Università
Ca'Foscari
Venezia

Master's Degree

in European, American and

Postcolonial Languages and Literatures

Final Thesis

# Late-Victorian Britain and 'the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization' in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*

**Supervisor**
Ch. Prof. Michela Vanon Alliata

**Assistant supervisor**
Ch. Prof. Alessandro Scarsella

**Graduand**
Elena Bassan
Matricolation number
876112

**Academic Year**
2019 / 2020

*To my parents,*

*Roberta and Nicola*

# Table of Contents

# Introduction

The last decades of the nineteenth century represented an economically, socially, culturally, and politically difficult period for Great Britain that found itself facing various hardships, both within its own borders and outside. The reappraisal of the Gothic genre, which re-emerged with great force precisely in this troublesome context, and the establishment of the figure of the vampire, as a bearer of social disorder and 'racial' uneasiness, are great expressions of a literature that becomes itself a response to the specific historical period in which it is placed.

This dissertation, starting from an analysis of the historical background of *fin de siècle* Britain, focuses on the figure of Count Dracula not so much as a vampire, but as an invader, an immigrant, as well as the personification of all the anxieties that troubled late-Victorian Britain. Through both a historical and literary research, my aim is to analyse how the novel *Dracula* (1897) can be regarded as a depiction of the concerns impacting such a historical period, becoming one of its most significant novels, a model of late-nineteenth century Victorian Gothic fiction, tending to Modernism, whose protagonist is the most well-known threatening vampire ever.

The first chapter of this work offers a historical, economic, social, and cultural introduction to the difficulties of the last decades of the nineteenth century in Great Britain. Each section will deal separately with each of the four most involved areas of this period, contrasting the first part of the Victorian era,

apparently stable and optimistic, with its worrying final decades. The points covered will therefore range from the maximum expansion of the colonial empire to its crisis, triggering the nightmare of reverse colonization; from economic prosperity to economic decline, also owing to the emergence of rival states, such as the United States and Germany; from the social order to the collapse of pre-established models, due to the claim of rights by women and the resulting questioning of gender difference; from the stability deriving from certain cultural convictions that scientific discoveries gradually undermine, to the change in the role of art and of the writer who becomes the critical voice of the hypocrisy of his time.

The second chapter will concentrate particularly on the Gothic genre, starting from an analysis of the term 'Gothic', originally used in a derogatory sense, and of its historical, cultural, and architectural expressions of the seventeenth century. The focus will then shift to the appreciation of Gothic in England: both in the literary field, as an expression of an ancient heritage, mostly in poetry, in which the role of strong feelings evoked by dark atmospheres was central, and in the architectural one, of which Horace Walpole was the main appraiser, as well as the pioneer of Gothic fiction.

The second part of the chapter will be dedicated to how the Gothic genre has re-emerged from the distant eighteenth century to the late-Victorian era, in the form of a renewed Victorian Gothic novel, an expression of the anxieties of its time, and how the novel *Dracula* can be included both in this genre, but also in another unprecedented subgenre, that of the 'Imperial Gothic'.

The final part, then, briefly explains for what reasons Stoker's novel can also be considered as one of the earliest examples of a premodern novel.

The third, and last, chapter focuses on the figure of Dracula: in particular, on how Stoker came to build such a character, through an extended legendary, historical, and literary research; then, on what were the reasons that led him to place much of the setting of his novel, as well as Dracula's castle, in a remote and desolate land, namely Transylvania. Stoker's biography will occupy the central part of the chapter, since the novel presents some autobiographical aspects and Stoker, indeed, seems to have been inspired by the figure of his charming master, the actor Henry Irving, for the creation of his vampire.

The final part deals with the paramount issue of the novel, that is 'Otherness': Dracula represents at once 'social otherness', due to his aristocratic roots, which aims at undermining the stability of the English middle-class; 'cultural otherness', on account of his origin from a backward land and polymorphism that sometimes makes him frighteningly close to the animal world, unleashing the nightmare of the return of the atavistic.

Finally, he represents 'racial otherness': he is a stranger, a degenerate whose blood threatens to 'contaminate' the 'pure' blood of the English 'race', dangerously spreading the fear of 'racial' miscegenation, given his relation with the gypsies. In addition, many of his characteristics are attributable to the Jews who, already in those years, began to be dangerously pointed out as 'parasites' and 'polluters'.

Dracula's position as an 'outsider', which is also similar to that of his Irish author within Victorian England, makes him a metaphor for the colonial past in which English subjugated and exploited colonized people, but now become themselves victims, as well as violent hunters in an attempt to repel the vampire's threat.

# Chapter 1

## The Late-Victorian World: "the Context of a Culture in Crisis"[1]

The main aim of this chapter is to provide a general overview of the historical, economic, social and cultural scenario of the late-Victorian era in Great Britain (1870-1901). As many historians point out, this period was deeply marked by a strong sense of anxiety, fear and bewilderment, so much so that it can be considered a real period of crisis. The securities of the Victorian culture, based on the optimistic confidence in progress and the stability of English middle-class, started to be undermined, bringing about social and psychological anxieties that will be then expressed in the revival of the Gothic genre and, especially, in the novel *Dracula* (1897). In order to illustrate the difficulties that affect this period as clearly as possible, each section will tackle a different aspect following the same logical order: first dwelling on what the alleged stability that characterized the first part of the Victorian period was based on, shifting then the focus on the causes that triggered the fin-de-siècle crisis.

[1] Spencer, K. L., "Purity and Danger: Dracula, the Urban Gothic, and the Late Victorian Degeneracy Crisis". *ELH* 59 (1), 1992, p. 206.

## 1.1 From the Heyday of British Colonial Expansion to Imperial Decline: the Spectre of Reverse Colonization

During Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901), Great Britain became the centre of a vast global empire that, by the end of the century, covered almost one-quarter of the Earth and ruled over four hundred million people.[2] After the loss of the thirteen colonies in the North America, due to the American Revolution (1776), British colonial interests shifted to other continents, such as Asia and Africa, and even the Pacific Ocean. This "second empire"[3] (the first one based on the American colonies, according to historians) encompassed a lot of new territories and established the undisputed power and control of Great Britain not only over the sea, but also over world trade. Moreover, in the second half of the nineteenth century, thanks to the introduction of some new technologies, such as the telegraph and the steamship, the British imperial power was facilitated in effectively controlling and defending its territories. Britain's colonies reached Australia, Canada and gradually made their way into the Indian subcontinent to then arrive into the African continent which, starting from the last decades of the nineteenth century, was eventually partitioned (or, better, "scrambled"[4]) between Britain and other European states. It is important to mention Ireland, which was also under British control and was considered its first colony: in 1829 some political rights were acquired by the Catholic

[2] Christ, C., Robson C. (eds.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature. The Victorian Age* (vol. E), 9th edition. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012, p. 1636.
[3] *Ibid*.
[4] "the scramble for Africa", *Ibid.*, p. 1637.

population, thanks to a movement led by Daniel O'Connell, but the great Irish famine (1845-46) killed or condemned to starvation the majority of the population which was, therefore, forced to leave the country and emigrate towards the British mainland or the USA. Other requests of independence were put forward by the Irish independence movements, but the last one, namely the proposal for Home Rule (1885), was not accepted, compelling Ireland to remain under British rule until 1921.[5]

In 1876 Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India: here, in particular, the intervention of the British was definitely devastating, both from the cultural point of view and the environmental one. To the English colonizers, India represented a sort of model colony in which to impose their language and culture, considered superior and more advanced, as well as new technologies: large infrastructures were created, such as the railway system and irrigation canals which hugely transformed the Indian environment, altering and destroying its rural lands, also because of massive deforestation.

Basically, the achievements of the imperial mission represented a source of pride and optimism for the British population that became aware of the country's global imperial supremacy and also convinced of the "noble duty"[6] it was performing in indoctrinating and re-educating the colonized, considered backward, uncivilized and represented as "otherness"[7]. Needless to say, this

[5] Bertinetti, P., *English Literature. A Short History*, Torino, Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2010, p. 187.
[6] Christ C., Robson C. (eds.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, p. 1638.
[7] Hatlen, B., "The Return of the Repressed/Oppressed in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*" in *Dracula: The Vampire and the Critics*, edited by Margaret L. Carter, London: UMI Research Press, 1988, p. 131.

"white man's burden"[8] was accompanied by violence, exploitation and subjugation, as well as "economic dependence [and] cultural appropriation"[9] of the colonized: the colonizers not only occupied a place in order to obtain raw materials, but also meant to eradicate its culture, imposing the use of their language, considered superior. In addition, the successes of the imperial enterprise contributed to the reinforcement and "consolidation of a specifically *British* identity"[10], since the differences between peoples within the British mainland and the British isles (Wales, Scotland and Ireland) seemed to lose importance, if compared to the much more evident power and cultural inequalities, as well as linguistical, religious and racial differences of the colonized countries.[11] The patriotic spirit of nationhood increased significantly, both thanks to widespread literacy and the extension of elementary education, so much so that the British people seemed to be "welded into a more cohesive whole"[12]. However, the colonized peoples, particularly indigenous non-white populations, though trying to imitate their colonizers and to conform to their European behaviour, were never considered as authentic 'British', mainly for the colour of their skin.[13]

As Höglund points out, "the late nineteenth century [is] the period of the most intense British imperial expansion but also the time when the Empire

[8] quotation by Rudyard Kipling, used in another context, in Christ, C., Robson C. (eds.), *The Norton Anthology*, p. 1638.
[9] Wisker, G., "Postcolonial Gothic" in *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* (vol. 2), edited by William Hughes, David Punter and Andrew Smith, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, p. 511.
[10] Christ C., Robson C. (eds.), p. 1638.
[11] *Ibid*.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 1639.
[13] *Ibid*.

begins to crumble"[14] because of the growing unrest in the colonies, the emergence of new world powers (Germany and the United States), the loss of overseas markets and incertitude about the morality of the imperial mission.[15] All these threats, together with the most striking one, namely the fear of a "reverse form of colonialism"[16], concurred to gradually erode "the integrity of the nation and [to] the decline of Britain as an imperial power"[17]. Some meaningful historical events marked the beginning of the crisis of the English empire: in Ireland, the political movement of Home Rule (founded in 1870) required the abolition of the Act of Union (1800), which allowed British political and judicial control over the isle, in order to establish an independent government, separated from the British one. Inevitably, this struggle for independence caused a widespread hostility towards the native Irish who were considered, by the English mainstream, as inferior, backward, violent and non-evolved. Also in India, the British empire had to manage several uprisings that complained about the benefits that the British obtained from the Indian territory at the expense of "major ecological damage and distorti[on] [of] the Indian economy and society"[18]. Thus, over this period, a class of intellectuals was being formed, as well as some elite Indian political movements, such as the Indian

[14] Höglund, J., "Catastrophic Transculturation in *Dracula*, *The Strain* and *The Historian*". *Transnational Literature* 5 (1), 2012, p. 1.
[15] Byron, G., "Gothic in the 1890s" in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, edited by David Punter, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2012, p. 186.
[16] Höglund, J., "Catastrophic Transculturation", p. 1.
[17] Byron, G., "Gothic in the 1890s", p. 187.
[18] Fisher, M. H., "The British Raj, 'Mahatma' Gandhi, and Other Anti-Colonial Movements" in *An Environmental History of India: From Earliest Times to the Twenty-First Century*, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 138.

National Congress (INC) that strongly demanded self-rule and independence[19], which will be obtained later, in 1947.

"The threat posed by new rivals to imperial hegemony, particularly the United States and a recently unified Germany, unrest in Ireland, and the early stirrings of nationalism in India and other parts of the Empire"[20] represented unequivocal signs of an "entire nation – as a race of people, as a political and imperial force, as a social and cultural power – [that] was in irretrievable decline."[21]

Within this context of an overall crisis, the most prevalent anxiety of the British emerged, namely the spectre of reverse colonization triggered by the phenomenon of immigration that, in those years, was bringing to Britain unfamiliar cultures perceived as threatening and further fostering concerns as well as prejudices. Consequently, in this situation, the British found themselves no longer in the position of the colonizers but, conversely, in that of the colonized, as if "[their] own imperial practices [were] mirrored back in monstrous forms [by a] marauding, invasive Other"[22].

As it will be further and more thoroughly discussed in the following chapters, this fear, but also many others, is precisely embodied in the character of Dracula, metaphorically represented as a conqueror, an invader, as well as

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 139.
[20] Brantlinger, P., "Imperial Gothic" in *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, edited by William Hughes and Andrew Smith, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012, p. 205.
[21] Arata, S., "The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization". *Victorian Studies* 33 (4), 1990, p. 622.
[22] *Ibid*., p. 623.

"the warrior nobleman […] and the primitive savage"[23] who "penetrate[s] to the heart of modern Europe's largest empire, and [whose] very presence seems to presage its doom".[24]

## 1.2 From Prosperity to Economic Depression: the Radical Change of British Economic Position

"The wealth of England's empire provided the foundation on which its economy was built."[25] As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Victorian confidence and optimism, as well as the issue of nationhood, which characterized the central part of the Victorian period (1848-70), were based primarily on the extraordinary imperial expansion and the resulting economic prosperity. The country was generally going through a period of stability that fostered confidence on both technical and scientific progress, economic development, population growth and general improvements in all fields of society. In factories and mines, the poor conditions of the workers, who were mostly children condemned to premature death due to serious diseases, such as tuberculosis, were gradually improved: thanks to a series of Factory Acts approved in Parliament, child labour was limited and working hours were reduced. The aristocracy, then, started to realize that free trade was contributing

[23] *Ibid*., p. 634.
[24] *Ibid*., p. 629.
[25] Christ C., Robson C. (eds.), p. 1029.

to enriching their estates, and almost all economic sectors – agriculture, industry and trade – were going through a period of growth and prosperity.[26]

The Great Exhibition (1851), held in Hyde Park, represented the great achievements in science and modern industry. The location itself, The Crystal Palace, was an example of modern architecture "in which materials such as glass and iron [were] employed for purely functional ends" in order to "[symbolize] the triumphant feats of Victorian technology"[27]. Consequently, England's technological progress and economic prosperity made colonial expansion and achievements possible. Between 1850 and 1870 the export of goods, people and capital increased, nearly two and a half million people emigrated, mainly to the colonies, and a large amount of capital was invested abroad: "this investment, of people, money, and technology, created the British empire"[28]. Besides considering the colonial mission as an ethical duty, the empire, in the first place, represented a source of wealth, raw materials, "markets for manufactured goods" and, principally, "world power and influence"[29]. However, riots, killings and unsuccessful wars in various parts of the empire, especially in India and Africa, entailed considerable expenses, both in economic terms and of human lives: for instance, the Anglo-Boer War (1899) between the English and the Boers (South African settlers of Dutch origin), which established British hegemony in South Africa, represented an enormous and unpopular massacre,

[26] *Ibid*., p. 1024.
[27] *Ibid*.
[28] *Ibid*., p. 1025.
[29] *Ibid*.

as well as the previous riots in India (the Indian Mutiny, 1857) and Jamaica (1865).[30]

As the economic historian William Ashworth points out, many experts agree on the fact that "Britain got from a much higher economic growth rate in the mid-Victorian years to a much lower one in the early years of the twentieth century"[31]. Indeed, during the last decades of the Victorian period, besides internal colonial problems, also the economic situation, which so far had favoured the prosperity and the apex of the empire, began to gradually modify and to cause no small concern to the country, since "outside the British Empire, other developments challenged Victorian stability and security"[32]. As a matter of fact, Great Britain started a progressive economic decline precisely in those years, when the industrial expansion took place in Germany and the United States which appeared to be the main rivals of the country. In particular, Germany, headed by Bismarck, back from the victory against France in 1871, represented a serious threat both from a naval and military point of view, but also for its intention to gain dominance in the commercial and industrial fields. Furthermore, the United States, once recovered from the Civil War, emerged as worrying competitors in industry as well as in agriculture, thanks to the vast westward expansion of railroads, towards grain-rich prairies that ensured not

[30] *Ibid*.
[31] Ashworth, W., "The Late Victorian Economy". *Economica*, New Series 33 (129), 1966, p. 17.
[32] Christ C., Robson C. (eds.), p. 1029.

only more advantageous grain prices, but also a different scale of productivity with which England was not able to compete.[33]

Another important event that further worsened the already difficult economic conditions of Great Britain was the so-called 'Long Depression' that lasted more than twenty years, from 1873 to 1896: this period of severe economic crisis and recession mostly affected Western Europe and North America. Albert E. Musson points out the "cyclical fluctuation"[34] of the economic crisis, explaining that it was characterized by peaks and falls. Nevertheless, he states that "the booms were short-lived, the slumps prolonged, and the business never really escaped from the atmosphere of uncertainty and depression."[35] The first, immediate and inevitable consequence of the economic depression was unemployment, especially in the industry of coal, iron, steel, ship-building and engineering; secondly, the fall in prices, due to some alleged reasons, such as overproduction, foreign competition and, especially, the increasing demand of gold whose production was not able to compete with the expansion of trade.[36] The price fall consequently caused negative effects, including reduced business trust as well as severe unemployment[37], so much so that this period, as demonstrated by some specific studies, presents unequivocal

[33] *Ibid*.
[34] Musson, A. E., "The Great Depression in Britain, 1873-1896: A Reappraisal". *The Journal of Economic History*, 19 (2), 1959, p. 200.
[35] *Ibid*.
[36] *Ibid*.
[37] *Ibid*., pp. 205-6.

"signs of relative stagnation and a considerable weakening of Britain's international economic position."[38]

Evidence of this stagnation could be noticed in the industry that "appear[ed] to have handicapped itself increasingly"[39]: for instance, Britain was losing its primacy in iron and steel, owing to difficulties in making changes and modifications to its industrial structure, as Germany and the United States were rapidly doing. Backwardness and troubles were evident also in the coal industry and in the cotton one: both underwent the decline of total production, mainly because of conservatism that significantly hindered the adoption of new technologies. Likewise, also with regard to electrical engineering and chemicals industries, Britain seemed unable to compete with its two main competitors, accentuating more and more the slowdown of the extraordinary expansion it had reached in the mid-eighteenth century with the Industrial Revolution.[40] Musson specifies that this stagnation of the British economy is accentuated by its comparison with the German and American ones, whose productivity growth rates exceeded the British ones. Britain, thus, was undoubtedly showing lacks within the industrial sector, production, and productivity.[41] Musson further suggests that the diminishing rate of growth of British investment and productivity was due to the decrease in British export, whilst "foreign competitors, such as Germany and the United States, were increasing their

[38] *Ibid*., p. 206.
[39] Ashworth, W., "The Late Victorian Economy", p. 23.
[40] Musson, A. E., "The Great Depression in Britain, 1873-1896: A Reappraisal", p. 207.
[41] *Ibid*., pp. 209-10.

production and productivity at a much greater rate."[42] Moreover, the strengthening of rivalry in overseas markets forced the British manufacturers to focus more on the internal market, given the fear of not being able to cope with a "competition bolstered by tariffs and bounties"[43].

Considering all these challenges, Britain was heavily affected in its economic position that changed radically: "the reaping of maximum benefit from [international matters] was hampered […], especially from the mid-eighties to the end of the century"[44], mainly due to the emergence of foreign competition. Also the agricultural sector was severely affected and the British trading policy shifted from free trade, which dominated the majority of the nineteenth century, back to imperialism and the "hope of finding salvation in colonial markets"[45].

### 1.3 The Breakdown of the Victorian Social Order

Victorian society is generally regarded as a conventional society, characterized by straight rules, prescribed roles and codes of behaviour. Queen Victoria herself, whose reign was marked by solidity and stability, "encouraged her own identification with the qualities we associate with the adjective

[42] *Ibid*., p. 213.
[43] *Ibid.*, p. 227.
[44] Ashworth, W., p. 27.
[45] Musson, A. E., p. 228.

[*Victorian*] – earnestness, moral responsibility, domestic propriety"[46], making Victorian society a large family based on respectability and decency.

Nevertheless, if on one hand the first half of Queen Victoria's reign can be associated with a period of overall development, change and progress, in almost every area, on the other hand it actually concealed difficult internal social conditions as well, so much so that it can be considered a period of strong contradictions. The gap between the country's power and wealth and the conditions of its inhabitants became more and more evident: industrialization, demographic increase, economic prosperity, colonial conquests, technological and scientifical advances, factors that guaranteed optimism and confidence among the population, clashed with the harsh conditions of workers. As already mentioned, "labouring and living conditions were often nothing short of horrendous"[47] since "workers and their families in the slums of such cities as Manchester lived horribly crowded, unsanitary housing"[48]. What is even more terrifying is the fact that even children were condemned to live and work in these inhumane conditions which often resulted in premature death. The owners of mines and factories put the blame on the theory of economic liberalism, according to which such inhumane and "unregulated working conditions would ultimately benefit everyone"[49]. However, and fortunately, some improvements and solutions to this situation were put forward, though initially in vain. As Bertinetti points out, a powerful organization of workers, the Chartists, united

[46] Christ C., Robson C. (eds.), p. 1019.
[47] Bertinetti, P., *English Literature*, p. 185.
[48] Christ C., Robson C. (eds.), p. 1022.
[49] *Ibid*.

to form a working-class movement, Chartism, which lamented the harsh working conditions imposed by the industrial system and demanded reforms from Parliament that would improve them.[50] The origin of this movement's name comes from the organization 'People's Charter' that "advocat[ed] the extension of the right to vote, the use of secret balloting, and other legislative reforms"[51]. Despite the commitment and the efforts to promote their program, as well as the numerous signatures collected in favour of the petition, their requests were rejected twice in Parliament (in 1839 and 1842)[52], leading to the dissolution of the movement, in 1848, which, howsoever, paved the way to a period of reforms.[53] After the abolition of the high tariffs on imported grains, established in order to encourage the consumption of English farm products, a system of free trade was introduced, thus allowing the importation of goods with the payment of a minimal tariff. This measure aimed at avoiding periods of food shortage among the population, as it had occurred in 1845, due to bad harvests and the potato famine in Ireland[54], caused by a disease that completely destroyed its roots and leaves.

The political scenario in these years was characterized by strong contradictions as well: "English political life was marked on the one side by widespread social struggles, peaceful protests and harsh repressions, and on the other side by a fundamental stability, with a regular alternation of Tory and

[50] Bertinetti, P., p. 185.
[51] Christ C., Robson C. (eds.), p. 1022.
[52] Bertinetti, P., p. 185.
[53] Christ C., Robson C. (eds.), p. 1022.
[54] *Ibid*., pp. 1022-23.

Whig governments."[55] Both parties, in the last decades of the century, aimed at improving the working conditions, through the introduction of the Education Act (1871), concerning elementary education, and the gradual enlargement of the electorate. With the approbation of a second reform Bill (1867) – the first one (1832) was still limited – the number of voters nearly doubled and was further extended in 1884, yet leaving women excluded.[56] Despite movements which required women's emancipation, through protests and propaganda activities, and the emergence of the Suffrage Movement at the end of the century, women obtained the right to vote only after the end of the First World War.[57]

In this regard, it is impossible not to focus on the role of women in Victorian society. Though England was considered one of the freest countries in the world, women were not supposed to be free at all[58]: they were condemned to a life that left them no choice but to adapt to the social roles prescribed for them as mothers and wives, submitted to both their family and husband, relegated to the role of "angel[s] of hearth"[59]. They had to represent the embodiment of the idea of 'decorum' and of the virtues of temperance and restraint "which rigorously excluded any reference whatsoever to sexuality" [60]. As Spencer rightly argues, the woman, somehow, had been assigned a task to perform within Victorian society: "in her guises of maiden, wife, and above all

[55] Bertinetti, P., p. 186.
[56] *Ibid*.
[57] *Ibid*.
[58] Christ C., Robson C. (eds.), p. 1033.
[59] Bertinetti, P., p. 186.
[60] *Ibid*.

mother, Woman (with a capital) had been appointed the guardian of moral virtue" [61]. The home, in which women were relegated, became "the temple of a new religion"[62] which took the place of the weak Christian orthodoxy: "the religion of romantic love as the source of salvation, and of the family as a haven for all the human warmth, grace and affection that had been banished from the father's daily life in the world"[63]. Basically, the house had turned into a refuge from the external world dominated by a busy life, based on business, from which the woman was excluded, but, "as the Angel in the House, was to save Man from his own baser instincts and lead him toward heaven"[64]. Needless to say, women did not benefit from the same rights, both political and legal, as men. Besides not being allowed to vote, they could not take part in political life or hold political office, they had restricted educational and employment opportunities; married women, furthermore, could not manage their own property and could not easily divorce their husbands.[65] Spencer claims that "never in western society have gender roles been more rigid or more distinct (at least in the middle classes) than in the nineteenth century"[66]. What is even more appalling is that these differences were supported by Victorian medicine as well: doctors asserted that women were not like men since "physical distinctions between women and men were absolute"[67] and "[these] difference[s] explained [women's]

[61] Spencer, K. L., "Purity and Danger: Dracula, the Urban Gothic, and the Late Victorian Degeneracy Crisis", p. 205.
[62] *Ibid*.
[63] *Ibid*.
[64] *Ibid*.
[65] Christ C., Robson C. (eds.), pp. 1031-32.
[66] Spencer, K. L., "Purity and Danger", p. 205.
[67] *Ibid*., p. 205.

limitations – physical, moral, and intellectual – and justified their legal and social disabilities"[68].

These alleged inequalities were strongly challenged to the point of giving rise to a debate, called the 'Woman Question', which required for women the same rights and, especially, argued "for the right of married women to own properties in their own names"[69]. Hence, a series of reforms in marriage and divorce laws started to acknowledge the rights of women within marriage.[70] Moreover, educational and employment opportunities were improved: the majority of women worked as servants in the homes of the rich, but "industrial society brought unprecedent pressures"[71] and a lot of lower-class women began to work in mines, under tremendous conditions, or in the textile trade. The conditions of labour in factories and mines gradually improved, reducing the work hours and eventually excluding women from mining, though other works, as field laborers or housemaids, were not less hard.[72]

From these conditions, another contradiction of Victorian society developed, which is perhaps the most striking: if on one hand women had been assigned the role of preserving moral virtue, embodying the figure of the temperate wife and loving mother, on the other hand Victorian moralism was characterized by "the constant and massive increase in the number of prostitutes to satisfy the demands not only of the displaced males caught up in the process

[68] *Ibid*.
[69] *Ibid*.
[70] Christ C., Robson C. (eds.), p. 1032.
[71] *Ibid*., p. 1033.
[72] *Ibid*.

of industrialization, but also […] the demands of the respectable husbands of the 'angels of the hearth'".[73] In this way, Victorian gentlemen, in order to preserve their wives moral attitude, could vent their impulses and fulfil their desires with prostitutes.

During the Victorian age, religion, as well as family, was an agent of oppression that emphasized the importance of family life and, especially, of marriage: remaining unmarried was absolutely unconventional and marriage was very often associated with prestige and money. Unmarried women, therefore, had few working opportunities, often underpaid or unattractive: emigration represented one solution. The other was working as governess, confined in a household, with a poor salary and an undefined status (between servant and family member)[74]. The conception of womanhood as specifically devised for the domestic role, in which "[the woman's] role was to create a place of peace where man could take refuge from the difficulties of modern life"[75], placed heavy pressure, and oppression, on women who were somehow given a role in public life, but also a specific space to be in. [76] In John Ruskin's words, women were supposed to be "enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise – wise not for self-development, but for self-renunciation."[77]

However, in the last decades of the century, such gender distinction between men and women started to be challenged: an emancipated form of

[73] Bertinetti, P., pp. 186-7.
[74] Christ C., Robson C. (eds.), p. 1033.
[75] *Ibid*., p. 1034.
[76] *Ibid*.
[77] Ruskin, J., "Of Queens' Gardens" in *Sesame and Lilies*, Cornhill, London: Smith Elder & co. 65, 1865, pp. 149-50, quoted in *Ibid*.

womanhood emerged, the "New Woman"[78], who "want[ed] higher education, striv[ed] to enter the learned professions, and even more frequently working outside home for money"[79], at least middle-class women, initially. The majority of New Women demanded the same freedom of sexual expression as men and insisted on leaving the house that had become a sort of prison.[80] To Victorian men, these requests represented "a direct threat to classic Victorian definitions of femininity"[81], as well as a denial of their womanhood, since they "challenge[d] the distinctions between women and men upon which the family – and therefore society – depended"[82], initiating a worrying threat to gender categories.

This threat, nevertheless, did not consist only in the demand for women's emancipation, but also in the emergence of two new male figures: Ledger points out that if the 'New Woman' represented a denial of femininity, likewise "the decadent and the dandy undermined the Victorians' valorization of a robust, muscular brand of British masculinity deemed to be crucial in the maintenance of the British empire"[83]. In addition, something else, in those years, caused even more scandal. Glennis Byron claims that this was "the time when society became more aware of homosexuality, when what was termed 'sexual inversion'

[78] Spencer K. L., p. 206.
[79] *Ibid*.
[80] *Ibid*.
[81] Ledger, S., "The New Woman and the Crisis of Victorianism" in *Cultural Politics at the 'Fin de Siècle'*, edited by Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 22.
[82] Spencer K. L., p. 206.
[83] Ledger, S., "The New Woman and the Crisis of Victorianism", p. 22.

first entered in public discourse"[84]. The issue of homosexuality, after the publication of *Sexual Inversion* by Havelock Ellis in 1897, instantly dominated public debates, with the consequent emergence of a "confusion of gender categories"[85] and, thus, an undermining of the social order that, according to anthropologists, "depends precisely on the clarity of such distinctions [between male and female, natural and unnatural]."[86]

Such fixed distinctions can also be applied to the broader social context of late Victorian England which can be defined as a dualistic universe: "what is inside is good, what is outside is bad"[87]. Mary Douglas, in this regard, notes interesting and significant similarities between witchcraft societies and the pollution fears pervading late-Victorians: "they manifested the same fears of pollution from outsiders, the same suspicion of deviants as traitors, and the same exaggerated estimation of what was at stake – in short, the same social dynamics as more traditional witchcraft societies"[88]. In witchcraft societies, the group members are forced to conform in a society whose classification system is not effective and has gaps, since it does not encompass the actual variety. Similarly, middle-class Victorians were pressed to conform to a model that was not so clear any more: "the old consensus on the central distinctions of their society – on which distinctions were indeed central, and how those distinctions were to be

[84] Byron, G., "Gothic in the 1890s", p. 194.
[85] *Ibid*.
[86] Spencer K. L., p. 206.
[87] *Ibid*., p. 207.
[88] Discussion drawn from Mary Douglas's *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*, New York: Random House, 1972, in *Ibid.*

defined and maintained – was breaking down"[89]. This crumbling inevitably provoked a strong debate: on one hand, those who aimed at consolidating the "'purity' of the inside by expelling as traitors those who breached the boundaries"[90]; on the other hand, those who strived for change, such as non-traditional women and homosexuals, demanding to "let some of the 'outside' in"[91] and to enlarge cultural boundaries.

Moreover, similarly to witchcraft societies, the Victorians had also problems within their own group: the leadership was unstable and the roles were not clearly defined, "neither traditionalists or 'rebel' forces could take complete command"[92]: the former, despite having the numbers and power, were not as educated, influential and exposed to the public as the latter. This dispute degenerated into the need to find a scapegoat, both as a group (Slavs, Jews, Orientals, non-traditional women, homosexuals, etc.) and as individuals[93], for example Oscar Wilde who underwent two trials, in 1895, because he was considered and "publicly disgraced as a sexual deviant"[94].

[89] *Ibid*.
[90] *Ibid*.
[91] *Ibid*.
[92] *Ibid*., p. 208.
[93] *Ibid*.
[94] Ledger, S., p. 29.

## 1.4 Cultural Anxieties of an "Age of Transition"[95]: Scientific Discoveries, Fear of Degeneration and Change in the Role of Art

"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."[96] During British colonial expansion, while missionaries began to spread Christianity in India, Asia and Africa, internal disputes about religious beliefs emerged. The Church of England was tripartite: Low Church (Evangelical), Broad Church and High Church. The Evangelicals became a powerful minority at the beginning of the nineteenth century thanks to their similarities, concerning religion and life, with the Dissenters, a large group external to the Church of England.[97] Basically, the Evangelicals gave special importance to the spiritual conversion of the individual into a moral Christian life and supported a severe Puritan moral code. The High Church was considered the 'Catholic' side of the Church that called attention to some relevant aspects, such as authority, ritual, and tradition. The Broad Church remained external from the controversies dividing the Evangelicals from the High Church: it promoted an extensive inclusive approach of the Church and was, therefore, more open to accepting various and different forms of thinking.[98] Utilitarianism continued to maintain the influence it had before the Victorian period: as a rationalist philosophy, it argued that "all

[95] Assertion by John Stuart Mill (1831), quoted in Christ C., Robson C. (eds.), *The Norton Anthology*, p. 1019.
[96] *Ibid*., p. 1028.
[97] *Ibid*., pp. 1025-6.
[98] *Ibid*., p. 1026.

human beings seek to maximize pleasure and minimize pain"[99], so an action can be considered morally correct if "it provides the greatest pleasure to the greatest number"[100]. Though at the basis of political and social reforms, this philosophy did not manage to focus on the spiritual needs of each individual. [101] The son of one of its disciples, John Stuart Mill, explained in his *Autobiography* (1873) how being raised according to utilitarian principles led him to be incapable of feeling and to a spiritual crisis: "that harsh lesson, branded upon him from infancy, was the doom of Mill"[102].

The challenge to religious beliefs gradually transformed into an extensive debate causing "a crisis in convictions and certainties which had subsisted for centuries"[103]: in particular, "science actually bore much of the responsibility for challenging the stability and integrity of the human subject"[104], since scientific discoveries made by English scientists had such a huge impact that appeared to be threatening and damaging to the certainties and beliefs that had been consolidated up until then.[105]

A fundamental scientific contribution, which intensified the weakening of many convictions, was made by the English biologist Charles Darwin (1809-1882). In his most famous treatise *The Origin of Species* (1859) is contained the revolutionary theory according to which species evolve over time by a process

[99] *Ibid*.
[100] *Ibid*.
[101] *Ibid*.
[102] Mill, J. S., "Autobiography of John Stuart Mill", London, 1873, in *The Edinburgh Review* 139 (283), 1874, p. 95.
[103] Bertinetti, P., p. 189.
[104] Byron, G., "Gothic in the 1890s", p. 189.
[105] Christ C., Robson C. (eds.), pp. 1026-27.

of natural selection: the individuals which are best adapted to, survive (survival of the fittest) and can reproduce, making their genes become dominant. Such statement was interpreted and criticized in many ways: on one hand, the notion of evolution was associated with that of progress and, thus, accepted by the majority of the scientific world; on the other hand, it was openly opposed by the clergy, since Darwin's theories completely excluded the presence of any God and "conflicted not only with the concept of creation derived from the Bible but also with long-established assumptions of the values attached to humanity's special role in the world"[106], thus "reduc[ing] humankind even further into 'nothingness'"[107]. Even more destabilizing was Darwin's later treatise *The Descent of Man* (1871) in which he explicitly blurs the boundaries between mankind and the animal kingdom, asserting that "human and apes [have] a common ancestor"[108] and that also civilized Europeans, like primitive peoples, derive from the ape-like ancester.[109] Such theories had a shocking impact and aroused many fears, based on the logical Darwinian assumption that "if something can evolve, it can also devolve"[110] or, more specifically, "for if humans [can] evolve, […] they [can] also *devolve* or degenerate, both as nations and as individuals"[111].

[106] *Ibid*., p. 1027.
[107] *Ibid*.
[108] Spencer K. L., p. 204.
[109] *Ibid*.
[110] Byron, G., p. 189.
[111] Spencer K. L., p. 204.

Such a blurred line between man and beast stirred up an unprecedented fear of degeneracy, in particular "national 'degeneracy'"[112] that, according to Spencer, further worsened the already difficult situation of the British empire at the end of the century[113]: the British army was repeatedly defeated by the Dutch during the Boer War, but what was even more worrying is the fact that "the recruiting campaign discovered the physical inadequacies of the men from London's East-End slums, who were alarmingly undersized, frail, and sickly"[114].

Important discoveries concerning the issue of degeneration were made by the Italian physician, anthropologist and jurist Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), the father of criminal anthropology. His scientific method to study crimes aimed at demonstrating that criminality is inherited: habitual criminals can thus be identified by specifical physical features and defects, "monkeylike anomalies"[115], "small cerebellum"[116], evidence of the fact that "criminals are born with evil inclinations […] [and] [these] cranial abnormalities in [them] […] correspond to the characteristics observed in normal skulls of the colored and inferior races."[117] Therefore, it can be argued that, starting from Darwinian discoveries, the Victorians began to be confused, with no more certainties and

[112] *Ibid*.
[113] *Ibid*.
[114] *Ibid*.
[115] Lombroso, C., *Criminal Man*, translated and with a new introduction by Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006 (first edition 1876), p. 45.
[116] *Ibid*., p. 48.
[117] *Ibid*.

"infinitely isolated"[118]: hence, it cannot be denied the fact that "by the 1860s the great iron structures of their philosophies, religions, and social stratifications were already beginning to look dangerously corroded to the more perspicacious"[119].

Not even the intellectual and literary fields were exempt from the radical changes brought about by the turn of the century. During the Victorian period, literacy had a significant expansion, enough to become almost universal by the end of the nineteenth century, thanks to the technological advances in printing that favoured the exponential increase of periodicals, books and newspapers throughout the century.[120] Books still remained quite expensive and, thus, affordable for middle-class readers, yet almost inaccessible to the rest of the readership, the average middle-class and lower-middle-class.[121] The subsequent development of private libraries, or circulating libraries, revealed to be helpful in order to make books available at reasonable prices, though some of these libraries decided to limit the purchases due to implicit censorship.[122] Moreover, novels were published in serial form, thus allowing the author to revise or change some aspects of the plot or of the characters, based on the readership's reaction, and also encouraging its curiosity between the end of one episode and the publication of the following. Furthermore, the publication on instalments stimulated "a distinctive sense of a community of readers, a sense encouraged

[118] Christ C., Robson C. (eds.), p. 1027.
[119] *Ibid*., pp. 1027-28.
[120] *Ibid*., p. 1034.
[121] Bertinetti, P., p. 190.
[122] *Ibid*.

by the practice of reading aloud in family gatherings"[123]. To the Victorian readership, the novel and the novelist covered a fundamental role: the Victorian novel was expected to be "the critical voice of the 19th-century British society"[124], so it was not only meant for entertainment, but also for instruction and information. It represented as well the most adequate form to depict the struggle between the various desires of the hero or heroine within the social conditions of the time. In particular, the heroine's pursuit of self-awareness was often regarded as the typical condition of humankind, and the novel perfectly "portray[ed] woman's struggle for self-realization in the context of the constraints imposed upon her"[125]. The main constraint was, undoubtedly, that of marriage which still remained an important theme in novels, together with love, though approached differently: "[…] marriage [was] no longer the goal toward which everything inevitably tends"[126], rather it became a sort of "fictional structure and an institution that would give women power, control, authority, security, respect, and, most significantly, agency."[127] The novelist, on his/her part, was supposed to be in dialogue with the reader, to embody a social and didactic role aligned with the moral one that was required from his/her own novel.[128] The role of the novelist and his/her relationship with the readership became even more meaningful in the passage from the publication of the book

[123] *Ibid*.
[124] *Ibid*., p. 189.
[125] Christ C., Robson C. (eds.), p. 1036.
[126] Larson, J., *Ethics and Narrative in the English Novel, 1880-1914*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 44.
[127] Teresa Magnum, *Married, Middlebrow, and Militant: Sarah Grand and the New Woman Novel*, 1998, p. 16, quoted in *Ibid*.
[128] Bertinetti, P., p. 189.

in instalments to the publication of the entire volume: the novelist became an actor who needed to obtain the public approval and whose primary aims were enchantment and entertainment, through the direct relationship with the public.[129]

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, women writers represented, in an unprecedent way, "not figures on the margins but major authors"[130], such as the widely known Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters and George Eliot. Albeit using different styles and subjects, Victorian prose writers were supposed to convince the reader and make him/her aware of the fact that the world and the society were inevitably changing[131]: generally, they resorted to the technique of the omniscient narrator who, being external to the narration but deeply aware of the thoughts of the characters, "moves and guides [them] with the authority of a creator God, judges them, rewards or punishes them […], to directly address the reader with observations of a philosophical, moral or simply commonsensical type"[132]. Many Victorian authors, though in different ways, claimed the inclusion of literature within a scientific and materialistic culture, arguing that "culture – the intensely serious appreciation of great works of literature – provides the kind of immanence and meaning that people once found in religion"[133].

[129] *Ibid*., pp. 190-1.
[130] Christ C., Robson C. (eds.), p. 1037.
[131] *Ibid*., p. 1040.
[132] Bertinetti, P., p. 189.
[133] Christ C., Robson C. (eds.), p. 1041.

Victorian poetry as well is worth of mention, since to nineteenth-century readers poetry represented "literature's highest pinnacle"[134]. The presence of poetry during the Victorian Age was pervasive and perceived as floating between post-Romanticism and pre-Modernism.[135] Though striving for innovation, the Romantic influences could not easily be concealed: "the Victorians often re[wrote] Romantic poems with a sense of belatedness and distance"[136], yet failing to maintain the confidence in the power of the imagination that strongly characterized their predecessors.[137] Victorian poetry addressed both past and present, conveying the nostalgia for the medieval world, but also dealing with the major concerns of the present society, as prose did.[138] This double interest was best exemplified by a group of artists, gathered in 1848, called The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, whose name is clearly inspired by their appreciation for Italian painting before Raphael which they considered absolutely perfect. This group firmly rejected the ugliness of the modern world, corrupted by industrialism, and preferred to refuge in the purity of medieval art, strictly attached to nature. Their poetry, thus, adopted medieval forms, such as the ballad, and medieval subjects. Moreover, their reflection on art became dominant within the cultural scenario of the end of the century: the pursuing of "Art for Art's sake".[139] In this way, art has no other purpose than the representation of pure beauty and is disengaged from any moral, political,

[134] *Ibid*., p. 1037.
[135] Bertinetti, P., p. 210.
[136] Christ C., Robson C. (eds.), p. 1038.
[137] *Ibid*.
[138] Bertinetti, P., p. 211.
[139] *Ibid*., pp. 216-7.

religious or utilitarian aim. Therefore, the poet is no longer to be considered "the [sage] with something to teach"[140], covering a sort of public role, but in the second part of the century "distance[s] [himself/herself] from [his/her] public by embracing an identity as a bohemian [rebel]"[141].

Furthermore, some late Victorian writers, such as Oscar Wilde and Robert Louis Stevenson, started to depict the Victorian age as "an age of hypocrisy and duality"[142]: in their most famous novels clearly emerges the duplicity of the age, or, better to say, "the dichotomy between appearance and reality"[143] of a society that on one side claimed to appear respectable and morally admirable, but on the other concealed a harsh reality of depravation, oppression and exploitation.

As the turn of the century approached, it became more and more evident, under any point of view, that the period that once characterized the heyday of Britain was coming to an end, bringing with it a sense of confusion, bewilderment and anxiety but, at the same time, opening the doors to a new modern era, as proclaimed by Max Nordau: "one epoch of history is unmistakably in its decline and another is announcing its approach."[144]

[140] Christ C., Robson C. (eds.), p. 1039.
[141] *Ibid*., p. 1040.
[142] Killeen, J., *Gothic Literature (1825-1914)*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009, p. 4.
[143] Bertinetti, P., p. 223.
[144] Nordau, M., *Degeneration* [eBook reader], London: William Heinemann, 1898 (original edition 1895), p. 29 of 1130, chap. I, quoted in Byron, G., p. 186.

# Chapter 2

## *Dracula*: a Modern Narrative and Quintessential Gothic Novel

This chapter aims at providing a general introduction to the Gothic genre, starting from its origins and to eventually discuss the novel *Dracula* (1897). Opening with the origin of the term Gothic and the emergence of Gothic fiction in the eighteenth century, the focus will then shift to the Gothic revival of the nineteenth century and its consequent clash with the traditional realist novels, along with the Enlightenment and humanist values. It is precisely in the disruptive fin-de-siècle context that the novel *Dracula* is included: imbued with terror, fear, supernatural occurrences and ominous atmospheres, it can be considered the quintessential vampire novel, an instance of premodern narrative which strongly distances itself from the mainstream fiction of the eighteenth century, as well as "a culmination of nineteenth-century English gothic"[145], a response to both social and psychological anxieties of its time.

[145] Jackson, R., *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, 1984, p. 18, quoted in Hughes W., "Fictional Vampires in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, edited by David Punter, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2012, p. 198.

## 2.1 The Gothic Background: Historical, Architectural and Artistic Significances at the Beginning of the Eighteenth Century

Being this chapter devoted to the Gothic genre, it is necessary to begin by briefly analysing the term Gothic itself, applying it to the various fields in which it is used. According to Robert Mighall, "the term generally carried derogatory connotations, originally serving as a metonym for the Germanic and, by association, the Medieval"[146].

As a matter of fact, in the early eighteenth century, the original meaning of the adjective Gothic carried a disapproving sense and, throughout the century, it acquired a strong significance associated with a historical connotation: it started to be attributed to the Goths, the barbarian German tribes that, around the IV century B. C., inhabited the countries of the Northern Europe, and whose actions "not only proved to be instrumental in the collapse of a Roman Empire that was already in decline but also heralded the beginning of the Dark Ages, a tempestuous period of conflict and unrest"[147]. In a strict historical sense, Fred Botting points out that these Germanic tribes were proud of their heritage of democracy and freedom, since they aimed at opposing forms of tyranny that were associated with the Roman empire and, thus, the Catholic Church.[148] Consequently to their decisive role in the breakup of the Roman Empire, which was considered the greatest and most influencing civilization of the world, the

[146] Mighall, R., *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmares*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. xv.
[147] Mason, D., "Goth" in *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* (vol. 1), edited by William Hughes, David Punter and Andrew Smith, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, p. 283.
[148] Botting, F., *Gothic*, London, New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 5.

term Gothic came closer and closer to the meaning of 'barbarian': in Dr Johnson's dictionary (1775), dated back to the Edwardian Age, the word 'Goth' is defined as "one not civilised, one deficient in general knowledge, a barbarian"[149]. Given the reference to the dark Medieval Ages, the term was consequently associated to "medieval culture, and thus [to] the culture dominant in the England of the 'Dark Ages'"[150], the prototype of "all that was savage and uncouth"[151], the representation of past times considered as "barbarous or uncivilised"[152], lacking in knowledge, order, harmony and rationality: basically, the term encompassed all the opposite characteristics that can be intrinsically connected to what is classical. In this regard, David Punter clearly explains this opposition through an effective list of antithetical dichotomies that summarizes in a few lines how the Gothic and the classical differ:

> Where the classical was well ordered, the Gothic was chaotic; where simple and pure, Gothic was ornate and convoluted; where the classics offered a set of cultural models to be followed, Gothic represented excess and exaggeration, the product of the wild and the uncivilised.[153]

The Gothic, thus, seems to be suitably devised in order to undermine the pre-existing paradigms of rationality and linearity, a reaction against the social order of the eighteenth century. Indeed, Jarlath Killeen claims that "the eighteenth century is still to be considered the age of reason, dominated by neoclassical

[149] Markmann, E., *The History of Gothic Fiction*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000, p. 23.
[150] *Ibid.*, p. 22.
[151] Mason, D., "Goth" in *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* (vol. 1), p. 283.
[152] Botting, F., *Gothic*, p. 4.
[153] Punter, D., *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (vol. 1: *The Gothic Tradition*), London: Longman, 1980, p. 6.

architecture and rational conversation, in which the Gothic could exist only as a counterpart to mainstream culture"[154]. Moreover, Punter views it "as a specific reaction to certain features of eighteenth-century cultural and social life"[155]. From the historical point of view of the late eighteenth century, the Gothic can be considered both as a national and transnational phenomenon: it spread throughout the whole of Europe, as a response to the main cultural and social turmoil, such as the French Revolution (1789) which eventually led to the "crisis of 'reason', understood as a means of explaining and understanding reality as a whole, as well as a timeless aesthetic sensitivity."[156]

Concerning the architectural and artistic field, the term Gothic indicates something lacking a definite style or, somehow, not harmonious, if compared to the classical. Punter points out that "it was used to refer to medieval architecture, principally ecclesiastical, from about the twelfth and the sixteenth centuries"[157]. What was associated with the Middle Ages, "to the Classical mind […] meant brutish architecture and intellectual stagnation."[158] Consequently, any deviation from uniformity and symmetry, the prototypical features of neoclassicism, was shown as a deformity belonging to a barbaric age, characterized by the lack of taste and order. According to Botting, the differences between classical and Gothic architecture were strongly emphasized by the eighteenth-century critics:

> Comparisons between Gothic and classical architecture served only to display the superiority of the latter. Joseph Addison, for example, praised the great

[154] Killeen, J., *Gothic Literature (1825-1914)*, pp. 3-4.
[155] Punter, D., *The Literature of Terror*, p. 403.
[156] Billiani, F., "European Gothic" in *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* (vol. 1), p. 219.
[157] Punter, D., p. 8.
[158] Mighall, R., *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction*, p. xv.

> and amazing form of the Pantheon in Rome and contrasted it with the meanness he found in Gothic cathedrals. Alexander Gerard, in his *Essay on Taste* (1764), denied Gothic structures any claim to beauty because they lacked proportion and simplicity.[159]

Basically, it can be stated that the eighteenth-century culture reflected and constructed the idea of itself on the rules and uniformity of composition belonging to the neoclassical style: "architecture told the story of its development and represented its values"[160]. What did not conform to the rules and deviated from the standards of perfection, what was perceived as irregular, exaggerated, chaotic and not ordered was rejected and dismissed[161], and Gothic architecture precisely incorporated such characteristics, considered disdainful, "with its 'nonsensical insertions of marbles impertinently placed; [its] turrets and pinnacles thick set with monkeys and chimeras … and other incongruities'"[162].

The Gothic was configured as the decadence of the Enlightenment, the rejection of neoclassical aesthetics in favour of mysterious and gloomy atmospheres, the "evocation of strong emotions of terror and horror, eccentricities, and extravagances in portraying both characters and settings."[163]

[159] Botting, F., pp. 30-1.
[160] *Ibid.*, p. 31.
[161] *Ibid*.
[162] John Evelyn's comment on Gothic architecture, quoted in Mighall, R., p. xv.
[163] Billiani, F., "European Gothic", p. 219.

## 2.2 The Mid-Eighteenth Century Literary and Architectural Gothic Revival

If at the beginning of the eighteenth century the Gothic was considered crude, barbaric, backward, without style or taste, as completely opposed to order and neoclassical purity, from the middle of the century, it started to be reconsidered in a definitely more positive way.

The term Gothic, once connoting "the unfavourable, the unhappy and ruined"[164], began to be considered not as something to be despised, but rather as something to be re-evaluated and re-appreciated as the bearer of idealized past values which have now disappeared: "the gothic is then a conscious anachronism, presented not as an error of taste or a corrupting influence, but as a positive attribute"[165]. Consequently, the past is no longer to be dismissed, but to be revived: "The past is re-valued and found to be superior to the present, a process that wears a nostalgic aspect"[166].

Punter points out how it is precisely within this context that all the negative attributes, which for a long time had been associated with the Gothic, gradually acquire a more positive connotation, thanks to a shift in cultural values, primarily affecting the artistic, literary and cultural fields:

> It is not possible to put a precise date on this change, but it was one of huge dimensions which affected whole areas of the eighteenth-century culture – architectural, artistic and literary; for what happened was that the medieval, the primitive, the wild, became invested with positive value in and for itself. Gothic stood for the old-fashioned as opposed to the modern; the barbaric as

[164] Markmann, E., *The History of Gothic Fiction*, p. 23.
[165] *Ibid*.
[166] *Ibid*.

> opposed to the civilised; crudity as opposed to elegance; […] gothic was the archaic and the pagan, that was prior to, or was opposed to, or resisted the establishment of civilised values and a well-regulated society.[167]

This Gothic past could not be ignored any more: the medieval gothic culture and the re-evaluation of its meaning in the eighteenth century conferred no little relevance to gothic history and culture. Markmann argues, indeed, how medieval gothic culture did not completely disappear from the mentality of the people who lived in the eighteenth century: "There were a number of fields where [it] was still alive to eighteenth-century people, for instance architecture, political theory, religion, literature and popular customs"[168]. Already during the years of the English civil war, the 1640s, political theorists, who sympathized for the republic, identified the old monarchical past as despotic and barbaric, while republicanism was associated with neoclassicism and, in particular, Ancient Rome and Greece.[169] In this regard, writers such as Harrington claimed that "ancient wisdom and civilization had been destroyed in Europe by Gothic barbarians, and that England's civil wars had liberated her from the Gothic forms of government"[170]. However, in 1660, with the Restoration of monarchy, republican neoclassicism was strongly opposed in favour of the revaluation of the Gothic tradition: many remarkable political philosophers argued that the English constitution was a mixture of barbarous and modern elements, "the product of progressive evolution. It preserved elements of the simple and the barbarous gothic system of government, while at the same time revisiting and

[167] Punter, D., p. 6.
[168] Markmann, E., p. 23.
[169] *Ibid*., pp. 24-5.
[170] *Ibid*., p. 25.

refining the laws for a modern and politer era."[171] The barbaric and ancient elements, thus, were not to be repudiated and deprecated, rather they had to be esteemed and valued as symbols of the historical foundations of the constitution.[172] Therefore, this reappraisal and revaluation of the Gothic culture is completed by the eighteenth-century reawakening of a collection of cultural values and customs, considered as 'antiquarian'[173], yet "possess[ing] a fire, a vigour, a sense of grandeur which was sorely needed in English culture"[174].

According to Punter, many writers started to emphasize the importance of the reappraised Gothic qualities: to them, this was the right time to revive whole areas of English cultural history that had hitherto been disregarded, and the only way to do this was through a revival of the Gothic past.[175] A defence of the Gothic from the neoclassical criticism was launched by Bishop Richard Hurd, who was also an intellectual and author of *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762). To him, the Gothic corresponded to the high medieval values of heroism, loyalty, gallantry and chivalry, pillars of medieval society and literary production[176]: "The ages, we call barbarous, present us with many a subject of curious speculation. What for instance, is more remarkable than the Gothic Chivalry? or than the spirit of Romance, which took its rise from that singular institution."[177] Hurd proceeds with his 'apology' of the Gothic also arguing that

[171] *Ibid*.
[172] *Ibid*., pp. 25-6.
[173] *Ibid*., p. 23.
[174] Punter, D., p. 6.
[175] *Ibid*.
[176] Markmann, E., *The History of Gothic Fiction*, p. 23
[177] Hurd, R., *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, 1762, quoted in *Ibid*.

Gothic romances seduced many famous and renowned Romance writers, such as Milton, Ariosto and Tasso, precisely for their non-observance of the established aesthetic rules. As a matter of fact, these writers were captured by the genius of those romances, an aesthetic experience which goes beyond the schemes, seeking for excess and clashing with rationality:

> The greatest geniuses of our own and foreign countries, such as Ariosto and Tasso in Italy, and Spenser and Milton in England, were seduced by these barbarities of their forefathers; were even charmed by the Gothic Romances. Was this caprice and absurdity in them? Or, may there be not something in the Gothic Romance peculiarly suited to the views of a genius, and to the ends of poetry?[178]

What had long been dismissed as rude, barbaric and backward, now revealed itself as "a source of power"[179], an invisible power for a society, based on order, purity and harmony, which could not accept any deviation from certain aesthetic precepts, yet a fascinating power for those 'forefathers' Hurd refers to. Basically, he criticizes the neoclassical stereotypes of taste, the emphasis put on imitation, morality and rationality, claiming that "poetical truth […] lies beyond the bounds of natural order [and that] poetry should indulge imagination and range in […] worlds that are associated with forms of nature that evoke a sense of wonder."[180]

However, although the Gothic past still continued to be represented as antithetical to the Enlightenment culture,

---

[178] Hurd, R., *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, quoted in Punter, D., *The Literature of Terror*, p. 7.
[179] *Ibid*.
[180] Hurd, R., *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, quoted in Botting, F., *Gothic*, p. 38.

> the events, settings, figures and images began to be considered in their own merits rather than as neoclassical examples of poor taste. Gothic style became the shadow that hunted neoclassical values, running parallel and counter to its ideas of symmetrical form, reason, knowledge and propriety. Shadows, indeed, were among the foremost characteristics of gothic works […]. Darkness, metaphorically, threatened the light of reason with what it did not know. Gloom cast perceptions of formal order and unified design into obscurity.[181]

The British Gothic revival, which flourished in the second half of the eighteenth century, can be analysed more clearly by focusing on each of the four main fields in which it manifested: the first three are strictly literary, concerning the rediscovery of the ancient British heritage, ballads and English medieval poetry, whereas the last one deals with the reappraisal of medieval architecture, pioneered by Horace Walpole. In particular, Botting argues that "it was literary works that provided the impulse for the new taste, [since] antiquarianism, the vogue for the Graveyard school of poetry and intense interest in the sublime were significant features of the cultural environment that nurtured the Gothic revival."[182]

Within the literary rediscovery of an ancient, truly British heritage, Punter includes authors such as Thomas Gray, James Macpherson and Thomas Percy.[183] Their form of poetry revealed to be imbued of emotion, irrationality and spontaneity, characteristics completely discordant with the measured and controlled language of neoclassical poetry, enough to be included within the phenomenon of 'sensibility', which spread in the second half of the eighteenth

[181] *Ibid*., p. 32.
[182] *Ibid*.
[183] Punter, D., p. 7.

century.[184] Moreover, their poetry played a fundamental role in the emergence of the following Romantic sensibility, as well as of its extreme version of celebration of the emotions after the age of reason, represented by the 'Gothicism': "For the next generation of poets, the Romantics, [this spontaneous type of poetry] acted as an invitation to push further forward and to throw off the neoclassical inheritance in its entirety"[185]. The poets of sensibility emphasized the importance of man's capacity to feel and man's more decentralized position in the world: man is capable of feeling benevolence for his fellows and is intrinsically aimed at the pursuit of happiness, not only his own, but also that of others, as argued by the famous Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776)[186].

Thomas Gray (1716-1771), in particular, represented a model and was very appreciated by contemporary writers. His masterpiece of melancholic sensibility *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751), written in memory of his deceased friend Richard West, is considered the milestone of 'grave poetry', an important component of pre-Romanticism[187], which appraised dark, gloomy and ominous atmospheres. Together with other poets, such as Edward Young and Robert Blair, Gray was a member of the 'Graveyard Poets' who meditated on man's mortal destiny and on death, "paint[ing] the gloomy horrors of the tomb."[188] According to them, "night gave free reign to imagination's

[184] Bertinetti, P., *English Literature. A Short History*, pp. 140-3.
[185] *Ibid*., p. 143.
[186] *Ibid*., p. 141.
[187] *Ibid*.
[188] *Ibid.*

unnatural and marvellous creatures, while ruins testified to a temporality that exceeded rational understanding and human finitude."[189] Basically, their kind of poetry encompassed everything that was rejected by rational and mainstream culture, topics that were almost avoided or ignored, such as death, night ghosts, graves and churchyards. Besides being a graveyard poet, Gray regarded himself as an important representative within ancient Welsh poetry[190], as the author of *The Bard* (1757): this ode allowed him to include his poetry in the category of the Sublime which confers an important role to savage and violent nature as a source of strong emotions, such as reverential awe and terror.[191] Bertinetti, in this regard, points out that in Grey's *Bard* the notion of the Sublime is displayed as "the celebration of the primitive, the spontaneous, the 'natural'"[192], the main characteristics of Romantic sensibility, as well as opposed to the paradigms of neoclassical poetry.

James Macpherson (1736-1796) covered an important role in the rediscovery of the ancient British heritage, as he translated a Gaelic fragment he published in 1762, presenting it as a translation of *Ossian* poems, a fabrication consisting in a series of poems with epic aim that referred to a Gothic, ancient past. Gaelic poetry, therefore, began to be considered as "the sublime manifestation of natural poetical genius"[193] and the starting point for a new kind of poetry.

[189] Botting, F., p. 32.
[190] Punter, D., p. 7.
[191] Bertinetti, P., p. 142.
[192] *Ibid.*
[193] *Ibid*., p. 143.

Thomas Percy (1729-1811) was appreciated for his translation in 1770 of *Northern Antiquities*, by P. H. Mallet, through which he aimed at "reaquant[ing] its readers with the ancient history of modern Europe."[194]

The second literary field involved in the Gothic revival is that of ballads. Here again one can include Percy with his important collection *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, published in 1765. This collection contained old songs, ballads and poems[195] and seemed to reintroduce and give new life to the form of 'folk-poetry' that paved the way for many ballads, namely the long ballad *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1797), by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.[196]

Concerning the area of English medieval poetry within the Gothic revival, one can encompass the works of Geoffrey Chaucer (*c*. 1340-1400) who, according to many scholars, is almost as remarkable as Shakespeare within English poetry.[197] His tales, close to the romance genre, perfectly depicted the lifestyle of the medieval world[198], and have been re-edited by Thomas Tyrwhitt in 1775-78.[199] In addition, Botting argues that "Shakespeare and Spenser were considered to be the inheritors of a tradition of romantic writing that harked back to the Middle Ages."[200] As a matter of fact, also the most important works of Edmund Spenser (1552-1599), great appreciator of Chaucer and of the Elizabethans, now began to be re-evaluated: Spenser deeply esteemed the

[194] Punter, D., p. 7.
[195] Bertinetti, P., p. 143.
[196] Punter, D., p. 7.
[197] Bertinetti, P., p. 11.
[198] *Ibid*., p. 13.
[199] Punter, D., p. 7.
[200] Botting, F., p. 35.

ancients, the classics and Latin poetry and was considered "as the writer who had brought English poetry to a level equal to that of the greatest poetry of any age or country"[201], "the English poets' poet"[202]. This new kind of poetry represented an instance of "a more imaginative form of literary creation [characterized by] wildness of natural scenery, marvellous figures and lyrical style [that] became signs of a re-evaluation of writing which privileged inventiveness and imagination over imitation and morality."[203] The Elizabethan culture succeeded in showing its greatness and originality through the theatre, the bearer of innovations, such as special effects and the 'blank verse', which removed the rhyme from the dramatic communication.[204] Moreover, in the first half of the sixteenth century, the interest in classical culture became so influential that it was also echoed in the theatre, with the recital of Latin texts, the translation of the comedies of Terence and Plautus and the tragedies of Seneca that rapidly represented models to be followed.[205]

Not only the Gothic revival manifested its effects within the literary field through the reappraisal of the ancient and medieval British tradition: also from the architectural point of view, the late eighteenth century disclosed a shift in taste, with an unprecedented interest in Gothic and medieval architecture, previously considered the quintessence of backwardness and incivility. During the eighteenth century, indeed, "ruins and other forms of Gothic architecture

[201] Bertinetti, P., p. 25.
[202] *Ibid*., p. 24.
[203] Botting, F., p. 35.
[204] Bertinetti, P., p. 34.
[205] *Ibid.*

assumed a different and positive significance […] The Gothic revival marked a major change in attitudes towards medieval styles."[206] Moreover, according to Andrew Smith, the term 'revival', applied to architecture, created the context for the subsequent rise of the literary Gothic: it precisely refers to "a cultural reconstruction of a medieval aesthetic that was in vogue in Britain from the early eighteenth to the late nineteenth century, [based on] a somewhat fantasised version of the past (combined with a sense of 'barbaric' Germanic tribes)"[207]. As a matter of fact, the Gothic revival in architecture "spurred by a renewed and romantic interest in things medieval"[208].

The first one to reappraise Gothic architecture and to consider it as "a species of modern elegance"[209] was Horace Walpole (1717-1797). To him, the Gothic meant passions and was strictly connected to the medieval taste: "One must have taste to be sensible of the beauties of Grecian architecture; one only wants passions to feel Gothic … Gothic churches infuse superstition; Grecian, admiration."[210] What is Gothic produces effects that go beyond reason, passions and emotions that transgress moral laws, an aesthetic trend strictly connected to the sublime: while the beauty is proportioned and represented in small dimensions, the sublime is associated with "grandeur and magnificence"[211] and

[206] Botting, F., p. 32.
[207] Smith, A., *Gothic Literature*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007, p. 2.
[208] Vanon Alliata, M., *Haunted Minds: Studies in the Gothic and Fantastic Imagination*, Verona: Ombre Corte, 2017, p. 11.
[209] Walpole, H., *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, Third Edition with Additions, vol. 1. London: Printed for J. Dodsley, Pall-Mall, M.DCC.LXXXII. [1782], p. 181.
[210] *Ibid*., p. 183.
[211] Botting, F., p. 3.

evokes "excessive emotion"[212]; more precisely, the Gothic not only transgresses the canons of aesthetics, but also develops strong emotional effects on the beholders who are not relaxed, but rather excited towards something that "[chills] their blood"[213], maintaining their nerves in constant tension. As the most remarkable theorist of the sublime Edmund Burke (1729-1797) argues, the effect of the sublime in its highest degree is that of astonishment: "[…] astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror."[214] The causes of the sublime – vastness, darkness, infinite, shapeless, limitless objects, without proportion – provoke this suspension of motions, an inexpressible feeling of both pain and delight, mixed with anxiety and fear, which ultimately triggers terror in men's bosom: "terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime"[215], it is what makes men feel diminished in size and, thus, vulnerable, seeking for self-preservation, given the strong fear of something so beyond their comprehension that cannot be understood, nor controlled.

In architectural terms, the irregularity and vastness of Gothic buildings represent the vastness of the mind itself: "A Gothic cathedral raises ideas of grandeur in our minds, by its size, its height, its awful obscurity, its strength, its antiquity, and its durability."[216] The large dimensions, height and darkness

[212] *Ibid*., p. 4.
[213] *Ibid*.
[214] Burke, E., *The Sublime and Beautiful. By Edmund Burke, Esq. With an Introductory Discourse Concerning Taste, and Other Additions*, Part 2, Sect. 1, «Of the passion caused by the Sublime», Oxford: British Library, 1796, p. 55.
[215] *Ibid*., Part 2, Sect. 2, «Terror», p. 56.
[216] Hugh Blair, quoted in Botting, F., *Gothic*, p. 59.

symbolize, indeed, the world that has no limits, and as the world is infinite, so is the mind, too.

The most extraordinary example of Gothic revival in architecture is certainly Horace Walpole's architectural project Strawberry Hill, an estate near London he purchased in 1747 and remodelled, making it a sort of Gothic castle in miniature: "Adding towers, turrets, battlements, arched doors, windows, and ornaments of every description, he created the kind of spurious medieval architecture that survives today mainly in churches and university buildings"[217]. This building represented the perfect mixture of both Gothic and medieval elements, enough to be considered a parody of Gothic architecture, though Walpole actually had not a parody in mind. Matthew M. Reeve observes the disharmonious and disconnected reminiscence of medieval architecture displayed by the building:

> Strawberry Hill mirrors the additive, ramshackle building patterns of medieval architecture, with ornament of different periods and dates, seemingly disconnected spatial volumes, and varying floor levels […] The house has often been considered a random mélange of Gothic ornament from different periods and places used out of its appropriate contexts.[218]

Strawberry Hill, which in Walpole's project was meant to be a real castle, actually appeared as an out of time pastiche, imbued with a jumble of styles: while on the outside it exhibited Gothic elements (the windows) together with the medieval ones (the towers), on the inside it imitated Gothic cathedrals, albeit

[217] Lynch, D. S., Stillinger, J., (eds.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature. The Romantic Period* (vol. D), 9th edition. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012, p. 584.
[218] Reeve, M. M., "Gothic Architecture, Sexuality, and License at Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill". *The Art Bulletin* 95 (3), 2013, p. 423.

in plaster, which Walpole exalted as an authentic repetition of the Gothic style, rather than a parody or a fake. Also Robert Miles regards the peculiar uneven style of the building as an incongruous imitation, absolutely lagging behind in time, though consciously produced:

> There is no doubt that Walpole took a deep, serious, antiquarian interest in his Gothic recreation at Strawberry Hill; but the very incongruity of its scale – never mind the papier-mâché battlements and seventeenth-century arms displayed as family artifacts from the Crusades – announce the house as a piece of theatre, an act of self-dramatization. The house is a pastiche, an imitation conscious of its irremediable belatedness.[219]

Strawberry Hill eventually became a model that fascinated tourists coming from all over and going home with the 'Gothicising' taste to be applied to their houses, too.[220]

## 2.3 Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and the Rise of Gothic Fiction

Not only Horace Walpole revealed to be first great admirer and re-appreciator of Gothic and medieval architecture, proving it in his grandiose project of Strawberry Hill, but he is also remembered as the initiator and progenitor of Gothic fiction, a sort of "trailblazer"[221] of the genre within the literary field. His best known and outstanding novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) "was recognised as the origin of this new, popular and prodigious species

[219] Miles, R., "Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis" in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, edited by David Punter, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2012, p. 103.
[220] Lynch, D. S., Stillinger, J., (eds.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature.* p. 584.
[221] *Ibid*.

of writing"[222] and widely considered as the first Gothic novel, "the source of one of the major strands of modern literary history."[223] It is important to highlight that for Walpole, the term 'Gothic', both from the literary and architectural point of view, indicated everything that could be associated with the Middle Ages and that he, indeed, concretely used as a historical background for his novel. Mighall, indeed, precises that Horace Walpole intended to set his gothic story "some time between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries"[224], therefore "it was 'Gothic' because it was 'Medieval'"[225].

Many scholars agree that "the Gothic came into being as a distinct literary genre in England during the late eighteenth century with the anonymous publication of [Walpole's novel in 1764]."[226] As a matter of fact, the first edition of this exemplar Gothic novel, published in 1764, actually was a fabrication revealing a fake origin: in the preface, the alleged translator, William Marshal, claimed to have found the manuscript, printed in Naples in 1529, in the North of England, in the library of an ancient catholic family.[227] The document, therefore, is presented as a translation of a medieval Italian story written by a monk, Onuphrio Murialto, a fictitious name for a Catholic canon of the Church of St. Nicholas in Otranto. Markmann reports the exact words written on the title-page of the first edition: "*The Castle of Otranto, a story. Translated by*

[222] Botting, F., p. 45.
[223] Markmann, E., p. 27.
[224] Walpole, Preface to the First Edition, *The Castle of Otranto*, ed. W. S. Lewis, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 3, quoted in Mighall, R., *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction*, p. xvi.
[225] *Ibid*.
[226] Vanon Alliata, M., *Haunted Minds*, p. 11.
[227] Markmann, E., p. 27.

*William Marshal, Gent. From the Original Italian of Onuphrio Murialto, Canon of the Church of St. Nicholas at Otranto*"[228]. In the preface to the second edition (1765), which was subtitled 'A Gothic Story', the fabrication is revealed and Walpole declares his attempt to unify the two kinds of romance, the ancient one (the medieval romance of chivalry, battles and crusades) and the modern one (the more realistic romance, the 'novel') of the eighteenth century. Hence, he was the first to admit that "his fictional experiment [was] a generic hybrid, a 'blend' combining two different 'kinds of Romance' […] in one work."[229] This is because Walpole was aware of the fact that in the eighteenth century the old, medieval romance was being replaced, though it did not completely disappear, by a new kind of prose fiction, that is the novel. While the medieval romance was located in a distant past, away from everyday life, the novel seemed to be closer to people's daily life, "a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written. […] [It] gives a familiar relation of such things, as pass every day before our eyes […]"[230]. The novel had no rigorous formal rules and soon became the expression of people's interior feelings, of the private self, contributing to the moral formation of the middle class.

Markmann interestingly points out that the two words 'gothic' and ' novel' are actually in opposition to each other: "While 'gothic' invokes an historical

[228] *Ibid*.
[229] Killeen, J., *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction: History, Origins, Theories*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014, p. 16.
[230] Clara Reeve (1785), quoted in *Ibid*., p. 18.

enquiry, 'novel' implicitly refers to a literary form; while 'gothic' implies the very old, the novel claims allegiance with 'the new'".[231]

Notably, since the beginning, the Gothic appeared to be a genre not totally pure and homogeneous, not absolutely detached from realism, but actually an hybrid and unstable genre, somehow encompassing and combining realism and romance: "Part of what makes the Gothic Gothic is that it is a mixture. It is a genre which absorbs and assimilates other genres."[232] Walpole, thus, in his attempt to combine the 'old' with the 'new', intended to put closer two worlds too distant from each other and apparently incompatible: as a matter of fact, the 'Gothic world' stood "at a considerable distance from the contemporary world of the eighteenth-century realist novel [as] ruled over by simple, primitive laws and conventions."[233] Moreover, the Gothic often recurs to supernatural and fantastical events that can hardly be explained rationally, yet such unspeakable occurrences delight the readers, transporting their imagination to other worlds, making their mind 'escape' from reality, even just for a few moments, "allow[ing] experiences beyond the rational."[234] This is precisely what Aristotle would call 'the cathartic release', the satisfaction produced on readers through an experience of psychological relief, triggered by strong emotions, such as pity and fear, which only Gothic novels can evoke: "By novelising the supernatural, the monstrous and the unspeakable, the gothic attempts to inscribe the passions

[231] Markmann, E., p. 17.
[232] Killeen, J., *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction*, p. 17.
[233] Punter, D., p. 10.
[234] Markmann, E., p. 21.

of fear and terror."[235] This is fundamentally the reason why the Gothic genre can vaunt its longevity: from its origin in the eighteenth century it "still shows no signs of subsiding, encompass[ing] most of fantastic fiction under a unifying motif – a preoccupation with fear and […] [the] focus on excess and passionate extremes"[236]. In this regard, also Jerrold Hogle points out that Gothic's relevance and influence over time are given by profound reasons:

> […] the longevity and power of Gothic fiction unquestionably stem from the way it helps us address and disguise some of the most important desires, quandaries, and sources of anxieties, from the most internal and mental to the widely social and cultural, throughout the history of western culture since the eighteenth century.[237]

Fundamental to point out and also connected to the ability of the Gothic to release "the powers of fancy"[238] is the way *The Castle of Otranto* was conceived and why Walpole wanted to create such a story: "I gave rein to my imagination; visions and passions chocked me"[239] he asserted in one letter, stressing the fact that he wanted to create a work of the imagination, where it could run free, following his passions in spite of rules and rationality. Even more remarkable, actually, is the starting point of the writing, the real germ of the novel, which he declares in a letter to William Cole (1765):

> […] Shall I even confess you what was the origin of this romance? I waked one morning in the beginning of last June from a dream, of which all I could recover was, that I had thought myself in an ancient castle (a very natural dream for a head filled like mine with Gothic story) and that on the uppermost

[235] *Ibid*., p. 22.
[236] Vanon Alliata, M., p. 12.
[237] Hogle, J. E., *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, New York, United States of America: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 4.
[238] Vanon Alliata, M., p. 11.
[239] Bertinetti, P., p. 144.

> bannister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armour. In the evening I sat down and began to write, without knowing in the least what I intended to say or relate. The work grew on my hands, and I grew fond of it […].[240]

Basically, this odd novel originated out of a frenetic experience triggered by a dream, or better, a nightmare, he had while he was in his mansion, surrounded by Gothic paintings: he dreamed of being in an ancient castle where he saw a gigantic armour that, in the novel, will crash onto someone, killing him, constituting, precisely, the opening scene of the story.

Themes, settings, prototypical characters, extreme passions, and the occurrence of inexplicable events mark this novel as the prototypical Gothic story:

> With its medieval trappings, curses and damsels in distress, and plethora of supernatural manifestations, starting from a gigantic helmet falling from the sky onto the son of the tyrannical prince of Otranto, the novel pioneered what would become the typical conventions, topography, sites, props, characters, and spooky effects of the Gothic.[241]

Given the importance of *The Castle of Otranto* in the inauguration of the Gothic genre, most critics agree that the term Gothic, from the literary point of view, encompasses and designates "a body of literature published between 1764, the year Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* first appeared, and 1820 […]."[242] This wide array of novels is generally marked and recognizable by some common conventions, undoubtedly introduced by Walpole's novel.

---

[240] Letter to the Reverend William Cole, 9 March 1765. *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, Vol. I: 88, in Walpole, H., *The Castle of Otranto: a Gothic Story, and, The Mysterious Mother: a Tragedy*, edited by Frederick S. Frank, Canada: Broadview Press, 2003, p. 259.
[241] Vanon Alliata, M., p. 11.
[242] Killeen, J., *Gothic Literature (1825-1914)*, p. 1.

First of all, the setting, both geographical, physical and historical: "early Gothic fiction [predilected] geographically and historically remote settings, such as Italy and Spain, [as they] are related to a well-established prejudice against the Catholic Church."[243] As a matter of fact, the geographical background of early Gothic novels is mainly represented by exotic places of Southern European countries, such as Spain, Italy or France, as Catholic countries:

> […] the use of Italy or generally southern European settings, would prove most influential as the mode developed in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Indeed, the most famous novels from this period […] are not even set in the Middle Ages, but derive their 'Gothicity' predominantly from the fact that the principal events take place in Catholic countries.[244]

Of course, this choice is determined by a specific reason that fits into the connection between Gothic and 'backwardness'. In particular, from the Protestant point of view, Catholicism was associated with corruption, superstition, abuses, arbitrary power, and passionate extremes, elements ascribable to the benighted, the backward and the barbaric, thus connectable to the Latin South. Therefore, the term Gothic, somehow, still implied a negative connotation, though culturally and semantically reversed: it initially referred to the barbaric tribes coming from the North, "which originally denoted to the Classical mind Germanic uncouthness and unreason"[245], and now, likewise, it "came to be associated with the Latin South, which from the Protestant perspective was uncivilized, unenlightened, and regressive."[246] As Botting

[243] Vanon Alliata, M., p. 12.
[244] Mighall, R., p. xvi.
[245] *Ibid*., p. xvii.
[246] *Ibid*.

points out, "manifestations of the Gothic past – buildings, songs and romances – were treated as products of uncultivated if not childish minds"[247], still not evolved, trapped in superstition, ignorance and barbarous beliefs, too distant from the civilised behaviour and the "privileged forms of cultural or artistic production that attended to the classical rules […] and conform to precepts of uniformity, proportion and order."[248]

Indeed, the early Gothic usually displays archaic, "particular settings, such as castles, monasteries, and ruins"[249], representations of the backward and uncivilized medieval past, now reappraised and intentionally chosen as the location for the development of these stories. As a matter of fact, *The Castle of Otranto* is set in a gloomy, nightmarish, labyrinthine castle, with subterrain galleries and dungeons, pervaded by a haunted aura. Concerning the *tòpos* of the castle, it is important to point out that Walpole was the very first to inaugurate this narrative convention frequently recurring in Gothic fiction. The castle represents the quintessential symbol of the feudal past, the oppressive patriarchal system, entrapment, incarceration, leading to mental and psychological disorientation and the desire to escape, recurrent motifs "always threatening to disrupt civilised values".[250] In this regard, Markmann adds a further point of interpretation dealing with politics: the castle can be symbolically connected to established authority and, thus, the monarchy's political power. However, this association can be ambivalent: if on one hand the

[247] Botting, F., p. 22.
[248] *Ibid.*
[249] Smith, A., *Gothic Literature*, p. 3.
[250] Vanon Alliata, M., p. 12.

motif of the castle is adopted in the Gothic novel as "an image of the oppressive restraint of the old order on modern innovation and change" [251], on the other, it can also symbolize a "place of refuge, where the entire community found protection and succour".[252]

Therefore, the location of Gothic novels suggests how the Gothic is concerned with the historical past, and will consequently change in the course of the centuries: "Gothic settings change […] if the location in question is perceived to harbour unreasonable, uncivilized, and unprogressive customs or tendencies"[253]. From the Southern European Catholic settings inhabiting Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Gregory Lewis' eighteenth-century Gothic novels, in the nineteenth-century Gothic fiction, the focus will shift to "urban, domestic, commercial and professional figures and locales"[254], other forms of threats replacing the uncivilized symbols of aristocracy.

Besides displaying conventional settings, early Gothic novels also encompass conventional and stereotyped characters - usually an orphan or abandoned heroine alone in a threatening world, harshly treated by her father or mother, and the recurrent presence of a powerful and manipulating villain. "The protagonist of the Gothic novel is most often a young woman who is pursued by villains of terrifying wickedness from whom she flees, and who in her flight faces every sort of real or imaginary danger […]"[255], this is precisely what

[251] Markmann, E., p. 27.
[252] *Ibid*., p. 26.
[253] Mighall, R., p. xviii.
[254] Botting, F., p. 6.
[255] Bertinetti, P., p. 144.

happens in Walpole's novel: a tyrannical villain, Manfred, becomes obsessed and starts to harass and persecute the young and helpless female protagonist, Isabella, with the bleak purpose of raping her to secure his progeny. Situation similar to those depicted by Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823) as well: her novels, also located in exotic places, ruinous castles and abbeys, mostly in Italy, represent the conventional characters of the persecutor villain who seeks to entrap the defenceless heroine, threatening her with death or rape. The villain is as threatening as he is fascinating, "the most complex and interesting character in Gothic fiction"[256]: in an attempt to achieve his own immoral goals, he pursues and manipulates other characters through lies and threats, yet not realizing the doom that awaits him. Misogyny and hierarchical power relations between the sexes are evident also in the most important novel by Matthew Gregory Lewis (1775-1818), *The Monk* (1796), set in Spain, an explicit tale of "monastic debauchery, black magic and diabolism"[257], expression of the repressive Catholic society. The protagonist, a young monk called Ambrosio, turns out to be a sadistic person: he starts to persecute a young girl, who is actually his sister, and ends up raping and killing her, revealing an appalling and groundless violence against women, aggravated by his gratification in inflicting pain on another person. In order not to be burnt alive by the Inquisition, he eventually makes a pact with the devil that condemns him to hell.[258] Therefore, it is clear that the female protagonists of these novels are frequently eroticized victims of

[256] Punter, D., p. 11.
[257] M. Cook, *Detective Fiction and the Ghost Story: The Haunted Text*, quoted in Vanon Alliata, M., *Haunted Minds*, p. 13.
[258] Bertinetti, P., p. 146.

violence and of the arbitrary, patriarchal power dictated by Catholicism. Within the female Gothic tradition, first identified in the course of the eighteenth century by the American feminist critic Ellen Moers, the female protagonists strive to challenge and subvert the gender boundaries[259]: a female gothic novel is "a novel in which the central figure is a young woman who is simultaneously persecuted victim and courageous heroine."[260] According to Botting, then, by not adhering to the gender roles assigned to them, "heroines […] could encounter not only frightening violence but also adventurous freedom."[261] Moreover, he points out that in Gothic fiction such predefined characters embody cultural anxieties: "[…] evil aristocrats, monks and nuns, fainting heroines and bandits populate the Gothic landscapes as suggestive figures of imagined and realistic threats"[262]. Hence, they not only have a function within the plot of the novel itself, but also expose the "illegitimate power and violence [that] threatens to consume the world of civilised and domestic values, […] the awful spectre of complete social disintegration in which virtue cedes to vice, reason to desire, law to tyranny."[263]

As it emerges from the plot of *The Castle of Otranto*, situations of fear, violence and persecution are paramount in Gothic fiction: evil, horror, irrationality, and passional behaviour dominate the scene, inscribed within a medieval, Catholic, superstitious context, in which victimised and defiant

[259] For a more detailed analysis of female Gothic fiction, see E. Moers, *Literary Women*, Garden City: New York, Doubleday and Co., 1976.
[260] Moers, E., *Literary Women*, p. 91.
[261] Botting, F., p. 7.
[262] *Ibid*., p. 2.
[263] *Ibid*., p. 5.

women are tormented by a mad hero-villain within the confined space of a castle or underground cells. All these peculiar motifs can only be achieved with the presence of the supernatural, the key-defining element of Gothic fiction: "a non-mimetic mode of expression, a type of romance intended to arouse terror in the reader, and a voice to ventriloquise the unspeakable"[264] by displaying fantastic, unexplainable occurrences that go beyond rationality and evade from reality. Smith interestingly observes that every Gothic text conceals a specific political condemnation of certain types of behaviour, making them emerge as 'evil': therefore, he further argues that the British Gothic of the late-eighteenth century was strongly influenced by the historical events of that period: the French Revolution, for instance, undoubtedly triggered conflicting feelings of fervour and anxiety for revolutionary ideas that somehow also transpired from the Gothic novels themselves.[265] Thus, it can be said that Gothic fiction, despite its attempt to escape from reality through the portrayal of imaginary worlds and fantastic events, is not completely disconnected from it: "Gothic narratives never [escape] from the concerns of their own times"[266], rather they are the expression of their anxieties that "[vary] according to diverse changes: political revolution, industrialisation, urbanisation, shifts in sexual and domestic organisation, and scientific discovery."[267] The bewilderment and worries deriving from such changes could only be rendered through the representation of borderline situations, imbued with fear, terror, cruelty, violence, insanity,

[264] Vanon Alliata, M., p. 11.
[265] Smith, A., p. 3.
[266] Botting, F., p. 3.
[267] *Ibid*.

pathological disorders and death. Punter, in this regard, effectively summarizes that "'Gothic' fiction is the fiction of the haunted castles, of heroines preyed on by unspeakable terrors, of the blacking lowering villain, of ghosts, vampires, monsters and werewolves"[268], literary motifs that evidently challenge the notions of rationalism and logic, typical of the Enlightenment:

> In the Gothic, as in Romanticism in general, this challenge was developed through an exploration of the feelings, desires and passions which compromised the Enlightenment project of rationality calibrating all forms of knowledge and behaviours. The Gothic gives a particular added emphasis to this through its seeming celebration of the irrational, the outlawed and the socially and culturally dispossessed.[269]

However, Mighall suggests that such differences with the Enlightenment are not an end in themselves, rather they are useful to consolidate the meaning of the Gothic which, otherwise, would not be completely understandable if not compared to its 'opposite' side:

> […] the Gothic phenomena encountered in these works only make sense from an enlightened and modern perspective. These novels do not reject the advantages of the enlightenment, modernity, and civilization in an irrational gesture of historical reversal; rather, they cling to these totems more insistently through their double recognition of the alternative. The Gothic dwells in the historical past, or identifies 'pastness' in the present, to reinforce a distance between the enlightened now and the repressive or misguided then.[270]

Therefore, it can be deduced that the Gothic provides a sort of connection between the past and the present: on one hand, it rediscovers and reappreciates other, distant worlds, awakening and spreading a strong medieval nostalgia; on

[268] Punter, D., p. 1.
[269] Hughes, W., Smith, A., "Introduction: The Enlightenment Gothic and Postcolonialism" in *Empire and the Gothic: The Politics of Genre,* edited by William Hughes and Andrew Smith, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 1.
[270] Mighall, R., p. xviii.

the other, it demonstrates in its stories, through specific motifs and conventions, how different that distant past is from the contemporary world, but also, at the same time, how much the changes of the present can be as frightening as the events of the past. Somehow, the past functions as "a mirror for the present"[271], re-proposing, in the apparently civilized and modern contemporaneity, the anxieties of a past that actually is not that far away. For this reason, the extraordinary potential of the Gothic lies in the fact that, besides subverting the paradigms of rationality, "it resonates as much with the anxieties and the fears concerning the crises and changes in the present with any terrors of the past."[272]

Needless to say, also in literature, as in architecture, the Gothic stands out strongly for its particular style. "Gothic signifies a writing of excess"[273]: logically, having to describe extreme situations, on the edge of reality, which evoke intense emotions, such as fear and terror, "it [strives] to eschew the contemporary world, the world of commerce and middle class, and so it [strives] also to avoid the language of everyday"[274]. Therefore, in order to convey such fervent excesses, the language can only be imbued with

> violent contrasts and [the] style often given to hyperbole, suspense and melodrama, [to provide] readers with vicarious but controlled satisfaction, offering them the possibility of directing outward their unconscious anxieties and repressed desires and thus experiencing a sort of cathartic release.[275]

[271] Billiani, F., "European Gothic", p. 219.
[272] Botting, F., "In Gothic Darkly: Heterotopia, History, Culture" in Punter, D. (ed.), *A Companion to the Gothic*, 2000, p. 3, quoted in *Ibid*.
[273] Botting, F., *Gothic*, p. 1.
[274] Punter, D., pp. 10-1.
[275] Vanon Alliata, M., p. 12.

Similarly to what happened in Gothic architecture, whose style exceeded aesthetic rules, significantly differing from the neoclassical one, also in literature, Gothic novels let themselves be carried away by "an over-abundance of imaginative frenzy, untamed by reason and unrestrained by conventional eighteenth-century demands for simplicity, realism or probability."[276] Exaggerated ornateness, eccentricity and extremization of passions, once again, clearly diverge from order, clarity and uniformity intrinsic to the neoclassical aesthetic paradigms: also with regard to the literary style, thus, "Gothic signified a trend based on feeling and emotion and associated primarily with the sublime."[277] Botting points out that Gothic figures are symbols of transgression, due to their aesthetical excesses that challenge reason and undermine rationality; however, he claims that transgression and excess, though at a first glance may appear dreadful and overwhelming, are actually useful to re-establish social values: going beyond the limits, both social and aesthetic, transgression redefines such limits by reinforcing their necessity. In other words, Gothic novels, by showing the threats and dangers of moral transgression through tales of insanity and violence, make the readers despise the villain and identify with the defenceless hero or heroine, unleashing a strong need for justice and social order. Hence, if at the beginning the transgression at the core of Gothic tales seems to arouse anxieties and provoke social breakdown, it eventually contributes to the rearrangement of limits[278]:

[276] Botting, F., p. 3.
[277] *Ibid*.
[278] *Ibid*., pp. 7-8.

> Good [is] affirmed in the contrast with evil; light and reason [win] out over darkness and superstition. Antitheses, made visible in Gothic transgressions, [allow] proper limits and values to be asserted at the closure of narratives in which mysteries [are] explained or moral resolutions advanced.[279]

These oppositions are what constitutes Gothic ambivalence: in order to define and encourage good, light and reason, it has first to exhibit their opposites, resulting in a dynamic in which "Gothic is an inscription neither of darkness nor of light, a delineation neither of reason and morality nor of superstition and corruption, neither good nor evil, but both at the same time."[280]

Regarding the 'impurity' of the Gothic and the consequent difficulty to categorize it whether as a 'genre', a 'domain', a 'mode', 'a discursive site', an 'area of literary space'[281], given its combination of different literary genres, it can be nevertheless encompassed under an unique motif, that is the preoccupation with worries connected to historical occurrences: the Gothic is "a type of fiction which invites readers' fears and anxieties in highly stylised mystery-tales, using a limited set of plots, settings and character types, and including an element of history."[282] Therefore, what profoundly denotes a Gothic novel, regardless of the setting, the characters and the plot, is the historical element: in other words, the setting, the characters and the plot itself become relevant in the light of the historical context in which they are inserted and which cannot be ignored: "[…] history is important because what remains constant throughout the development of the mode, and which serves as its

[279] *Ibid*., p. 8.
[280] *Ibid*., p. 9.
[281] Killeen, J., *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction*, p. 13. The author specifies that the terms used to define the Gothic are manifold and vary depending on the critic.
[282] Fiona Robertson, quoted in Killeen, J., *Gothic Literature (1825-1914)*, pp. 1-2.

defining characteristic, is the imputation of historicity, of 'Gothic-ness', regardless of immediate or calendar time."[283]

Criticised for their immorality, impropriety and absurd exaggeration, considered at times even ridiculous in their uncontrolled representation of extreme passions, Gothic novels were ambivalently assessed by the literary mainstream, especially the neoclassical one: on one hand, it was worried about the fact that their spread could produce devastating effects, aimed at undermining social stability; on the other hand, despite their association with depravity and literary and moral indecency, Gothic novels intended to propose and celebrate the values of justice, virtue and decency, albeit through a mode undeniably out of reality and apparently anomalous and exaggerated.[284] And it is precisely in this ambivalence that the originality of this genre resides: it somehow wants to transmit the anxieties of a society strongly destabilized by the social, political and economic changes of its time, trying to re-establish an order, yet conveying such an order through the destruction of any rational and moral barrier:

> "[…] Gothic fiction can be said to blur rather than distinguish the boundaries that regulated social life, and interrogate, rather than restore, any imagined continuity between past and present, nature and culture, reason and passion, individuality and family and society.[285]

If many scholars agree on the fact that the origin of the Gothic genre dates back to the publication of *The Castle of Otranto*, they also agree that another

[283] Mighall, R., p. xviii.
[284] Botting, F., pp. 45-6.
[285] *Ibid*., p. 47.

great Gothic novel, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) by Charles Robert Maturin, marked the heyday of the genre, but also its – temporary and apparent – decline. As a matter of fact, it is worth pointing out, as Killeen does, that the Gothic never completely disappeared: "What is certainly true is that while one manifestation of the Gothic came to an end with Maturin's magnum opus, the form and tradition did not simply die in that moment, but were reborn and revivified in new ways"[286], so much so that, after 1820, it was no longer so simple to identify the Gothic within a unique and closed frame. Also Aviva Briefel agrees with this statement: "The scholarly story goes that following the publication of Maturin's novel, the gothic ceased to be a cohesive genre and its conventions were dispersed among a range of literary contexts."[287] This is because the Gothic succeeded in manifesting itself through numerous variations and particularities, somewhat different from the traditional and original conventions it had exhibited during the eighteenth century, disclosing, once again, its adaptability and hybridity. Basically, the Gothic revealed its limitlessness and power through "the multifarious forms in which it has survived"[288] throughout the nineteenth century, almost "behav[ing] […] like the ghosts and phantoms that populate many of its canonical texts"[289]: its apparent disappearance, but at the same survival over the years, makes the Gothic an

[286] Killeen, J., *Gothic Literature (1825-1914)*, p. 3.
[287] Briefel, A., "The Victorian Literature of Fear". *Literature Compass* 4 (2), 2007, pp. 508-9.
[288] Punter, D., p. 21.
[289] Killeen, J., *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction*, p. 18.

'haunting absence'[290] or, to use an oxymoron, an omnipresent absence, still pervasive, though in different ways.

The emergence of Romanticism, for instance, did not completely obscure the presence of the Gothic, rather it shared some characteristics with it, such as the celebration of nature, emotions, imagination, exoticism, medieval nostalgia, the focus on the exploration of the self and the inner workings of the mind. Basically, both the Gothic and Romanticism were configured as a reaction against the rationality of the eighteenth-century neoclassicism. It can be stated, then, that Gothic narratives fascinated many Romantic poets, especially those called 'visionaries', who rejected the strict rules dominating the world and limiting literature to what was already visible and concrete. Thus, "signs of the poets' acquaintance with the terror school of novel writing show up in numerous well-known Romantic poems"[291], such as the widely popular ballad *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), composed by Samuel T. Coleridge and included in the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, a collection of poems written together with William Wordsworth. Coleridge himself wrote in *Biographia Literaria* that it was agreed that the poems he was supposed to compose for this collection should have dealt with "persons and characters supernatural, or at least Romantic"[292]; on the contrary, in the poems composed by Wordsworth "subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life"[293]. However, if on one hand Wordsworth

[290] Julian Wolfreys, quoted in Killeen, J., *Gothic Literature (1825-1914)*, p. 3.
[291] Lynch, D. S., Stillinger, J., (eds.), p. 585.
[292] Coleridge, S. T., *Biographia Literaria; or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* [eBook reader]. Produced by Tapio Riikonen and David Widger, 2004 (original edition 1817), p. 497 of 1212, chap. XIV.
[293] *Ibid*.

advocated for the use of common language, comprehensible to the majority of the readership, on the other, Coleridge, relying on a sort of pseudo-Gothic linguistic style, created a long poem which resulted almost difficult to read, full of archaisms.

Moreover, while it is true that Romanticism was somehow influenced by the Gothic, it is also true that it awakened figures that would later prove to be fundamental in the Gothic of the nineteenth century: "Vampires are the most obvious case in point: the legendry itself is age-old, and even in English literature there are plenty of pre-romantic allusions, but only in the early nineteenth century did vampirism get brought into alignment with more modern anxieties."[294] During the Romantic period, legends about vampires, coming from Slavic folklore, were revived by "a wave of curiosity toward everything related to the horrific and barbaric superstitions of distant lands"[295]. The first appearances of vampirism in England date back to Coleridge's *Christabel* (1800), a long narrative ballad, the "progenitor of the female vampire"[296], and the epic poem *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) by Robert Sauthay, containing an episode in which the main character's bride turns into a vampire. Another success is represented by John William Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819), "the first vampire story in prose [which] was an immediate success, establishing the

[294] Punter, D., p. 422.
[295] Vanon Alliata, M., "Vampires and Vampirism" in *The Encyclopaedia of Victorian Literature* (vol. 4), edited by Dino F. Felluga, US: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015, p. 1713.
[296] *Ibid*.

cult of vampirism in England and on the Continent"[297], as well as the most influential source of inspiration for Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897).

Killeen recognizes the pervasive presence of the Gothic also in the emergence of the historical novel, pioneered by Sir Walter Scott with his first novel *Waverley* (1814). Even before the publication of his prose masterpiece, Scott was a poet who privileged medieval or Romantic settings, disclosing a taste for ancient past, wild landscapes and nature easily recognizable in Gothic narratives.[298] Though both the Gothic and the historical novel focus on the importance of historical events, the latter does it in a more 'realistic' way, being based on reality and, at the same time, "combin[ing] realism with romantic *topoi*"[299]; the events narrated belong to an heroic past too distant from the present, thus past and present are perceived as completely different and separated. However, according to Killeen, there is not such a clear distinction between Scott's historical novel and Gothic fiction: "[Since] both [literary genres] ask important questions concerning the relevance of history to the present […], there is no clear line demarcating the historical novel from the Gothic"[300]. He further adds that the two genres complement each other and their relationship is "osmotic and cross-fertilising [since] together they highlight the centrality of historical inheritance to the nineteenth-century mind."[301]

[297] *Ibid*.
[298] Bertinetti, P., p. 177.
[299] *Ibid*., p. 178.
[300] Killeen, J., *Gothic Literature (1825-1914)*, p. 28.
[301] *Ibid*.

Typical elements of the Gothic romance, then, can also be noticed in Victorian realist fiction, in particular in Charlotte Brontë's masterpiece *Jane Eyre* (1847): "the ghost of Jane's uncle, the mysterious and threatening atmosphere of Thornfield Hall, the menacing presence of Bertha"[302], as well as the presence of an orphan, humble heroine – Jane – and an ambiguous, moody figure – Edward Rochester – half Gothic villain, half Byronic hero, whom the heroine is in love with. However, it is important to point out that in *Jane Eyre* the supernatural does not convey terror, rather appeasement: Jane, after becoming aware of the fact that Rochester had for a long time kept his mad wife imprisoned in the attic, refuses to marry him and leaves Thornfield Hall, returning in the end, declaring her love to Rochester and marrying him, though maimed and blind due to a fire caused by his first wife.[303]

## 2.4 Late-Nineteenth Century Victorian Gothic: New Anxieties, New Settings and New Figures

After an apparent obscured presence during the nineteenth century, yet still perceptible and pervasive, the Gothic re-emerged, perhaps even more strongly, at the end of the century: "As a mode […] the Gothic continued to return throughout the nineteenth century, dispersed into a variety of fictional forms, before re-emerging with full force once more during the period identified as the

[302] Bertinetti, P., p. 203.
[303] *Ibid*.

Decadence."[304] As a matter of fact, it is precisely in the late-Victorian context of historic, cultural, social and economic decadence, largely discussed throughout the first chapter, that a full re-appropriation of Gothic fears and monstrosities can reappear in the literary context, since "the Victorian *fin de siècle* witnessed a fascination with the gothic that rivaled its popularity in the eighteenth century."[305]

After many decades marked by the dominant literary trend of realism, which focused on the difficulties of lower-class ordinary people in unremarkable circumstances, with close attention to the elements of physical setting and the employment of the laws of verisimilitude, the Gothic broke into the scene as a signal of something that was changing and going towards an irremediable decline: "[…] as concerns about national, social, and physic decay began to multiply in late Victorian Britain, so Gothic monstrosity reemerged with a force that had not been matched since the publication of the original Gothic at the previous *fin de siècle*."[306]

Therefore, many scholars agree to include novels written during this period within a specific category: the Victorian Gothic, a subgenre of Gothic fiction that "has major continuities with what preceded it and yet encodes its own cultural and social preoccupations."[307] As already examined in the first chapter, Great Britain, in the last decades of the century, was going through a

[304] Byron, G., Punter, D., *The Gothic*, Malden [MA]: Blackwell, 2004, p. 26.
[305] Briefel, A., "The Victorian Literature of Fear", p. 509.
[306] Byron, G., "Gothic in the 1890s" in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, p. 187.
[307] Punter, D., "Victorian Gothic" in *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* (vol. 2), edited by William Hughes, David Punter, Andrew Smith, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, p. 711.

period characterized by strong difficulties: the imperial power, which for centuries benefitted of an undiscussed global supremacy, was facing a period of unprecedent decline, due to the rise of new powers, such as Germany and the United States; moreover, the morality of the colonial mission was being questioned and the colonies started to show signs of intolerance, thus beginning to cause many problems to the stability of the empire. Not even within the borders the situation was simple: the middle class could no longer rely on traditional family values on which its stability had long been based, because of the emergence of new revolutionary figures, such as the 'New Woman' and the homosexual, which aimed at destabilizing such fixed conventions. Furthermore, the social unease produced by the Industrial Revolution was evident in the difficult working situation of many working-class families and in the overpopulated city slums, in which serious diseases circulated, too. Such problems, anxieties and changes settled within the "sudden resurgence of Gothic in the late nineteenth century"[308] which re-emerged with even more determination in order to become, somehow, the narrator of this period of crisis and of the anxieties connected to it. The Victorian Gothic is, thus, still linked to the traditional eighteenth-century Gothic portrayal of fear, supernatural events, dreadful atmospheres, uncanny and immoral characters, yet in a renewed way, adapting such conventional motifs to the contemporary historical period, to contemporary settings and contemporary characters. By maintaining a sort of continuity with the tradition, though adding new elements, symbolizing the

[308] Byron, G., Punter, D., *The Gothic*, p. 39.

changing times, the Gothic reveals "its ability to migrate and adapt to formal circumstances far removed from its 'original' manifestations in the late eighteenth century, [yet] follow[ing] the traces of a tradition, maintaining its own cognitive implications and formal thematic conventions."[309]

The novel *Dracula* (1897), by the Irish writer Bram Stoker, represents the prototypical instance of the Victorian Gothic, as it is one of the major texts produced in this period, reflecting all its anxieties:

> Far from being just an absorbing tale of terror saturated with Gothic conventions, *Dracula* (1897), never out of print since its first publication, is a complex novel reflecting some of the prevailing cultural and psychological concerns of the late Victorian period, as well as a vivid interest in the developing fields of neurology and psychiatry. Sadism and erotic deviance, male anxieties about the unknown territory of femininity, threats of contagion from more vigorous 'primitive' people, the horrors of atavism and reverse colonization, are some of the many discourses at work in this classic horror story.[310]

Fundamental characteristic of the Victorian Gothic is "the domestication of Gothic figures, spaces and themes"[311]: the settings, the characters and the supernatural occurrences are no longer located in a far away, exotic and Catholic past, as in the earlier Gothic of the eighteenth century, rather terror and anxieties are brought "next door"[312], as effectively present in the contemporaneity. Dreadful events and gloomy atmospheres live together with the contemporary reader, in the same historical period and in the same physical environment, becoming familiar, but also creepy at the same time: "The exotic and historical

[309] Killeen, J., p. 3.
[310] Vanon Alliata, M., *Haunted Minds*, p. 23.
[311] Byron, G., Punter, D., p. 26.
[312] Spencer, K. L., "Purity and Danger: Dracula, the Urban Gothic, and the Late Victorian Degeneracy Crisis", p. 201.

settings that serve to distance the horrors from the world of the earlier Gothic are replaced with something more disturbingly familiar: the bourgeois domestic world or the new urban landscape."[313] Medieval and exotic settings, appreciated and portrayed, for instance, in Walpole and Radcliffe's novels, leave space to other settings perceived as the new bearers of threats and cultural deterioration connected to the contemporary time: the English city. Killeen explains that this shift in location is one of the reasons why the Gothic was somehow marginalized immediately after 1820:

> the growth of the metropolis was part of the reason why traditional Gothic fast became obsolete after the early 1820s – it was hard to be so frightened of the Catholic Continent when it seemed that much more terrible things were happening in the dark alleys and lanes of the city in which you lived.[314]

Foreign Catholic countries, and the superstitions connected to them, seemed to be no longer the central core of this new kind of Gothic, though "this focus on the contemporary world does not mean that Gothic relinquishes its interest in the past."[315] On the contrary, the metropolis, in Victorian Gothic, became the new refuges of a sort of perpetuation of the medieval, places not fully modernized, where some aftermath of immorality and backwardness still survived in an age that was convinced to have distanced itself from the darkest ages. The Victorian Gothic, thus, despite its changes in setting and the portrayal of more modern times, is still bounded to history, as Mighall points out: "'History' reveals to be central to the Gothic mode even when it depicts a

[313] Byron, G., Punter, D., p. 26.
[314] Killeen, J., p. 12.
[315] Byron, G., Punter, D., p. 29.

contemporary setting."[316] Therefore, if the modern city still preserves elements of uncivilization and barbarism, "there is little need for sublime ruins, wild mountains and labyrinthine castles"[317]: the city replaces these traditional Gothic motifs by becoming the new site of fear, imprisonment and tyranny, representing, on one hand, an apparent modernity that yet, on the other, conceals monstrosities and dreadful threats, as also Emily Alder observes: "Monsters emerge from the shadows of the city, symbolizing anxieties about moral and physical degeneration, invasion, and imperial decline circulating at the fin de siècle."[318]. In this regard, Spencer effectively defines this new end-of-the-century trend of setting Gothic narratives in contemporary and urban places as 'Urban Gothic':

> […] the fantastic that develops at the end of the nineteenth century […] is identifiably different from the Gothic of one hundred years before, [since] the new authors insist on the modernity of the setting [and] […] a modern setting means, most profoundly, an urban setting, as by the end of the century well over half of the population of the British Isles lived in cities.[319]

And it is precisely this displacement, and the consequent increase of population, the source of the majority of the concerns, such as overcrowding, poverty and poor sanitation: characteristics unfortunately belonging to the slums of the modern cities that the medieval cities of the Middle Ages could not imagine. Killeen reports the assertions of George William MacArthur Reynolds, a British journalist and fiction writer, who was convinced that "[…] it is only in

[316] Mighall, R., p. xviii.
[317] Byron, G., "Gothic in the 1890s", p. 188.
[318] Alder, E., "Urban Gothic" in *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* (vol. 2), p. 704.
[319] Spencer, K. L., "Purity and Danger", p. 200.

modernity that the city establishes itself as labyrinthine: the city as a physical and moral maze is directly related to the growth and intensification of the population, both of which are caused by industrialization."[320] The urban slums of modern cities, ignored, avoided, set aside as if they did not exist, as too threatening to the apparently civilized Britain, but at the same time products of that civilization, become the new representation of old, medieval times: "It is the modern London that produces monsters, not its medieval counterpart, since 'the country that contains the greatest wealth of all territories of the universe, is that which also knows the greatest amount of the hideous, revolting, heart-rending misery'"[321].

As a matter of fact, in *Dracula*, a quintessential narrative of pain and devastation, the vampiric embodiment of threats and fears, coming from an obscure Eastern world, very quickly makes his way to Victorian London, triggering countless concerns and anxieties aiming at undermining the apparent stability of English middle-class. Being a Victorian Gothic novel, thus dealing with new social concerns arising from a new problematic historical period, yet it does not totally deviate from what were the settings of the original Gothic of the previous century. Botting, indeed, observes how

> in the setting of *Dracula* stock features of the Gothic novel make a magnificent reappearance: the castle is mysterious and forbidden, its secret terrors and splendid isolation in a wild and mountainous region form a sublime prison as any building in which a Gothic heroine was incarcerated. […] Throughout the novel ruins, graveyards and vaults – all the macabre and

[320] George William McArthur Reynolds, *The Mysteries of London*, 1845, quoted in Killeen, J., *Gothic Literature (1825-1914)*, p. 14.
[321] *Ibid*., p. 15.

> gloomy objects of morbid fascination and melancholy – signal the awful presence of the Gothic past.[322]

Actually, while it is true that, from a certain point on, the novel is mainly set in the modern city, the centre of the Empire, it is also true that, the initial part is set in a Transylvanian far away land. In this remote place, the threatening vampiric character succeeds in imprisoning his first victim in a gloomy castle, located on a high precipice, from which it is practically impossible to escape. Therefore, even though in the course of the novel the setting changes gradually from a remote one to a more modern one, some motifs of the progenitor Gothic novels – distant, desolate, mysterious lands, and the *tòpos* of the castle, introduced by Walpole – are, at least, initially preserved, as the unaware Jonathan Harker describes in the first pages of his journal:

> This was all so strange and uncanny that a dreadful fear came upon me, and I was afraid to speak or move. The time seemed interminable as we swept on our way, now in almost complete darkness, for the rolling clouds obscured the moon. […] Suddenly I became conscious of the fact that the driver was in the act of pulling up the horses in the courtyard of a vast ruined castle, from whose tall black windows came no ray of light, and whose broken battlements showed a jagged line against the moonlit sky.[323]

What significantly changes in Victorian Gothic fiction, seeming evident also in *Dracula*, are the characters that, logically, change with the change of time. As the historical-temporal setting becomes part of the contemporary world and is close to the reader, also the characters are renovated and reflect the changing society: "The romantic Gothic villain is transformed as monks, bandits

[322] Botting, F., p. 146.
[323] Stoker, B., *Dracula*. Introduction and notes by Maurice Hindle. Preface by Christopher Frayling. London: Penguin, 2003 (1897), p. 20. Henceforth all quotations are from this edition and will be given in the text in parentheses.

and threatening aristocratic foreigners give way to criminals, madmen and scientists."[324] As Byron also states, the central figure of the end-of-the-century Gothic fiction is no longer the bad persecutor whose aim is to imprison and rape a poor, defenceless young woman, but "[as] the city is now the primary Gothic landscape, the primary figure at the heart of most Victorian *fin de siècle* texts is the scientist."[325] The development of science was fundamental in such period in which many certainties started to be questioned, especially the stability of the empire and the consequent fears about immigration. According to Victoria Margree and Byrony Randall, mid-Victorian ideas of progress and civilization seemed, at least initially, to be supported by scientific discoveries, in particular by Charles Darwin *The Origin of Species* (1859); however, Darwin's later affirmation about humanity's ape origin and its possible involution into that primitive state, together with Cesare Lombroso and Max Nordau's ground-breaking theories about criminality and degeneration, contributed to threaten the security of that society which for long time had considered itself superior.[326] Botting, indeed, notes that

> Darwin's theories, by bringing humanity closer to animal kingdom, undermined the superiority and privilege humankind had bestowed on itself. Along similar lines, the work of criminologists like Cesare Lombroso and Max Nordau attempted to discriminate between humans: some were more primitive and bestial in their nature than others.[327]

[324] Byron, G., Punter, D., p. 26.
[325] Byron, G., "Gothic in the 1890s", p. 188.
[326] Margree, V., Randall, B., '"Fin-de-siècle Gothic" in *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, edited by William Hughes and Andrew Smith, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012, p. 218.
[327] Botting, F., p. 137.

According to Byron, "during the *fin de siècle*, what the scientist tends more and more to dabble with is the mind"[328], revealing a growing interest in that obscure and inscrutable side of man's nature that reveals to be an internal threat to social order. In *Dracula*, Dr Van Helsing is a Dutch doctor who is, at the same time, also a professor, a scientist, a metaphysician, a philosopher and a lawyer. Moreover, together with his former student Dr Seward, who is a psychiatrist and director of an asylum, he is an expert in Lombroso and Nordau's contemporary theories, as well as issues concerning hypnotism and unconscious cerebration. Being aware of Lombroso's theories on the criminal man and of the facial peculiarities that make the criminal distinguishable and recognizable, Dr Van Helsing identifies such features in Dracula without hesitation: "There is this peculiarity in criminals […] He be of child brain in much. Now this criminal of ours is predestinate to crime also; he too have child-brain […]" (pp. 362-3).

In *Dracula,* furthermore, also the figure of the eighteenth-century imprisoned and persecuted heroine is renewed: interestingly, "the place of a heroine […] is taken by the naïve young lawyer Harker"[329]. The man, during his journey to the remote castle in order to conclude a transaction with a mysterious nobleman, is repeatedly warned about the danger of his destination, finding himself, after a few days, entrapped in that dreadful castle, with no way out. Likewise, the renewal of the victim, who is now a lawyer, the exponent of the Victorian middle-class, also implies the renewal of his executioner that, in this

[328] Byron, G., p. 190.
[329] Botting, F., p. 146.

Victorian Gothic novel, it is well-known it is a vampire. Nevertheless, to Botting, it seems simplistic to define Dracula a mere Gothic villain[330]: rather he is "an aristocrat, […] a libertine, […] a warrior, […] a foreign Other, […] a super human being indifferent to morals and endowed with impressive physical strength"[331].

However, such new figures – the physician and the vampire – were not completely unknown before *Dracula*'s publication. They had already been introduced by another Irish writer, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu (1814-1873), in his most famous collection of ghost and supernatural tales *In a Glass Darkly* (1872). This collection contains two stories – the first one, *Green Tea*, and the last one, *Carmilla* – which revealed to be a source, for what concerns the characters, for Stoker's *Dracula*. In particular, in *Green Tea* Le Fanu introduces the figure of the German physician and proto-psychiatrist, Dr Hesselius, "a 'psychic doctor' who prefigures later ghost or monster-hunters, which culminated in nineteenth-century terms in Van Helsing in *Dracula*"[332]; then, *Carmilla*, which, besides being regarded as the first example of the female vampire in English literature, represents also one of the major sources for Stoker's vampire novel. As a matter of fact, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the fascination for vampire tales, already revived during the Romantic period, resulted in the concrete establishment of Vampire fiction as a subgenre of Gothic fiction, as well as "the construction of the vampire as the Gothic villain"[333]. According to Botting, the

[330] *Ibid*., p. 147.
[331] Vanon Alliata, M., "Vampires and Vampirism", p. 1713.
[332] Punter, D., "Victorian Gothic" in *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* (vol. 2), p. 715.
[333] Chromik, A., "Vampire Fiction" in *Ibid*., p. 707.

figure of the vampire re-emerged precisely in this specific period "in new [shape], with a different intensity and anxious investment as [object] of terror and horror."[334] To the Victorians, the figure of the vampire was associated with superstition, irrationality, cruelty, and darkness. Both in Le Fanu and in Stoker, indeed, it is portrayed as a threatening figure, "agent of disorder, degeneration, and transgression"[335], a parasitic force who preys on other people's lives in order to continue his abnormal existence, eternally trapped halfway between life and death. Precisely for these peculiar, intrinsic features, according to Gina Wisker "vampires have remained the most malleable figure of horror, [since they] can exist in a liminal state, neither living nor dead, creature or human, destabilizing seemingly fixed categories upon which our sense of reality rests."[336]

## 2.5 Joseph S. Le Fanu and the Victorian Ghost Story

Joseph S. Le Fanu, Irish author of ghost stories, as well as a central figure in Irish Gothic tradition, is considered the founder and the most remarkable exponent of another new form, emerged in this period – the Victorian Ghost story, a natural development originating from Gothic novels and tales, encouraged by the growth of new literary magazines, owed to the mid-century implement of the publishing industry[337]. Le Fanu's ability to combine Gothic literary conventions with the realistic technique resulted in the creation of texts

[334] Botting, F., p. 135.
[335] Vanon Alliata, M., *Haunted Minds*, p. 22.
[336] Wisker, G., "Horror Fiction" in *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* (vol. 1), p. 332.
[337] Byron, G., Punter, D., p. 27.

imbued with psychological awareness and supernatural terrors evoked by foreboding atmospheres.

Similarly to Victorian Gothic novels, also Victorian Ghost stories express the anxieties of their times, embodied, in this case, by ghosts that perform a double task: on one hand, they criticize the absolute Victorian faith in progress representing, on the other, similarly to vampires, the return of the past into the present. To Killeen, the role of the ghost is fundamental: he explains that, in psychoanalytical terms, it represents what has for long time been repressed in the individual, personal and domestic life of the Victorians, because overshadowed by more traumatic events; therefore, he argues that such "past that comes back to haunt the present is almost always a deeply domestic one, involving mothers, fathers, sons and daughters, and personal transgression that has been repressed […]"[338]. According to psychoanalysis, this past comes back in a disruptive and disturbing way, in the from of psychic or physical uneasiness. Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, in his essay, entitled "The Uncanny" (1919), defines as the *Unheimlich* – the 'uncanny'[339] – this sort of repression:

> the uncanny is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar […], [so it] is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old – established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression.[340]

[338] Killeen, J., p. 129.
[339] Hughes, W., Smith, A., "Introduction: The Enlightenment Gothic and Postcolonialism" in *Empire and the Gothic: The Politics of Genre*, p. 3. The authors explain the collapse between the *unheimlich* and the *heimlich* ('homely') occurring in the home that is both a domestic refuge and a site of obscure secrets.
[340] Freud, S., "The Uncanny", first published in Imago, Bd. V., 1919, pp. 1-2, 13.

In other words, ghosts represent the sense of displacement and bewilderment felt by the Victorians within the new historical context in which they were living, yet transferred also in the domestic setting where "the known and the familiar contains and can become in an instant the concealed and fearful"[341]. The Victorian ghost story, therefore, similarly to the Victorian Gothic novel, creeps into places very close to readers, "increasingly featur[ing] familiar, ordinary and domestic settings, [and locating] terror in the mind"[342].

Moreover, the spread of this form is connected to "the growing interest in spiritualism and parapsychological phenomena such as telepathy, mesmerism and clairvoyance"[343] that were clearly configured as a polemical reaction to the evolutionary scientific faith prevailing in the second half of the century, as well as inspiring psychoanalytical interpretations, given the focus on supernatural and incomprehensible occurrences.

## 2.6 The 'Irish Gothic' and the Conflict Between Past and Present

Interestingly, Killeen includes both Stoker and Le Fanu within the sphere of the 'Irish Gothic', given their origin from families belonging to the Irish Protestant minority and their conflictual relationship with Ireland. In particular, the writers belonging to what he denominates the 'Anglo-Irish class' exhibit an

[341] Warwick, A., "Vampires and the Empire: Fears and Fictions of the 1890s" in *Cultural Politics at the 'Fin de Siècle'*, edited by Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 208.
[342] Vanon Alliata, M., p. 15.
[343] *Ibid*., pp. 14-5.

ambivalent attitude of loyalty to their native Irish identity and allegiance to the English culture. To them, the Union (1801) represented both a threat to their political power, which was transferred to the English parliament, but also a guarantee that the Irish Protestant minority would never be oppressed by the Catholic majority. The Union, furthermore, functioned as a barrier to prevent the Catholic natives power from taking over the 'Anglo-Irish' community after the Catholic emancipation (1829). This apparent, and only initial, peaceful coexistence between the two factions did not mean lack of disagreements and conflicts: on the contrary, Irish writers felt subjugated to the mainstream model of the Union and strived to accentuate their independence by making 'uncomfortable' topics re-emerge in their narratives. Therefore, the Irish Gothic does not want to forget the past and the horrible pains suffered by the Irish because of the English, refuses to tell stories in which past and present coexist in harmony, pretending that the past of discrimination against the Irish never existed[344]: rather, "the Irish Gothic ruptures the present by the re-entry of elements of the past that the present wants to forget, and effectively puts an end to the future entirely, [therefore] the tension between past and present is not resolved but in fact exacerbated […]."[345] And it is precisely in this context that Le Fanu and Stoker's narratives can be encompassed, though Killeen seems reluctant to recognize a true 'Irish Gothic' genre: "'Irish Gothic' is not a genre but rather a particular inflection of a genre, weighted with political and

[344] Killeen, J., pp. 111-13.
[345] *Ibid*., p. 113.

ideological ballast."[346] For this reason, he appears more favourable to classify the 'Irish Gothic' as a tradition, though he admits that this definition is the subject of debate among various critics. Specifically, he explains that the major theorist of the 'Irish Gothic', as well as Le Fanu's biographer, W. J. McCormack, argues that it is not possible to identify neither an Irish Gothic definite 'tradition', nor a 'canon': firstly, because the Irish Gothic writers did not introduce new features, but simply transferred into their texts what was already present in the English Gothic; secondly, because there is not a stable chronological influence among writers, evident in the fact that there is a time gap of twenty-five years between the publication of Maturin's novel (1820) and Le Fanu's first novel (1845). Moreover, McCormack also points out that the term 'canon' contains political connotations and seems to promote ideological agendas. Other scholars as well seem open to the dismissal of the term 'tradition' in favour of 'mode', since the former appears too restrictive to describe a set of forms, motifs, styles, and themes constantly varying according to the historical period, the place and the writer.[347] Killeen concludes recognizing the Irish Gothic as "a canon, a tradition and a mode all at once"[348], since Irish writers similarly dealt with the historical situation of their country by using Gothic conventions, and the specificity of their writing relies precisely on the fact that they were involved first-hand in the issues they recounted, without being strongly influenced by precursors.[349]

[346] Killeen, J., *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction*, pp. 18-9.
[347] *Ibid*., pp. 19-22.
[348] *Ibid*., p. 27.
[349] *Ibid*.

## 2.7 *Dracula* within the 'Imperial Gothic': Anxieties of Degeneration and Reverse Colonization

A novel like Stoker's *Dracula* can be encompassed within an unprecedented literary subgenre dealing with "the incursion of fear and the occult into *fin-de-siècle* colonial literary narratives […], a new genre of literature […] that reflect[s] 'anxieties about […] the weakening of Britain's imperial hegemony.'"[350] This new form is called the 'Imperial Gothic' and was firstly explored by Patrick Brantlinger in his book *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*, published in 1988. He suggests that the main themes constituting this form are the following: 'going native', better known as the individual regression to a primitive state; insanity, mainly regarded as the cause of this regression; fantasies of reverse colonisation, disclosed in *Dracula*, as well as degeneration, in all its forms, racial, psychological and civilisational, and anxieties about homosexuality, feminism, hauntings, and occult phenomena.[351] The 'Imperial Gothic', thus, addresses even more decisively the main issues characterizing the late-nineteenth century anxieties, specifically concerning the fear of the collapse of the great British empire, which, in the period between 1870 and 1900, comprised and dominated a very large territory and millions of people. Therefore, as Alexandra Warwick observes, the 'Imperial Gothic', distinguishes 'here' (home) and 'there' (abroad): relying on

[350] Briefel, A., also quoting Patrick Brantlinger's "Imperial Gothic", in "The Victorian Literature of Fear", p. 517.
[351] Brantlinger, P., "Imperial Gothic" in *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, p. 204.

the alleged superiority of the English culture and the Englishman, the risk was that he could be negatively influenced by other cultures, considered inferior, going beyond his own rational individuality. However, in the 'Imperial Gothic', this dreaded influence can also work in reverse: "The scenarios represented in domestic imperial Gothic narratives are ones in which the flow is reversed or out of control and the center is invaded and undermined."[352]. As a matter of fact, Dracula, as it will be largely discussed in the next chapter, embodies the return of "the repressed of the past […] [who haunts] the landscapes or cityscapes of British cities […] [which had been] built on wealth from enslavement, mineral pillaging, and trade in human suffering."[353] To Warwick, then, *Dracula*, being an end-of-the-century Vampire novel, is undoubtedly to be included within "the apocalyptic narratives of Imperial Gothic, [characterized by] the simultaneous vision of collapse and salvation, the enactment of annihilation and the blueprint for its avoidance."[354]

## 2.8 *Dracula*: the Prototypical Premodern Novel

Besides being an innovative Gothic novel for the topics covered, the characters involved and the settings represented, what really makes *Dracula* a unique, but also an irregular narrative, completely unrelated to the traditional mainstream literary context that dominated the eighteenth century, and part of

[352] Warwick, A., "Imperial Gothic" in *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* (vol. 1), p. 340.
[353] Wisker, G., "Postcolonial Gothic" in *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* (vol. 2), p. 512.
[354] Warwick, A., "Vampires and the Empire: Fears and Fictions of the 1890s" in *Cultural Politics at the 'Fin de Siècle'*, p. 219.

the nineteenth, is the form in which it is written. According to many scholars, this novel can be deemed as a specimen of modern narrative, whose structure almost approaches the thriller: "What makes *Dracula* a powerful exploration of the psychology of fear is its innovative testimonial, artifactual, and quasi-detective structure."[355] As a matter of fact, the novel abandons the traditional omniscient perspective, presenting different points of view, actually corresponding to the different characters, which emerge in a fragmented way: "the novel is composed of fragments supposedly inscribed, typed and recorded by a number of different people"[356] that, in this way, make the narrative polyphonic. Moreover, Botting focuses on the modernity of the narrative, pointing out that "*Dracula*'s narrative fragments are of a distinct modern cast [since] are recorded in the most modern manner: by typewriter, in shorthand and on phonograph."[357] He further adds that the modernity of the novel resides also in other instances of up-to-date systems of communication, such as train timetables, newspaper cuttings, telegrams, legal and commercial documents, medical and psychiatric categorizations that are not only useful in the story-telling, which appears to be based on a true "real-time technique"[358], but also in the tracing of Dracula's movements.[359] The modernity of the novel is also connected, as already explained above, to the presence of contemporary characters, representatives of modern science, such as Dr Seward and Dr Van

[355] Vanon Alliata, M., "Vampires and Vampirism", p. 1716.
[356] Markmann, E., p. 189.
[357] Botting, F., p. 147.
[358] Vanon Alliata, M., p. 1716.
[359] Botting, F., p. 147.

Helsing, and the professional position of the men who ally against the vampire, all exponents of late-Victorian society's middle-class.

The absence of a pervasive omniscient perspective, in favour of the mixture of first-person accounts and eyewitness reportage, reveals the "multifaced and incomprehensible nature of reality"[360] which makes "*Dracula* 'the first great modern novel in British literature'"[361].

[360] Vanon Alliata, M., p. 1716.
[361] Jennifer Wicke, quoted in Brantlinger, P., "Imperial Gothic" in *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, p. 214.

# Chapter 3

## Dracula: the Embodiment of 'Otherness' Threatening the Heart of Modern Europe

This chapter will be entirely dedicated to the figure of Dracula as the effective representative of the nightmarish Eastern 'Other' who threatens to invade, contaminate and annihilate Western modern Europe, represented in the novel by the late-nineteenth century advanced, yet unstable Great Britain. Starting from an analysis of the various sources, also biographical, which led Stoker to the creation of this character, the rest of the chapter will concentrate on the political overtones of the novel: in particular, on how Stoker enclosed in his disquieting vampire the political and cultural concerns that tormented Great Britain at the end of the century. The issue of 'Otherness', therefore, will be paramount in the second part of this chapter: threatening foreign invasion and aiming at destabilizing Victorian social order, Dracula represents at once the social, cultural and racial 'Other', a real dark threat to England.

### 3.1 The Origins of Dracula: Legendary, Historical and Literary Sources

The historical and folkloric research fulfilled by Stoker in order to create the most famous literary vampire ever was undoubtedly remarkable. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, ancient legends of vampirism had been revived in the folklore of almost every culture during the Romantic period,

which triggered the curiosity towards terrible superstitions inhabiting far away lands. As a matter of fact, the belief in vampires was actually rooted in the Eastern European folklore of the eighteenth century: numerous deaths occurring in Servia and Wallachia, a region belonging to the present Romania, unleashed terror and insecurity in those regions, since "people died like rotted sheep"[362].

Apparently deriving from the Servian world *vampir*, the term 'vampire', in Eastern folklore, is associated to an undead creature that by night leaves its buried body in order to satisfy its thirst of blood, by sucking it from living people. Therefore, the desire of blood is connected both to the need to satisfy an aberrant appetite, but also to the necessity to continue an unnatural existence: like a parasitic creature, which lives at the expense of others, a vampire "dies and is buried but continues to lead a Vampyr life in the grave, nourishing himself by infecting others, and promiscuously propagating Vampyrism."[363] Being a figure between life and death, unable to die but not fully alive, it is condemned to a gloomy existence: by night, the vampire leaves the coffin where its dead body is buried and reinvigorates it by absorbing the life force of other living creatures who, after being attacked, become vampires themselves. Its menacing power derives from "its ability to maintain its victims in a condition of languor and exhaustion, bleed[ing] to death and becoming themselves vampires because of a demonic possession."[364] According to Eastern superstition, the spread of its

[362] Leatherdale, C., *The Origins of 'Dracula': The Background to Bram Stoker's Gothic Masterpiece*, London: William Kimber, 1987, p. 60.
[363] *Ibid*.
[364] Vanon Alliata, M., "Vampires and Vampirism", in *The Encyclopaedia of Victorian Literature* (vol. 4), p. 1713.

'infestation' can be stopped through a specific procedure, or better 'ritual': a stake is driven through the dead body, the head is cut off, or "the heart torn out and the body burned, or boiling water and vinegar are poured on the grave."[365] According to the definition provided by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, besides referring to a blood-sucking creature, originally coming from Eastern European mythology, the term 'vampire' also indicates some species of blood-sucking bats inhabiting Central and South America, in particular one named *Desmodus rufus*. This species is known as a blood-sucking bat inhabiting Chile and Brazil, identifiable by peculiar characteristics, especially the teeth that seem specifically designed for the purpose of bloodsucking: "the upper front teeth (incisors), of which there are only two, are enormously enlarged […]. The canines, though smaller than the incisors, are large and sharp."[366] The wounds inflicted by such sharped incisors are described as similar to those that may be accidentally caused by a razor when shaving and allow the bat to ingest its 'food', leaving it in a state of languor and lethargy.[367]

It is interesting to point out that the first time Stoker encountered the name 'Dracula' was in the summer of 1890, while he was doing research in the Whitby library. There he found a book by William Wilkinson titled *An Account of The*

[365] From the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 9th ed., vol. 24, Edinburgh: Black, 1888, pp. 52-3, in *Dracula: Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical, Historical and Cultural Contexts, Critical History and Essays from Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, edited by John Paul Riquelme, New York: Palgrave, 2002, p. 402.
[366] *Ibid*., p. 405.
[367] *Ibid*., p. 406.

*Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia* (1820) through which he became aware of the fact that "'Dracula in the Wallachian language means Devil'"[368].

Historically, the origin of the character is attributed to a real Romanian prince and warlord, Vlad Dracula or Vlad Tepeş, who lived in the fifteenth century, a source of inspiration for Stoker. In the West, this warrior – 'voïvode' in Wallachian – was known as 'Vlad the Impaler' for the cruelty with which he used to kill his victims, in order to keep the Turkish troops away from the West: "the methods by which he cemented his rule over Wallachia, by wholesale impalement of those who opposed him, […] quickly made him one of the most notorious figures of the age."[369] It is important to specify that in Stoker's time Transylvania was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and thus administered by Hungary. The provinces of Wallachia and Moldavia were annexed to Romania only after the First World War. Prince Dracula (Vlad III) was actually born in Sighişoara, a Transylvanian town, but ruled over Wallachia to the south in 1448, from 1456 to 1462 and in 1476 before dying, thus his castles are to be found in Wallachia, even though Stoker set Castle Dracula between Transylvania and Moldavia.[370] However, while it is true that Stoker relied on a true historical background dealing with Hungarian campaigns against Turkish incursions, the issue of impalement is not tackled in the novel. Moreover, as Markmann points out, "the historical figure, the Voïvode Dracula, was not a vampire, despite his reign of terror"[371], rather it was Stoker who associated the

[368] Leatherdale, C., *The Origins of 'Dracula'*, p. 87.
[369] *Ibid*.
[370] *Ibid*., p. 86.
[371] Markmann, E., *The History of Gothic Fiction*, p. 194.

figure of the demonic tyrant with that of the vampire. Indeed, Count Dracula claims a blood relation with a Wallachian Prince and his proud descendance from an aristocratic and military tradition: "Here I am noble; I am *boyar*; the common people know me, and I am master." (p. 27) Therefore, on one hand, Dracula assumes to be the last descendant of the family of *boyars*, on the other he also claims a legacy with the Szekelys[372], an aristocratic family in whose "veins flows the blood of many brave races who fought as the lion fights, for lordship." (pp. 35-6) Harker includes the Szekelys among the nationalities inhabiting Transylvania and he seems aware of the fact that the Count is one of them:

> In the population of Transylvania there are four distinct nationalities: Saxons in the south, and mixed with them the Wallachs, who are descendant 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. (p. 8)

Stoker, indeed, points out Dracula's legacy with the Szekelys, about which he could have read in a book by Emily Gerard, *The Land Beyond the Forest* (1888). In this book is reported a popular song about the Szekelys in which is highlighted the strength and fearlessness of Great Attila, King of the Huns, with whom a legacy is recognized[373] in the words of Dracula as well: "What devil or what witch was ever so great as Attila, whose blood is in these veins?" (p. 36), he asks

[372] As explained in note 8 to chapter I (p. 440), the Szekelys are an old family of Transylvania, descendants of Attila.

[373] See the popular song reported in note 8 to chapter I (p. 440). Attila (V century), also known as 'the whip of God' (*flagellum Dei*) for his ferocity, was one of the most feared enemies of the Western and Eastern Roman Empire. King of the Huns, an Asiatic nomadic people, he barbarically invaded and destroyed the Roman Empire, invading Greece, Italy and the Balkans.

rhetorically, holding up his arms, while talking to Harker. The Szeklers were an Hungarian-speaking ethnic group, currently recognized as a minority by the Romanian government, coming from Hungary, "whose race were traditional guardians of the frontier with Moldavia and the Ottoman Empire"[374]. Needless to say, Dracula is very proud of his ancestry and blood-relations with powerful rulers and warriors. This becomes even more evident in his speeches when he describes the events in which his progenitor Vlad the Impaler fought against the Turkish enemies to defend the Christian faith. Harker carefully observes that when talking about Transylvanian history and the deeds performed by his ancestors, "he warm[s] up to the subject wonderfully" and "he [grows] excited as he [speaks], and walk[s] about the room pulling his great white moustache and grasping anything on which he [lays] his hands as though he would crush it by main strength." (p. 35) Then, he cleverly notes how the Count, in his accounts, encloses himself within a vast group, always speaking in the plural:

> I asked him a few questions on Transylvanian history, […]. In his speaking of things and people, and especially of battles, he spoke as if he had been present at them all. […] Whenever he spoke of his house [the boyars] he always said 'we', and spoke almost in the plural, like a king speaking. (p. 35)

Like in a true aristocratic speech, he praises the achievements of his heroic dynasty and is also convinced to have somehow played an important political role which ultimately has also favoured the West: "Who was it but one of my race who as Voivode crossed the Danube and beat the Turk on his own ground? This was a Dracula indeed!" (p. 36), he proudly highlights, clarifying that it was

[374] Leatherdale, C., p. 109.

his ‘race’ that kept the Turks away and finally triumphed over them. As Punter observes, Dracula is not an individual, rather the representative of “a dynasty, a ‘house’, the proud descendant and bearer of a long aristocratic tradition.”[375]

Concerning the literary sources from which Stoker took inspiration in the construction of his quintessential vampire, it is necessary to mention first *The Vampyre* (1819), a short story in prose by John William Polidori, which was an immediate success. Recognized as the forefather of the literary vampire, Polidori’s character was the first to show many psychological, as well as anthropological, implications which far exceeded the mere achievement of gothic horror and sensational effects.[376] This story was misattributed to Lord Byron, of whom Polidori was the physician, but actually it is based on Byron’s own incomplete tale, *Augustus Darvell* (1819) he told Polidori and others during the famous night at Villa Diodati, the same occasion in which Mary Shelley conceived her famous horror masterpiece *Frankenstein*. Polidori’s vampire, Lord Ruthven, a pale, young man, modelled on the Byronic figure of seducer and poet, “became a model for the English vampire[s]”[377] that followed: Polidori, though inspired by Eastern European legends about vampires, transformed his character from “a hideous village ghoul into an aristocratic seducer who preys upon high society”[378]. To readers, Lord Ruthven seemed a real projection of Lord Byron himself, a gentleman proud of his sexual appeal

[375] Punter, D., *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (vol. 1: *The Gothic Tradition*), p. 257.
[376] Vanon Alliata, M., *Haunted Minds*, p. 31.
[377] Punter, D., *The Literature of Terror*, p. 119.
[378] Vanon Alliata, M., “Vampires and Vampirism”, p. 1714.

and aware of his charming personality. However, Polidori created a dangerous character who is a predator and a murderer at the same time. In London, the ingenuous Aubrey meets the fascinating and self-confident Lord Ruthven, with whom travels to Greece. There, Ruthven kills a girl, then goes back to London, with another identity, and becomes engaged to Aubrey's sister. The naïve young man, unable to oppose Ruthven's will, collapses both physically and mentally, and dies after his sister's death, who is killed by Ruthven.[379] According to Punter, the fascination that Ruthven exerts on poor Aubrey is comparable to that exerted by the aristocracy: Ruthven is an undead, "as the power of the aristocracy in the early nineteenth century was dead and not dead"[380], his thirst of blood corresponds to the aristocratic need of conflict and family preservation. As in Stoker, but more in general in English culture, Polidori's vampire is elegant, seductive and transgressive, a Gothic villain and an anti-bourgeois figure, mythologized by the middle class and expression of its own anxieties of the past. Polidori modelled Ruthven on Byron probably to take revenge on his master who belittled him in his literary ambitions, and Aubrey as modelled on himself, as condemned to a subordinate position.[381] Polidori, therefore, attached a strong psychological insight to his story, since "vampirism [to him] was essentially a powerful metaphor to articulate a wide range of conflicts regarding himself and the tempestuous relationship with Lord Byron"[382]. However, Punter observes how Polidori's Lord Ruthven and Stoker's Dracula have different

[379] *Ibid*.
[380] Punter, D., p. 119.
[381] Vanon Alliata, M., p. 1714.
[382] Vanon Alliata, M., *Haunted Minds*, p. 34.

endings: Polidori's vampire is a 'winner' in the end, while Stoker's, instead, will be defeated by Victorian rationalism and progress. Similarly, though, both versions of vampire "have desires which are socially insatiable [and] their satiation would involve social disaster […]. They are individualist disruptives […] who are not content with the restrictions placed on them by a settled and ordered society."[383]

Another influential source for Stoker was James Malcom Rymer's *Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood*, a 'penny dreadful' serial novel, published between 1845 and 1847, which signalled the transition from the romantic vampire tale to the modern vampire literature. According to many critics, it can be considered the novel which "stabilized the conventions of literary vampirism for future horror writers – most notably Bram Stoker"[384]. Like Polidori's Lord Ruthven, also Rymer's Lord Francis Varney is an aristocrat. He preys on a family of fallen rich but, unlike Stoker and Polidori's vampires, his thirst of blood is primarily organic, rather than seductive: "blood, in Rymer's narrative, does not double for semen"[385], since Varney's purpose is merely that of nourishing himself, and he achieves it through attacks that almost seem like violent physical assaults, rather than sexual encounters. Despite his non-existent seductive charm, Lord Francis Varney embodies all the most recurrent stereotypes about vampires, such as "[the] dreadful eyes, the fearful-looking

[383] Punter, D., p. 120.
[384] David Skal, 1996, quoted in Hughes, W., "Fictional Vampires in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, p. 200.
[385] Hughes, W., "Fictional Vampires in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries", p. 201.

teeth projecting like those of some wild animal, hideously, glaringly white, and fang-like, [and] the long nails"[386].

Written in the form of a diary, which prefigures *Dracula*'s structure, Guy de Maupassant's two fantastic horror stories *Le Horla*, published between 1886 and 1887, represent another fundamental source for *Dracula*, primarily for the form and the method of narration. The nameless protagonist and storyteller reports the events and his anxieties in the first person, like Harker does in *Dracula*, though the narration abruptly stops at a certain point. He feels terribly haunted by the presence of an invisible creature, called Le Horla, which gradually consumes his life, driving him to madness and finally to suicide, apparently the only way out of that dreadful nightmare. Keeping a diary, both for Harker and for the unknown protagonist of Maupassant's tale, becomes "an instrument of self-analysis […], the only way to be present to oneself […], a therapeutic act of self-preservation, […] the only way to rationalize [one's] fears and achieve some sort of mental clarity"[387]: writing becomes the only refuge and a way to keep the mind 'busy' somehow, a sort of distraction from the inexplicable events happening around them.

Last but not the least, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) is one of the major literary sources on which Stoker relied for the creation of his novel. The last novella contained in the collection of stories *In a Glass Darkly* (1872), "Sheridan Le Fanu's […] *Carmilla* lifted the vampire motif to new heights of

[386] Rymer, J. M., 1991, p. 150, quoted in *Ibid*., p. 200.
[387] Vanon Alliata, M., p. 165.

literary creativity [and] its impact on […] Bram Stoker was such that Stoker came near to plagiarism."[388] Le Fanu's story is set in a castle, in Styria, which the author never visited, a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, thus triggering the common belief that vampires came from uncivilized lands allegedly because of the epidemics originated there in the eighteenth century[389]. The whole story is infused with an oneiric atmosphere in which eros and melancholia are deeply linked in order to create a novella imbued with strong emotional power, evocative tone and deep psychological dimension. The events are related by the vampire's victim, Laura, who tells the story after her encounter with the female vampire, Carmilla. She arrives at the castle at night out of a carriage accident and soon befriends with Laura who, nevertheless, notices the strange, enigmatic behaviour of her friend: she sleepwalks, she does not say anything about her life and, even more unsettlingly, she starts to behave erotically towards Laura, with whom she eventually falls in love. Her embraces seem to be burning with love and the language she speaks is "the language of desire – a desire demanding immediate gratification [which is] also the language of dominion, of absolute control over one's victim."[390] Moreover, in her discourses, she associates cruelty with eros, equating death with sexual knowledge: "love will have its sacrifices. No sacrifice without blood."[391] Carmilla is such a powerful and fascinating seductress who "seduces Laura in such highly erotic terms that at one point

[388] Leatherdale, C., p. 86.
[389] Frayling, C., *Vampires: Lord Byron to Count Dracula*, 1991, quoted in Vanon Alliata, M., "Vampires and Vampirism", p. 1715.
[390] *Ibid*.
[391] Le Fanu, J. S., *Carmilla* [eBook reader]. Produced by Suzanne Shell, Sjaani and PG Distributed Proofreaders, 2003 (original edition 1872), p. 65 of 159, chap. VI.

Laura even wonders if she is a young man in disguise."[392] Therefore, the connection between eroticism, sexuality, and vampirism becomes unequivocally clear. It is evident then, especially in the very epilogue of the novel, where Carmilla is stabbed, beheaded and burnt, that Le Fanu wanted to stress the eternal beauty of his female vampire, instead of demonizing her. Carmilla is thus portrayed as

> the embodiment of the eternal feminine, the emblem of the *femme fatale*, the epitome of a seductive, astute and domineering femininity who captivates and bewitches her victims with her beauty and charms, but also brings death and destruction in her wake.[393]

With her "gloating eyes" and "hot lips" she succeeds in attracting Laura to her, aware of her delicate features and her erotic appeal. Precisely for this reason, Frayling includes Le Fanu's novella among "the more obvious literary stimulus for Stoker's choice of the sexually charged vampire theme" (introduction, p. xvii), since prohibited love is explicitly dramatized and homoerotic tones are evident. Moreover, one cannot ignore the fact that Dracula and Carmilla are finally similarly destroyed: in the same way, through stabbing, beheading and burning, but also by means of a figure present in both works, namely that of the vampire expert, which in *Dracula* is Dr Van Helsing and in *Carmilla* general Spielsdorf. However, the characterizations of the two vampires are unequivocally different: while Le Fanu portrays Carmilla as a seductive woman, a *femme fatale*, whose beauty does not fade and appealing femininity dangerously attracts to death, Stoker's Dracula clearly demonstrates all the

[392] Byron, G., Punter, D., *The Gothic*, p. 269.
[393] Vanon Alliata, M., *Haunted Minds*, p. 144.

terrifying vampire attributes. His pale face, red lips, sharp teeth, "hairiness, foul breath [and] affinity with bats and corpses"[394] are surely not as attractive as Carmilla's beautiful features, but rather explicit expression of the animalistic nature of the vampire.

In most cases, thus, literary vampires, such as Lord Ruthven and Lord Francis Varney, and Dracula too, are both aristocrats and seducers: they represent both a social class as well as forbidden – or, better, repressed – and "'deviant' sexuality, […] the ultimate embodiment of transgression."[395]

## 3.2 The Transylvanian Setting: the Land Beyond the Forest

Stoker had not thought from the beginning of setting his novel in Transylvania: rather, Le Fanu's impact on him was so significant that he was initially determined to set it in Styria and to construct it around a female vampire, similar to Carmilla[396], yet he subsequently changed his plans and created his timeless novel. As a matter of fact, when Stoker was at the dawn of his work, he had not yet learned about the historical character Dracula on which he would have based it, nor did he intend to set it beyond Styria. Therefore, if the book by William Wilkinson he found in the Whitby library proved decisive, as it introduced Prince Dracula for the first time to Stoker, then other sources or encounters must have prompted him to choose the Transylvanian setting.

[394] Auerbach, N., *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, 1995, p. 21, quoted in *Ibid*.
[395] Byron, G., Punter, D., pp. 268-70.
[396] Leatherdale, C., p. 86.

Drawing from the fifteenth-century Voïvode and cruel warrior Dracula III, "the site of Castle Dracula was in fact not determined until well after Stoker had begun to write"[397]: actually, he had initially set his castle in Styria, but then he rewrote the initial chapters, shifting the setting far beyond Le Fanu's Styria. Even though, historically, the castles of Prince Dracula were actually located in Wallachia, where he had ruled for some years, Stoker decided to transfer his fictional castle "further north, close to the remote Borgo Pass which connects Transylvania with Moldavia."[398]

He may have decided to change the setting of his novel probably after reading the article "Transylvanian Superstitions" (1885) by Emily Gerard who knew that land well. Gerard's information, indeed, provided him all the knowledge about that land's myths and superstitions he needed to be aware of in order to set his novel there, as "she present[ed] Transylvania as the superstitious backwater of Europe, a place where belief in ghouls, goblins and vampires is accepted without question."[399] Harker, indeed, in the first pages of the novel, seems aware of the fact of being travelling towards a land famous for its superstitions, of which he had read up in the library, like Stoker himself:

> […] I had visited the British Museum, and made search among the books and maps in the library regarding Transylvania; […] 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. (pp. 7-8)

[397] Arata, S., "The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization", p. 627.
[398] Leatherdale, C., p. 86.
[399] *Ibid*., p. 108.

Most interestingly, Gerard's article three years later took the form of a two-volume book titled *The Land Beyond the Forest* (1888), explicit reference as well as translation from the Latin of the word 'Transylvania'.[400]

According to Barbara Belford, another influence on Stoker's decision to change the setting of his novel may have arrived from an Hungarian folklore expert he met in 1890, called Arminius Vambéry, who is also mentioned by Van Helsing in the novel:

> I have asked my friend Arminius, of Buda-Pesth University, to make his record; and, from all the means that are, he tell me of what he has been. He must, indeed, have been that Voivode Dracula who won his name against the Turk, over the great river on the very frontier of the Turkey-land. […] He was no common man. […] The Dracula were, says Arminius, a great and noble race […]. (p. 256)

This professor, a teacher of obscure languages, may have contributed to the change of setting, though it is not sure that he established the vampire myth.[401] Moreover, it is important to point out that the way Dracula became a vampire is not the 'usual' way, that is through a bite on the neck and bloodsucking, rather, "through the study of magic"[402] in an academy located in the Carpathians, mentioned by Gerard in her article:

> […] I may as well mention the *Scholomace*, or school supposed to exist somewhere in the heart of the mountains, and where all the secrets of nature, the language of animals, and all imaginable magic spells and charms are taught by the devil in person. Only ten scholars are admitted at a time, and

[400] *Ibid*.
[401] Belford, B., *Bram Stoker: A Biography of the Author of 'Dracula'*, United States: Da Capo Press, 2002, p. 260.
[402] Hatlen, B., "The Return of the Repressed/Oppressed in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*" in *Dracula: The Vampire and the Critics*, p. 126.

> when the course of learning has expired and nine of them are released to return to their homes, the tenth scholar is detained by the devil as payment […].[403]

Emily Gerard, therefore, also seems to have provided Stoker the suggestion for how Dracula could have originally became a vampire. This is also explained in the novel by Van Helsing who reports Arminius Vambéry's words:

> The Draculas were, says Arminius, a great and noble race, though now and again were scions who were held by their coevals to have had dealing with the Evil One. They learned his secrets in the Scholomance, amongst the mountains over Lake Hermanstadt [town in western central Romania, see note 7 at page 450], where the devil claims the tenth scholar as his due. […] in one manuscript this very Dracula is spoken of as "vampyr", which we all understand too well. (p. 256)

It can be claimed that, probably due to its distant geography and peculiar geology which made the land almost inaccessible, to Victorian readers, the Transylvanian setting was not so familiar. Leatherdale, indeed, describes it as "surrounded on three sides by the rocky barrier of the Carpathians, and on its western approaches by one of Europe's most impenetrable forests" so much so that "it seemed to be the remotest part of a remote country – a land beyond the land beyond the forest"[404]. Also Harker considers this remote territory as "one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe." (p. 8) The Carpathians were actually known by the Victorians as a territory in which many empires followed one another over the centuries, and Transylvania, in particular, as Arata points out, "was known primarily as part of the vexed 'Eastern Question' that so obsessed British foreign policy in the 1880s and '90s"[405]. The region, therefore,

[403] Gerard, E., "Transylvanian Superstitions". *The Nineteenth Century, a Monthly Review*, 18 (July-December 1885) [eBook reader], London: Kegan Paul, Trench & co., pp. 135-6.
[404] Leatherdale, C., pp 108-9.
[405] Arata, S., "The Occidental Tourist", p. 627.

was configured more as the core of political and racial turmoil than as the site of myths and superstition. The Balkans did not represent a territory of colonial relevance for Britain, rather an area of "sporadic interest outside of formal national control"[406], not so colonially significant as Africa or India. Nevertheless, educated Britons, from the last decaying years of the nineteenth century to the threshold of the First World War, were fascinated by the region's rich tradition of British culture. After the independence of Greece (1830) from the Ottoman Empire, the British tended to defend it: on one hand, it was associated with scientifical and architectural progress as well as military power, on the other, it was known in the West as 'the Sick Man of Europe', due to its conflicts with Austria-Hungary and Russia for statehood.[407]

Transylvania, therefore, seems to be specially located halfway between Western and Eastern traditions, as Harker observes in the very first pages of his journal, on his way to Dracula's castle: "The impression I had was that we were leaving the West and entering the East; the most Western of splendid bridges over the Danube, which is here of noble width and depth, took us among the traditions of the Turkish rule." (p. 7) Transylvania, a land geographically exotic and historically colonized by both the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires, seems simultaneously in and out Europe: its Eastern and Western identity is not strictly defined and delimited, but rather ambivalent, entrapped into a "liminal identity [that] oscillat[es] between familiar-European and alien-Ottoman

[406] Hughes, W., "A Singular Invasion: Revisiting the Postcoloniality of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*" in *Empire and the Gothic: The Politics of Genre*, p. 91.
[407] Hughes, W., *Bram Stoker Dracula. A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 90.

cultures"[408]. Emily Gerard points out how the region preserves historic folk memories, which had been somehow rejected by European rationality:

> It would almost seem as though the whole species of demons, pixies, witches, and hobgoblins, driven from the rest of Europe by the wand of science, had taken refuge within this mountain rampart [Transylvania], well aware that here they would find secure-lurking place, whence they might defy their persecutors yet awhile.[409]

Therefore, Europe is not completely foreign and detached from this land, rather it is part of a kind of vortex, of which Transylvania is the centre. Dracula himself defines his land as "the whirlpool of European races" (p. 36), in which many populations fought for supremacy in a true bloody battleground, since "there is hardly a foot of soil in all this region that has not been enriched by the blood of men, patriots or invaders." (p. 28)

There was no better and more emblematic place, thus, in which Stoker could have set the castle of his menacing Count: "by moving Castle Dracula there, [he] gives distinctly political overtones to his narrative"[410], located in a place characterized by a "polyracial character"[411] and known for succession of empires, violent incursions and battles. Since, according to Stoker, vampires are associated with rise and decay of empires and military conquest, only this remote region would fit his purpose of representing Dracula as a conqueror and

[408] *Ibid*.
[409] Gerard, E., "Transylvanian Superstitions", p. 130.
[410] Arata, S., p. 627.
[411] *Ibid*., p. 628.

invader[412], an aristocrat engaged in form of domination not only as an individual, but as a "race-synecdoche"[413].

### 3.3 Sir Henry Irving as an Inspiration for Dracula

Some biographical hints on Bram Stoker's life are necessary to entirely understand how the author came to the construction of the character of Dracula.

Bram Stoker was born on 8 November 1847 in a suburb in the north of Dublin, at the time of the Great Famine in Ireland (1845-47). Born into a non-wealthy Protestant family, he was the third of seven children and invalid in early childhood, due to an unknown illness which made him blind and bed-ridden until he was seven. During his illness, his mother Charlotte, an Anglo-Celtic woman from the rural west of Ireland, used to read him tales about folklore, superstition, Irish legends, and myths. His father, Abraham Stoker, was born in Dublin and was a civil servant in the British administration of Ireland[414]. In 1864 Bram enrolled in Trinity College and, even though his formal academic career was not particularly brilliant, he excelled in other areas, such as athletics and competitive rugby football, proving to be a very talented athlete[415], despite the serious illness he suffered from in childhood. Not only he became a successful athlete and was appointed the University Athlete in 1866, but also director of

[412] *Ibid*. The author points out that for Stoker, the vampire 'race', among the others, is the most threatening race inhabiting the area (pp. 627-8).
[413] Hughes, W., "A Singular Invasion", p. 92.
[414] Hughes, W., *Beyond Dracula: Bram Stoker's Fiction and its Cultural Context*. London [et al.]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000, p. 5.
[415] *Ibid*.

some important organizations, such as the Philosophical Society and the Historical Society, a role that often led him to speak in public.[416] His academic career at Trinity was interrupted, allegedly for financial reasons, and in 1866 he began to work in the Irish Civil Service in Dublin Castle, starting a career apparently more notable than the academic one. He indeed obtained some important promotions, thanks to his motivation and accuracy, yet he decided to leave his position to devote himself to his great passion: writing. His admiration for poetry and theatre was already evident from his college years, during which he took part in a discussion in defence of Walt Whitman's debatable poetry. Stoker also had the opportunity to meet him in person in the 1880s, remaining profoundly fascinated and influenced by his poetry, and by that of D. H. Lawrence as well. While working in Dublin Castle, he frequently went to the theatre and began a career like drama critic for Irish magazines and fictions, as well as for the *Dublin Mail*, a newspaper for which he wrote his reviews without being paid.[417]

Stoker's passion for the theatre, perhaps passed down to him by the father, opened him the way to one of the encounters that will definitely change his life. In 1876 the encounter with Sir Henry Irving, one of the most famous theatre actors of the last decades of the nineteenth century, revealed to be a sort of 'epiphany' for Stoker, the beginning of the most important and meaningful chapter of his writing career. The first time he saw Irving acting was in 1867 in

[416] Riquelme, J. P., *Dracula: Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical, Historical and Cultural Contexts, Critical History and Essays from Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, p. 6.
[417] *Ibid*., p. 7.

Dublin, at Theatre Royal: since that moment, Stoker became intensely passionate about the theatre (chronology, p. xiii).

In December 1876, after reading Stoker's review of Irving's performance in *Hamlet* at Theatre Royal, the actor decided to invite the drama critic to dine with him. After being praised for his meticulous review, Stoker was thrilled and instantly captured by Irving's charisma and charm[418] which will gradually led him to an idealization of the actor and also to a kind of falling in love. Given the appreciation for his review, but also for his personality and career in general, in 1878 Stoker was offered and persuaded to leave his secure administrative position in order to become Irving's acting manager at the Lyceum Theatre in London. This task, which Stoker promptly accepted, involved important responsibilities for him that were not just limited to the practical administration of the company, but also to its publicity and touring schedules, even outside London, in the United Kingdom and the United States.[419] Therefore, the time this job required was considerable: besides being his business manager, he was also Irving's confidant, personal secretary and loyal friend.[420] Moreover, Stoker's position was not only that of the employee subordinate to the boss, but also that of 'right-hand man', collaborator and advisor. He somehow worked on behalf of Irving at the Theatre and frequently represented him at public functions. In such a stimulant context, he met many important intellectual celebrities and political personalities, also involved in Imperial politics, and had

[418] Belford, B., *Bram Stoker: A Biography of the Author of 'Dracula'*, pp. 3-4.
[419] Hughes, W., "Stoker, Bram" in *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* (vol. 2), p. 649.
[420] Belford, B., p. x.

the occasion to attend to popular Shakespearean plays and melodramas that inspired him in his literary career.[421] Moreover, during his work at the Lyceum, he had the possibility to analyse the concerns that were affecting English society at the end of the century – the integrity of national identity, gender politics, religious controversy – and to discuss them at clubs.[422] However, his duties led Stoker to postpone his marriage with Florence Balcombe, who will turn out to be a sexually rigid wife, hence his resorting to prostitutes to vent his repressed sexuality. This eventually will cost him dearly, making him ill with syphilis, cause of his death in 1912.

During his nearly thirty years of demanding work for Irving, being immersed in a pervasive literary context, Stoker never abandoned writing; in fact, he was furtherly motivated. Constantly working side by side with the actor, on the one hand, Stoker shared his power and popularity, yet on the other he was aware that such power came solely from Irving's influence and excellence on his work. Therefore, writing appeared to be the only way to have a 'life' separate from that of his boss, the only way to build his own individual career, based on his own literary expressiveness and ability.[423] From short fiction, he devoted himself to the novel: in particular, eight of his novels, including *Dracula*, were written while he was working for Irving, "thus completed effectively on a part-time basis, the research and writing often effected on tour or in breaks between

[421] Riquelme, J. P., *Dracula: Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical, Historical and Cultural Contexts*, pp. 8-9.
[422] Hughes, W., *Beyond Dracula*, p. 8.
[423] Riquelme, J. P., p. 10.

productions or rehearsals."[424] As Frayling points out, every occasion or free moment proved useful for writing: "Bram Stoker tended to write on the run in hotels, on trains, in libraries and on leave from the Lyceum […]." (preface, p. xi) For his research on Dracula, indeed, he also devoted his vacation time outside London, near Whitby, where part of the novel is set, and in London, at the British Library, he continually searched for useful material for his novel, especially that concerning superstitions and geography of Eastern Europe.[425]

As Polidori modelled his charming Lord Ruthven on the figure of his master, Lord Byron, many scholars agree on the fact that also Stoker took inspiration from his master, Henry Irving, in the creation of Dracula, so much so that he is even considered "as the prototype for the vampire count"[426]. As a matter of fact, such strong, brave, as well as noble warrior can be interpreted in the light of the meeting with Irving, to whose service Stoker devoted most of his life: Irving's commanding, captivating, and noble personality exerted such an appeal and admiration on Stoker that he managed to project all these characteristics onto his literary vampire. Belford indeed points out that "on that [December evening in 1876] he met Count Dracula"[427], a powerful and attractive personality, perfectly suited to fill the role of the noble master, as Dracula is.

The encounter with Irving changed and so deeply affected Stoker's life that on the actor's death (1905) Stoker fell into a terrible shock, both physical and professional, which led to him suffering from a series of strokes and even a

[424] Hughes, W., pp. 7-8.
[425] Riquelme, J. P., p. 11.
[426] Vanon Alliata, M., "Vampires and Vampirism", p. 1718.
[427] Belford, B., p. 5.

financial crisis.[428] In 1906, after a terrible stroke, he was paralyzed for many months, with damaged eyesight, too. His attempt to become a lecturer and an exhibition coordinator did not have the desired success, consequently he completely devoted himself to writing, the only possible source of income.[429] In that same year, indeed, he published his longest work, *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving*, a two-volume biography he wrote during his convalescence, in which he openly praises his deceased employer, yet not remaining unseen. This work collects material about the company's tours, its productions at the Lyceum Theatre and represents an important pillar in the history of the theatre.[430] Moreover, in the book he describes the encounter with Irving and the consequent strong friendship that developed "as profound, as close, as lasting as can be between two men" originated from a "Soul [which] had looked into soul!"[431]. Riquelme highlights the non-chronological form of the book: Stoker did not merely put in order his memoirs, but gave shape to a sometimes fragmentary work, inserting anecdotes and commentaries and "shap[ing] the memoirs in ways that reveal[ed] his own interests and attitudes."[432] As Hughes observes, Stoker also reported the encounters he had with authoritative politicians, such as Disraeli and Gladstone, and remarkable poets, for instance Tennyson and Whitman.[433] According to Riquelme, then, the book also reveals the different political thought that Stoker and Irving had concerning the issue of the Irish

[428] Hughes, W., "Stoker, Bram" in *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* (vol. 2), p. 649.
[429] Hughes, W., *Beyond Dracula*, p. 9.
[430] Riquelme, J. P., p. 13.
[431] Stoker, B., *Personal Reminiscences*, vol. I, p. 31, quoted in introduction, p. xxx.
[432] Riquelme, J. P., p. 13.
[433] Hughes, W., "Stoker, Bram", p. 650.

Home Rule. Stoker was an Anglo-Irish, in the middle of an ambiguous cultural tradition that, on the one hand, made him a moderate supporter of Irish autonomy and, on the other an admirer of the British Empire, and of the 'nation' intended not only as England, but more widely as "English-speaking peoples, including the Irish, Americans, English-speaking Canadians, and others."[434] As a Protestant Irish writer, living in London, in such a difficult period for the Empire, he was often reminded of his origins and sometimes treated with prejudices, due to his in-between position that both supported Irish independence and admired England and its people. While Stoker supported the Home Rule movement, Irving "was always chaffing [him] about it"[435] and while the actor was convinced that Great Britain was the "Great Empire on which the sun never sets"[436], Stoker realized that, at the end of the century, British national identity was instead actually collapsing.

According to Belford, "[*Dracula*] is [Stoker's] most autobiographical novel"[437] in which he mirrors himself and the most important components of his real life in the main characters of the novel: specifically, his master, Irving, and his father, Abraham, represent respectively the 'bad father', embodied by Dracula, and the 'good father', embodied by the physician Van Helsing. Stoker's mother, Charlotte, is projected onto the intelligent Mina, while his wife, Florence, is represented by the submissive Lucy.[438] Interestingly enough, the

[434] Riquelme, J. P., p. 16.
[435] *Personal Reminiscences*, p. 343, quoted in *Ibid*., p. 18.
[436] *Personal Reminiscences*, p. 342, quoted in *Ibid*.
[437] Belford, B., p. 5.
[438] *Ibid*.

young lawyer, Jonathan Harker, can be considered Stoker's alter-ego: besides sharing the same research about Eastern Europe in the library, they also share a similar and peculiar dream scene, which happened to Stoker in real life and to Harker in the novel, anticipating a paramount scene. As it happened to Horace Walpole, regarding the initial scene of his famous Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, also Stoker's imagination was triggered by a nightmare that then became Harker's journal entry, anticipating the climax of the novel, that is the eroticized passage describing the attack of the three female vampires: "I suppose I must have fallen asleep; I hope, but I fear, for all that followed was startlingly real – so real that now […] I cannot in the least believe that it was all sleep." (p. 44) This scene in which Harker succumbs to pleasure, feeling both desire and repulsion for the three women kissing him on his throat, is then abruptly interrupted by the arrival of the Count who claims his possession over Harker: this is precisely what Stoker dreamed of on the night of 7 March 1890 and which he instantly wrote down on a sheet of paper; his bad dream "was the origin of *Dracula*". (preface, p. x) Biographically, then, this passage also represents Stoker's own anxieties about masculinity, since he did not consider himself powerful as a man, as well as his frustrated and repressed sexuality, due to his wife's rigidity, he could unleash only by resorting to prostitutes.

His uncontrolled sexual activity eventually led him to death, in 1912, which was allegedly attributed to syphilis, a serious, highly contagious and sexually transmitted disease. When he died, he was just known as Irving's shadow, his right-hand man, but then "he became the almost invisible author of

a single well-known book, whose importance and influence have continued to grow, […] [leaving] an indelible mark on literature, film and popular culture."[439]

## 3.4 Dracula: the Social Other Threatening the Victorian Bourgeoise World

Through the construction of the character of Dracula as a noble descendant of an important and ancient family of feudal rank, the Boyars, Stoker seems to have wanted to enclose in him, first of all, a social belonging opposite to that prevalent in England at the end of the nineteenth century, that is the bourgeoise. However, he not only limited himself to giving Dracula an aristocratic identity, alien to modern and contemporary English society, but also made him an active and dynamic character, proud of his origins and determined to preserve them, through invasion and domination: "Stoker makes Dracula vigorous and energetic […] [he] represents the nobleman as warrior"[440], he is not merely the aristocratic vampire seducer, a representative of the aristocratic thirst for sexuality, as Lord Ruthven and Carmilla; rather Stoker's aristocratic vampire is also and primarily an invader or, better, the 'invasive other', born in a distant past and coming from a backward and foreign land, who gradually threatens to colonize the more progressed and civilized Victorian world with the aim of destroying its social and also cultural stability.[441]

[439] Riquelme, J. P., p. 19.
[440] Arata, S., p. 628.
[441] Vanon Alliata, M., p. 1717.

Interestingly enough, according to Burton Hatlen, Dracula represents the socially other and the 'socially oppressed' precisely because he is "the embodiment of all the social forces that lurked just beyond the frontiers of Victorian middle class consciousness"[442]: it is what English society rejects and strives to oppress and which, on its sudden reappearance, causes worry, terror and anxiety.

However, it almost seems that the modernity and rationality of English society paradoxically favoured him in his invasion plans, thus making England the ideal place for the preservation of his demonic race, "the place of all the world of most promise for him" (p. 341), whose progress, scepticism and trust in science would hardly have given importance to folkloric superstitions about vampirism, hence leaving him an open field. As a matter of fact, Richard Wasson claims that in Dracula's native land he is hindered by suspicions and superstitions, characteristics of an undeveloped society still trapped in folkloric legends, whereas what little remains of peasant England at the turn of the century is more sceptical, far from non-rational folkloric beliefs. And it is precisely for this reason that, at least initially, the astute Count's invasion plans prove to be effective[443]: the progress that made the West proud, and England in particular, also proves to be the weak point, what makes it vulnerable and attackable, as it is unable to accept and believe in the existence of something beyond its control.

[442] Hatlen, B., "The Return of the Repressed/Oppressed in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*", p. 120.
[443] Wasson, R., "The Politics of *Dracula*" in *Dracula: The Vampire and the Critics*, p. 21.

It is necessary to point out that the way in which Dracula carries out his plans of conquest is closely linked to his aristocratic origin: indeed, "like the peasant, his life is rooted in the soil"[444] and, most importantly, wherever he goes, he must carry with him coffins containing the earth of his native land, and that is exactly what he does at the beginning of his conquest of England. It must be specified, indeed, that the way the Count approaches the land to be invaded is somehow deceitful, not immediately perceivable, and thus even more dangerous: his arrival is not signalled by a large army, or navy, equipped with modern technology, like all modern empires and especially the British one; rather the way he approaches England is almost unsophisticated or rudimentary, and as such the expression of the backwardness from which he comes. Hughes, indeed, points out that:

> lacking the necessary force for a modern imperial adventure, [the Count's] invasion thus takes the form of immigration, a subtle and unseen crossing of borders by way of trade routes, in the holds of cargo vessels, and upon the very carts and railway trucks that distributed imported wares from the British east-coast ports to the metropolis.[445]

Similarly, the way he moves within the modern world is worryingly covert: something odd and unusual is perceived, starting with young Lucy and her strange behaviours, though it does not cause great concern right away, precisely because the threat is not concretely visible and, therefore, attackable. As Lucy worsens, and as the main characters become aware of the actual presence of a threat looming over them, subtly attacking people's bodies, the

[444] Hatlen, B., p. 130.
[445] Hughes, W., *Bram Stoker Dracula. A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*, p. 77.

conflict between the advanced Victorian society and the eastern dark threat becomes inevitable. From this point, a bitter fight opens between the Anglo Saxon professionals and the one who represents the 'social other', the aristocrat from an unknown and uncivilized land: it becomes evident, then, that these two opposite categories give rise to a "struggle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness"[446], a recurrent motif in many romances and novels, which metaphorically associates the light with 'good' and the darkness with 'evil' and, consequently, what is considered as 'evil' provokes anxiety and fear not only for his evilness, but precisely because it represents something unusual, the "Other, alien, different, strange, unclean and unfamiliar"[447].

In the analysis of the 'good' characters, who are committed and unite to defeat the threatening, foreign 'evil', their social belonging cannot be left out of consideration. If the Count represents the threat of a revival of aristocracy, rooted in his land and unable to move without the coffins with the earth containing it, his seekers and victims are exponents of the modern and stable Victorian middle-class, wealthy and even engaged in important positions, such as that of a lawyer or a doctor. Jonathan Harker, the author of the journal which occupies most of the novel, is a lawyer and, from the beginning, "assum[es] the role of the Victorian traveller in the East"[448], therefore, he represents modernity

[446] Hatlen, B., p. 120.
[447] see Friedric Jameson, quoted in *Ibid.* According to Jameson, the concepts of 'good' and 'evil' are historically and humanly constructed. The category of evil is associated with that of Otherness, since it is perceived as completely different and outside the 'mainstream' and the traditional, hence threatening. Stoker, then, labelled Dracula with physical, social, cultural, and racial 'Otherness', given his extraneousness and non-belonging to the 'mainstream' Victorian world.
[448] Arata, S., p. 636.

par excellence. He is also the first one to venture into the dark East, of which he seems to have some foreknowledge or, perhaps, prejudices, starting from the unpunctuality of trains: “It seems to me that the further East you go the more unpunctual are the trains. What ought they to be in China?” (p. 8). His foreknowledge, coming from the books he had read at the British Museum, makes him feel detached and aliened from the strange world in which he is entering, “[he] [does] not feel comfortable” (p. 11) in that mysterious and superstitious land, in which a woman offers him a crucifix and puts a rosary around his neck. To his rational and Protestant mind, such gestures seem almost idolatrous and make him “not feeling nearly as easy in [his] mind as usual.” (p. 11) However, the meeting with the Count demolishes all the certainties and beliefs on which he had based his construction of the East up to that moment, since “the light and warmth and the Count’s courteous welcome [seem] to [dissipate] all [his] doubts and fears.” (p. 23) As a matter of fact, the Count initially turns out to be anything but a rude person: his attitudes towards Harker are one of hospitality, kindness and willingness, leaving no room for doubt as to his true nature. Moreover, he is also an educated and informed person who has read up especially about the country of origin of his host, similar to what Harker had done before setting out for Transylvania. The lawyer indeed observes:

> In the library I found, to my great delight, a vast number of English books, whole shelves full of them, and bound volumes of magazines and newspapers. A table in the centre was littered with English magazines and newspapers, though none of them were of very recent date. The books were of the most varied kind – history, geography, politics, political economy, botany, geology, law – all relating to England and English life and customs and manners […]. (p. 26)

The Count, then, admits his curiosity about England and London, of which he learned about "the crowded streets […] and [Harker's] tongue" (p. 27) thanks to those books. Surprisingly, Harker is faced with a person who is anything but unprepared and 'barbarian', as he would have expected to find in that mysterious land, given his initial prejudices. Arata indeed observes that "when Harker arrives at the end of his journey East, he finds, not some epitome of irrationality, but a most accomplished Occidentalist"[449] who can even be considered Western, rational, organized, educated, and intelligent as Harker is. Contrary to all expectations, then, the quintessential Victorian middle-class exponent travelling East stands on the same level of the backward aristocrat that will travel West: they both have foreknowledge of the respective countries they will visit, though Dracula's 'visit' and Occidental knowledge is not motivated by a genuine curiosity, rather "represents the essence of bad faith, since it both promotes and masks [his] sinister plan to invade and exploit Britain and her people."[450] According to Hatlen, Harker is one of the most important members of the ruling Victorian middle-class: being a lawyer, he is educated, rational, occupying a prestigious position in society, since "[he] represents the state, the juridicial and political system."[451] Basically, Harker in the novel is the personification of the Law, as well as the scapegoat who must face the threat first, deceived by his innocence and good faith that initially do not allow him to realize the threat that surrounds him. Furthermore, this naïve aspect of him perfectly refers to the

[449] Arata, S., p. 637.
[450] *Ibid*., p. 638.
[451] Hatlen, B., p. 121.

typical inexperience of the *Buildungsroman* protagonists, a widespread genre in the nineteenth century, and to the alleged impotent manhood, attributed to Victorian men.[452] The sexual repression, typical of a restrained and controlled society, based on appearances and decency, is evident in the climax scene of the novel in which Harker is sexually attacked by the three female vampires. In this episode, he feels both attraction, strong desire, and dreadful repulsion for those three women who seem to dominate, threaten and almost 'devour' him. Such opposing feelings are clearly reported in his diary:

> […] All three had brilliant white teeth, that shone like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips. There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips. […] There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive. […] I closed my eyes in a languorous ecstacy and waited – waited with beating heart. (pp. 45-6)

Pervaded by so much allure and unable to release himself from such a disgusting, yet delightful sensation, Harker finally succumbs to the fascinating pleasure of a transgressive and forbidden attraction, enjoying the active sexual role of the three women. Harker's yielding to temptation is therefore the result of a repressed sexuality advocated by a repressive society, for which the role of the 'penetrating woman' was unacceptable, as an inversion of the traditional gender norms that provided man as the active part in the sexual act. In this way, as Punter observes, Dracula "blurs the line between man and woman by demonstrating the existence of female passion"[453]. The one who seems to have

[452] Hennelly, Jr. Mark M., "*Dracula*: The Gnostic Quest and Victorian Wasteland" in *Dracula: The Vampire and the Critics*, p. 87.
[453] Punter, D., *The Literature of Terror*, pp. 262-3.

'control' over the three women is the Count, who appears at the end of this eroticized passage, ordering his wives to stay back from Harker: "Back, I tell you all! This man belongs to me! Beware how you meddle with him, or you'll have to deal with me." (p. 46) Despite his prominent role in Victorian society, Harker gradually becomes imprisoned in that gloomy castle, "but without that protection of the law which is even a criminal's right and consolation" (p. 52) and what awards him social prestige. It can be said, then, that Harker is to all effects a 'default' character, a bourgeoise professional, a white Victorian heterosexual English gentleman not only perfectly integrated into the society of his time, but also representation of how that society wanted to appear.

Another representative of the Victorian progressed society is Dr Seward, also a middle-class professional, whose role is as important as Harker's, as a "representative of the Victorian scientific establishment"[454] and progress. He is the director of an asylum in London and suffers from insomnia; being sentimentally frustrated after a rejected proposal, he dedicates himself completely to work, the only relief from his frustration. While Harker represents the Law and the Victorian traveller going toward the unknown East, Dr Seward personifies Science, but is also an "alter-ego for the reader as detached spectator"[455]. He is a pillar of scientific progress and, being strongly attached to science and rationality, he is not easily influenced by what his Dutch colleague

[454] Vanon Alliata, M., *Haunted Minds*, p. 177.
[455] Hennelly, Jr. Mark M., "*Dracula*: The Gnostic Quest and Victorian Wasteland", p. 87.

and teacher, Dr Van Helsing, tells him about vampires, questioning such non-rational beliefs:

> Yesterday I was almost willing to accept Van Helsing's monstrous ideas; but now they seem to start out lurid before me as outrages on common sense. I have no doubt that he believes it all. […] Surely there must be *some* rational explanation of all these mysterious things. (p. 217, italics Stoker's)

Seward is a dedicated and sensitive man, almost fragile in some respects, but Stoker wanted to depict him as "an unlikely guarantor of the psychic order"[456] and "the perfect embodiment of a determined masculinity"[457] so idealized in Victorian society. However, somehow, like the reader, he assumes the role of the sceptical spectator and "impotent observer"[458] of the destruction produced by the Count, not being able to save his beloved Lucy. Nevertheless, according to Hatlen, he is an undoubtedly dominant figure, representing, together with Harker, "the groups which […] keep English society functioning"[459], that is Law and Science, both models of rationality and technology that contributed to the establishment of England as a powerful nation.

Another pillar of this society is Arthur Holmwood, or Lord Arthur Godalming, an aristocrat, the personification of the English tradition. Unlike Dracula, he is the 'good' aristocrat: indeed, he has no intention to attack and demolish the bourgeois ruling class, rather he wants to join it, becoming a sort of "bourgeois aristocrat"[460], by marrying one of its members, that is Lucy

[456] Vanon Alliata, M., p. 164.
[457] *Ibid*., p. 167.
[458] *Ibid*., p. 177.
[459] Hatlen, B., p. 121.
[460] *Ibid*.

Westenra. Being the embodiment of the aristocratic values, he also represents the decay of such values in contemporary society, since the wealthy class he represents can no longer avail itself of the authority of the past. As Hatlen suggests, indeed, he seems to be perfectly integrated into contemporary society and even seems to prefer it over that of his origins, though, given his noble title, he cannot aspire to a professional position.[461] His little open-mindedness makes him unable "to believe in things [he] cannot" (p. 206) and will also be the cause of the loss of his fiancé who will be "appropriately seduced by Count Dracula"[462].

These male characters, thus, perform the role of defenders of the nation from an invader and, thanks to their power and dominant social positions, the decisions they take reveal to be determinant for the survival of their society. As a matter of fact, each of them, according to their possibilities and legal or scientific knowledge, contribute to the rescue of their country. More specifically, what they strive to defend is the purity and decorum of the Victorian woman, represented differently by the novel's two female characters, Lucy and Mina. Lucy, the archetype of the ideal, innocent and submissive Victorian woman, whose name suggests "the principle of right light"[463], with her beauty and desirability, will attract Dracula's attention, and will end up being one of his victims. Mina, initially a bearer and teacher of Victorian "etiquette and decorum" (p. 183) who rejects the ideal of the 'New Woman', in the second part

[461] *Ibid*.
[462] Hennelly, Jr. Mark M., p. 86.
[463] *Ibid*., p. 88.

of the novel undergoes a strong change that will lead her to be a pragmatic young lady: her intelligence, determination and intuition will prove fundamental in tracking Dracula's movements in London, also thanks to the telepathic connection she has with the Count. Mina, gifted with "man's brain […] and woman's heart" (p. 250), will be the first one to notice Lucy "weaker and languid day by day", "wak[ing] up and walk[ing] about the room" at night, "painful struggl[ing] for breath" and with two, red "tiny wounds […] like little white dots with red centres" (p. 106) on her neck. Despite various efforts to save poor Lucy, who, over time, seems to be increasingly weaker, restless and overwhelmed by Dracula's attacks, science and rational attempts to save the young woman prove to be almost useless: the blood transfusions proposed by Van Helsing, although at first appear to be effective, are not enough to keep alive the girl who continues to aggravate, and the final decision can be nothing other than to kill her to give her eternal rest.

The difference between the threatening vampire and the bourgeois characters, committed to defending their society and its values, is then obvious. Basically, Dracula clearly represents the embodiment of everything that modern society refused to accept and was required to repress in order to preserve order and stability. As Punter effectively summarizes in a few lines:

> […] Dracula stands for lineage, the principal group of characters for family; Dracula for the wildness of the night, they for the security of the day; Dracula for unintelligible and bitter passion, they for the sweet and reasonable emotions; Dracula for the physical and erotic, they for repressed and etherealised love.[464]

[464] Punter, D., p. 259.

However, with his intelligence, organizational capacity, human resemblance, and European origin, he would not even seem so 'different' from his English hunters, except that

> his roots are in *Eastern* Europe – Slavic, Catholic, peasant, and superstitious where England is Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, industrial, and rationalist. […] [Moreover], unlike Arthur, the bourgeois aristocrat, he belongs to a much older, more feudal sort of aristocracy, one that was going out of favor in England.[465]

It is fundamental to point out, indeed, how neither Lucy, nor Dracula are finally annihilated thanks to the force of science. It almost seems that "the collective identity of these men"[466], all exponents of the progressed Anglo-Saxon society, represented in the book by the union between pragmatism, science, law, and prestige, is not yet sufficient in defeating the dark threat that hangs over it. If it is true that their success lies in the fact that in the end they manage to repel the threat, thanks to cohesion, rationality and technology, it is also true that the actual final destruction occurs through absolute irrational methods. As a matter of fact, "the committee of modernists achieve their victory not by dint of their science, but their credulous retreat into folklore remedies"[467]: Dracula, like Lucy, is killed according to the vampire-killing method dictated by folkloristic superstitions, that is through "resort[ing] to exotic and primitive knives (Jonathan's Kukri and Morris's bowie)"[468], "cut[ting] off his head at once

[465] Spencer, K. L., "Purity and Danger: Dracula, the Urban Gothic, and the Late Victorian Degeneracy Crisis", p. 213.
[466] McKee, P., "Racialization, Capitalism, and Aesthetics in Stoker's 'Dracula'". *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 36 (1), 2002, p. 58.
[467] Markmann, E., *The History of Gothic Fiction*, p. 198.
[468] *Ibid*.

and driv[ing] a stake through his heart" (p. 356) and "the whole body crumbl[ing] into dust" (p. 401). Stoker, in this way, points out how English society is finally rescued, though not by "the triumph of psychiatry and technology over irrationalism and the forces of darkness"[469], rather through "superstition [which] […] takes precedence over reason"[470]: that society that considered itself advanced, civilized and rational, finally lets itself be overwhelmed by barbarity and superstitious beliefs, "exposing the limits of Western medical science at technology, ultimately eroding British confidence in the inevitability of progress"[471]. Dracula, somehow, "has caused [the characters exponents of English progress] to abandon their faith in material science and modernity"[472]: though ultimately defeated, the Count's assault, thus, did not prove to be useless or inefficient, rather it revealed how even such a scientifically advanced and culturally progressed society had to 'fold' to archaic methods, initially scoffed, to achieve final victory.

### 3.5 Dracula: the Cultural Other Triggering Cultural Degeneracy

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, in the section concerning the 'Imperial Gothic', this subgenre, in which *Dracula* must be undoubtedly included, is deeply engaged with all the major anxieties that pervaded Britain at the turn of the century, first of all that of cultural degeneration and the horror of

[469] Vanon Alliata, M., p. 177.
[470] Botting, F., *Gothic*, p. 151.
[471] Vanon Alliata, M., "Vampires and Vampirism", p. 1717.
[472] Markmann, E., p. 198.

the return to the atavistic. In such a narrative, as Arata observes, the "savagery" is both appealing and repugnant: "[the] proximity to elemental instincts and energies, energies seen as dissipated by modern life, makes [the primitive] dangerous but also attractive"[473].

Given his social belonging to a rooted-in-the-soil aristocracy and his origin from a distant past and a dark, superstitious land, the figure of the "four-hundred-year-old vampire" can be easily associated with that of "an atavistic 'criminal type'"[474], the embodiment of the primitive, a primordial force, "the darkness invad[ing] the 'heart of light', England itself"[475]. Dracula's threat of degeneration resides not only in the fact that he is the representative of a primordial and backward world, haunting civilization - an already disturbing element in itself - but also in the fact that his ways of representing primordiality and regression are varied. Precisely, "the atavistic vampire […] is associated with the disruption and transgression of accepted limits and boundaries"[476]: he has no fixed identity, he oscillates between life and death, and, most importantly, he is not even physically determined. And the threat of degeneracy he triggers is originated precisely from this, from his being neither wholly a human, nor wholly a beast, but rather from taking the appearance at times of the former or of the latter depending on his 'needs'. Botting, indeed, recognizes polymorphism as a peculiar characteristic of the figure of Dracula: "Dracula's

[473] Arata, S., p. 624.
[474] Mighall, R., *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmares*, p. 138.
[475] Hatlen, B., p. 126.
[476] Byron, G., Punter, D., *The Gothic*, p. 231.

threat is polymorphousness, both literally, in the shapes he assumes, and symbolically in terms of the distinctions he upsets."[477] As a matter of fact, it is not difficult to find in the novel the allusion to animal or non-human elements in reference to Dracula; moreover, many times he emerges as a physically not particularly attractive figure, with peculiar, strange and unfamiliar physical traits. Harker, having seen him first-hand, immediately perceives his unusualness and provides an accurate physical description of him in the first pages of his journal:

> I had now the opportunity of observing him, and found him of a very marked physiognomy. His face was 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 can see it under the heavy moustache, was fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth; these protruded over the lips, whose remarkably 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 of extraordinary pallor. […] I had noticed the backs of his hands […] and they had seemed rather white and fine; […] I could not but notice that they were rather coarse – broad, with squat fingers. […] there were hairs in the centre of the palm. The nails were long and fine, and cut to a sharp point. (pp. 24-5)

This detailed description is fundamental, as Harker seems to emphasize some peculiarities: for instance, the features of the face and hands seem strongly accentuated; the extreme pallor, attributable to his vampire nature, hitherto still unknown to Harker; and the hair, scant on the temples, but more diffused elsewhere. Characteristic that could not go unnoticed in the eyes of an end-of-the-century Victorian reader who could have probably connected such an

[477] Botting, F., p. 150.

abundant presence of hair ("bushy hair"), as well as hairs ("massive eyebrows", the "heavy moustache" which almost covers the mouth, and the "hairs in the centre of the palm") to the ancestral origin of man, supported by Darwin in his treatise *The Descent of Man* (1871). The absence of distinction between man and beast, the common ancestor of humans and apes, and the possible involution or degeneration of the humankind, theories advanced by Darwin, were a matter of serious concern to modern readers, belonging to a civilized and advanced society, like the Victorian one. Dracula is precisely the perfect expression of the widespread concern of degeneration and of the return of the ancestral past, since "the presence in the modern city of a centuries-old feudal aristocrat, whose primitivism is writ large across his physiognomy, signals precisely [the] anachronistic presence of the past in the present […]"[478].

Dracula not only overcomes national boundaries by moving West, from backwardness to modernity, but also overcomes relentlessly many other non-physical boundaries, including also the one that separates man from animal. Punter points out that "Count Dracula is a symbol for the abhuman[479] [and] this is signalled in a wide variety of ways, for example through his consanguinity with the animals, his proximity to bat and wolf […]"[480]. In the novel, indeed, the occasions in which he presents himself in the form of a beast, or at least in a

[478] Margree, V., Randall, B., "Fin-de-siècle Gothic" in *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion,* p. 220.
[479] for an extended analysis of the topics of 'abhuman' and 'abjected', see Kristeva J., *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, translated by Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
[480] Punter, D., "Dracula. *The Abhuman, the Family, the Cemetery Guard*" in *Dal Gotico al Fantastico. Traduzioni, riscritture e parodie,* edited by Michela Vanon Alliata and Giorgio Rimondi. Venezia: Libreria Editrice Cafoscarina srl, 2015, p. 55.

non-human form, are many. For instance, Harker tells in his diary that during his journey to the castle, the carriage where he was travelling was about to be attacked by terrifying wolves:

> I saw around us a ring of wolves, with white teeth and lolling red tongues, with long, sinewy limbs and shaggy hair. They were a hundred times more terrible in the grim silence which held them than ever when they howled. For myself, I felt a sort of paralysis of fear. (p. 19)

Trying to shout and beat on the side of the carriage, hoping in vain to frighten the wolves, Harker is then astonished of how the mysterious carriage driver – he will later realize being Dracula himself – succeeds in dispersing the wolves:

> How he came there, I know not, but I heard his voice raised in a tone of imperious command, and looking towards the sound, saw him stand in the roadway. As he swept his long arms, as though brushing aside some impalpable obstacle, the wolves fell back and back further still. […] When I could see again the driver was climbing into the calèche, and the wolves had disappeared. (p. 20)

Then, a few pages later, almost immediately after the exhaustive description of the Count, reported above, Harker is pervaded by a sense of unease and once again focuses his attention on the Count's sharp teeth. During a moment of dreadful silence, he hears the howling of the wolves coming from the outside and precisely in that instant "the Count's eyes gleamed, and he said: 'Listen to them – the children of the night. What music they make! […] You dwellers in the city cannot enter into the feelings of the hunter.'" (p. 25)

In the novel, not only Dracula's association with werewolves is made explicit, but also that with bats, originating from the relation between vampirism and some species of bloodsucking bats inhabiting South America, as reported

by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.[481] Indeed, in his attempt to attract the beautiful and naïve Lucy to himself, with the aim of transforming her into a vampire too, the Count takes the form of a large bat. As a matter of fact, Mina, in her journal, expresses her concern for her friend who is found, on many occasions, restless and sleepwalking during the night because she is attracted by a bat flying out the window:

> […] Again I awoke in the night, and found Lucy sitting up in bed, still asleep, pointing to the window. […] Between me and the moonlight flitted a great bat, coming and going in great, whirling circles. Once or twice it came quite close, but was, I suppose, frightened at seeing me […]. (p. 104)

Lucy, in a half-dreamy state, murmurs that she saw two red eyes, leaving Mina shocked who, soon after, is convinced she is seeing a strange figure, bent towards her friend: "[Lucy] appeared to be looking over at our own seat, whereon was a dark figure seated alone. I was a little startled myself, for it seemed for an instant as if the stranger had great eyes like burning flames; but a second look dispelled the illusion." (p. 105) Later, after going out for a walk on the cliff, Mina once again notices her friend looking out the window; realizing that Lucy was not looking at her, as her eyes were closed, Mina again observes that "by her, seated on the windows-sill, was something that looked like a good-sized bird" and, returning to the room, observes that "she was moving back to her bed, fast asleep, and breathing heavily; she was holding her hand to her throat, as though to protect it from cold." (p. 105) A few days later, indeed, after the umpteenth episode of sleepwalking, Mina is worried about Lucy's weakness,

[481] see paragraph 3.1, p. 101.

paleness and shortness of breath, but especially, about the two red marks on her neck which, however, do not yet make her think that her friend may have been a victim of Dracula's attack.

Moreover, also Harker tells to have seen the Count in the form of an animal, in this case a lizard. One night, he is attracted by something mysteriously strange that was moving along the castle wall:

> As I leaned from the window my eye was caught by something moving a storey below me […]. What I saw was the Count's head coming out from the window. I did not see the face, but I knew the man by the neck and the movement of his back and arms […]. But my very feelings changed to repulsion and terror when I saw the whole man slowly emerge from the window and begin to crawl down the castle wall over that dreadful abyss, *face down*, with his cloak spreading out around him like great wings […]. I saw the fingers and toes grasp the corners of the stones […] and by thus using every projection and inequality move downwards with considerable speed, just as a lizard moves along a wall. (p. 41)

Harker is understandably startled by the Count's animal appearance, and admits to being terrified, without the possibility of escaping the disturbing events that surround him.

Furthermore, later in the novel, the Count is also associated with rats which are considered the most disgusting animals. As in the opening pages he seemed to have the predominance over werewolves, even in the episode told by Dr Seward he seems to impose himself on rats:

> A dark mass spread over the grass, coming on like the shape of a flame of fire; and then He moved the mist to the right and left, and I could see that there were thousands of rats with their eyes blazing red – like His, only smaller. He held up his hand, and they all stopped. (p. 298)

In all these examples, in which not only the Count himself becomes a bestial being, but also exerts control over animals, which seem to obey him instantly,

the boundary between humankind and animals disintegrates, thus leaving room for the nightmare of animal degeneration that haunted contemporary Victorian culture, also following Darwin's unprecedent discoveries.

Dracula, therefore, in many ways represents the 'alterity', what is completely different from what can be socially and culturally accepted, "the 'primitive' that Victorian thinkers posited as the modern citizen's opposite: […], he is like an animal, he is like a child."[482] And it is precisely on the label of 'child' that it is necessary to dwell. In stating that "this criminal has not full man-brain, […] he be not of man-stature as to brain. He be of child-brain in much" (p. 362), Van Helsing points out the physiognomic anomalies and the presence of primordial, atavistic characteristics, already underlined by Harker in his description. However, Van Helsing's hypotheses about Dracula's primitive traits are not limited to a mere observation of his physical 'aberration', rather they go further, to the point of defining him a true savage, a quintessential degenerate, "a criminal and of criminal type [with an] imperfectly formed mind" (p. 363), not on the basis of unfounded speculation, rather according to the theories of scholars such as Lombroso and Nordau. According to Mighall, such theories, belonging to the field of criminal anthropology, to which Stoker referred in outlining his character, explain that criminality comes from the past: thus, primitive criminals and criminal behaviours can return to manifest themselves in the present or can frightfully regress to that criminal past,

[482] McKee, P., "Racialization, Capitalism, and Aesthetics in Stoker's 'Dracula'", p. 57.

originating "true savages in the midst of our brilliant European civilization"[483]. This possible return of ancestral forms within modern society represented a serious cause of concern for contemporary civilization which began to become obsessed with the nightmare of the "return of the native" and the "frightening spectacle of the primitive"[484], both embodied by Dracula. As the physiognomy and peculiar physical traits proved fundamental in the classification of the degenerate criminal, logically also the behaviour was subject to analysis: indeed, "what was deemed unprogressive, uncivilized, or merely antithetical to modern (hegemonic) interests or values was potentially a target for such [identification]"[485], and therefore to be avoided and excluded, as Otherness, incivility, different, hence 'evil'. In particular, concerning innate instincts, especially sexual ones, adult and civilized men seem to control them or, at least, they control them because this is what the society in which they live requires them to do, respecting decorum and decency; and this explains on the one hand, the sense of restraint felt by Harker when attacked and seduced by the three female vampires; on the other, the desire to transgress and to let himself go to the pleasure denied him by society – temptation to which he inevitably succumbs, following a forced repression of his instincts. But while civilized men seem to contain themselves or, at least, they try to, Dracula has no control of his primordial instincts and unleashes them, becoming "the mirror and shadow of

[483] Lombroso, 1887, cited by Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, 1992, p. 32, quoted in Mighall R., *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction*, p. 139.
[484] Vanon Alliata, M., *Haunted Minds*, p. 178.
[485] Mighall, R., pp. 139-40.

Victorian masculinity"[486], the repressed male sexual desire that Victorians men could not externalize, and it almost seems that Dracula does it for them. Interestingly, as Hennelly suggests, Dracula's journey to the modern West can be interpreted as a search for the developed brain, belonging to his enemies, that he does not have; similarly, "the 'man-brains' of the Londoners seek the primitive passion and natural energy of the non-repressed 'child-brain' of Transylvania"[487]. Both 'factions', somehow, yearn for what they lack and go looking for it where they know they can find it: Dracula in his invasion of the West and his pursuers who want to drive him back to his homeland, they themselves also going, eventually, East. Likewise, similarly to the characters who represent them, both London and Transylvania culturally lack something, they are "'barren land[s]', […] each desperately need[ing] the strength of the other to heal its own sterility"[488]: the former looking for the repressed primitive passion inherent in the human being, the latter seeking for the civilized, rational knowledge that characterized England.

Dracula, in his being the 'culturally Other', once again, requires to the characters exponents of Western civilization to look not only at what they have – progress, rationality, science which are condensed into an 'adult brain' – but also to what they lack or they have been forced to deny – passion and irrationality given by instinct and desire which, undeniably, belong to the human being. Therefore, "[he] represents precisely those dark secret drives that the men

[486] Botting, F., p. 149.
[487] Hennelly, Jr. Mark M., p. 81.
[488] *Ibid*.

most fear in themselves, […] – [including] the intimate self of the family man, threatened by unrestrained sexual appetites."[489]

## 3.6 Dracula: the Racial Other Threatening Biological Contamination and Reverse Colonization

Closely connected to the nightmare of cultural degeneration and the regression to an atavistic past is the fear of racial degeneration which, somehow, also encompasses the two previous ones: threats of racial 'contagion', pollution and miscegenation unleashed by primitive and foreign invaders, culturally backward and socially 'strangers', were real in late-Victorian England, already weak internally, also from a political and economic point of view. The fear that a savage, primitive, yet more powerful 'race', could annihilate a more advanced and civilized, yet vulnerable society, "enacts the period's most important and pervasive narrative of decline, a narrative of reverse colonization"[490], which is paramount in *Dracula*.

As mentioned above, the threat posed by Dracula lies both in his individual nature, which makes him an invading aristocrat, a vigorous seducer and culturally degenerate, but primarily in the fact that he is the representative of an entire race or, better, "of all dark, foreign (i.e., non-English) races"[491]. Not only he comes from a land historically known as a place of bloody battles between

[489] Spencer, K. L., "Purity and Danger", pp. 213-4.
[490] Arata, S., p. 623.
[491] Hatlen, B., p. 130.

the peoples who passed through it, but he is also "dangerous as the representative or embodiment of a race which, all evidence suggested, was poised to 'step forward' and become 'masters'"[492], that is the dynasty of boyars, of which he is a proud descendant. As Hatlen interestingly suggests, Dracula's invasion plans appear to have deeper historical roots, and this is reflected in Dracula's own statement, in which he almost seems to be offended and complain about being the 'victim' and main target of British ingenuity: "[The British] should have kept their energies for use closer to home. Whilst they played wits against me – against me who commanded nations, and intrigued for them, and fought for them, hundred of years before they were born – I was countermining them." (p. 306) Here the reference is clearly to the battle against the Turks in which his role was fundamental, since he defended the Carpathian mountain passes from their incursions, performing a "historical mission which establishe[d] him as a centurion of Christian Europe […] [but also] a metaphoric Turk"[493], thus becoming himself a racial outsider, after having long fought against the real invaders. Therefore, in asserting that the Count himself became a Turk in the demanding task of repelling the Turks to defend Europe from their assaults, Hatlen interprets his invasion as "motivated in part by the desire for vengeance against an ungrateful Europe"[494], a reason, therefore, given by the resentment towards a nation that is not only not at all grateful to him, but that also persecutes him in an attempt to push him back to his native land and eliminate him. This

[492] Arata, S., p. 640.
[493] Hatlen, B., pp. 128-9.
[494] *Ibid*., p. 128.

because the Count's incursion from Transylvania, a backward, feudal land, racially 'impure' in the eyes of the Victorians, who knew it only for its political instability and racial conflict, represented a serious concern endangering not only their social and cultural apparatus, but also, precisely, the racial one. Not by chance, indeed, it is Dracula himself who defines his own land as the "whirlpool of European races" (p. 36) emphasizing the wide variety of races and peoples who fought for supremacy there, thus it is configured both as a war territory and as the native land of vampires. In light of this, as Arata suggests, Stoker has established a relationship between racial conflict, the imperial crisis and vampirism at a time in which the imperial crisis was not affecting the Carpathians, but Great Britain itself: "With vampirism marking the intersection of racial strife, political upheaval, and the fall of empire, Dracula's move to London indicates that Great Britain, rather than the Carpathians, is now the scene of these connected struggles"[495] and its internal weakness and instability, from every point of view, is further worsened by the troublesome arrival of the Count. In this way, therefore, he is not only a mere embodiment of the political turmoil and racial hybridity of his homeland, but is also the bearer of such political uneasiness and alleged racial 'impurity', since he "carries the germ of national instability into any territory which he visits"[496], in this case, Great Britain.

[495] Arata, S., p. 629.
[496] Hughes, W., *Bram Stoker Dracula*, p. 84.

What is most important to point out is that his invasion is not limited to the conquest of the territory: rather, it is even more terrifying because it is perpetuated first of all through the conquest of bodies, made possible because of his relentless need for blood. His desire for blood is thus ambivalent and doubly disturbing: on the one hand, it is a biological need of the vampire, as well as the only way to continue his unnatural existence between life and death, therefore, he cannot renounce to what allows him to stay 'alive'; on the other hand, the need for blood has also a political significance, as it is a symbol of conquest and invasion. His vampire nature "weakens the stock of Englishness by passing on degeneracy and the disease of blood lust. Dracula as a monster/master parasite feeds upon English health and wealth."[497] This emphasizes his double position as vampire and conqueror. Both of these thrusts, the biological and the political one, are therefore not separate, but condense into a single threat: the threat "that a stronger, more primitive race will invade from without and assimilate the English"[498], starting from the individual bodies, up to the entire nation. Arata observes that the invasion perpetrated by the Count is perhaps even more frightening precisely because his purpose is not to annihilate the victims in a definitive way, but to take control over them: he "imperils not simply [their] personal identities, but also their cultural, political, and racial selves, […] [and] designates a kind of colonization of the body, […] not because [he] destroys

[497] Halberstam, J., "Technologies of Monstrosity: Bram Stoker's *Dracula*" in *Cultural Politics at the 'Fin de Siècle'*, edited by Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 256.
[498] McKee, P., p. 45.

bodies, but because he appropriates and transforms them."[499] Through this transformation and assimilation of the victim, he therefore aspires to generate 'non-living beings' similar to him, taking advantage of the weakness of his 'preys' in order to "create a new and ever-widening circle of semi-demons to battle on the helpless." (p. 60) Blood, thus, plays a fundamental role in the spreading of conquest which Hughes suitably defines a "sanguinary conquest" or, more frighteningly, an "epidemic"[500]. Dracula is not only satisfied with the invasion of a territory, both physical and political, but he also wants to affirm, spread and "[consolidate] his occupation through sanguine though sexualized conquest."[501] As a matter of fact, the blood he needs to continue living also becomes the only means that allows him to ensure survival and expand his demonic species: it can therefore be similarly associated with the semen, as both perform the same function, yet it represents a frightening threat, as Dracula's semen does not have a stable identity, but takes on different forms, suited to his polymorphous nature.[502]

Moreover, it is necessary to point out that, wanting to take advantage of the vulnerability of his victims, he purposely begins his bloody conquest starting from those who were considered the 'weakest' and defenceless members of society, namely children and women. After Lucy's death, in a newspaper cutting

[499] Arata, S., p. 630.
[500] Hughes, W., "Fictional Vampires in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries", pp. 202-3.
[501] Hughes, W., *Bram Stoker Dracula*, p. 80.
[502] Botting, F., p. 150.

inserted in the novel, a strange, mysterious event that involved a group of young boys is reported:

> During the past two or three days several cases have occurred of young children straying from home or neglecting to return from their playing on the Heath. […] the consensus of their excuses is that they had been with a 'bloofer lady' […] some of the children, indeed all who have been missed at night, have been slightly torn or wounded in the throat. The wounds seem such as might be made by a rat or a small dog […]. (pp. 188-9)

Another child that was missing is then found and seems to suffer the same wound as the other boys: "It has the same tiny wound in the throat as has been noticed in other cases. It was terribly weak, and looked quite emaciated. It too, when partially restored, had the common story to tell of being lured away by the 'bloofer lady.'" (p. 190) It can therefore be deduced that the Count, after conquering the body of Lucy, the quintessential embodiment of the Victorian ideal woman – as well as literally representative of the light of rationality (Lucy) of the West (Westenra, her surname)[503] – made use of her beauty (the 'bloofer lady'[504]) and almost maternal sweetness to conquer and take possession even on innocent children. It is precisely in the contamination of Lucy's blood, and subsequently in Mina's, and in her transformation from a submissive and innocent woman to a relaxed and restless one that Dracula's racial threat resides: his ability to erode the identity of the person he attacks, absorbing and transforming it completely, is linked to the same ability that Romanians also had:

[503] Hughes, W., p. 79.
[504] see note 5 to chapter XII, p. 448. It is explained that 'a bloofer lady' is a childish way of saying 'a beautiful lady'.

> […] the Magyar who takes a Roumanian girl for his wife will not only fail to convert her to his ideas, but himself, subdued by her influence, will imperceptibly begin to lose his nationality. This is a fact well known and much lamented by the Hungarians themselves, who live in anticipated apprehension of seeing their people ultimately dissolving into Roumanians.[505]

This phenomenon, which Arata calls 'deracination', the dissolution and annihilation of one's racial identity, represents the core of the nightmarish threat of reverse colonization[506] which tormented the end-of-the-century unstable England: the terror that a 'racial outsider', apparently more sexually vigorous, forceful and uninhibited, could not only invade the country, but also sexually invade its people, starting from women, was widespread among the population, especially the male one. For that matter, as also Hatlen observes, the Western belief that foreign men, especially 'black' men, are more robust and sexually powerful seems to have contributed to the construction of the character of Dracula who, although not at all 'dark' in skin, embodies all the characteristics that make him a "dreaded black rapist"[507]: given his being a vampire, he is "vigorous, masterful, energetic, robust, [all] attributes that are conspicuously absent among the novel's British characters, particularly the men."[508] He seems to be the reflection or, better, the "dark double"[509], of Victorian male sexuality as well as, at the same time, the expression of its own decline, since "by way of women Dracula attacks men; through women he will contaminate and colonise the teeming metropolis of London."[510] This becomes evident especially in the

[505] Gerard, E., *The Land Beyond the Forest*, 1888, pp. 304-5, quoted in Arata, S., p. 630.
[506] Arata, S., p. 631.
[507] Hatlen, B., p. 129.
[508] Arata, S., p. 631.
[509] Botting, F., p. 149.
[510] *Ibid*., p. 151.

inability of English men to save Lucy: once racially 'infected' by Dracula's monstrous blood, the only way to cure her seems to be by giving her 'pure' blood transfusions to restore her contaminate racial identity. Arthur Holmwood, Lucy's fiancé and aristocratic Englishman, seems the only one who can succeed in this attempt as "he is so young and strong and of blood so pure" (p. 133) given his social position.[511] Blood transfusions, not only by Holmwood, but also by other Victorian men, inevitably take on a sexual, and even racial connotation, which is opposed to that of Dracula: while his attacks seem to revitalize Lucy, who is restless at night, and make her look better, as Mina notes, blood transfusions by Victorian men do not prove useful or, at the very least, only apparently. Moreover, if Dracula's assaults seem to reinvigorate women, the same cannot be said for men: Arata indeed points out that Harker is physically weak, pale, almost consumed, "white-haired as the action proceeds, while Dracula, whose white hair grows progressively darker, becomes more vigorous."[512] Hatlen indicates another element which can be associated with the sexual energy allegedly belonging to 'other' races, that is Dracula's smell[513], which Harker clearly perceives when the Count approaches him: "As the Count leaned over me […] a horrible feeling of nausea came over me, which, do what I would, I could not conceal." (p. 25)

The totality of all these characteristics, embodied by Dracula – strength, power and sexual vitality, his almost nauseating smell – could only be

[511] Arata, S., p. 632.
[512] *Ibid*., p. 631.
[513] Hatlen, B., p. 129.

considered threatening and 'alien' to English society and the 'racial purity' it wanted to preserve, and for this reason to be removed and annihilated. Indeed, the fear of racial miscegenation, caused by foreign and degenerate immigrants, was paramount in Victorian *fin de siècle* Britain, precisely because what the Victorians considered 'Other' was much closer than they thought: as Hughes points out, "the Alien [was] not merely external, but enjoy[ed] a disturbing intimate relationship with the internal also"[514]. Dracula, perfectly embodying the 'racial other', was not just physically close, but he was gradually settling into people's bodies as well, like a real epidemic, infestation, contamination triggered by a "monstrous hybrid […] agent of monstrous hybridization […] [who pursues] his project of catastrophic transculturation, […] that ultimately aims at a gothic apocalypse where all London should become a realm of the undead."[515] Racial and ethnic hybridity could not be accepted, as destroyers of the barrier between the 'pure', 'internal', 'mainstream' Self (what the Victorian believed themselves to be) and the 'impure', 'external', 'foreign' Other (everything that came not only from Romania, but generally from the East), hence triggering racial miscegenation and degeneration. As Punter observes, Dracula represents the nightmarish union between Self and Other, being "a merger of species, the harbinger of ethnic collapse, […] [who] threatens [the empire] from within, attacking the whole concept of morality by preying upon

[514] Hughes, W., *Bram Stoker Dracula*, p. 80.
[515] Höglund, J., "Catastrophic Transculturation in *Dracula*, *The Strain* and *The Historian*", p. 5.

and liberating aspects of the personality which are not under moral control […]"[516].

What exasperates the terror of racial degeneration and contamination even more is the relationship that the Count has with the gypsy ethnic group:

> Il *boyar* Dracula, ultimo e fiero discendente dell'aristocrazia feudale rumena, è infatti apparentato anche con gli infingardi zingari che fungono da suoi intermediatori con il mondo esterno e che del delinquente sembrano avere tutti i vizi e le passioni.[517]

As Punter clearly explains, the Count belongs both to the family of the *boyars* and that of the gypsies, usually known for their nomadic lifestyle, as opposed to the 'settled' one, dictated by the 'mainstream' society, and for this reason considered 'outsiders'[518]. As also Harker explains in his journal, where he calls them by their third name, the 'Szgany', they represent his only chance to communicate with the outside world and, in one occasion, when he sees them settling in the courtyard of the castle, he takes the opportunity to give them the letters addressed to Mina:

> There are thousand of [gypsies] in Hungary, and Transylvania, who are almost all outside law. They attach themselves as a rule to some great noble or *boyar*, and call themselves by his name. They are fearless and without religion, save superstition, and they talk only their own varieties of the Romany tongue. I shall write some letters, and shall try to get them to have them posted. I have already spoken to them through my window to begin an acquaintanceship. […] I have given the letters; I threw them through the bars of my window with

[516] Punter, D., *The Literature of Terror*, p. 263.
[517] "The *boyar* Dracula, the last and proud descendant of the Romanian feudal aristocracy, is indeed also related to slothful gypsies who operate as his mediators with the outside world and that seem to share all the criminal's vices and passions: nomadism, irreligiousness and ferocity." (Vanon Alliata, M., "Introduzione. *I fantasmi dell'Io*" in *Dal Gotico al Fantastico. Traduzioni, riscritture e parodie*, 2015, p. 13), my translation.
[518] Punter, D., "Dracula. *The Abhuman, the Family, the Cemetery Guard*", pp. 56-7.

> a gold piece, and made what signs I could to have them posted. […] I could do no more. (pp. 49-50)

Moreover, Punter observes not only the Count's effective relation with this nomadic population, but also how some physical characteristics attributed to the gypsies recalled the Jewish's ones:

> The way gypsies are described […] it is a gathering or litany of abjected races and features – "swarthy", "black", "low in stature", "African-looking jaw", "Jewish nose". And worse, of course, is the attribution of non-humanness to the gypsies […], as though their nomadry means that they are undistinguishable from wild animals […].[519]

Halberstam, then, points out that also the smell, which is another of Dracula's peculiar characteristics, "marked [the Jews] out as different and indeed repugnant objects of pollution."[520] And it is precisely for these considerations and 'abject' features that the vampire in Stoker's novel fits into the discourse of anti-Semitism that began to spread from the nineteenth century, particularly "in literature, [where] the appearance of 'foreign' (particularly Semitic) scapegoats became more apparent." (introduction, p. xx) Moreover, in the 1890s parasitism and Jewishness were strongly related, given the Jews' alleged 'taking advantage' of the physical labour of the working-class British: "the Jewish body […] was constructed as parasite […] [and] the horror generated by the repugnant […] body of the vampire bears great resemblance to [it]"[521]. Albeit Dracula is not actually Jewish, he nevertheless embodies "a conglomeration of anti-Semitic

[519] *Ibid*., p. 59. Punter, in this analysis, is referring to the description of gypsies provided in the book by Marius-Mircea Crişan, *The Birth of the Dracula Myth: Bram Stoker's Transylvania*, 2013, p. 84.
[520] Halberstam, J., "Technologies of Monstrosity", p. 256. See C. Roth (ed.), *The Ritual Murder Libel and the Jew* (London: n. p., 1935).
[521] *Ibid*., p. 257.

stereotypes: avarice, racialized physical characteristics, Eastern European descent, […], [and so he is included among] all the recurring figures in discussions of Jewishness […].[522] Also Halberstam observes that, due to his peculiar physiognomy, his aversion to Christianity, and his parasitical attacks, Dracula "resemble[s] stereotypical anti-Semitic nineteenth century representations of the Jew."[523] Besides his Semitic-like physical features, which make him a kind of "monstrous Jew"[524], he is also a wanderer, as were also the Jews, considered as "monstrous, bestial, pollutants, sexually deviant, satanic and child-killers"[525], all characteristics that in the novel are reconnected to Dracula who, according to this interpretative key, becomes himself a sort of "demonic Wandering Jew"[526]. His threat does not primarily lie in the fact that he comes from Romania, but in the fact that Romania, in the novel, seems to function as a synecdoche of Eastern Europe in general, a multiracial and multicultural territory that thus makes the Count a representative of "many races, many nations, and more than one religion, though his perceived threat is consistently Eastern and Other"[527]. And particularly the Jew, here embodied by Dracula, in late-Victorian Britain, was the symbol of the "Othered, immigrant and unacceptable East"[528], often associated with pollution and epidemics, especially

[522] Briefel, A., "The Victorian Literature of Fear", pp. 512-8.
[523] Halberstam, J., p. 248.
[524] Byron, G., Punter, D., *The Gothic*, p. 232.
[525] Killeen, J., *Gothic Literature (1825-1914)*, p. 179.
[526] *Ibid*.
[527] Hughes, W., *Bram Stoker Dracula*, p. 85.
[528] *Ibid*.

plague epidemics, caused by rats – which often accompany Dracula as well – of which the Jews were unreasonably blamed.[529]

Furthermore, it cannot be overlooked that Dracula's position as a 'racial Outsider' also mirrors Stoker's analogous position within Victorian England, as many scholars point out. Being the son of Irish parents who, despite being Protestants, were not part of the Irish ruling élite, as they were not particularly wealthy and influent, "Stoker was himself […] an outsider in Victorian England"[530]. However, it was not just a matter of religion, but of strong – unfounded – prejudices that the British rulers had towards the Irish, and that an Irish native, like Stoker, who later moved to England, could not ignore. Indeed, as Arata explains, "Britain's subjugation of Ireland was marked by a brutality often exceeding what occurred in the colonies, while the stereotype of the 'primitive … dirty, vengeful, and violent' Irishman was in most respects identical to that of the most despised 'savage'"[531]. To the Irish, who remained under British rule until 1919, the year of independence, were attributed the worst and most denigrating adjectives, connected to their presumed inferiority and backwardness which, according to the English, had blocked them in the status of primordial apes, an undeveloped and inferior race. Stoker, in the service of Sir Henry Irving, felt great admiration for him and for the members of the English ruling class, but never abandoned his strong Irish identity and claimed

[529] Davison, C. M., *Bram Stoker's Dracula: Sucking Through the Century, 1897-1997*, 1997, p. 154, quoted in *Ibid*., p. 88.
[530] Hatlen, B., p. 132.
[531] See L. P. Curtis, *Anglo-Saxons and Celts: A Study of Anti-Irish Prejudice in Victorian England*, 1968, reported by Arata, S., p. 633.

independence for his country. His in-between identity, which on the one hand, united him to Irving, but on the other, also to his native land, probably made him feel uncomfortable, or rather, an 'outsider', among Irving and his aristocratic friends.[532]

Dracula's function, therefore, appears to be nothing more than that of a metaphor for the imperial and colonial past, a reflection of what the English themselves had done in the heyday of their colonial expansion: subjugation of weaker peoples, exploitation, violence, eradication of the culture of the colonized to impose that of the colonizer, considered superior. In this way,

> in Count Dracula, Victorian readers could recognize their culture's imperial ideology mirrored back as a kind of monstrosity, [since] Dracula's journey from Transylvania to England could be read as a reversal of Britain's exploitation of 'weaker' races, including the Irish.[533]

In reflecting British colonial ambitions and enacting them, in turn, in his invasion of Victorian England, the Count does not merely appear as an enemy, a bearer of disorder, but also as a 'double' of those who were once colonizers, and now feel threatened by a degenerate and foreign intruder. In this "terrifying reversal […], the colonizer finds himself in the position of the colonized, the exploiter becomes exploited, the victimizer victimized"[534], as a response to the brutalities committed in the past, which cannot be ignored, but take the form of a 'deserved punishment' to expiate such imperial barbarities.[535] Consequently, in a difficult period from every point of view, such as the turn of the century,

[532] Hatlen, B., p. 132.
[533] Arata, S., p. 634.
[534] *Ibid*., p. 623.
[535] *Ibid*.

the British were literally terrified of any hint of foreign invasion, as it could have represented a "return of the repressed or a [form] of reverse colonialism (the East getting its own back on the West)" (preface, p. xii), and exacerbated the already pervasive "cultural and political concerns of [the period]"[536] which focused primarily on the irretrievable decline of the empire and the consequent end of British colonial supremacy.

Therefore, Dracula clearly "encompasses the sum of all late-Victorian fears"[537] – imperial and economic decline, liberation of female sexuality, homosexuality, cultural and racial degeneration provoked by the invasion of savage and primitive colonizers – but not only: in Stoker's optimistic vision of a possible salvation of the empire, given the final defeat of Dracula, this salvation is eventually obtained by the transformation of his rational and civilized persecutors into violent ones. As Dracula, in his invasion, becomes the frightening 'double' of those who were once colonizers, his persecutors also become the 'double' of themselves, the projection of what they want to repel: "As he physically invades, he is himself rhetorically invaded, subject to scrutiny and, indeed, to the kind of hostility frequently reserved for unwelcome immigrants"[538], of whom he is the representative. The way in which the salvation of the nation is achieved is an unequivocal reminder of the ferocity of British colonialism: the Count is chased and persecuted to death, thus "the real

[536] Vanon Alliata, M., p. 163.
[537] Punter, D., *A Companion to the Gothic*, 2000, quoted in Briefel, A., "The Victorian Literature of Fear", p. 513.
[538] Hughes, W., p. 78.

blood-sucking parasites are the British, not the Count"[539], who, in their unstoppable hunt for the degenerate invader, "[they themselves turn] into degenerate, violent colonisers"[540].

[539] Smith, A., *Gothic Literature*, p. 116.
[540] *Ibid*., p. 117.

# Conclusions

The problematic context from the economic, political, social, and cultural point of view of late-Victorian Britain undoubtedly favoured the emergence of anxieties and concerns that found expression in the Gothic literature of the late-nineteenth century.

The aim of this work is to analyse Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* (1897), examining the characteristics for which it can be considered an expression of such a troublesome background as well as one of the main instances of the English Victorian Gothic novel, a sort of literary embodiment of the worries of its period.

The major fear of these end-of-the-century decades consisted precisely in what the scholar Stephen Arata calls 'the anxiety of reverse colonization': the British political nightmare of the loss of imperial influence and supremacy that could have dangerously favoured the invasion by 'foreign races', once colonized and now colonizing.

Together with these political overtones, which are paramount in *Dracula*, Stoker wanted to enclose in his vampire and in his Victorian Gothic novel also the cultural and social anxieties of the contemporaneity of his time.

As a matter of fact, the society was rapidly changing: the aristocracy was losing its authority while an advanced and progressed middle-class was emerging. Moreover, in the eyes of the Victorians, the predefined gender categories were starting to collapse: women began to claim their rights and

independence, leading to the emergence of an emancipated 'New Woman'; the weakening of the male figure and homosexuality definitely were perceived as worrying issues, undermining what was supposed to be the fixed border between man and woman. Such distinctions, which internally started to vacillate, inevitably had repercussions even beyond the national borders, materializing in a preoccupation with possible invasion by 'deviant', 'not pure' foreigners who could have 'contaminated' a society considered superior, yet no longer solid and internally defined, but divided.

Such concerns were further exacerbated by Charles Darwin's scientifical discoveries regarding the ape-origin of man and the possible degeneration of humankind, both individually and collectively. A further collapse of a deep-rooted distinction, this time between man and animal, could not have had a more devastating impact. Following the studies of the anthropologist Cesare Lombroso, the presumed belief of the existence of 'inferior races', recognizable by some peculiar physiognomic features, spread even further, materializing in a real anxiety for the return of the atavistic, the fear of a regression to a primitive state.

As a novel belonging not only to the Gothic genre, but more precisely to that of the 'Imperial Gothic', such contemporary concerns are condensed and take shape in the dreadful character of Count Dracula. Read superficially, the novel deals with a terrifying Transylvanian vampire who moves West and sucks blood to stay alive, leaving his victims forceless. However, after an in-depth study, one can argue that Dracula is not merely a vampire – perhaps, the vampire

par excellence – but he is also a warrior and a conqueror, a transgressor of physical and non-physical boundaries, the expression of unconscious desires, as well as the conglomerate of all late-Victorian nightmares, especially the cultural and racial ones.

His blood thirst does not limit to the organic necessity to feed, rather is a metaphor of conquest, both of the body and of the nation, aware that through 'biological' invasion he would soon have achieved also the 'political' one.

Given his sometimes animalistic features, his sexual strength and vitality, his origin from an ancient, feudal aristocracy, belonging to a far away and obscure East, "Dracula is foreignness [him]self"[541], culturally, sexually, racially, and socially 'Other', a bearer of disorder, fears and social collapse.

With his final defeat, order is restored. The union of professional Anglo-Saxon men finally manage to free the nation from such a threatening invader. However, in an attempt to annihilate and kill him, they themselves eventually become violent invaders. They become the 'other' of themselves. So much technologically developed and socially advanced, they turn exactly into what they want to eliminate: hunters, invaders, and murderers, a sort of reminder of the barbarities committed during colonialism that Dracula somehow wanted to avenge.

[541] Halberstam, J., "Technologies of Monstrosity: Bram Stoker's *Dracula*" in *Cultural Politics at the 'Fin de Siècle'*, p. 262.

# Bibliography

## Primary Sources


Burke, Edmund. 1796. *The Sublime and Beautiful. By Edmund Burke, Esq. With an Introductory Discourse Concerning Taste, and Other Additions*. Oxford: British Library.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. 2004 (1817). *Biographia Literaria; or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*. Produced by Tapio Riikonen and David Widger. [eBook reader, Release Date: July, 2004. Last Updated: January 26, 2013. Distributed by The Project Gutenberg]. Also available online at http://www.gutenberg.org/files/6081/6081-h/6081-h.htm.

Le Fanu, Joseph Sheridan. 2003 (1872). *Carmilla*. Produced by Suzanne Shell, Sjaani and PG Distributed Proofreaders. [eBook reader, Release Date: November 7, 2003. Most recently updated: April 29, 2019. Distributed by The Project Gutenberg]. Also available online at http://www.gutenberg.org/files/10007/10007-h/10007-h.

Mill, John Stuart. 1873. "Autobiography of John Stuart Mill". *The Edinburgh Review* 139 (283), Jan 1, 1874, p. 95. Available at https://search.proquest.com/docview/1298977685/fulltextPDF/1D281D9D989A4520PQ/1?accountid=17274 (last accessed 30/10/2020).

Ruskin, John. 1865. "Of Queens' Gardens" in *Sesame and Lilies.* Two lectures delivered at Manchester in 1864. Second Edition with Preface, pp. 149-50. Cornhill, London: Smith Elder & co. 65. Available at https://books.google.it/books?id=mq4WAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false (last accessed 30/10/2020).

Stoker, Bram. 2003 (1897). *Dracula*. Introduction and notes by Maurice Hindle. Preface by Christopher Frayling. London: Penguin.

Walpole, Horace. 1782 (1762). *Anecdotes of Painting in England with some Account of the Principal Artists and Incidental Notes on Other Arts*. Collected by the late Mr. George Vertue and now digested and published from his original Mss. by Mr. Horace Walpole. Third Edition with Additions, vol. 1. London: Printed for J. Dodsley, Pall-Mall, M.DCC.LXXXII. [1782].

Walpole, Horace. 2003 (1764). *The Castle of Otranto: a Gothic Story, and, The Mysterious Mother: a Tragedy*, edited by Frederick S. Frank. Canada: Broadview Press.

---

Freud, Sigmund. 1919. "The Uncanny" ("Das Unheimliche"). First published in Imago, Bd. V., reprinted in Sammlung, Fünfte Folge. Translated by Alix Strachey, pp. 1-21. Available online at https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/freud1.pdf (last accessed 02/04/2021).

Gerard, Emily. 1885. "Transylvanian Superstitions". *The Nineteenth Century, a Monthly Review*, 18 (July-December 1885), pp. 130-50. London: Kegan Paul, Trench & co. [eBook reader, Release Date: May 26, 2016. Distributed by The Project Gutenberg]. Also available online at http://www.gutenberg.org/files/52165/52165-h/52165-h.htm.

Lombroso, Cesare. 2006 (1876). *Criminal Man*. Translated and with a new introduction by Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Nordau, Max. 1898 (1895). *Degeneration*. Translated from the Second Edition of the German Work. London: William Heinemann. [eBook reader, Release Date: February 9, 2016. Distributed by The Project Gutenberg]. Also available online at http://www.gutenberg.org/files/51161/51161-h/51161-h.htm.

**Secondary Sources**

Alder, Emily. 2013. "Urban Gothic" in *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* (vol. 2), edited by William Hughes, David Punter, Andrew Smith, pp. 703-6. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Arata, Stephen. 1990. "The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization". *Victorian Studies* 33 (4), pp. 621-45. Available at http://www.jstor.com/stable/3827794.

Ashworth, William. 1966. "The Late Victorian Economy". *Economica*, New Series 33 (129), pp. 17-33. Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/2552270 (last accessed 02/03/2021).

Belford, Barbara. 2002. *Bram Stoker: A Biography of the Author of 'Dracula'.* United States: Da Capo Press.

Bertinetti, Paolo. 2010. *English Literature. A Short History*. Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore.

Billiani, Francesca. 2013. "European Gothic" in *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* (vol. 1), edited by William Hughes, David Punter, Andrew Smith, pp. 219-24. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Botting, Fred. 1996. *Gothic*. London, New York: Routledge.

Brantlinger, Patrick. 2012. “Imperial Gothic” in *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, edited by William Hughes and Andrew Smith, pp. 202-16. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Briefel, Aviva. 2007. “The Victorian Literature of Fear”. *Literature Compass* 4 (2), pp. 508-23.

Byron, Glennis, Punter, David. 2004. *The Gothic*. Malden [MA]: Blackwell.

Byron, Glennis. 2012. “Gothic in the 1890s” in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, edited by David Punter, pp. 186-96. UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Christ, Carol T., Robson, Catherine (eds.). 2012. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature. The Victorian Age* (vol. E), 9th edition. Founding Editor Emeritus, M. H. Abrams. General Editor, Stephen Greenblatt. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company.

Chromik, Anna. 2013. “Vampire Fiction” in *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* (vol. 2), edited by William Hughes, David Punter, Andrew Smith, pp. 707-10. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Fisher, Michael H. 2018. “The British Raj, ‘Mahatma’ Gandhi, and Other Anti-Colonial Movements” in *An Environmental History of India: From Earliest Times to the Twenty-First Century*, pp. 135-62. UK: Cambridge University Press.

Halberstam, Judith. 1995. “Technologies of Monstrosity: Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*” in *Cultural Politics at the ‘Fin de Siècle’*, edited by Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken, pp. 248-66. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hatlen, Burton. 1988. “The Return of the Repressed/Oppressed in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*” in *Dracula: The Vampire and the Critics*, edited by Margaret L. Carter, pp. 117-35. Ann Arbor, London: UMI Research Press.

Hennelly, Mark M., Jr. 1988. "*Dracula*: The Gnostic Quest and Victorian Wasteland" in *Dracula: The Vampire and the Critics*, edited by Margaret L. Carter, pp. 80-92. Ann Arbor, London: UMI Research Press.

Hogle, Jerrold E. 2002. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. New York, United States of America: Cambridge University Press.

Höglund, Johan. 2012. "Catastrophic Transculturation in *Dracula*, *The Strain* and *The Historian*". *Transnational Literature* 5 (1), pp. 1-11. Available at https://dspace.flinders.edu.au/xmlui/bitstream/handle/2328/26432/Catastrophic_Transculturation.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

Hughes, William. 2000. *Beyond Dracula: Bram Stoker's Fiction and its Cultural Context*. London [et al.]: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hughes, William, Smith, Andrew. 2003. "Introduction: The Enlightenment Gothic and Postcolonialism" in *Empire and the Gothic: The Politics of Genre,* edited by William Hughes and Andrew Smith, pp. 1-12. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hughes, William. 2003. "A Singular Invasion: Revisiting the Postcoloniality of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*" in *Empire and the Gothic: The Politics of Genre*, edited by William Hughes and Andrew Smith, pp. 88-102. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hughes, William. 2008. *Bram Stoker Dracula. A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism.* Consultant editor Tredell Nicholas. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hughes, William. 2012. "Fictional Vampires in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, edited by David Punter, pp. 197-210. UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Hughes, William. 2013. “Stoker, Bram” in *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* (vol. 2), edited by William Hughes, David Punter, Andrew Smith, pp. 648-53. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Killeen, Jarlath. 2009. *Gothic Literature (1825-1914)*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Killeen, Jarlath. 2014. *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction: History, Origins, Theories*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Larson, Jil. 2001. *Ethics and Narrative in the English Novel, 1880-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

Leatherdale, Clive. 1987. *The Origins of ‘Dracula’: The Background to Bram Stoker’s Gothic Masterpiece*. London: William Kimber.

Ledger, Sally. 1995. “The New Woman and the Crisis of Victorianism” in *Cultural Politics at the ‘Fin de Siècle’*, edited by Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken, pp. 22-44. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lynch, Deidre S., Stillinger, Jack (eds.). 2012. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature. The Romantic Period* (vol. D), 9th edition. Founding Editor Emeritus, M. H. Abrams. General Editor, Stephen Greenblatt. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company.

Margree, Victoria, Randall, Bryony. 2012. “Fin-de-siècle Gothic” in *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, edited by William Hughes and Andrew Smith, pp. 217-24. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Markmann, Ellis. 2000. *The History of Gothic Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Mason, Diane. 2013. “Goth” in *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* (vol. 1), edited by William Hughes, David Punter, Andrew Smith, pp. 283-87. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

McKee, Patricia. 2002. “Racialization, Capitalism, and Aesthetics in Stoker’s ‘Dracula’”. *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 36 (1), pp. 42-60. Available at http://www.jstor.com/stable/1346114.

Mighall, Robert. 2003. *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History’s Nightmares*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Miles, Robert. 2012. “Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis” in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, edited by David Punter, pp. 93-109. UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Moers, Ellen. 1976. *Literary Women*. Garden City: New York, Doubleday and Co.

Musson, Albert E. 1959. “The Great Depression in Britain, 1873-1896: A Reappraisal”. *The Journal of Economic History* 19 (2), pp. 199-228. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Economic History Association. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/2114975 (last accessed 1/10/2020).

Punter, David. 1980. *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (vol. 1: *The Gothic Tradition*). London: Longman.

Punter, David. 2013. “Victorian Gothic” in *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* (vol. 2), edited by William Hughes, David Punter, Andrew Smith, pp. 711-18. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Punter, David. 2015. “Dracula. *The Abhuman, the Family, the Cemetery Guard*” in *Dal Gotico al Fantastico. Traduzioni, riscritture e parodie*, edited by Michela Vanon Alliata and Giorgio Rimondi, pp. 55-64. Dorsoduro, Venezia: Libreria Editrice Cafoscarina srl.

Reeve, Matthew M. 2013. “Gothic Architecture, Sexuality, and License at Horace Walpole’s Strawberry Hill”. *The Art Bulletin* 95 (3), pp. 411-39. Published by CAA. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/43188840 (last accessed 9/11/2020).

Riquelme, John P. 2002. *Dracula: Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical, Historical and Cultural Contexts, Critical History and Essays from Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. New York: Bedford.

Smith, Andrew. 2007. *Gothic Literature.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Spencer, Kathleen L. 1992. “Purity and Danger: Dracula, the Urban Gothic, and the Late Victorian Degeneracy Crisis”. *ELH* 59 (1), pp. 197-225. Available at https://www.jstor.com/stable/2873424.

Vanon Alliata, Michela. 2015. “Vampires and Vampirism” in *The Encyclopaedia of Victorian Literature* (vol. 4), edited by Dino F. Felluga. Associate editors Pamela K. Gilbert and Linda K. Hughes, pp. 1713-19. US: Wiley-Blackwell.

Vanon Alliata, Michela. 2015. “Introduzione. *I fantasmi dell’Io*” in *Dal Gotico al Fantastico. Traduzioni, riscritture e parodie*, edited by Michela Vanon Alliata and Giorgio Rimondi, pp. 9-20. Venezia: Libreria Editrice Cafoscarina srl.

Vanon Alliata, Michela. 2017. *Haunted Minds: Studies in the Gothic and Fantastic Imagination*. Preface by David Punter. Verona: Ombre Corte.

Warwick, Alexandra. 1995. “Vampires and the Empire: Fears and Fictions of the 1890s” in *Cultural Politics at the ‘Fin de Siècle’*, edited by Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken, pp. 202-20. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Warwick, Alexandra. 2013. “Imperial Gothic” in *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* (vol. 1), edited by William Hughes, David Punter, Andrew Smith, pp. 338-42. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Wasson, Richard. 1988. “The Politics of *Dracula*” in *Dracula: The Vampire and the Critics*, edited by Margaret L. Carter, pp. 19-23. Ann Arbor, London: UMI Research Press.

Wisker, Gina. 2013. “Horror Fiction” in *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* (vol. 1), edited by William Hughes, David Punter, Andrew Smith, pp. 328-33. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Wisker, Gina. 2013. “Postcolonial Gothic” in *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* (vol. 2), edited by William Hughes, David Punter, Andrew Smith, pp. 511-14. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

# Acknowledgements

*Desidero ringraziare, in primo luogo, i miei genitori per avermi sostenuta, in tutti i modi possibili, in questi anni e per avermi permesso di arrivare fino a qui. La mia gratitudine e riconoscenza nei vostri confronti non sarà mai abbastanza.*

*Un ringraziamento speciale lo devo dedicare a Mattia, il mio ragazzo, per essere, ed essere sempre stato, pazientemente ed amorevolmente, al mio fianco, ogni giorno. Grazie per avermi incoraggiata, ascoltata, aiutata in ogni modo: gran parte di questo traguardo è anche merito tuo.*

*Un grazie a mia nonna Assunta, sulla quale ho sempre potuto contare, fin da piccola, e agli altri miei nonni, anche quelli che non ci sono più. Spero siate orgogliosi di me.*

*Un grazie di cuore alla mia amica Chiara S. per ascoltarmi e consigliarmi sempre, e anche per tutti i momenti passati insieme a ridere, studiare – e mangiare – in questi anni.*

*Ringrazio tutte le mie amiche più care e tutti coloro che, in un modo o nell'altro, mi hanno seguita in questo percorso.*

*Infine, ringrazio anche la mia determinazione e caparbietà, senza le quali non avrei potuto raggiungere questo traguardo di cui sono immensamente orgogliosa.*

*Con affetto,*
*Elena*