, for both grant the historical dimension a seat of honour in the analysis of literary texts. However, while New Historicism tends to root the analysis in the historical past, Postcolonial criticism uses the historical analysis as a tool in order to achieve a fuller understanding of later realities, identifying the implications of the colonial past upon either the present or, in any case, a subsequent time. Arata's work, for instance, cited in the previous section, could easily be included in this section as well, for it deals with the anxiety of 'reverse colonization" – clearly a direct consequence of colonisation itself, and therefore classifiable as a post-colonialist concern.

An interesting reading offered by Postcolonial criticism of *Dracula* surely involves the Irish question, an overview of which has been provided within the first chapter. Smart and Hutchenson, for instance, in their insightful Postcolonial reading of Dracula, link Stoker's novel to Ireland's memory of the Great Famine – often silenced by an historiography which has been biased by the cultural hegemony of the colonizers.[268] Indeed, they conclude their essay by asserting that

> The spatial nature of Famine memories creates their affective transcendence—the pictures, images and scenes hold the same evocative charge that they did in the moment when they were first conveyed. The persistence of these memories is the point. While historical narratives had relegated them to either the convenient past or to the silence that was the particular fate of that terrible story, Gothic novels such as Dracula raised them to the surface of the narrative, moving them from the margins of legitimacy to a new position at the center of postcolonial discourse.[269]

This statement is not simply the conclusion to their reasoning in this specific context, it is also a prefect exemplification of the essence of Postcolonial criticism, as among its aims, as previously mentioned, is precisely to bring to the light the silenced narratives of the oppressed, using memory as a primary tool to carry out his task.[270] Concerning the

[268] R. Smart, M. Hutchenson (2007). *Suspect Grounds: Temporal and Spatial Paradoxes in Bram Stoker's Dracula: A Postcolonial Reading*. Postcolonial Text, 3(3), pp. 1-22, p. 20.
[269] *Ibid.*
[270] Interesting in this context, more as further reading on the Postcolonial focus on memory as a literary tool than as a further exploration on Dracula in the context of post-colonialism, are some of Toni Morrison's insightful reflections on the subject, which can be found in: T. Morrison (2019). *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations*. New York: Random House.

Irish Question, another interesting reading is surely Stewart's, in his *Bram Stoker's Dracula: Possessed by the Spirit of the Nation?*: in his essay, Stewart points out how "In Irish critical commentary on Dracula there are current signs of more than an element of political animus against the erstwhile ascendancy class in Ireland"[271] – a ruling class which was mostly of British extraction or descent – as it opts "for an interpretation according to which Stoker's aristocratic vampire is unequivocally identified with the despised Irish landlords, thus turning the novel into a covert political confession on the part of the Protestant ascendancy".[272]

[271] B. Stewart (1999). *Bram Stoker's* Dracula: *Possessed by the Spirit of the Nation?,* Irish University Review, 29(2), pp. 238–255, p. 255.
[272] *Ibid.*

Chapter Four
Vamping up the Monster: A Journey through Dracula's Screen Adaptations

As already mentioned, *Dracula* has been the subject of countless adaptations ever since its first publication in 1897. For the purpose of my analysis, I will only be considering screen adaptations – whether for cinema or television – as one of the main didactic tools for classroom use, which will be assessed in the following chapter. However, prior to delving into an analysis of some of the main adaptations of *Dracula*, it is appropriate to provide an overview of what adaptations are, and of some of the related theories.

The task of defining adaptation is surely not an easy one: its evolution throughout the centuries, the variety of media it involves, the terminological ambivalence between the process and the product, the incredible wealth of conflicting perspectives – both theoretical and practical – as to how one should perform an adaptation, and the dissonant opinions concerning its critical receptions make it difficult to theoretically frame adaptation. In her *Theorizing Adaptation*, Kamilla Elliott brings together a lot of the issues which accompany theoretically framing adaptation. While she asserts that "adaptation resists theoretical definition",[273] she also establishes a connection between definition and adaptation, for "both establish relations by navigating similarities and differences between entities and related others and by relations of entities to their context".[274] It thus becomes resourceful to revert back to definitions, in this case of the term "adaptation". The *Oxford English Dictionary* locates the first definition of "adaptation" as early as 1597, when the term's meaning – now obsolete, according to the dictionary – was "The application of something to a particular end or purpose; the action of applying one thing to another or of bringing two things together so as to effect a change in the nature of the objects".[275] From 1663, adaptation was also used as "The quality or state of being adapted

[273] K. Elliott (2020). *Theorizing Adaptation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 179.
[274] *Ibid.*
[275] "*adaptation*, n., sense 1", Oxford English Dictionary, September 2023, retrieved on January 28, 2024, at: https://www.oed.com/dictionary/adaptation_n?tab=meaning_and_use.

or suitable for a particular use, purpose, or function, or to a particular environment".[276] Yet, it was not until 1700 – with the subsequent addendum rendered necessary by the emergence of new media – that the term also came to signify "An altered or amended version of a text, musical composition, etc., (now esp.) one adapted for filming, broadcasting, or production on the stage from a novel or similar literary source".[277] From 1787 on, adaptation acquired the meaning of "The action or process of altering, amending, or modifying something, esp. something that has been created for a particular purpose, so that it suitable for a new use",[278] while the introduction and affirmation of Darwinian theories in Victorian times saw a semantical expansion of the term, which at that point also incorporated its use in the field of Biology, meaning "A process of change or modification by which an organism or species becomes better suited to its environment or ecological niche, or a part of an organism to its biological function, either through phenotypic change in an individual or (esp.) through an evolutionary process effecting change through successive generations".[279] As can be seen, by no means do these definitions exclude one another; while the definition which is most suitable to this context is surely the one dating back to 1700, as it explicitly refers to texts which are altered or amended, all other definitions offer food for thought, and the one linking the concept of adaptation to the field of Biology is of particular interest for understanding the mode of engagement of adaptations with those who engage with them. Indeed, I find myself in agreement with Linda Hutcheon when she speaks of the film *Adaptation* (2002), stating:

> I was struck by the other obvious analogy to adaptation suggested in the film by Darwin's theory of evolution, where genetic adaptation is presented as the biological process by which something is fitted to a given environment. To think of narrative adaptation in terms of a story's fit and its process of mutation or adjustment, through adaptation, to a particular cultural environment is something I find suggestive".[280]

Especially when analysing the adaptations of a novel which was almost contemporary to Darwinian theories, this link surely becomes particularly suggestive, for "adaptation, like

[276] "*adaptation*, n., sense 3.a", Oxford English Dictionary, September 2023, retrieved on January 28, 2024, at: https://www.oed.com/dictionary/adaptation_n?tab=meaning_and_use.
[277] "*adaptation*, n., sense 4", Oxford English Dictionary, September 2023, retrieved on January 28, 2024, at: https://www.oed.com/dictionary/adaptation_n?tab=meaning_and_use.
[278] "*adaptation*, n., sense 5", Oxford English Dictionary, September 2023, retrieved on January 28, 2024, at: https://www.oed.com/dictionary/adaptation_n?tab=meaning_and_use.
[279] "*adaptation*, n., sense 7.a", Oxford English Dictionary, September 2023, retrieved on January 28, 2024, at: https://www.oed.com/dictionary/adaptation_n?tab=meaning_and_use.
[280] L. Hutcheon (2006). *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York, London: Routledge, p. 31.

evolution, is a transgenerational phenomenon",[281] which only grants the survival of the "fittest", of those works which are able to "adapt to those new environments *by virtue of* mutation",[282] and flourish precisely thanks to their reliance on their adaptations.

The often negative stigma associated with adaptations among critics up until the close of the 20th century has been somewhat mitigated by the efforts of those theorists of adaptation who have come together to prove that "Adaptations were more than lamentably unfaithful or vulgar versions of literature mired in popular culture and market issues on the one hand, or merely derivative, impure cinema on the other".[283] While the incredible popularity of adaptations among the public is undeniable, as demonstrated by the successes of franchises such as *Harry Potter*, *Star Wars*, *The Lord of the Rings*, or *Jurassic Park* – among many others – their critical reception has often been ambivalent dure to its being anchored to the above mentioned idea that adapting a work of literature for cinema or television means vulgarising it in order to maximise profits. While it is inevitable for some aspects of the literary text to get lost along the road of adaptation – Baines pointed out some of the linguistic aspects which do suffer in the process, namely the simplification of lexicon, syntax, dialogue, plot, character, and theme[284] – the focus of analysis for adaptation studies has recently shifted towards the "examination of what might be *gained* in the process of adaptation".[285] Indeed, while the simplification of language does often occur in adaptations due to the needs imposed by the change in medium, it is also true that other elements may be added to film in order to compensate for, and sometimes expand on, what has been "lost" in terms of plot and linguistic complexity. As pointed out by Hutcheon, when a change of medium occurs and the narration is shown rather than being told, much of the information contained in the written text can be "rapidly translated in to action or gesture […] or dispensed with altogether",[286] and "description, narration, and represented thoughts must be transcoded into speech, actions, sounds, and visual images".[287] This transcoding process means that rather than

[281] *Id.,* p. 32.
[282] *Ibid.*
[283] A. Primorac (2017). *Victorian Literature and Film Adaptation*. Victorian Literature and Culture, 45(2), pp. 451-459, p. 451.
[284] L. Baines (1996). *From Page to Screen: When a Novel Is Interpreted for Film, What Gets Lost in the Translation?*, Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 39(8), pp. 612-622, pp. 614-616.
[285] A. Primorac, *Victorian Literature and Film Adaptation*, cit., p. 452.
[286] L. Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, cit., p. 39.
[287] *Id.*, p. 40.

focusing on the potential loss, the viewer should be focusing on the reconceptualization of the source text which, at times, may lead to an expansion of the reader/viewer's perception of the narration. Hutcheon's example goes beyond the more traditional emphasis placed by theorists on the visual, "on the move from imagination to actual ocular perception",[288] – which is nonetheless relevant to this analysis, as it highlights the immediateness of the visual element in comparison with the written text. Hutcheon focuses also on the aural: speech, music, noise, and voice-overs are all elements which "enhance and direct audience response to characters and action […] to underscore and to create emotional reactions. Film sound can be used to connect inner and outer states in a less explicit way than do camera associations"[289] and I believe that, however subtle, sound evocations may be among the most immediate ones to reach the viewer.

Concerning the link between the Victorian novel and film, Marsh and Elliott argue that this literary form was definitely among the pillars which allowed the development of film, as it was one of the sources upon which early cinematography drew.[290] The two authors also point out how, when analysing the persisting influence of the Victorian novel on film, four main issues must be considered: "Its value as a quarry for plots and characters, the social function it transmitted to cinema; its role as a narrative model; and the cultural prestige it lent the new medium".[291] *A Christmas Carol*, *Dracula*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, anything involving *Sherlock Holmes*, *Oliver Twist*, *Jane Eyre, Frankenstein, The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Jungle Book, Great Expectations, The Picture of Dorian Gray*: these are only some of the most commonly adapted British works of literature of the nineteenth century. Authors, screenwriters, and directors choose to keep returning to these works of literature for their adaptations, and scholars have been attempting to explain this recurrent behaviour: Marsh and Elliott have concluded that perhaps, "In adapting Victorian novels to film […] we deliberately haunt ourselves with our ancestors; we return to those texts not only as cinematic origins but as the origins of our own modern era, impelled by our master-narrative, the Freudian imperative to uncover what has been hidden and

[288] *Ibid.*
[289] *Id.*, p. 41
[290] J. Marsh, K. Elliott (2002). *The Victorian Novel in Film and on Television*. In P. Brantlinger, W. B. Thesing, (eds) (2002), *The Companion to the Victorian Novel*. London: Blackwell, pp. 458-477, p. 458.
[291] *Ibid.*

repressed".[292] Perhaps, I would add, there is also some comfort in the idea of returning to something which has already been explored and adapted, as the more adaptations are produced, the more nuances of both the adapted text and of its various interpretations can be brought to light in all the cultural contexts in which they come to life. Moreover, as Hutcheon brilliantly sums up, in adaptations "the conservative comfort of familiarity is countered by the unpredictable pleasure in difference":[293] adaptations thus become an everlasting stimulus on the experiential level, mixing elements of disruption which alter the familiar, and representing both the timelessness of a story and its potential for variation depending on period and culture.[294]

In spite of the wealth of Victorian literary texts adapted into film, the choice for this analysis has fallen upon Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and its adaptations for a number of reasons. First of all, as I tried to explain in the previous chapters, *Dracula* seems to be perfect since it embodies many of the discourses which characterised the Victorian Era, and can therefore be an incredibly useful tool in the classroom in order to foster students' understanding of such issues, allowing them to critically engage with the text and with the discourses it unfolds. Moreover, as Marsh and Elliott point out, "*Dracula* was both conceived at exactly the same time as the new medium of film, and in some sense also imagined its advent",[295] making it an attractive choice for cinema and television for "its emphases on transformation and materialization are peculiarly and perfectly realizable by film, with that medium capacity […] to make the fantastic seem as solidly real as the railroads and factories of the Lumières' prosaic universe".[296] Another interesting point raised by the two authors is that *Dracula* makes a perfect case for the confirmation of the critical claim that "nineteenth-century Gothic fiction has functioned (and continues to function) as the Freudian id or lurid subconscious of film",[297] and it therefore allows cinema "access to decadence without risk of censorship",[298] as its "conversion of sex into violence, and its displaced pornographic fixation on the dead and rotting (as opposed to ecstatic and tabooed) body, have become standard tropes of film horror".[299] For all these

[292] *Id.,* p. 476.
[293] L. Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, cit., p. 173.
[294] *Id.,* pp. 173-175.
[295] J. Marsh, K. Elliott, *The Victorian Novel in Film and on Television*, cit., p. 469.
[296] *Ibid.*
[297] *Id.,* p. 465.
[298] *Ibid.*
[299] *Ibid.*

reasons, the choice does indeed fall upon Bram Stoker's classic, and while the analysis has thus far focused on its historical and literary dimensions, I will now proceed with an overview of some of its many adaptations for cinema and television, starting with the earliest, *Nosferatu* (1922), and finishing with one of the lates, Netflix's miniseries *Dracula* (2020).

4.1 Early Cinematic Adaptations: From *Nosferatu* (1922) to the Late 1970s

The first filmic representation of Bram Stoker's novel came in 1922, when the silent movie *Nosferatu*, directed by F. W. Murnau, premiered in Germany. This modernist adaptation of *Dracula*, according to Hand, has its most radical element in the figure of the Count himself, whom, in this earliest adaptation, has the name of Count Orlok, and is interpreted by German actor Max Schreck.[300] This reconceptualization of the character could therefore be considered as the most blatant example of detachment from the adapted text, as the viewer visually perceives Dracula as a "personification of death: his skull-like head contains rodent teeth and Modern film technology enables him to move with frightening speed, in negative image or with physical impossibility".[301] Moreover, returning to adaptations as contextualised expressions of their own historical reality – not the reality of the narration, as its nature is fictional, but the reality of the historical context in which they are produced – Hand argues that "just as Stoker's popular novel provides a fascinating insight into late-Victorian anxieties, *Nosferatu* is a nightmare vision befitting its immediate post-First World War context".[302]

Hensley argues that one of the greatest contributions of *Nosferatu* to the survival and success of the *Dracula* story is the incorporation of the romantic theme which has since accompanied many of the adaptations of the novel.[303] Indeed, in the novel the vampire seems to choose Mina and Lucy as his first victims almost as an act of revenge against the male characters – "My revenge is just begun! I spread it over centuries, and time is on my side. Your girls that you all love are mine already; and through them you and others shall yet be mine—my creatures, to do my bidding and to be my jackals when

[300] R. J. Hand (2012). *Adaptation and Modernism*. In D. Cartmell (ed.) (2012). *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 52-69, p. 63.
[301] *Ibid.*
[302] *Ibid.*
[303] W. E. Hensley (2002). *The Contribution of F. W. Murnau's "Nosferatu" to the Evolution of Dracula*. Literature/Film Quarterly, 30(1), pp. 59–64, p. 59.

I want to feed".[304] On the contrary, in *Nosferatu*, Count Orlok is unable to resist Ellen Hutter (Mina's alias in this early adaptation: the name change was due to copyright infringement issues) and she, in return, offers herself as a willing victim, knowing that her sacrifice will lead to the destruction of the Count.[305] This plot change involving the mode of destruction of the monster is also significant: while, in the novel, Dracula is eliminated by the Crew of Light, a "band of men" which is able to save humanity from the threat of vampirization, in *Nosferatu* the success of male comradery is substituted by the strength of a woman's self-sacrifice, and the monster is ultimately vanquished by the first sunlight shining upon him; in Roth's words,

> The vampire is not ambushed outside and violently staked and beheaded, but with the dawn's sunlight dissipates into the bedroom. Whereas the setting in the novel is natural (the Borgo Pass) and the agent of destruction is social (a band of men), the setting in the film is social (interior bedroom) and the agent of destruction is natural (the sun). Whereas in the novel the vampire's ultimate demise is effected by male attack, it is accomplished by feminine surrender in the film.[306]

The questions which inevitably arise in response to such a dramatic change – why does the character of Van Helsing, so central in the novel, almost disappear? Why has the destruction of the vampire been so thoroughly revised? – are answered by Roth with the association of these modifications to the "social-psychological characteristics of the contemporary German culture in which the filmmaker worked: the influence of mysticism and fantasy, and attraction-repulsion towards tyrants".[307] This once again leads the analysis back to the concept of evolution of adaptations in harmony with the social, historical, and political climate of the time of their production, and highlights their potential as tools for the comparative analysis of contexts. However, in spite of its being the product of its time, "Murnau's adaptation is more than a historical artifact. Over seventy years after the release of Nosferatu, viewers still feel the impact of Murnau's work",[308] as it is "now recognized as a classic film, one of the most successful horror films ever made",[309] and it remains "An extraordinary example of how film works to

[304] B. Stoker, *Dracula*, cit., p. 285.
[305] W. E. Hensley, *The Contribution of F. W. Murnau's "Nosferatu" to the Evolution of Dracula*, cit., p. 63.
[306] L. Roth (1979). *Dracula Meets the "Zeitgeist": "Nosferatu" (1922) as Film Adaptation*. Literature/Film Quarterly, 7(4), pp. 309–313, p. 310.
[307] *Id.*, p. 313.
[308] J. C. Holte (1997). *Dracula in the Dark: The* Dracula *Film Adaptations.* Westport, London: Greenwood Press, pp. 34-35.
[309] *Id.*, p. 34.

transform the words and images of literary texts into objective and affective visual words"[310]

Following the lead of *Nosferatu*, adaptations of *Dracula* multiplied over the course of the 20th century. In this section, I manly consider the adaptations made up until the end of the 'seventies, for the Count's big Hollywood development which followed Francis Ford Coppola's 1992 adaptation slightly changed the rules of the game, while still paying tribute to its predecessors. Within this time span, some of the best-received by the public among *Dracula*'s adaptations were Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931), starring Bela Lugosi as Count Dracula, and the series of Hammer Studios productions starring the unforgettable Christopher Lee as the vampire, and Peter Cushing as Van Helsing. Many critics have argued that, in spite of the technical faults which are inevitably present in Tod Browning's rendition of the novel – which were mainly due to a restricted budget and to the moment of transition from the silent era to the sound era which cinema was undergoing – this adaptation has probably been the most influential of all, as it represented a shift in focus from the metaphor of disease to the confrontation between good and evil, the failure of the European aristocratic model, and the redeeming role of science and civilization. [311] As the first Hollywood adaptation of *Dracula*, Browning's film "also captures the fears of America in the midst of a depression; foreign influences, barely perceived or understood, threaten to undermine the values of a good, patriarchal, Christian society".[312] Moreover, Bela Lugosi's powerful performance as the Count and the radically different portrayal of Dracula provided in the film – if compared to the horrifying, rat-like Orlok – have become "the most widely known visual image of Dracula in the world":[313] while "still emphasising the monstrous elements of Dracula",[314] Browning's vampire introduces some elements which have become the footprints of many Draculas to come: the sleek appearance – elegant and clean-shaven, with jet-black hair –, and the heavy Eastern-European accent, highlighted by Lugosi's roots, are both elements which are not present in the adapted text but have become a trademark for all following renditions of the Count, participating in the creation of the iconic character. Finally, much

[310] J. Marsh, K. Elliott, *The Victorian Novel in Film and on Television*, cit., p. 466.
[311] J. C. Holte, *Dracula in the Dark,* cit., pp. 40-41.
[312] *Id*., p. 41.
[313] *Id*., p. 38.
[314] J. C. Holte (1999). *A Century of Draculas*. Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts, 10(2), pp. 109-114, p. 112.

of Browning's budget was allocated for the recreation of an "elaborate Gothic set"[315] for all the scenes set in the castle, especially in the opening section, thus setting a notable Gothic tone for the film.

The success of the Hollywood series of horror films inaugurated by Tod Browning's *Dracula* was surely a source of inspiration for British film company Hammer Films, "which also created a series of horror films with an identifying film style".[316] Indeed, thanks to the 1958 Hammer production of *Dracula*, "Stoker's vampire rose from the grave of neglect with renewed vigor, to the delight of a new generation of viewers".[317] The success of the Hammer *Dracula* series of films was possible due to a number of factors: first, it focused its narratives on the audiences for which the movies were targeted, granting a privileged role to a teen audience which emerged after WWII; second, it created its own style, "a formula that stressed physical action, sexuality, the use of color photography, and gothic settings";[318] third, it ensured the collaboration with an American distributor, thus granting the necessary money and the potential audience necessary for success.[319] One relevant aspect of the Hammer adaptations of Bram Stoker's novel is their much more conservative nature when it comes to the portrayal of the female characters, which are mainly viewed as passive and victimised rather than assuming an active role in the destruction of the vampire, as happens with Mina in the novel.[320] However, I would argue, this secondary, passive role assumed by the female characters strengthens the affirmation of the two antithetical characters of Dracula and Van Helsing, contributing to the construction of the powerful image of the "two hostile patriarchs"[321] which has accompanied audiences throughout the two decades of Hammer *Dracula* productions. The plot and character simplifications which occur in these renditions of the novel are a 'necessary evil', for they allow the development of action and settings, as well as the extreme dramatization of the conflict between good and evil, which are two clearly separate entities embodied, respectively, by the characters of Van Helsing and Dracula. Moreover, the strength of this dichotomy is enhanced by the powerful performances

[315] J. C. Holte, *Dracula in the Dark,* cit., p. 37.
[316] *Id.,* p. 36.
[317] *Id.,* p. 49.
[318] *Id.*, p. 50.
[319] *Ibid.*
[320] *Id.*, pp. 55-56.
[321] *Id.,* p. 55.

provided by Lee and Cushing, who have performed two of the most distinctive and iconic portrayals of Bram Stoker's two antagonists in film history.

4.2 Blockbuster-Vampires: From *Dracula* (1992) to *Dracula Untold* (2014)

Francis Ford Coppola's version of *Dracula* is, to this day, one of the most faithful adaptations of Bram Stoker's 1897 novel. While faithfulness to the source is not the most relevant factor for the critical analysis of an adaptation – as has been explored in previous sections – it can still prove useful as a didactic tool, as it provides a visual support for the understanding of the story line and, in this case, highlights some aspects of the narrative which had previously been disregarded. While Coppola adds lots of romance into the mix, creating an epic background love story between the Count and Mina which perdures throughout the centuries – thus turning Dracula into some sort of romantic monster, and the film into "a dark version of *Beauty and the Beast*"[322] – he captures the essence of the story and of the characters, aided by James Hart's screenplay; to put it in Coppola's words:

> Mainly, it was that no one had ever done the book. I'm amazed, watching all the other Dracula films, how much they held back from what was written or implied, how they played havoc with the characters and their relationships. In our movie, the characters resemble Stoker's in their personalities and function, including many characters that are often cut out. […] Aside from the one innovative take that comes from history – the love story between Mina and the Prince – we were scrupulously true to the book.[323]

One of the characteristics of the novel which are often neglected in adaptations – and which was masterfully portrayed by Coppola and Hart – is its complex narrative structure: a mixture of diary entries, letters, newspaper articles, telegrams, and memos, which give the reader contrasting feelings of legitimacy and doubt in terms of reliability of the sources. In *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, viewers are granted a similar experience, as the cinematic rendition uses "lots of period documents and travel aids. The journey into Transylvania is unveiled in layers, in multiple dreamlike images and writings, snippets of documentation".[324] Moreover, the care and dedication which was given to the costumes and the visual elements – according to Coppola, the "jewel of the show"[325] –earned the film two Academy Awards for Best Costume Design and Best Makeup, on top of a third

[322] *Id.,* p. XVII.
[323] F. F. Coppola (1992). *Introduction: Finding the Vampire's Soul*. In F. F. Coppola, J. V. Hart (1992). *The Making of* Dracula. New York: Newmarket Press, pp. 2-5, p. 3.
[324] *Ibid.*
[325] *Ibid.*

earned for Best Sound Editing, leaving Coppola's *Dracula* as the sole *Dracula* adaptation to have ever been awarded prizes at the Oscars. The care and attention which have accompanied the design of costumes and sets allow the viewer to fully immerse in a Victorian Gothic world, where the Gothic decadence of Castle Dracula and Carfax Abbey and the liveliness and frenzy of the Victorian metropolis are both beautifully portrayed. In spite of Coppola's faithfulness claims, however, Elliott and Marsh point out that

> It is no longer possible to make a direct adaptation of *Dracula*; in filming the text, one also films a tradition coterminous with the horror film, even with cinema itself. Hence the kaleidoscopic inclusiveness of Coppola's operatic extravaganza, in which the hypnotic eyes of Bela Lugosi meet the detachable demonic shadow of Murnau's Count Orlok.[326]

While it is undeniably true that *Bram Stoker's Dracula* draws from the previous tradition of *Dracula* movies, it is also true that it gave new life to the figure of the vampire, and it "single-handedly revitalized the vampire film much in the same way that Ann Rice's first vampire novel startled the literary community",[327] deriving not only from Stoker's text, but also from "Grand opera and the Romantic literary tradition".[328] Coppola's film maintains the figure of Dracula as a monster, but the addition of a deeply romantic dimension – which expands the notion of a Count Orlok unable to resist the female heroine, ready to sacrifice herself for the collective good – allows for a more human character development of the Count. Indeed, Dracula is portrayed as a fallen angel, a great man who has lost his soul when he has lost his love and is able to finally achieve salvation thanks to the enduring power of this love – reincarnated in the body of Mina. While this reading powerfully deviates from the soulless, loveless monster brought to life by Stoker, the incorporation of a strong romantic element was among the ingredients of the film's success, and it has accompanied many later adaptations of the novel, as well as the booming proliferation of vampire fiction and film in general. However, the vampire romance was obviously not an invention of Coppola, for this tradition, as seen in the previous chapter, pre-dates *Dracula* itself. This heavy plot change, however, somewhat undermines the theme of Dracula as a foreign invader, for the Count's purpose for reaching England no longer has its central focus on the possibility of preying on the

[326] J. Marsh, K. Elliott, *The Victorian Novel in Film and on Television*, cit., p. 468.
[327] A. Silver, J. Ursini (1997). *The Vampire Film: From Nosferatu to Interview with the Vampire*. New York: Limelight Editions, p. 155.
[328] *Ibid.*

multitudes of the metropolis: Dracula mainly, and only, wants to reach England to find his long-lost love, whom he has "crossed oceans of time to find".[329]

Also drawing from previous cinematic tradition, for it evidently tributes the Universal Classic Monsters film series, is Sommer's *Van Helsing* (2004), an action-packed rendition which incorporates lycanthropy, vampirism, and Frankenstein's monster as its main monstrous ingredients. This filmic adaptation problematizes the opposition between good and evil by introducing Van Helsing's amnesia, deriving from his guilt for having murdered Dracula centuries prior to the unfolding of events which occur throughout the film. Van Helsing becomes the central character of the narration, and his struggle to identify himself with "the good" is in striking opposition with Stoker's portrayal of the character, who is the leader of the Crew of Light and the main guide to the defeat of the Count thanks to his thorough knowledge of both science and folklore. In this adaptation, Van Helsing's ambivalence is emphasised by his lycanthropy, and is only resolved with the final destruction of Dracula and the restoration of order. Moreover, Sommer's depiction of Dracula is particularly interesting, as it seems to deviate from the strain of romanticised vampires inaugurated by Coppola and revert back to the concept of the soulless monster whose primary goal is to prey on the living and spread his curse upon humanity. Ironically, the means through which Dracula aims to achieve such goal is science: indeed, he plans to contaminate the world with his vampiric disease through the birth of his legion of children – which can only occur through the use of Frankenstein's machine. In spite of a cool critical reception, Sommer's Van Helsing does offer some interesting points for reflection, as well as being undeniably entertaining, as proven by its box office success – as far as blockbuster action horrors are concerned.

The last film in this section is Gary Shore's *Dracula Untold* (2014). Shore's Dracula returns to Coppola's portrayal, expanding on the origin story of the vampire and placing Prince Vlad somewhere in between a superhero and a monster – with a much stronger pull towards his hero side. At the opening of the film, Dracula is still human, and he is the embodiment of Stoker's vampire's ancestral line of warriors: a hero among men. As the narration progresses, the hero chooses to surrender to the powers of evil in order to save his family and his people for the invasion of the Turks, and he acquires the powers

[329] J. V. Hart (1992). *Act II: The Blood Is the Life*. In F. F. Coppola, J. V. Hart (1992), *The Making of Dracula*. New York: Newmarket Press, pp. 74-113, p. 84.

of the master vampire by drinking his blood. If the nobility of Dracula's motives for turning into a superhuman being was not enough to bring out the romantic element, the choice of closing the film on Dracula's encounter with his long-lost love – Mina – simultaneously stresses the romantic identity of the (monstrous) hero and pays its tribute to Coppola's romance. This superhero origin tale, however, loses touch with Stoker's novel on too many levels: while it is inevitable for the plot of an origins story to be radically different from that of the adapted text, I believe that the greatest loss suffered by this adaptation in its detachment from Stoker's novel is its excessive thematic simplification: Dracula is no longer a threat to humanity, but is instead an agent of salvation for his people; the threat of foreign invasion, rather than being embodied by the figure of the vampire, is averted precisely thanks to the intervention of the monster. Furthermore, the time displacement makes the Victorian Gothic element entirely disappear; the issues of gender and sexuality vanish, for the sexualisation of the vampire is merely associated to his love-making with his wife and the portrayal of Vlad is nothing but patriarchal, losing any possible nuance of ambiguity; science is simply not considered at any point of the narration as even remotely relevant. To sum up, what would have been an interesting juxtaposition between good and evil embodied by the character of Dracula is mainly lost through his unequivocally heroic acts of protection; the Freudian idea of the repressed only briefly surfaces following Vlad's vampirization – which also loses the sexual charge of the vampiric bite, for it occurs through his drinking the vampire's blood rather than his becoming the vampire's prey – but goes back into oblivion due to his heroic self-control.

4.3 From the Big Screen to the Small Screen: *Dracula* and Television

While the best-known *Dracula* adaptations have come in the form of movie-theatre films, the novel has come back to life in many other forms, among which are its television adaptations. In this section I will mainly consider two adaptations, namely the series *Penny Dreadful* and *Dracula* (2013). A privileged space will be awarded to the latest serial rendition of Stoker's novel, Netflix's *Dracula* (2020), which will be analysed in the last two sections of this chapter in order to provide a more detailed exploration and analysis. Surely, the serial adaptation of British classics of literature is not a novelty in television, and its success relies on the logic of the Victorian weekly or monthly instalment structure; indeed, as Butt points out, the serial publication of novels in

Victorian times was an adaptation to the changing role of literature – from elitist commodity to mass-market product– and its scope was hooking its readership "through a narrative structure designed to achieve precisely that end"[330] – the achievement of maximum capitalization. Butt also argues that "in broadcasting, serial adaptations of classic novels employ the same narrative devices for the same commercial end, to create and sustain a mass television audience […] over the duration of the serial's broadcast".[331] While *Dracula* was not originally published as a series of instalments – not in Britain, at least –, the serial dimension of the television adaptation recuperates a distinctive aspect of nineteenth-century culture, allowing to enhance the Victorian connection between the adapted text and the adaptation. Moreover, Gothic Horror stories seem to easily lend themselves to this type of rendition, for the elements of suspense and tension are embedded within their narratives, providing authors with plenty of pivotal points which can serve as hooks for the viewers. Another important aspect, which is granted by the extended length of the serial format, is the more thorough exploration of the characters, of their development, and of the settings in which the narratives unfold.

Penny Dreadful englobes the idea of seriality in its very title, for it evokes the late-nineteenth century serial narratives which drew their content from Gothic novels, were thought for an audience which for the most part did not have access to the novel format, and recounted the thrilling and bloodthirsty deeds of criminals in a form of fiction which was viewed by its opponents as cheap and excessively violent.[332] Four classics of British literature are intertwined in this "appropriation, intertextuality and transfiction exercise":[333] Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. The series is not *per-se* an adaptation of any of the above-mentioned novels, thus setting it free of "claims to have realised 'the spirit of the text' or the author's real, unstated intentions".[334] Yet, it is true that *Penny Dreadful* maintains a Victorian Gothic tone, and, while detaching itself from the plot and intentions of the classic texts, it still serves as a

[330] R. Butt (2012). *The Classic Novel on British Television*. In D. Cartmell (ed.) (2012), *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation*, cit., pp. 159-176, p. 169.
[331] *Ibid.*
[332] B. Poore (2016). *The Transformed Beast: Penny Dreadful, Adaptation, and the Gothic*. Victoriographies, 6(1), pp. 62-81, pp. 63-64.
[333] L. Monterrubio Ibáñez (2020). *Penny Dreadful (2014-2016). Postmodern Mythology and Ontology of Otherness.* Communication & Society, 33(1), pp. 15-28, p. 15.
[334] B. Poore, *The Transformed Beast*, cit. p. 70.

portrayal of many of the themes which characterise the genre – and which characterised the Victorian era. In terms of tone set by the depiction of its context – Victorian London – *Penny Dreadful* seems to be "concerned with historical accuracy"[335] as well as aware of the stereotypes often associated with the Victorian metropolis. In my view, it attempts to merge its "realism and historical verisimilitude"[336] with the "shaping of a new image of the nineteenth-century city".[337] The result is that "*Penny Dreadful* historicizes Horror London, dwelling? on the plight of the impoverished and the marginalized"[338] in order to serve its own story-line purposes. When it comes to Dracula, he is "the main antagonist of *Penny Dreadful*'s Third Season and the overreaching antagonist of the entire series",[339] and his figure is reminiscent of Gary Oldman's seductive Prince Vlad. The main female victims of *Penny Dreadful*'s Dracula are two: Mina Murray and Vanessa Ives; however, if one should draw a parallelism between Stoker's characters and the characters of this serial, *Penny Dreadful*'s Mina serves a purpose closer to that of Lucy's, while Vanessa, the strong woman who partakes in the action aimed at destroying Dracula, has a closer link with the novel's Mina. Through the depiction of these two characters,

> The series plays with how Victorian society viewed and circumscribed female sexuality and propriety. While Mina is pure until Dracula seduces her and unleashes the sexuality within, Vanessa Ives is established as a sexual and seductive woman from the outset. […] Penny Dreadful functions here as a subversive gloss on the nineteenth century, as it lays bare the hypocrisy of Victorian culture regarding women.[340]

Neither Mina nor Vanessa can be saved from the monster: Mina is killed by Dracula, and Vanessa eventually surrenders to him, turning into his bride, and apparently fulfilling the subversion of the Victorian feminine by accepting her sexuality through vampirization; however, once she is turned into a vampire, "Vanessa appears to have nothing outside her own thoughts. […] She is completely dependent on one man for information and society. Having accepted her nature, she seems here reduced to the thing she never wanted to be,

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[335] C. Louttit (2016). *Victorian London Redux: Adapting the Gothic Metropolis*. Critical Survey, 28(1), pp. 2-14, p. 7
[336] *Id.,* p. 8.
[337] *Ibid.*
[338] D. Manea (2016). *A Wolf's Eye View of London:* Dracula*,* Penny Dreadful*, and the Logic of Repetition*. Critical Survey, 28(1), pp. 40-50, p. 44.
[339] J. Hawkins (2023), *In the House of the Night Creatures:* Penny Dreadful*'s Dracula*. In J. Grossman, W. Scheibel (eds.) (2023), Penny Dreadful *and Adaptation: Reanimating and Transforming the Monster*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 71-86, p. 71.
[340] *Id.*, p. 79

[…] a Victorian wife".[341] The issues of gender and sexuality are also explored in *Penny Dreadful* under the lens of queerness and homosexuality; indeed, there are plenty of occurrences throughout the series in which homosexual behaviours are portrayed, although the catalyst of this sexual promiscuity is not the vampire. Other themes of Stoker's novel are explored in the serial: the juxtaposition of religion and superstition, enhanced by the multiple references to ancient mythology; the focus on science and technology with an interest in "magic-lantern shows, in seances, in museums and exhibitions, in asylums, and in laboratories – all technologies and sites where the nineteenth century attempted to crack the code of categorical knowledge".[342] In addition, the serial also deploys the metaphor of vampirism as a form of invasion and potential degeneration of humankind portrayed by the spread of darkness and of a plague throughout London once Vanessa is turned into a vampire.

In contrast with *Penny Dreadful*, the 2013 *Dracula*'s "bright vision of the Gothic city plays up to the clichéd components of foggy, dangerous 'Horror London' in almost cartoonish style. In doing so, it self-consciously provides a twenty-first century spin on the colourful aesthetic of the mid-twentieth-century Hammer horror films".[343] Cancelled after its first season, this adaptation of Stoker's novel largely departs from the adapted text, turning the Count into an American tycoon who forms an unlikely alliance with Abraham Van Helsing, who enables Dracula's return to life rather than acts as the catalyst for his destruction. The crucial narrative features which make this rendition familiar to the viewers – as they are part of the collective memory site which has been built throughout a century of *Dracula* adaptations, rather than following the adapted text – are the portrayal of Dracula, who is "a suave, beautiful gentleman [..] directly identified with the real-life Vlad Țepeș",[344] and his love for Mina, who – as in Coppola's adaptation – is the supposed reincarnation of Vlad's deceased wife.[345] The villain of the story is unequivocally identifiable in the Order of the Dragon, an historical Christian association which is the embodiment of an evil capitalist power that draws its resources from the oil industry and against which Dracula, Van Helsing, Harker, and Renfield join forces. This reconceptualization of *Dracula* serves the purpose of transposing Victorian anxieties to

[341] *Id.*, p. 75.
[342] *Id.,* p. 84.
[343] C. Louttit, *Victorian London Redux*, cit., p. 11.
[344] D. Manea, *A Wolf's Eye View of London*, cit., p. 47.
[345] *Ibid.*

the contemporary scene, and the series becomes a reflection of twenty-first century – rather than nineteenth century – anxieties. However, at a closer glance, the two do not seem to be as dissonant as the revolutionised plot would suggest: while the role of the villain has been displaced, and blood and traditional vampirism seem lose their foreground role in the narration, vampirism assumes the form of capitalism, and oil becomes the new blood. In turn, science maintains its primary role as aid towards the destruction of evil, as well as showing its limits: indeed, Grayson and Van Helsing's use of scientific means disrupts the existing order while aiding the simultaneous re-creation of a capitalist economic power based on a different energy source. While I would somewhat agree with Manea's assertion that "*Penny Dreadful* and *Dracula* are similarly parasitic and selective, refusing any faithful adaptation of source texts, employing multiple appropriations and constructing characters that are more than anything else mergers of iconic images and types",[346] I would also argue that this viewpoint is somewhat limiting, for both series allow an exploration of the Victorian Gothic both in terms of setting and mood, and in thematic terms, while simultaneously pushing viewers, through the development of new narratives, towards a transcultural reading of the Victorian which ultimately anchors itself to the present.

4.4 Netflix's *Dracula* (2020)

While much literature exists around many of the previous adaptations of the novel, little – or next to nothing, if one excludes viewers' reviews – has been written about one of the most recent adapted versions of *Dracula*, the Netflix-BBC miniseries which premiered on January 1, 2020, starring Claes Bang as the infamous Count. Created by Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat, both akin to the adaptation and modernization of Victorian texts – their writing contributions figure in the incredibly popular BBC series *Sherlock*, starring Benedict Cumberbatch – and best known for their writing of many *Dr Who* episodes, this adaptation of Stoker's novel is, in my opinion, the example of a successful balancing act between tradition and modernity, paying tribute to many of its predecessors while simultaneously bringing to the mix elements of novelty. The miniseries is divided into three episodes: *The Rules of the Beast*, *Blood Vessel*, and *The Dark Compass*.

[346] *Id.*, p. 48.

The Rules of the Beast is set in Hungary, between two locations: Castle Dracula and the convent in which Harker finds refuge following his escape from the vampire. The title of the episode is in itself revealing, for it is here that viewers learn of Count Dracula's plan: reaching England and feeding on its people.

> Jonathan: You took everything from me…
> Dracula: Of course. You were my harvest. You are the high road that leads me to England.
> Jonathan: Why England?
> Dracula: The people. All those intelligent, sophisticated people. As I've been trying to tell everyone for centuries – you are what you eat.[347]

In this moment, Dracula provides viewers with a clear understanding of what he had previously told Jonathan when informing him that his presence at the castle would have been requested for the duration of one month, during which he would have assisted him with his knowledge of the English language and his understanding of British culture:

> Dracula: I am looking forward to England, Mr Harker. The people here, they are…narrow. They lack ambition, *vitalitate.* I wither among them. They are without…what is the word? Without *flavour*.
> Jonathan: …Perhaps you mean character?
> Dracula: Perhaps. This is good – you must correct my English at all times, Mr Harker. From you I shall learn to pass among your countrymen as one of their own.
> […]
> Jonathan: Count Dracula, I'm a lawyer, not a teacher.
> Dracula: There will be no need to teach – simply remain at my side. I shall absorb you.[348]

Indeed, as the episode progresses, Harker becomes evidently weaker, while the Count progressively rejuvenates and loses the thick Eastern European accent which had initially characterised him, thus visually and aurally representing such absorption. Harker's account of the events at Castle Dracula, rather than being narrated in his diary – as happens in the novel – is told in a first-person narration, while he is sheltered in a Hungarian convent, being questioned by one of the sisters – Agatha Van Helsing. It is precisely thanks to Agatha's questioning – and unorthodox scientific method – that viewers come to learn the rules by which Dracula 'plays': he cannot enter any premises unless invited in, he fears the cross, he absorbs his victims through vampirization, he is

[347] M. Gatiss, S. Moffat (2018). *Dracula. Episode 1: The Rules of The Beast. Shooting Script*. Count Dracula Ltd, available online at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/documents/dracula-episode-1-the-rules-of-the-beast-shooting-script.pdf, retrieved January 31, 2024, p. 59.
[348] *Id*., p. 16.

able to possess other living beings, and he evidently carries with him a thoroughly ambivalent sexual charge. The tone of the relationship between Dracula and Agatha Van Helsing, a mixture of antagonism and fascination, is thus established within the first episode of the series, and mainly at the end of their first encounter:

> Dracula: What's your interest in me? Who are you, Agatha Van Helsing?
> Sister Agatha: Your every nightmare at once. An educated woman in a crucifix.
> And she turns and sweeps away.
> On Dracula watching her go. His face - the anger has been replaced by fascination. He cocks his head, observing her. Smiles. Almost like he likes her - admires her. Then, unconsciously, he smacks his lips.[349]

While Dracula, by the end of the episode, has resumed all his strength, Harker has been fully absorbed by the vampire. The Harker who is staying at the convent is clearly a changed man if compared with the healthy, lively Harker who first arrives at Castle Dracula: "He's so bone thin it's like you can hear the click of his skeleton. So pale he's white. His bald head gleams like a cueball. There is something almost unreal about him – blank, unblinking".[350] Harker's dehumanisation is the direct consequence of his becoming un-dead: while the monster thrives, nothing but a shadow of what Jonathan had once been remains. Jonathan is no longer able to recognize his fiancé, Mina, he no longer feels hunger, he cannot resist his thirst for blood – and he becomes a mere tool in the hands of the Vampire when he allows the monster into the convent, where he kills all the living, except for Agatha and Mina, who had disguised herself as a nun in order to hear Harker's account first-hand.

The second episode, *Blood Vessel*, is the detailed account of the journey of the *Demeter* from an unidentified Eastern port to the shores of Whitby. The whole episode is guided by the conversation – and game of chess – between Dracula and Sister Agatha: as the story unfolds, the two characters make their moves, until Agatha's – apparent – final victory, as well as death. The game of chess is finally revealed to be nothing but a dream induced by Dracula's victimisation of Agatha, who is truly held captive in one of the ship's cabins – another example of the ambiguous relationship between the two characters, blatantly conflictual and antagonistic while simultaneously the expression of

[349] *Id.,* p. 88.
[350] *Id.*, p. 1.

mutual interest, curiosity, and, at times, attraction. Indeed, just before Agata awakens from her vampiric dreams, Dracula openly admits he is fascinated by her:

> Agatha: This is not real. None of this is real. Is this…am I…
> Dracula: Agatha, you haven't been properly awake since we left the convent.
> She looks at his wine glass.
> Dracula: The kiss of the vampire is an opiate.
> Agatha: Are you...drinking my blood?
> Dracula: You are exquisite, Agatha. So much, insight, wit, learning, wickedness even. One does not hurry such a vintage. I've been making you last.[351]

However, while Agatha dies at the end of the episode, along with all other passengers and members of the crew, Dracula manages to save himself by closing himself in one of his boxes of soil, awakening 123 years after the journey of the *Demeter* and finally reaching the shores of Whitby, finding himself catapulted in the 21st century.

When Dracula reaches modern-day England, he has his first encounter with one of Agatha's descendants, Zoe Helsing, a doctor whose blood seems to be poisonous for the vampire – and it will later be discovered that it is poisonous due to her illness. The story has now entered its third and final chapter, The Dark Compass, when character of Lucy Westenra is introduced as one of Dracula's victims: beautiful, sexually loose, in search of an escape from a reality which is unable to satisfy her, Lucy offers herself to Dracula in order to receive, in exchange, a getaway from a life that she perceives as empty, and the vampiric bites becomes her drug of choice:

> Lucy: Will you ever love me?
> Dracula: No.
> Lucy: Well that's one less thing to worry about.
> Dracula: Aren't you even a little scared of me? Aren't you afraid of anything? Even dying?
> Lucy: (Shrugs) Everybody dies.
> Dracula: Oh, Lucy. You are a very special flavour.
> […]
> The strange vampire bruise is revealed on Lucy's neck. Dracula, almost tender.
> Dracula: What do you want to dream about?
> Lucy: Put me somewhere beautiful. Where no one can see me. Where I don't have to smile.[352]

[351] M. Gatiss, S. Moffat (2018). *Dracula. Episode 2: Blood Vessel. Shooting Script*. Count Dracula Ltd, available online at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/documents/dracula-episode-2-blood-vessel-shooting-script.pdf, retrieved January 31, 2024, p. 65.
[352] M. Gatiss, S. Moffat (2018). *Dracula. Episode 3: The Dark Compass. Shooting Script*. Count Dracula Ltd, available online at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/documents/dracula-episode-3-the-dark-compass-shooting-script.pdf, retrieved January 31, 2024, pp. 77-78.

Among the characters introduced in this last episode is also Jack Seward, whose unrequited love towards young Lucy, engaged to the American Quincey, is what ultimately leads him to stake her, freeing her from an eternity as an un-dead. Moreover, the character of Renfield is introduced in the role of Dracula's 21st-century lawyer, once again underlying the position of the law firm as enabler – in the first episode, the law firm had been the means through which Dracula had been able to acquire properties in Britain, while in the third, Renfield becomes Dracula's lawyer-servant who frees him from his detention in the Harker Foundation and helps him procure his next victims.

The story comes to a close after Zoe Helsing drinks Dracula's blood, establishing a connection between herself and her ancestor, Agatha Van Helsing, whose memory has been kept alive through Dracula's veins. Zoe and Agatha are therefore able to identify Dracula's fear, of which he himself is unaware until they serve their function of facilitators in his acquisition of full self-knowledge: death itself. The episode – and the story – end with Dracula's acceptance of his fear and his final death by suicide, which he is able to achieve by drinking Zoe's cancer-polluted blood. Zoe/Agatha's final monologue is the embodiment of the women's role as facilitators in Dracula's reckoning with his own fears:

> Dracula: I don't understand.
> Zoe: (Dutch accent slowly taking over.) I have very few breaths left to explain. So don't interrupt. Consider Count Dracula. Who cannot bear to look in a mirror. […] Dracula, who won't stand revealed in the sunlight. And who cannot enter a home without invitation. These aren't curses. They are merely habits that have become fetishes that have become legends that even you believe. The rules of the beast. As we discussed so very long ago. […] But why? What are you afraid of? You are a warrior, from a long line of warriors. Your grandfather died in battle. Your father, your brothers, your sons, their sons. All of them fell as heroes on the battlefield. But not you. Not Count Dracula, the warlord who skulks in the shadows, and steals the lives of others, unwelcome everywhere - who sleeps in a box of dirt, and dreams of a warrior's grave. Who suddenly found himself in thrall to Lucy Westenra - a girl in love with the thing he fears the most. With death. (Weakly, she produces a crucifix) And now we know why this works. […] Because it speaks of the courage you long to possess. The courage it takes to die. […] I call you ashamed. Count Dracula is ashamed. […] I don't need this protection. I'm dying. I'm doing the one thing you can never do, Dracula.
> She gasps.
> Dracula: You're in pain.
> Zoe: I am equal to it. You seek to conquer death - but you cannot until you face it without fear.[353]

4.4.1 Bringing the Vampire Home: Between Modernity and Tradition

This late rendition of *Dracula*, while not overly praised by the critics, offers much food for thought: the evident tributes to its predecessors – both the novel and the previous

[353] *Id.*, pp. 109-111.

adaptations – merge with elements of novelty, and the time displacement which occurs between the first and the last episode allows viewers to acquire a wealth of elements which become useful for a comparative analysis of settings, characters, contexts, and themes. Because this Dracula exists both in the past and in the present, he is both the reflection of a decaying 19th-century aristocracy and of a 21st-century upper-class decadence, while carrying throughout the centuries a societal antagonization of sexual ambiguity, an increasingly conflictual relationship with religion, and a quasi-obsession with the 'other', which is portrayed by the assimilation of one's essence through blood. Moreover, this Netflix adaptation is also a showcase for the empowerment of female characters – especially Agatha Van Helsing, but also Lucy and Mina – as well as offering much inspiration for the analysis of the role played by science both in Victorian times and in the modern days. I personally believe that there are three more key elements which make this adaptation appealing to the contemporary public – and especially to young viewers: the modernisation of dialogue, which is filled with irony and is made accessible for all types of audiences; the sapient usage of modern cinematography, which allows the creation of a stunning Gothic setting in the first episode and is able to convincingly bring to the surface the horror – and, at times, the gore – which accompanies the figure of the vampire; the miniseries format, with three movie-length episodes, which is able to provide viewers with both the enjoyment of a film and the thrill of anticipation typical of series – without requiring the time-consuming commitment demanded by the presence of several seasons.

First and foremost, I would like to focus my analysis on the figure of the vampire: Netflix's Dracula first appears on screen as an old, repugnant man, with a strong Eastern-European accent, who slowly rejuvenates and acquires a perfect English pronunciation, as well as the manners of a true English gentleman – except for his ravenous thirst for blood – thanks to his absorption of Jonathan Harker. The image portrayed after the metamorphosis is perfectly in line with the image of the vampire built through the impersonations of Bela Lugosi and Christopher Lee – simple, elegant clothes, the classic drape, black hair and a clean-shaven face – and I would argue that Claes Bang's looks as Dracula are strikingly reminiscent of some of Lugosi's most iconic moments as the Count. However, before he undergoes this dramatic change, Dracula seems to inherit much of Gary Oldman's portrayal, particularly drawing from the opening and the closing sections

of the film. Claes Bang's Dracula is the embodiment of ambivalence: he is both terrifying and incredibly seductive, fearful of the cross and allured by science, dominant and weak. He is also unequivocally clever, remarkably witty, and overtly queer, thus contributing to the construction of the parodic element within the series. Kamilla Elliott points out that as parodies

> redouble Gothic double, refake Gothic fakeries, and critique Gothic criticism, they go beyond simple mockery to reveal inconsistencies, incongruities, and problems in Gothic criticism: boundaries that is has been unwilling or unable to blur; binary oppositions it has refused to deconstruct […]; and points at which a radical, innovative, subversive discourse manifests as its own hegemonic, dogmatic, and clichéd double, as in critical manipulations of Gothic (dis)belief.[354]

The incorporation of parody within this adaptation – not a new tool in the adaptation of Dracula –, of the blurring of boundaries explicitly evoked by the very character of the Count, is surely a resourceful element for analysis embedded within this rendition, as it offers plenty of cues for further examination and discussion.

Crucial to the unfolding of the story, and potentially just as important as Dracula for the narration – for the story would not progress without the juxtaposition between her and the Count – is the character of Agatha Van Helsing. Interestingly, in this rendition, the classically male scientist Abraham Van Helsing is transformed not only into a woman, but also into a nun. This gender inversion is functional to the storyline, for it serves the purpose of introducing an underlying sexual tension between the two elements of the dyad, which finds its apex in the sex scene which closes the series. This final sex scene is also serves the purpose of portraying the act of vampirization as overtly sexual, as the dream-like state induced by the vampire's bite is lived by the victim as a romantic sexual intercourse, while the vampire is seen sucking her blood: this series of shifting images clearly suggest the association between the two acts. The creation of a connection between the character of Van Helsing and the female sphere also subverts the adapted text's Victorian male dominance and acts as an agent of disruption: in the end, the beast is single-handedly defeated by a woman's reason, and is humanized by its confrontation with the very mortal fear of death. Also interesting in analysing Agatha's character is her ambivalent relationship with religion: she is a nun, and – as is pointed out more than once throughout the series – her relationship with God is very ambivalent; indeed, the only

[354] K. Elliott (2008). *Gothic-Film-Parody*. Adaptation, 1(1), pp. 24-43, p. 24.

moment in which she overtly asserts that there is a God is not through an act of faith, but because she feels she has 'scientific' proof of His existence, ironically provided by Dracula's demonic fear of the cross. Moreover, Zoe/Agatha ultimately undermines the role of the cross as a tool for protection against the monster, assimilating it to all the other – useless – superstitions which, according to her, are used by Dracula as some sort of shield to mask his own true fear – death. Agatha is thus portrayed as the sole heroine of the story: the Crew of Light disappears, and is substituted by many supporting characters who aid the nun as the story progresses – the other nuns who live in the convent in the first episode, some of the ship's crew and passengers in the second, and Dr Seward in the third –, and her saving Mina from the Count allows the creation of the Harker foundation – started by Mina as she safely returns to England. Similarly to *Nosferatu*'s Ellen, Agatha dies as a martyr in an attempt to save humanity from the monster; however, the nun's sacrifice is only a temporary victory, and her death is not final, for her essence survives in the veins of the Count.

Throughout the three episodes, one recurrent line comes to identify the most pivotal metaphorical element of the entire series:

> Jonathan has cut himself on one of the shards - blood drips from his thumb.
> Dracula: Please. Attend your hand.
> […]
> Jonathan: It's fine, it's nothing.
> Dracula: Blood is not nothing. *Blood is lives*.[355]

> Jonathan: I suppose not. But how could he know my thoughts?
> Sister Agatha: A dog can sniff stories on the slightest breeze, while we are blind in the wind.
> Jonathan: He smelled my thoughts in the air?
> Sister Agatha: No, Mr. Harker, that would be ridiculous - but perhaps in your blood. Perhaps stories flow in our veins, if you know how to read them. *Blood is lives*.[356]

> Agatha: I know you're careful about what you eat. I'm intelligent. I've travelled, I've lived, I've learned. And I know about creatures like you, Count Dracula. The abominations that slouch among us. I've been studying you, and filth like you, all my life. It's been my passion since I was a child. You might say...(Smiles)... it's in my blood.
> Dracula: (Rolling his eyes) Oh, who'd be a predator with talking food?

[355] M. Gatiss, S. Moffat, *Dracula. Episode 1: The Rules of The Beast*, cit. pp. 19-21, emphasis added.
[356] *Id*., p. 22, emphasis added.

> Agatha: Blood is more than food for you. *Blood is lives*, blood is data. I have lived more, and learned more, than anyone you've fed off in a very long time. Shall I spill it all over the floor?[357]

> Dracula: […] *Blood is lives*. Everything is in the blood, Zoe, if you know how to read it. Do you know how to read it?
> Zoe: You couldn't read mine. You choked on it.
> Dracula: […] You're fast, clever, driven. But driven by what? Agatha, she was trying to save everyone - but you hold yourself apart. […] There is a shadow on your heart, Zoe Helsing… […] Cancer! That's why your blood was poison to me. You are driven by death - you're dying.[358]

> Dracula (V.O.): In the matter of blood, I am a connoisseur. *Blood is lives*. Blood is testimony. The testimony of everyone I ever destroyed flows in my veins. I will choose with care who joins them now.[359]

> Sister Agatha: Oh do stop hanging your mouth open like that. Dracula drank my blood, and you drank his. *Blood is lives*. What is left of mine is in him, and now also in you. As he promised, I have traveled to the new world in his veins.[360]

All these sections exemplify the various functions which blood performs in the series, both drawing from and expanding on the adapted text: blood is still the means through which the disease is spread, and it is still becomes a vessel through which identity is somewhat transported. However, while the disease spread in the novel is vampirism, the series expands on this notion by adding the presence of a modern-day, human plague (cancer) which becomes the element that ultimately kills the vampire. The vampire is thus both victim and perpetrator, spreading his vampiric disease and becoming a willing victim of human disease, once again transposing Stoker's novel's metaphor while simultaneously subverting it. The idea of blood as a vessel of identity, which has been argued by many critics to be embodied in the novel by the figure of little Quincey Harker, in whose blood run the bloods of the Crew of Light and of the Vampire, is also expanded in the series: indeed, while blood seems to serve as mere food for Stoker's vampire, it is clear that in the 2020 adaptation blood becomes data, which the vampire is able to decode and assimilate: blood is identity, knowledge, history – and all three live in the vampire.

[357] *Id.,* p. 102, emphasis added.
[358] M. Gatiss, S. Moffat, *Dracula. Episode 3: The Dark Compass*, pp. 48-49, emphasis added.
[359] *Id*., p. 56.
[360] *Id.,* p. 93.

The idea of degeneration through vampirization is also present in the series, as all of the vampire's victims slowly deteriorate as he absorbs their strength and livelihood – until they finally become puppets in the vampire's hands, whose consciousness is relegated to a remote site and overwhelmed by Dracula's control. The representation of this degeneration is extremely graphic, and particularly evident in the character of Harker, whose before and after-bite portrayals are radically different.

Last but not least is the theme of homoeroticism, whose latent and ambiguous presence is maintained in the series through the character of Dracula, but, once again, expanded upon with the introduction of other characters – for instance, the Polidori-inspired Lord Ruthven, whose homoerotic romance with his valet Adisa is made quite explicit throughout the second episode. Concerning Dracula's sexuality, the authors of the series have openly stated in an interview with the *UK Times* that Dracula is not bi-sexual, but rather bi-homicidal; however, while it is true that Dracula chooses victims, not lovers, his victims also become his brides and, as has been previously pointed out, the final scene of the serial establishes a clear link between the act of vampirization and sexual intercourse. Moreover, in the first episode Sister Agatha repeatedly asks Harker whether he has engaged in sexual relations with the Count, and Harker's flashbacks to his time at the castle partly show the sexual dreams induced by his vampirization – dreams in which he is having intercourse with Mina, whose face morphs into Dracula's during the act. Agatha also reassures an evidently flustered Jonathan about the fact that there is no shame in dreams, for they are "A haven where we sin without consequence"; the potential homoerotic act between Harker and Dracula is thus maintained as shameful from Harker's perspective – as the sexual encounters with the vampires at Castle Dracula were disconcerting for Stoker's Harker – but a modern spin is added to the storyline, for Agatha only sees this act as a potential source of contact with Dracula, which is merely a factor to be considered in the search of a diagnosis for Harker's disease rather than as cause of shame. Character and theme development in this 2020 adaptation are therefore a balancing act between the adapted text – and all that it implies in terms of its Victorian context – and a modern take of the story which incorporates contemporary anxieties to the Victorian Gothic, as well as building on the previous tradition of on-screen Draculas and introducing some easter eggs which pay tribute to other classics of Victorian literature.

Chapter Five
Teaching the Victorian Gothic through Screen Adaptations of *Dracula*

In the contemporary classroom, achieving student engagement with literary texts seems to be an increasingly challenging task, and I would argue that the greatest problem for the achievement of this task is constituted by the way in which the teaching of literature is approached, especially at secondary school level; indeed,

> Throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth century, students in literature classes were still taught as if their job was to 'get it right', if not tenses and inflections then interpretations and meanings. The right interpretations and meanings came not from student thought, inquiry, or questioning, and certainly not from student 'opinion', which most teachers until recently (and some still, if truth be told) viewed in quotation marks, but from the instructor. 'Right opinion' was what the teacher thought.[361]

While the above-mentioned contribution mainly refers to teaching in higher education, I believe that the teaching of English Literature in the context of secondary school suffers from a similar limitation, for students often miss the point of *why* they are learning about literature in the first place. The fact that this issue is still relevant in a higher education setting, where the choice of curricula is much more dependent on the student's personal choice, does nothing but enhance its poignancy in a context in which the curricula is much more rigid, and school attendance is often seen as a must rather than a want – hence the necessity to provide students with a valid motive to engage with literature and humanities in general, one which can resurrect their lost interest in seemingly unimportant, as well as curricula-imposed, fields of study. By this I do not mean to affirm that the study of humanities is unimportant, but that in modern-day culture it is often undermined by the increasing predominance of market necessities which lead students to perceive what they are taught as useful only in relation to their future employment perspectives.[362] What I argue is that students should be made aware of the vital importance of humanities – in

[361] E. Chambers & M. Gregory (2006). *Teaching & Learning English Literature*. London: Sage Publications, p. 11.
[362] *Id.,* p. 7.

this specific case, of literature – and that a shift in perspective from the *what* to the *why* in the educational context is necessary in order to achieve the purpose of increasing levels of student engagement with the subject. How, then, can educators build an effective pedagogical frame? I find myself in agreement with Chambers and Gregory in their asserting that such pedagogical frame should be "drawn from conditions that affect all students, because they affect all human beings";[363] educators should thus offer students their "pedagogical guidance" rather than impose their understanding, showing how literature can serve as a means for intellectual and personal development, as well as a means through which individuals can enrich their understanding of all fields of knowledge, "for both finding and creating meaning is the telling and consuming of stories. Hence the existential importance of literary study".[364]

Particularly interesting to the purpose of my analysis is Chambers and Gregory's integration of a parallelism between literature and mass-media production in terms of narrative power:

> The contents of vicarious identification and emotional transport offered by literature differ – often but not always – from that offered to us by mass media, but the psychology of the phenomenon is the same in all these cases. It is an eagerness to go outside of ourselves, to find out who we are by triangulating our experience with that of others, and to feel that we are a part of something larger than our own solitary existence. Literary travelling consistently and persistently achieves such identification and transport across generations, races, ethnicities, genders, classes and cultures. There have never been any non-storytelling cultures.[365]

Indeed, while the language, the style, the conventions and the mediums which govern mass media production – in this specific case, I am referring to cinema and television – and literary production are, in many ways, different, the common ground of their narratives is that they are both ways to express and live experiences which allow us to intertwine our existence with the existence of others, regardless of boundaries imposed by space, time, and reference culture, while simultaneously allowing us to critically engage with them – for all narratives are telling of the context in which they come to life. Film can therefore prove to be a useful tool in the context of teaching literature, for both its similarities and differences with the literary text can be means through which students'

[363] *Id.,* p. 12.
[364] *Id.,* p. 13.
[365] *Id.*, p. 17.

understanding of and engagement with the latter can be enhanced. As argued by Lipiner, however,

> Media literacy, including film […] should not replace the conventional written word of literature, but rather lend a helping hand to teaching literacy. Simply showing a movie to students without engaging in class discussion and proper integration with more traditional, pedagogical tools does not provide sufficient edification.[366]

This statement, I would argue, is particularly true in an ESL classroom, for in this context the role of literature as a language-learning tool should be considered more heavily than it is in the EFL context. However, a balance must be found between the usage of literature as a mere language-learning tool and as a "*valuable* means of acquiring cultural insight because literature frequently isolates for close scrutiny the aesthetic, moral, spiritual, and social values that a given community cherishes – values and patterns of behaviour which too often are not clear to the casual observer".[367] Scott raises an interesting point by underlining the difficulty which may be encountered by an educator while teaching literature in the ESL classroom, an environment in which the level of language knowledge and fluency possessed by the students may not be sufficient to thoroughly explore the contents of the literary selections chosen for the students.[368] The solution he proposes is simple, but effective: adapting the literary text in order to make it more accessible to students who have a limited proficiency in the language.[369] I would therefore argue that, precisely due to its simplified nature if compared to the adapted texts, the usage of film as a supporting tool within the ESL classroom could achieve a number of objectives, mostly beneficial for learners: first, it would allow for a deeper engagement with the literary text due to its transmission via multiple channels – through the use of language, both written and spoken, image, and sound; second, this multi-channel approach would make the text not only more engaging, but also more accessible to all students, regardless of their proficiency levels – as well as attempting to level out the playing field between students who learn in different ways, thus making the learning environment more inclusive; third, allowing students to learn from both the written text and adaptations could potentially deepen their critical understanding of the text, for it would push them

[366] M. Lipiner (2011). *Lights, Camera, Lesson: Teaching Literacy through Film.* E-Learning and Digital Media, 8(4), pp. 375-396, p. 375.
[367] C. T. Scott (1964). *Literature and the ESL Program.* The Modern Language Journal, 48(8), 489–493, p. 490.
[368] *Id.*, pp. 490-491.
[369] *Id.*, pp. 491-492.

towards a guided reflection around the adapters' choices, which, in turn, could allow the unfolding of a constructive debate around the pivotal themes of the text. Moreover, the use of movie adaptations – with subtitles – is also a way of stimulating and aiding listening comprehension while escaping the more predictable context of the mere language exercise. However, I also believe there are downsides to this practice, and that is why one has to be particularly careful with the material which is proposed for use in class and with the planning of the activities. Indeed, without proper preparation, students may perceive non-traditional and non-textbook activities – especially when it comes to literature – as a moment in which they can let their guard down, and this is probably due to the way in which visual materials are often used in a classroom: as a visual aid to which the teaching is delegated in order to give teachers a break, "without offering comments and questions".[370] This use of film as a pacifier or as a gap-filler is not the use which should be made of film within the classroom, for it encourages students to disengage from the visual material and to associate the screening time with 'free time', thus undermining the pedagogical value of media usage. The functions which watching film can perform in a classroom if used correctly are many, and I would like to focus on a few which I deem most important: it can enhance students' critical awareness, interest, and involvement with the literary text – proving to be particularly effective with 'at risk' students;[371] viewing a movie with closed-captions may enhance student's understanding of themes and characters while simultaneously allowing them to get more comfortable with the language of the literary text;[372] the use of film as film – rather than film as literature – may enhance students' understanding of concepts of literary theory through their visualization;[373] film may aid students in critically analysing how popular culture becomes expression of both literacy and identity.[374] Once the potential benefits of using film in the ESL classroom has been assessed, educators have to concern themselves with the issue of creating teaching units which enable the realization of such potential, leading to the enhancement of students' engagement with, and understanding of, the literary text.

[370] M. Lipiner, *Lights, Camera, Lesson: Teaching Literacy through Film*, cit., p. 377.
[371] M. Vetrie (2004). *Using Film to Increase Literacy Skills.* The English Journal, 93(3), 39–45, p. 44.
[372] B. Walton (2006). *Thank You, Kenneth Branagh*. Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 49(7), 556–559, pp. 557-559.
[373] V. Muller (2006). *Film as Film: Using Movies to Help Students Visualize Literary Theory*. The English Journal, 95(3), 32–38, p. 35.
[374] *Ibid.*

5.1 Understanding the Context

The first element which needs to be taken into account by educators when choosing how to build a teaching unit is, of course, the context in which such unit will be proposed. Indeed, teaching materials should be conceived and designed in relation to their recipients: presenting beginners with an original Shakespearean sonnet would not only be unproductive – for the limited understanding of the language wouldn't allow them to understand the text – but it would also potentially lead to a loss in confidence and motivation on the part of the students who see the tasks set by the teacher as unachievable. Moreover, the teacher should be aware that all classrooms are made up of students who host a range of capabilities and, in order to make the learning environment inclusive, it is necessary to try and "reach all learners, as well as attending to students with documented disability labels".[375] According to Naraian, eight principles should be followed in order to make sure the learning environment is inclusive:

1. Since every environment has its own unique characteristics, the practice of inclusion is "unpredictable, multidimensional, and always unfinished",[376] and must therefore be constantly revised and adapted depending on the new struggles which may arise;
2. In order to construct an inclusive environment, all learners should be understood in their globality, and the guiding principles should be those of social justice;
3. Educators are the first and most important decision-makers when it comes to designing inclusive practices within the learning environment;
4. The high quality of practices should not be hindered the limitations imposed by time and placements and vice-versa;
5. The practices of inclusive education and special education should be intertwined and incorporated within a learning environment in order to achieve the most socially just results;

[375] S. Naraian (2017). *Teaching for Inclusion: Eight Principles of Effective and Equitable Practice*. New York: Teachers College Press, p. 3.
[376] *Id*., p. 6.

6. Teachers should assume an active role in order to help students understand and implement practices led by the "principles of care, respect, and responsibility to each other";[377]
7. Teachers should learn how to draw relevant elements for designing their pedagogical frameworks from the experiences of the students' families;
8. In order to expand and strengthen inclusive teaching practices, teachers should share their experiences within the teaching community in order to be able to learn from each other as well as teach each other the best practices for inclusion.[378]

While Naraian mainly focuses his study on inclusivity on students with disabilities, I would argue that these eight points are particularly relevant for the creation of an inclusive environment regardless of the presence of students with disabilities, for diversity is not limited to disability. Indeed, while in a classroom there may be no students with disabilities, it is unlikely that such classroom will be perfectly homogeneous in terms of learning abilities, preferred learning methods, previous knowledge, ethnicity, gender, and so on. I believe that these eight practices should be implemented to the best of the educators' abilities in all learning environments in order to make an attempt at achieving the most socially just, inclusive classroom they possibly can. Therefore, when teachers approach the task of structuring a didactic unit, these principles of inclusion should always be clear in their mind in order to achieve the unfolding of the students' maximum potential both as learners and as human beings, for the school environment does not simply serve as a means through which students acquire knowledge, but also as a stage for the absorption of essential principles which should guide them in their development as parts of a larger community.

When planning *how* to teach, educators should therefore always have in mind *who* the recipients of their teaching are: in this case, as the present study is purely theoretical and has not been tested in a real-life classroom, I will present a fictional scenario and build a teaching unit around it, providing a theoretical framework of how to proceed rather than *ex-post-facto* empirical evidence to prove or disprove the validity of the approach – an aspect which would be interesting to further analyse in another context. For the purpose

[377] *Id.,* p. 10.
[378] *Id*., pp. 6-12.

of this analysis, there are some constraints which are to be taken into account, and are represented by the context in which it is appropriate to teach Victorian Gothic literature in Italian ESL classrooms, and by the language level of the group of students. Moreover, the educator should be aware of the individual needs of students in order to be able to plan activities which are as suitable for everyone as possible, from gifted students to students with disabilities who are part of the learning environment. In this specific case – which will be integrated with more examples in the last section of this chapter – I will envision the scenario of a fifth-year class of a *Liceo Linguistico*; the choice is due to the fact that within the Italian school system the study of the literature of the foreign language(s) is only part of the curricula of the *Licei*, while other types of schools focus solely on language and, in particular, on the special languages more closely related with the dominant fields of studies – which vary depending on the type of school. In addition to that, the Victorian Era and its literature are traditionally part of the fifth year's English curriculum. The class population is made up of 24 students, 9 of whom are females, and 15 are males. The overall CEFR level of the class is B2; within the classroom there are one gifted student – who is female – and two students with a mild but certified form of dyslexia – one male and one female. Moreover, the class is diverse in terms of ethnic backgrounds, for one student has lived a migration experience and two are second-generation migrants. The purpose of creating this particular scenario is to stage a plausible classroom situation while simultaneously including elements of diversity which force the educator to plan for inclusion. Moreover, the number of hours dedicated weekly to the subject also needs to be taken into account – and in this context the total amount of hours per-week which are dedicated to the study of English language and culture is three.

As previously mentioned, one of the most important pre-conditions for the best possible planning on the part of the teacher is the thorough understanding of the context in which the teaching will occur. The acquisition of information about the students' individual and collective needs therefore assumes a role of paramount importance within the learning environment. While the ideal scenario would be a classroom where there have been consistency and continuity in terms of teaching methods and in terms of reciprocal understanding between teacher and students, real-life situations often do not allow for such consistency to exist within the learning environment. However, educators should put as much effort as possible into the identification of the students' needs and should include

teaching methods which allow for all types of learners to reach their maximum potential, regardless of their preferred learning styles. Because every human being learns new information by using four main styles – visual, auditory, reading, and kinaesthetic[379] – all four modes should be somewhat included in the development of a teaching unit: the practice of including all perception modes allows all students to venture out of their comfort zones while retaining the possibility to learn in their preferred manner. These four learning modes also known as VARK – serve to indicate the preferred ways of acquiring information for each individual, and designing a teaching unit in a multimodal fashion seems, in my opinion, the best way to grant all students equal access to information in our "complex multimodal world".[380] Indeed, while some students may learn more effectively by using images, pictures, and movies, others may be more comfortable with discussions, lectures, and stories, or by taking part in a practical activity or a role play, or by reading a text or writing a composition. None of these aspects should be neglected – especially when educators do not have the opportunity to gain a thorough knowledge of their students' preferred learning modes – in order to plan effectively. Multimodal learning should therefore offer an opportunity for all students to engage with new information in a productive way. I would personally argue that including film in the context of teaching literature is an effective way to satisfy the multimodal learning need of a diverse classroom, for it integrates the lectures and the reading of the literary text with visual and aural elements which are too often neglected within a learning environment – but serve the purpose of including all types of learners in the classroom experience in a way that may result engaging for everyone, thus aiding teachers in the process of maintaining higher levels of interest and motivation throughout the teaching module for the entire group.

5.1.1 Setting Appropriate Teaching Objectives

Another element of paramount importance in the planning process is the identification of clear, measurable objectives which should be achieved by students throughout the teaching unit. When it comes to teaching literature – and humanities more in general –, it may be more difficult to identify such objectives, for in this context the achievement of

[379] P. C. Wankat, F. S. Oreovicz, (2015). *Teaching Engineering, Second Edition*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, p. 368.
[380] *Ibid.*

learning goals is harder to measure in an objective fashion. Moreover, since the ESL context calls for a stronger integration of language-learning objectives than an EFL context would, as the language level of an ESL classroom is naturally lower than the language level of those who use English as their first language, the educator needs to always keep in mind the linguistic dimension when designing the objectives of a course and of a teaching unit, even when its main focus of attention is literature. The first distinction which should be made, I believe, is a distinction between global objectives and specific objectives: since a course is articulated in a number of teaching units, the objectives of the latter should always be thought in the broader context of the course as a whole. The objectives of the whole course should then be thought within a broader framework, which is the general scope of teaching in secondary education. The adherence to this multi-level system should grant coherence in goal definition both across subjects and within subjects, thus allowing the creation of a synergic learning environment with a shared vision in terms of scopes and methods. Coherence and consistency should in turn help students in the process of achieving their learning objectives and should deepen their understanding of the *whys* which lie behind the creation of their school curricula. This three-layer framework is articulated as follows: the national level, at which guidelines are provided for each type of secondary school; the class level, at which the collective of teachers of a specific class defines the relevant teaching framework; the subject level, at which learning objectives for each specific subject are defined by one teacher.

In this context, I will mainly be concerned with the definition of teaching objectives at the subject level and their partition within specific teaching units, but I also believe it is necessary to provide a general idea of the national guidelines to which subject-level goal-definition responds. These general guidelines for the fifth year of the *licei* are illustrated in the following chart:[381]

[381] This chart is the result of my translation of a summary of the national guidelines for the teaching of foreign languages and cultures in the Italian *licei*. The original document is available online at: https://www.zanichelli.it/download/media/wnrl/2012_materie_linguestraniere.pdf. Retrieved on January 12, 2024.

General guidelines and skills	Specific learning objectives	
	Language	**Culture**
• Development of language-communication skills (comprehension, production, and interaction); • Knowledge of the culture of the studied language in an intercultural perspective; • Achievement of at least a B2 level within the CEFR framework; • Usage of the foreign language for the comprehension and oral and written production of non-language-related contents.	• Achievement of at least a B2 level within the CEFR framework; • Oral and written production of texts (to report, describe, and argue); • Reflection on the formal characteristics of texts with the scope of achieving an acceptable level of language proficiency; • Strengthening of foreign language abilities aimed at the acquisition of non-linguistic knowledge.	• In-depth analysis of the cultural aspects of the studied language in relation with the vocation of the school, with a specific focus on the issues and languages of modern and contemporary times; • Literary and contrastive analysis of literary texts; • Understanding of cultural products of diverse types and genres concerning current issues, film, music, and art; • Usage of modern technologies to do research, find further information about non-language-related topics, express oneself creatively, and communicate with foreign counterparts.

As can be seen, the emphasis placed on language acquisition is very strong: while I do agree that language acquisition is of paramount importance in an ESL context, I also think that, in practice, at a B2 level there should be a much stronger emphasis on the oral and written production of texts, on the acquisition of conversational skills, and on the enhancement of the students' ability to delve deeper into all types of texts by exploring their meaning – not simply literal, but also cultural – by re-elaborating and contextualising them – both in an historical perspective and by constructing parallelisms with their own personal experience. While these objectives are listed in the above chart I think that, in the Italian classroom, there is often a much stronger focus on the acquisition of lexicon – which is essential in order to be able to sustain a conversation, but should be transversal

to the activities rather than being the central focus of teaching – and on the literal translation of extracts of texts rather than on conceptual re-elaboration and critical analysis. I believe that this scenario mostly occurs due to the vastly adopted structure of teaching units when it comes to teaching literature, which entails an introduction to authors, plots, and themes, the reading of extracts of the texts, and then exercises which often include multiple choice, gap-filling, or matching, and – although these activities are proposed by textbooks – often neglect rather than encourage debate and conversation, which are necessary in order to develop students' ability to interact in the foreign language – a skill which, more often than not, comes out as weakest for Italian students. Surely, not all students are thrilled by the study of literature: however, as mentioned in previous sections, their motivation needs to be enhanced by the creation of links between the literary text and topics which are relatable for all, for they are intertwined with the very notion of being human. In line with this belief, the objectives I will propose for my model of teaching unit will be mostly centred on the understanding of concepts and on critical thinking and analysis rather than on the development of specific language skills, for I believe that the latter should be largely consequential to the achievement of the former. Moreover, as the language level of the fictional classroom which is here considered is B2, students should possess a sufficient mastery of grammar structures and lexicon to allow them to sustain activities which presume their ability to independently enhance their vocabulary, with some guidance on the part of the educator, but without needing to grant such activities too much of an already limited classroom time.

Specific learning objectives	
Language	**Culture**
• Students are able to express their opinion on the topics of the unit both orally and in writing; • Students are able to demonstrate the acquisition of new lexicon through speaking and writing activities; • Students are able to demonstrate their knowledge of the foreign language to discuss	• Students are able to demonstrate an understanding of the main features of the Victorian Gothic; • Students are able to perform a contrastive analysis of film and literature in relation to the issues outlined throughout the unit;

both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of the proposed materials.	• Students are able to identify how the main features of the Victorian Gothic are expressed through the novel *Dracula*; • Students are able to critically analyse the novel and its themes, and to provide their own perspective on its relation with contemporary times; • Students are able to use film as an instrument to create a stronger connection between the literary experience and their own experience.

The evaluation method for assessing the achievement of the above-listed objectives will be further discussed in later sections.

5.1.2 Choosing the Right Adaptation(s) and Handling the Screening Stage

When integrating the usage of authentic materials in the structure of a teaching unit, it is of paramount importance that they are chosen while keeping in mind the learning objectives which have been established at the start of the planning process. In this case, as thoroughly explored in the previous chapters, the materials which will be integrated in the teaching unit are filmic adaptations – on top of the novel, which is also to be considered as authentic material. However, I believe it is useful, before delving deeper into the criteria for the choice of the right adaptation(s) to be used in a given teaching unit, to quickly remind the reader the reasoning behind the choice of the novel – *Dracula*. While *Dracula* has become part of the literary canon in fairly recent times, its teaching in the context of Italian secondary schools is still somewhat disregarded, for 'traditional' curricula tend to stick to what is known and carry on the tradition of exposing students to certain texts rather than others. When it comes to the Victorian Gothic, for instance, the preferred texts are often *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, or *Heart of Darkness* – to name a few –, and Dickens is surely a must when it comes to Victorian literature; Stoker, on the other hand, is often avoided both by educators and by textbooks, and I believe this exclusion may be due to the fact that only the text has only been recently included in the literary canon, which causes diffidence among educators concerning the effectiveness of using it as teaching material within the classroom environment. Contrary to this widespread trend, I would argue that *Dracula,* as a quintessential Victorian Gothic

novel, is the perfect text in order to get students to both grasp the features of the Gothic genre and get a better understanding of the Victorian era and its characteristics, which have been listed in the previous chapters. Moreover, since Dracula is a character which is known by most students, to some extent, due to its wide presence within popular culture – even if the novel has often not been read by them – and that the figure of the vampire has been made particularly alluring by the proliferation and popularity of teen literature and films which feature this particular monster, I would argue that this novel could be particularly interesting and stimulating as a didactic tool within a classroom, especially if associated with film.

In order to choose the best *Dracula* adaptation(s) to be presented to students in a given context, one should therefore refer back to the teaching objectives that have been previously set, to the language level possessed by the classroom, and to the number of hours which have been allocated to the unit. For instance, if the purpose of the teaching unit was to get better acquainted with the text of the novel, understanding the style of the narration, and providing a visual support to the literal reading of the text, I would probably argue that the to-go adaptation would be Bram Stoker's *Dracula,* for it is the film which more closely resembles the novel's storyline, the adapted text's characterization of the protagonists, and its narration structure. However, if among the aims of the teaching unit is the development of students' ability to create parallelisms between the themes of the Victorian Gothic and their historical context and the students' own experience of contemporary reality, anxieties, and contradictions, I would argue that it would be more suitable to choose an adaptation which re-conceptualises the novel and, while maintaining aspects of the adapted text which clearly place it in the framework of the Victorian Gothic, also performs an act of modernization which allows students to more easily envision possible parallelisms between the Victorian Era and contemporary times. For these reasons, I believe that Netflix's production of *Dracula* would be a suitable choice in this particular context; indeed, not only does it succeed in portraying some of the key features of the Victorian Gothic – especially in the first two episodes – but it is also able to create a contemporary *Dracula* and to bring the vampiric threat to the streets of present-day London, building a more easily relatable context for students and facilitating their ability to perform a critical, contrastive analysis. Moreover, in terms of time constraints, accessibility of the product, and language, this adaptation seems to be suitable for use in

a classroom. Although it is a serial product, it is made up of only three episodes, which makes it much easier to use in a classroom than a serial like *Penny Dreadful,* which, in spite of being certainly interesting to explore, would require a much wider commitment on the part of students were it to be seen integrally. In spite of being an adaptation of a Victorian text, the language which is used is manly modern, and the fact that it is available on a platform such as Netflix makes it easily accessible to most students and allows the option of activating English subtitles (for the classroom) as well as subtitles and dubbing in multiple other languages – a feature which could provide useful support to students who struggle with language and wish to watch the episodes with other language combinations other than English audio and English subtitles. Surely, even if the teacher chooses to allocate quite a few hours to this teaching unit, it would not be recommended to watch all three episodes in full in the classroom, for the total duration would amount to approximately four and a half hours, and it would be counterproductive to allocate this much class time to the viewing of the film, for it would take away precious time to post-screening activities and to the reading of the text. The best way to select the extracts to be shown in class is to choose the themes to be dealt with first, and to find the most appropriate sections of the series in accordance with the selected themes. While the elements of horror may be appealing to some students, they may also hurt some other students' sensibilities, and while horror is one of the features of the Gothic, I would try to limit to the bare minimum the most graphic and gory passages of the film. Moreover, even if sexuality is one of the underlying themes of the novel, I would grant the same treatment to the most sexually explicit contents, for the discussion on sexuality may be unfolded even without presenting students with graphic materials which may be deemed unsuitable for younger audiences within an educational context. While it is true that in contemporary times the exposure that young adults experience to violence and sexuality has reached unprecedented heights – and precisely due to this exposure, I personally believe that discussing these themes it is part of a healthy educational environment– I would also argue that contributing to such excess in the exposure to graphic materials would not only be inappropriate, but also unnecessary and counterproductive, for it would potentially hinder the achievement of the educational aims of the unit by distracting students' attention from the purposes of the screening.

As explored in previous chapters, many are the themes on which the attention of students could be brought when it comes to the Victorian Era, the Gothic, and *Dracula*. Considering the unit's objectives and the choice of adaptation, however, for this specific unit I would select three themes which would be more suitable to the fulfilment of the educator's goals: the changing role of women, the encounter with the 'other', and the tension between science, religion and superstition. This choice of themes should allow students to gain a better understanding of both the Victorian setting and of the anxieties which characterised it, and of the Gothic genre as a mirror of such anxieties; moreover, as these themes are relevant to the Victorian Era as much as they are relevant to contemporary times, their unfolding could serve as an effective means to build an interesting critical debate on such issues, as well as a contrastive analysis between the two epochs. Last but not least, all the selected themes are somewhat embodied by the figure of the vampire, and they would serve as a means to transversally explore this entity, as well as the metaphor of blood, which are both essential components of the novel. In order to grant the best possible learning outcomes for the teaching unit, I would recommend that the integral reading of the novel be assigned as homework during the summer vacation of the previous year, so that all students may already be familiar with the text, of which a few relevant passages will then be analysed in class throughout the duration of the unit. Since, as already mentioned, time restrictions would make it unproductive to dedicate four and a half hours to viewing the full series in class, I would select three relevant passages for each episode which embody the themes chosen as focus for the unit, for a total of no more than thirty minutes per-episode. In order to maintain attention levels high and avoid the film-as-gap-filler effect, I would also recommend to select three extracts of about ten minutes each, and to interval the viewing of the film with activities that can immediately help students enhance their understanding of the selected issues, allowing concepts sink in by working on them immediately rather than viewing the full thirty minutes in block and then carrying out the activities.

As for the first episode, the three extracts I would select are: Dracula and Harker's first meeting (00:08:00 to 00:18:00) for the theme encounter with the 'other'; Harker's escape from Castle Dracula as recounted by him to Sister Agatha and Mina (00:49:45 to 1:00:29) for the theme science/religion/superstition; Dracula and Siter Agatha's first conversation (1:08:27 to 1:18:07) for the changing role of women. Following the same

thematic order, for the second episode I would select: the presentation of various passengers of the vessel and Dracula's encounter with – and murder of – the Duchess (00:12:51 to 00:20:08); the death of Sister Agatha (01:13:20 to 01:24:08), and the murder of Dorabella (00:28:22 to 00:35:50). As with the final episode the screening activity would have reached its third week, I believe that some complexity could be added by removing the association between one passage and one theme, in order to push students to identify elements of all three themes within the presented extracts: Dracula and Zoe's meeting at the Harker Foundation (00:31:37 to 00:41:50); one of Lucy and Dracula's encounters (00:44:20 to 00:56:04); Dracula and Zoe/Agatha's last confrontation and death (01:21:40 to 01:29:45). Since the students should already be familiar with the text – as they would have read it during the holidays – and the reading of texts is slower than watching a movie clip, I would associate the reading of no more than one or two short extracts a week from the novel to the viewing of the film. For the first week, I would propose the reading of pages 19-24, where the first encounter between Harker and the Count is narrated, and a particular emphasis is placed on the idea of 'other'; for the second week, I would move forward with the reading of pages 53-59, where there is an exchange of letters between Mina and Lucy in which they speak of Mina's profession and of Lucy's marriage proposals; the choice of reading for week three would then fall upon pages 199-203, where the staking of Lucy Westenra is described, and I would bring the focus of attention to the tension between science, religion and superstition which emerges from the text. As the time allocation for the subject in the selected context is of three hours per week, I would suggest that a two-hour weekly block be allocated to the viewing of film and the connected activities, and that the remaining hour be allocated to the analysis of extracts of the novel which mirror – as far as possible – the passages selected for the viewing. I would argue that it would be preferrable to deal with the written text first, so that film and activities may be used not only as a learning tool, but also as a tool for motivating students to better engage with the written text, for their understanding of the latter is essential in order to carry out all subsequent activities. Overall, this part of the teaching unit should therefore have a duration of three weeks.

5.1.3 Planning Pre- and Post-Screening Activities

To plan a teaching unit which aims to give space to all learning modes, it is essential to diversify activities in order to allow all students to have access to their preferred learning

method, while simultaneously pushing them towards trying to learn in different ways. Moreover, the way in which the unit is structured should allow educators to both allocate time for students to exercise their language abilities and to evaluate the fulfilment of the learning objectives both *in itinere* and with a final project or test – as secondary schools in Italy require that students be awarded grades on a scale from 1 to 10. Structuring such a unit is not an easy task, for it requires a substantial time allocation and the integration of lectures, group and individual activities, listening, reading, speaking, and writing tasks, as well as class discussions and, potentially, role play activities. On top of the three weeks allocated to screening and reading time – and connected activities, I would therefore suggest the addition of two more weeks, one before and one after the three-week block. The first week should be an introductory week, in which the unit is presented and students are warmed up to the context of the Victorian Era and to the themes which they will be required to further analyse in the following week; this part of the unit is essential for it provides students with an initial set of tools to be exploited in the following weeks, pointing their learning compass in the right direction. By 'right direction' I do not mean that they should perceive the provided context as a path from which they cannot deviate, or on top of which they cannot elaborate, but that they should be made aware of both historical facts – which are an essential part of the unit, for, as previously mentioned, literature is a product of its environment and does not exist in a vacuum – and of aspects which they should be familiar with before starting to analyse the texts in order to enhance their ability to identify relevant themes and autonomously re-elaborate information. The last week, on the other hand, should be allocated to the evaluation of their work, which is to be articulated into two blocks: a two-hour block for oral evaluation, and a one-hour block for written assessment. In this fashion, educators should be able to minimise times for direct assessment and maximise student exposure to contents – both linguistic and literary – and to the development of their skills; moreover, this organization should encourage student participation throughout the unit by placing a stronger emphasis on continuous assessment rather than on formal assessment.

I believe it is essential for the educator to thoroughly plan all aspects of the unit, from the modes in which the information will be presented to students or re-elaborated by them, to how much time should be allocated to each activity and in which context. Clear and precise planning should be a helpful tool for teachers in order not to lose sight

of their teaching objectives and to make sure that each learning mode finds it space within the unit, without disregarding any needs. Surely, teachers should be flexible – for instance, one discussion may end up being shorter or longer than expected – but they should always refer back to their initial plan in order to be able to evaluate the progression of the activity and the possibility of having to re-assess their course of action as the activities take place. In the following chart, I will provide my personal example of the structure of a teaching unit, including all the activities which should be carried out inside and outside of the classroom, as well as writing and conversation prompts.

Mode	Activities	Time allocation
Lecture Visual support tools: • Power Point presentations	Lesson 1: Introduction to the Victorian Age	40 minutes
	Lesson 2: Victorian anxieties - Changing role of women - Theme of the 'other' - Science / religion / superstition	40 minutes
	Lesson 2: Introduction to *Dracula* and the Victorian Gothic	40 minutes
	Lessons 3 to 8: Introduction to the extracts of text and film which are read and seen in class	Approximately 5 minutes per-extract: Lesson 3: 5 minutes Lesson 4: 15 minutes Lesson 5: 5 minutes Lesson 6: 15 minutes Lesson 7: 5 minutes Lesson 8: 15 minutes
Individual work Written production of texts	Each week, students will be assigned a writing task (min. 250 words) as homework. The topics will be the following:	Independent work to be carried out at home throughout the duration of the unit, with weekly

	Week one: What were some of the main sources of anxiety in Victorian England and why? Week two: How do you feel *Dracula* reflects the theme of the encounter with the 'other'? Reflect on the issue and provide examples which you believe demonstrate how the idea of 'otherness' may be relevant to contemporary society. Week three: How do you feel *Dracula* portrays the changing role of women within society? Reflect on the issue and provide examples which you believe demonstrate how this change may be relevant to contemporary society. Week four: How do you feel *Dracula* presents the tension between science, religion, and superstition? Reflect on the issue and provide examples which you believe demonstrate how such tension may be relevant to contemporary society.	revisions and feedback on the part of the teacher.
Role play activities Students are assigned parts at the end of the previous week	Reading of the novel	Approximately 4 minutes per-page: Week two: 24 minutes

(e.g.: pp. 53-59, one student is Lucy, one student is Mina, and one student is Mr Morris); they will therefore have time to become acquainted with the text and to be the ones to perform the reading in class during the allocated time. The two students with dyslexia will not be asked to read in front of their peers, unless they want to, and will be asked to assume a more active role throughout the speaking part of the lesson. Another solution may be assigning them shorter parts, and providing them with more accessible reading materials (printing out sections of the chapters, from which they may read out loud, with bigger fonts and upper-case letters, highlighting the sections which are assigned to them, and allocating their reading parts more in advance in order to give them more time to prepare and get familiar with the text.		Week three: 28 minutes Week four: 20 minutes
Group work During the first lesson, the class of 24 students will be divided into 6 groups of 4 students, and each group will be allocated a theme and a time (e.g.: science, Victorian Era; changing role of women, present).	Each group will be required to produce a 10-minute presentation concerning their theme in relation to *Dracula* (both the novel and the film) considering the historical context (Victorian era or present) which has been assigned to them.	Independent work to be carried out at home throughout the duration of the unit, with weekly revisions and feedback on the part of the teacher.

Class discussion To be prompted by the teacher before and/or after each lecture, screening, and reading activity	Lesson 1 Before starting the lecture: brainstorming activity on previous knowledge about the Victorian Era.	5 minutes
	Lesson 2 Before dealing with Victorian anxieties: In light of what has been learnt in the previous lesson, what do you think could be a source of anxiety for the British population in Victorian times? After having dealt with Victorian anxieties: What do you think about these themes in the Victorian context? Do you believe they are still relevant? Before introducing *Dracula* and the Victorian Gothic: brainstorming activity on previous knowledge about the novel. After having introduced *Dracula* and the Victorian Gothic: Was your idea of the character and the novel in line with what has been discussed today? How is it different? What do you think the vampire represents?	Before Victorian anxieties: 5 minutes After Victorian anxieties: 15 minutes Before *Dracula* and the Victorian Gothic: 5 minutes After *Dracula* and the Victorian Gothic: 15 minutes
	Lesson 3 After reading:	Approx. 30 minutes

	How is Dracula portrayed in the novel? What do you think Harker feels when he meets Dracula? Why do you think that? What passages of the text do you believe define Dracula as 'other'? How do you think this portrayal relates with Victorian imperialism and with the fear of the 'other'? Do you think we still experience similar reactions to a first impression when we meet someone? Do you believe this passage is relevant for contemporary times?	
	Lesson 4 After the first clip: How does the first encounter between the Count and Harker compare with the novel? What elements of the Gothic do you see in the mood of the clip and in its setting? After the second clip: What elements of this clip make you think about science? Religion? Superstition? Considering what has been discussed so far, is there anything you find unusual? If so, what and why? After the third clip: What is your impression of Sister Agatha? Why do you think the writers of the serial made the	Approx. 20 minutes per-slot

	choice of revolutionising the character of Van Helsing?	
	Lesson 5 After reading: What do you think about Lucy and Mina? How are they different? How are they alike? What ideal of womanhood do they represent? How do you think the role of women has changed throughout time? How is it different now from how it was in Victorian England?	Approx. 28 minutes
	Lesson 6 After the first clip: What do you think about the idea that by biting those who are different from him, Dracula 'absorbs' them? what types of 'otherness' can you identify in this clip? How do you feel about Dracula's interactions with such a variety of people? After the second clip: What do you think prevails in this clip? Faith or reason? Are there elements of superstition? While Agatha is a very rational character, what do you think guides her behaviour? What do you think of the act of sacrificing oneself for others' wellbeing? Can you think of any examples? After the third clip:	Approx. 20 minutes per-slot

	What do you think of Dorabella? Do you find any common elements between her and the Lucy of which we have read in the novel? And with Mina?	
	Lesson 7 After reading: What is the impression you get of Van Helsing? Do you see him as a man of science? If yes, why? If not, why? Do you think this passage reflects Victorian ambiguities concerning the issues of science, religion, and superstition? How? Do you think these ambiguities still persist? Can you give some examples?	Approx. 35 minutes
	Lesson 8 After each clip, ask students how they feel each extract relates with the three main themes which have been analysed, which elements strike them the most, and how they feel about the contemporary contextualisation of the themes performed within the adaptation.	Approx. 20 minutes per-slot

5.1.4 Defining Evaluation Methods

As previously mentioned, the programming stage of a teaching unit is of paramount importance in the overall success of the learning process. Indeed, programming is not only useful as a tool for teachers to build a reference framework that allows them to proceed smoothly in the unfolding of the teaching process, but it is also fundamental for evaluating both students' achievement of the learning objectives and the quality and

relevance of the teaching unit itself for the fulfilment of such objectives.[382] As Novello points out,

> For too long the term 'assessment' has been associated, in the school environment, with negative considerations: it represents a problem for students, who always feel the need to demonstrate that they have studied (and not necessarily understood) the subject in order to pass their class; it represents a problem for teachers, who resent the evaluation task and do not have the adequate times and means to carry it out; it becomes a problem for parents, who assimilate and pass on grade-related anxieties; it becomes a problem for headmasters, who have to interpret and often justify the numbers.[383]

Evaluating and assessing competences and abilities, however, is not a process which should be reduced to the attribution of a grade to the student – which is what, unfortunately, happens too often within the school environment. The process of evaluation and assessment is a tool in the hands of educators which should serve multiple purposes: adjusting teaching methods and objectives in order to provide students with the best possible learning experience and outcomes; building a constructive learning environment, in which students are able to use the assessment moment to communicate – both directly and indirectly – "their progress, their challenges, their needs (often not foreseeable and different from student to student) and their degree of satisfaction in relation with the subject".[384] The evaluation and assessment practice should therefore accompany the entire learning process, starting from the planning phase, and ending with the moment of formal evaluation – which is a requirement of the Italian school environment but should be perceived as a moment of productive cooperation between all actors involved, rather than as a source of anxiety, a possible punishment, or an unjust practice. Assessment should not be synonym of judgement, it should be a moment in which both teachers and students ask themselves what has been done, what the results were, and how the process and the outcomes can be improved. Moreover, as far as ESL contexts are concerned, since the teaching is aimed at the acquisition of communicational competencies, assessment is not only useful, but also necessary, because it is the only means through which both educators and learners can become fully aware of potential faults which could lead to miscommunication.[385] Teaching, observing, providing students

[382] A. Novello (2014). *La Valutazione delle Lingue Straniere e Seconde nella Scuola: Dalla Teoria alla Pratica*. Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, p. 13.
[383] *Id.,* p. 9, my translation.
[384] *Ibid.,* my translation.
[385] *Id.,* p. 10

with feedback and welcoming students' feedback are therefore elements which become tools for bettering future planning, and should allow for a cyclical improvement of the teaching practice in line with the specific needs which emerge from a given learning environment.

The assessment on the part of the educator thus begins with planning, for it is necessary, as previously highlighted, to understand the needs of the students in order to be able to design a teaching unit which is able to respond to such needs to the best of the teacher's abilities, considering all the possible constraints which may be imposed by the context. To perform an initial assessment in order to be able to set appropriate teaching objectives, educators should therefore ask themselves the following questions:

- Who are the recipients of this teaching unit?
- What is their language level?
- What motivates them?
- How can I maximise their engagement?
- Which practices have I adopted in the past which have proven to be successful within a similar learning environment?
- What am I required to teach?
- How can I integrate these requirements with the specific needs of this classroom?

These questions help educators channel their knowledge of present and past situations into a productive planning, aimed at accounting for the needs of the students while simultaneously keeping in mind the general context and the curricular requirements which need to be fulfilled. The tasks and activities carried out inside and outside of the classroom should always be designed while keeping in mind the answers to these questions, and in a fashion which allows educators to adapt the difficulty of the tasks to the outcomes of continuous assessment. Continuous assessment and mutual feedback are both necessary for achieving a successful outcome: tasks should never be assigned without being assessed, individually highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of learners and offering a space for constructive confrontation and for answering students' questions. In the teaching unit which I have designed and presented in this study, for instance, students are assigned tasks for which they receive the educator's feedback individually, and are then offered time at the end of lessons to ask any questions they may

have concerning both the feedback they have received and the contents of the lesson. Moreover, classes are designed with the idea of providing students with enough time to speak about their ideas, perspectives, and doubts, thus offering them guidance in the process of critically analysing the presented materials and facilitating the fulfilment of their individual and group tasks. Moreover, both written and oral tasks mirror the situations of formal evaluation, allowing students to familiarise with evaluation methods and to become acquainted with the criteria which will then be adopted for their final assessment. Indeed, the moment of final assessment should be a way for both students and educators to evaluate what has been covered throughout the unit, both in terms of contents and in terms of activity types: proposing activities for final assessment which have not been exercised throughout the unit, nor have been the object of feedback and guidance on the part of the educator would simply be useless and unproductive for everyone involved in the learning process.

In this context, I would propose the following methods for final assessment, which mirror the learning objectives defined for the unit:

- A written task, for the completion of which students will have one hour. The task should be designed in line with the written tasks which students have been assigned throughout the unit – open questions in which they have to articulate their opinion on, and demonstrate their knowledge of, the topics and themes which have been thoroughly discussed throughout the unit – and for which they have received extensive individual feedback and an opportunity to discuss any possible issues with both the educator and their classmates. The evaluation of the task should be performed using the same criteria with which the previous ones have been assessed, all of which have been made clear by the educator both at the time of presenting the unit, and through continuous assessment.
- An oral task, for which students have prepared throughout the entire duration of the unit – both through group work, and through the wide space dedicated to the exercise of their speaking abilities in class – and which is to be carried out in the form of group presentations of the duration of maximum ten minutes, in which all students will have to speak and actively participate. The topic of the presentation will be assigned to each group at the beginning of the very first lesson of the unit, and they will be able to choose how to approach it. Each group will be required to send the teacher a weekly update on

their work and will receive feedback and guidance on the part of the educator, who will be available to answer any questions and doubts. Since the task is to be performed in a group, but the assessment is individual, each weekly report should highlight how each individual has contributed to the progress of the project, and the assessment should be performed both at group level and at individual level. The presentation given at the moment of final assessment will be followed by individual questions (one per-student). The entire process should not last longer than 20 minutes per-group, for a total duration of two hours.

- A time allocation of 30 minutes at the start of the eleventh lesson which serves as a space for both students and educators to provide and articulate feedback on the overall unit, on the achievement of learning objectives, and on areas of potential improvement of both teaching and learning processes.

5.2 Before and after: Presenting the Teaching Unit to Students and Drawing Conclusions on the Achievement of Teaching Objectives

To avoid miscommunication and to set the correct expectations for students concerning the teaching unit, its clear and in-depth presentation to the classroom before beginning with any of its activities is of paramount importance. Moreover, it is important that the expectations which have been set at the start of the unit are met both on the part of the educators and on the part of the students, and that any re-assessments which may occur throughout its duration are contextualised and motivated. Setting expectations is fundamental in order to build a learning context in which accountability becomes relevant both for teachers and for students: if educators fail to deliver their teaching in a manner that allows students to achieve the set learning objectives, they should be accountable for this deficiency, and they should therefore take their own share of responsibility into account throughout the assessment process; similarly, if students fail to meet teachers' expectations – or exceed such expectations – teachers should interrogate themselves as to why this mismatch between reality and expectation has occurred. Accountability is essential in order to be able to understand the faults and the strengths of the teaching and learning processes: if the unit unfolds and concludes positively, it means that the educator's objectives and methods were effective for the given classroom; on the contrary, if there are any faults with the unit, it is possible to identify them and figure out why they occurred and how they can be fixed. Perhaps the educator was unable to identify the

correct language level of the classroom, and therefore presented students with activities that may be too difficult for them to carry out; in this case, the educator should be able to re-assess the tasks and adapt them in order to make them more accessible to all students. Perhaps the issue is that students do not put enough time and effort into the work which they have been assigned; in this case, this effort deficiency may be due, for example, to a lack of motivation, and the educator should once again re-assess the activities in order to improve levels of student engagement. With proper planning, expectation setting, and communication between the students and the teacher, it is possible to create a model which allows to identify any 'bugs' and to fix them by going back to the beginning and re-adjusting the plan. I believe that this interactive and flexible model allows both teachers and students to better themselves, their knowledge, and their performance within the school environment, and making students and active part of the enhancement of their learning environment also serves as a tool to teach them problem-solving skills which may be beneficial for their growth as individuals both inside and outside of school, as well as allowing their empowerment and the development of their understanding of the importance of accountability. The evaluation process should be perceived by both teachers and students as a method for bettering themselves rather than an obstacle course against which they need to battle. Grades should become perceived as an indication of progress in relation with the achievement of the learning objectives rather than as a mere measurement of knowledge: they should be a tool to push students towards the fulfilment of their potential, not a punishment for failing or a reward for succeeding. For the above-listed reasons, it is essential to provide space both at the start of the teaching unit in order to set expectations – state the learning objectives, the contents of the unit, how they will be presented, what tasks the students will be asked to carry out, how they will be evaluated, and why – and at the end of the unit to draw conclusions on the learning outcomes and on the validity of the teaching methods, which should always be put into question in order to grant the necessary dynamism to the learning environment. The final 30 minutes of the unit should be a moment in which educators explain to students how they can work to improve, and these suggestions on the part of teachers should always attempt to be as constructive as possible, to highlight the strengths of individuals, their areas of improvement, and methods which can adopted to strengthen their weaknesses rather than simply telling them that they did something wrong or that they were unable to

carry out a task. I believe the role of educators should be pointing students in the right direction for the fulfilment of their potential, and there are no students unable to improve when they are given the right support, regardless of their starting point. In order to build a cooperative, communicative, and productive environment, it is of paramount importance that students understand the guiding and supporting role which teachers have in the development of their knowledge, skills, and education, and I think that this can only be achieved through mutual trust and dialogue, confrontation, and accountability: and it all starts with adequate planning.

The following chart serves as a summary of the unit and to provide a more concise and linear picture of its contents and timings:

Lesson	**Outline of activities**	**Timing**
1	1. Presenting the teaching unit and explaining evaluation criteria 2. Brainstorming 3. Lecture	→ 15 min → 5 min → 40 min
2	1. Brainstorming 2. Lecture 3. Class discussion 4. Brainstorming 5. Lecture 6. Class discussion	→ 5 min → 40 min → 15 min → 5 min → 40 min → 15 min
3	1. Introduction 2. Reading / role play activity 3. Class discussion	→ 5 min → 24 min → 31 min
4	1. Introduction 2. Screening 3. Class discussion 4. Introduction 5. Screening 6. Class discussion 7. Introduction 8. Screening 9. Class discussion	→ 10 min → 10 min → 20 min → 5 min → 10 min → 20 min → 5 min → 10 min → 20 min

	10. Homework assignment & questions	→ 10 min
5	1. Introduction 2. Reading / role play activity 3. Class discussion	→ 5 min → 28 min → 15 min
6	1. Introduction 2. Screening 3. Class discussion 4. Introduction 5. Screening 6. Class discussion 7. Introduction 8. Screening 9. Class discussion 10. Homework assignment & questions	→ 10 min → 10 min → 20 min → 5 min → 10 min → 20 min → 5 min → 10 min → 20 min → 10 min
7	1. Introduction 2. Reading / role play activity 3. Class discussion	→ 5 min → 20 min → 35 min
8	1. Introduction 2. Screening 3. Class discussion 4. Introduction 5. Screening 6. Class discussion 7. Introduction 8. Screening 9. Class discussion 10. Homework assignment & questions	→ 10 min → 10 min → 20 min → 5 min → 10 min → 20 min → 5 min → 10 min → 20 min → 10 min
9	Written assessment	→ 1h
10	Oral assessment	→ 2h
11	Assessment and unit feedback	→ 30 min

Conclusions

The analysis carried out throughout these five chapters serves to validate the choice of using the novel *Dracula* in a secondary school environment as a tool to teach the Victorian Gothic, and of incorporating the usage of filmic adaptations in a didactic unit in order to enhance students' motivation, understanding of the relevant themes, and language skills. While *Dracula* is surely not the only – nor the most utilized – novel to be taught in this environment for this purpose, I believe this analysis has proven that its characteristics make it an excellent choice in order to both fulfil curricular requirements and stimulate students' interest in the subject. While *Dracula* is often dismissed by educators in secondary schools, I believe I have demonstrated that its usage in this environment is not only adequate, but also recommendable, for the wealth of themes which can be explored through its study allows teacher to select the focus of their lectures from a vast, all-encompassing pool of issues which cover all of the most relevant aspects of the Victorian era and of the Gothic genre. By exploring the historical background in which the literary Gothic flourished and the anxieties which characterised this epoch, I have framed the historical context which students are to be familiarised with during their classes. Moreover, the in-depth analysis of the Gothic genre and of its main features which is carried out throughout the second chapter, if read in synergy with the third chapter, which delves deeper into the origins, characteristics, and themes of Stoker's novel, clearly points towards Dracula as one of the quintessential works of Victorian Gothic literature – one which, considering the popularity of the figure of the vampire, and students' familiarity with at least some of the novel's adaptations, seems to be potentially among the most captivating to teach these topic within a secondary school environment.

While I have only proposed one example of teaching unit to provide a model to support my claim that the novel and its adaptations are a suitable means to teach the Victorian Gothic within the analysed environment, the same method which I have adopted for planning this teaching unit can be adopted to plan many others. I believe that by

outlining the main Victorian anxieties and the main themes and aspects of the genre and of the novel, as well as by providing an analysis of various adaptations of the latter and of some of their main features, this study provides educators with sufficient material to make their own choices at the planning stage – in terms of themes and adaptations – while also guiding them in the process of planning a teaching unit in terms of structure and identification of teaching objectives.

This analysis has two main limits at its core: first, it is carried out with the aim of satisfying the requirements of one specific environment – Italian secondary schools – and therefore neglects other aspects which could be relevant in other contexts, in which different perspectives may be adopted and other aspects may result more relevant; second, it lacks empirical evidence of the outcomes of the teaching process. Concerning the first aspect, I believe that the analysis which I have carried out, in spite of adopting a mainly western-centric perspective, is developed at a sufficient depth so as to allow the unfolding of other points of view concerning the analysed issues, for it clearly identifies the pivotal aspects to be taken into account concerning the historical and literary contexts and the novel, and it offers examples of how to approach the analysis of adaptations – although it may not satisfy the needs of other existing narratives in terms of contents. Concerning the second issue, I believe that an empirical approach to the verification of the validity of my teaching unit model within a secondary school environment would be a potentially interesting development for further research.

In spite of its limitations, I would argue that this research endeavour has successfully proven the validity of using *Dracula* and its adaptations as a means to teach the Victorian Gothic within a secondary school environment in Italy by providing educators with a model for building a teaching unit and by successfully creating a connection between the novel, its historical and literary context, its adaptations, and a twenty-first century classroom.

I believe I have successfully proven that to engage students with this subject, it is necessary to make them understand how it explores themes which, while rooted in a different context, are relevant in every context for they are representative of human nature rather than only being the expression of a distant past. With its direct and indirect exploration of the anxieties which characterised the Victorian era, *Dracula* is also a perfect tool to foster awareness; its adaptations, on the other hand, are the perfect tool to

help students envision how cultural constructions and perceptions have changed through time, and to help them reflect on how *they* perceive them now, in their present world. The educator's job consists in guiding students through the process, stimulating their ability to reflect on these issues and to approach them critically, while simultaneously enhancing their language and communication skills.

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Summary in Italian

Comprendere il gotico letterario e le sue caratteristiche è di aiuto non solo per migliorare la propria comprensione del contesto nel quale questo genere si è sviluppato, ma è anche un mezzo per l'individuo per raggiungere una maggiore consapevolezza di sé e del proprio contesto, poiché l'essenza del gotico sta nella sua capacità di portare a galla problematiche ed emozioni che l'essere umano tende a reprimere e interiorizzare. Nel presente lavoro di tesi, ho scelto di esplorare questo genere letterario precisamente per questa ragione: perché la sua natura permette di entrare in contatto con aspetti dell'esistenza che fanno parte sia della vita contemporanea, sia dell'epoca Vittoriana – periodo nel quale il gotico come genere letterario ha raggiunto la sua massima espressione. Dracula è stato selezionato tra i vari romanzi che appartengono questo genere poiché, come viene dimostrato nel presente elaborato, ne è la perfetta rappresentazione, sia in termini di temi che di ambientazioni e toni; in breve, Dracula potrebbe essere definito il romanzo gotico per eccellenza.

Considerando che il gotico vittoriano è parte integrante del programma di lingua e letteratura inglese all'interno dei licei italiani, ho scelto di esplorare uno degli approcci adottabili per presentare questo genere letterario agli studenti proprio in questo contesto, ovvero l'inclusione di adattamenti cinematografici nell'unità didattica dedicata a questo tema. Il mio scopo è quello di fornire un quadro di riferimento che provi l'utilità dell'adottare questo metodo integrato con l'obbiettivo di accrescere l'interesse degli studenti nei confronti dell'argomento trattato, la loro comprensione di tale tema, il loro livello di motivazione e le loro abilità linguistiche. Questo lavoro ha inoltre l'obiettivo di promuovere un metodo cooperativo di interazione tra studenti e docenti mirato al miglioramento ciclico della qualità dell'insegnamento, un modello che incoraggi gli studenti a sviluppare il loro pensiero critico sia in termini di rielaborazione dei contenuti, sia per quanto riguarda la loro capacità di comprendere le motivazioni che stanno dietro

all’inclusione di un dato argomento nel loro curriculum scolastico, spingendoli a riflettere sull’efficacia dei metodi di insegnamento e sulle motivazioni alla base della loro struttura.

Prima di leggere questo elaborato, è importante tenere presente il contesto per cui è stato pensato, ovvero la creazione di materiali didattici per la scuola secondaria italiana. Per questo motivo, ho scelto di centrare la mia analisi all'interno di un quadro che comprende principalmente testi e articoli di riferimento che sono stati scritti in un contesto occidentale, e che quindi rispondono alle esigenze e alle prospettive del mondo occidentale e del curriculum degli istituti selezionati. Questa scelta, tuttavia, non deve essere percepita come esclusiva di altre possibili prospettive, ma deve invece essere vista come un punto di partenza per lo sviluppo di un modello più inclusivo, che può essere ulteriormente ampliato e migliorato integrandovi altre prospettive, che possono svilupparsi in sinergia o in contrasto con quella presentata. Lo scopo di questa analisi è quello di delineare gli aspetti cardine da tenere in considerazione sia per quanto riguarda il contesto storico e letterario dell’età vittoriana, sia per quanto riguarda Dracula, e di offrire esempi di come affrontare l'analisi degli adattamenti e la strutturazione di un'unità didattica. Tuttavia, è necessario tenere presente che le prospettive e i contenuti di questa analisi sono aperti ad essere adattati ad altri contesti, poiché il suo scopo non è quello di fornire un'interpretazione dogmatica, ma piuttosto di progettare un quadro di riferimento da cui gli educatori possono selezionare materiali rilevanti da utilizzare nelle loro classi - e tali materiali possono essere esplorati da una prospettiva che può essere diversa da quella qui proposta.

Altrettanto importante, per evitare possibili fraintendimenti, è comprendere che questa analisi è una proposta dettagliata, ma pur sempre teorica, di come affrontare l'insegnamento dell'argomento scelto, una proposta che deve ancora trovare conferme di validità nella pratica. Questo lavoro ha il limite di non essere stato ancora sperimentato in un contesto classe, cosa che potrebbe essere interessante fare per ampliare la presente analisi. I limiti di un approccio puramente teorico sono evidenti quando si tratta di progettare attività pratiche; tuttavia, il mio intento è quello di attingere a pratiche pedagogiche esistenti, la cui efficacia è già stata dimostrata, per progettare un modello che possa rispondere alle esigenze sia degli studenti, sia degli educatori, e che contenga linee guida che possano essere adottate per la progettazione di altre unità didattiche - nello stesso contesto o in contesti diversi. Tra i principi guida che hanno accompagnato lo

svolgimento della mia analisi c'è l'idea che l'insegnamento debba essere un processo inclusivo, un processo in cui gli educatori devono essere in grado di soddisfare al meglio i bisogni di apprendimento dei loro studenti e in cui l'insegnamento della letteratura non deve essere percepito solo come un esercizio linguistico, ma anche come una fonte di sviluppo individuale e di gruppo. Il motivo per cui ho scelto di affrontare questo argomento in questo modo è che, nella mia esperienza personale, ho riscontrato che l'insegnamento è troppo spesso percepito come una pratica meramente prescrittiva, in cui gli studenti assumono un ruolo passivo, non sono messi nella posizione di poter esprimere le proprie opinioni, e sono quindi privati della possibilità di sviluppare un pensiero critico, che ritengo sia tra le competenze più importanti che l'ambiente scolastico possa spingere gli studenti ad acquisire.

Nel primo capitolo, fornisco una panoramica generale del contesto storico in cui fiorì il gotico come genere letterario: l'epoca vittoriana. L'obiettivo del capitolo è quello di esplorare le complessità di questo contesto storico e le contraddizioni che lo hanno caratterizzato, con particolare attenzione alle questioni dell'imperialismo, dello sviluppo scientifico e tecnologico e del cambiamento del ruolo della donna all'interno della società. L'imperialismo britannico, fiorito durante il regno della regina Vittoria, è stato per lungo tempo un tema divisivo per la popolazione inglese. Nonostante i primi tentativi di espansione, l'Impero iniziò a deteriorarsi a causa delle crescenti ansie proprie della società tardo-vittoriana. I timori legati alla ‘colonizzazione inversa’ e al declino dell'Impero furono alimentati sia dall'immigrazione dalle colonie, sia dalla crescita economica di Germania e Stati Uniti, contribuendo così alla creazione di un senso di declino imminente. Inoltre, il capitolo approfondisce i dibattiti riguardanti religione, scienza e superstizione caratteristici dell’epoca vittoriana. Quest'epoca vide l'ascesa di nuove teorie scientifiche e l'intensificarsi del dibattito religioso, con una crescente conflittualità tra le varie sezioni della Chiesa d'Inghilterra. I movimenti razionalisti, come l'utilitarismo, iniziarono a sfidare il pensiero religioso, riflettendo l'evoluzione del panorama intellettuale dell'epoca. Infine, all’interno di questo capitolo, esploro come il mutato ruolo delle donne alla fine del XIX secolo fu essenziale per sfidare le norme di genere tradizionali e che tale sfida costituì un'altra contraddizione intrinseca della società vittoriana, divisa tra l'idealizzazione delle donne come "angeli del focolare" e la loro emancipazione. Nell'analizzare l'influenza di queste contraddizioni sociali sulle opere letterarie

dell'epoca, il capitolo sottolinea la loro importanza ai fini della comprensione e dell'analisi della letteratura prodotta in questo periodo, sostenendo che le contraddizioni esistenti all'interno della società vittoriana hanno fornito un terreno fertile per la creazione di opere letterarie complesse e stratificate che affrontano i cambiamenti sociali e le ansie dell'epoca.

Il tema della letteratura gotica, con particolare attenzione al gotico vittoriano di fine secolo XIX, viene approfondito nel secondo capitolo, costruendo un ponte tra le ansie che hanno caratterizzato l'epoca vittoriana e lo sviluppo di questo genere. Inoltre, il secondo capitolo serve a identificare chiaramente alcune delle questioni che rendono il gotico rilevante per il lettore contemporaneo: sessualità e genere, l'incontro con l'"altro", la paura di ciò che è sconosciuto e lo sfruttamento dell'orrore e della degenerazione come strumenti utili a canalizzare le ansie culturali. Nel complesso, il capitolo fornisce spunti di riflessione sulle origini e sullo sviluppo del romanzo gotico, affrontando la sua nascita nel XVIII secolo e la sua evoluzione in epoca vittoriana. Il capitolo evidenzia come il gotico abbia fornito una piattaforma per esplorare le emozioni, la psicologia individuale e gli aspetti più oscuri dell'esperienza umana. La rinascita del gotico in un'epoca caratterizzata dalla razionalità scientifica sottolinea il suo ruolo di contrappeso ai movimenti intellettuali e culturali prevalenti. Questa panoramica pone le basi per comprendere l'attualità del genere gotico, così come il suo fascino duraturo agli occhi del lettore contemporaneo.

Nel terzo capitolo approfondisco l'analisi del romanzo che ho scelto come strumento di insegnamento per il gotico vittoriano: *Dracula* di Bram Stoker. Nella prima sezione analizzo le origini del romanzo attraverso una panoramica dei suoi predecessori, oltre a fornire al lettore una migliore comprensione della figura del vampiro e della sua rilevanza all'interno del contesto storico e culturale di riferimento. Questo capitolo, sia nella prima sezione che in quelle successive – che esplorano, rispettivamente, i temi e i personaggi cardine del romanzo e le letture critiche di quest'ultimo – svolge la funzione di individuare in che modo il romanzo riflette i contesti storici e letterari analizzati in precedenza, e fornisce una panoramica delle letture critiche di *Dracula*, con particolare attenzione alle tre principali filoni: la critica psicanalitica, il nuovo storicismo e la critica postcoloniale. Questa panoramica può aiutare gli educatori a individuare i temi e le letture

cardine del romanzo che possono essere discussi nel contesto classe al fine di favorire il potenziamento delle capacità di pensiero critico degli studenti.

Il quarto capitolo tratta del secondo strumento che ho scelto per la strutturazione dell'unità didattica: gli adattamenti cinematografici del romanzo. Fornendo una panoramica di tali adattamenti, intendo dimostrare come essi possano diventare strumenti utili all'interno di un ambiente scolastico per raggiungere una serie di obiettivi di apprendimento, fornendo agli studenti molteplici mezzi – oltre al testo scritto – per avvicinarsi al testo, comprenderlo e apprezzare la rilevanza sia del romanzo che dello studio della letteratura. In questo capitolo ho scelto di sottolineare come gli adattamenti, così come i testi adattati, siano influenzati dal contesto storico e sociale in cui vengono prodotti, discutendo la loro evoluzione e il loro ruolo culturale. Il capitolo approfondisce l'importanza di adattamenti cinematografici come *Nosferatu* (1922) e *Dracula* (1931) di Tod Browning, mostrando come essi riflettano le ansie e le paure della società dei rispettivi periodi. Il capitolo esplora inoltre l'impatto dell'adattamento di Francis Ford Coppola del 1992 nel plasmare l'immagine iconica di Dracula, spaziando su altre due reinterpretazioni cinematografiche del romanzo di Stoker, *Van Helsing* (2004) e *Dracula Untold* (2014), che sono esempi, rispettivamente, di una fusione e riconcettualizzazione di alcuni classici del gotico letterario e di una storia che narra le origini dell'iconico vampiro. Inoltre, ho scelto di includere gli adattamenti seriali di Dracula in questa analisi e ho concentrato la mia attenzione principalmente su *Penny Dreadful* e *Dracula* (2013), dedicando anche un'intera sezione alla produzione Netflix *Dracula* (2020) – essendo quest'ultimo l'adattamento selezionato per l'unità didattica.

Nel quinto e ultimo capitolo, fornisco un esempio teorico dettagliato di unità didattica, progettata per insegnare il gotico vittoriano nel contesto della scuola secondaria in Italia, in particolare all'interno di un liceo linguistico, tramite l'utilizzo di *Dracula* – sia in forma scritta che attraverso i suoi adattamenti cinematografici. L'unità didattica da me progettata mira a essere il più possibile rispondente ai bisogni degli studenti, inclusiva, significativa e motivante. Con questo esempio, spero di delineare un modello di approccio alla strutturazione di un'unità didattica che possa essere riprodotto anche in altri contesti.