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Thiago Silva Sardenberg

The all-seeing mirror: reflecting on vampires as allegories in socio-culturally sensitive literary works

Rio de Janeiro

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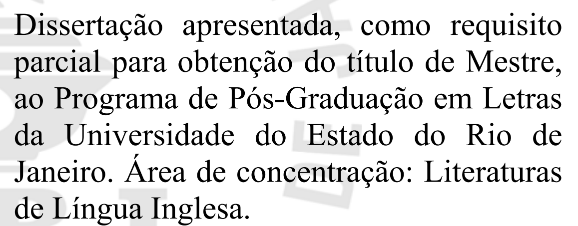

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2012

DEDICATION

To Andy, for always being there, endlessly encouraging and supporting me from the very beginning of my academic journey.

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I would like to thank the whole faculty of the Rio de Janeiro State University (UERJ) for completely changing my idea of literature and its endless world of meanings. Attending their classes was both a pleasure and an honor.

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RESUMO

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Esta dissertação tem como objetivo analisar a figura do vampiro na literatura como poderosa ferramenta de leitura e interpretação dos medos e angústias que afligem um determinado espaço sociocultural. Ao olhar para a evolução do vampiro literário através dos séculos dezenove, vinte e vinte e um, notamos que cada uma de suas encarnações difere dramaticamente da anterior, e no que o vampiro é reinventado, ele engaja-se num diálogo pertinente e coerente com questões de seu próprio tempo, nunca perdendo assim sua relevância. Sua existência heterogênea, explicitada na dissertação primariamente através das obras *Carmilla*, de Sheridan LeFanu, *Dracula*, de Bram Stoker, *Eu Sou a Lenda*, de Richard Matheson, *Entrevista com o Vampiro*, de Anne Rice e *Fledgling*, de Octavia Butler, e as diferentes questões suscitadas em cada uma dessas obras – como a sexualidade, a alteridade e o hibridismo – nos levarão ao entendimento de que o vampiro pode potencialmente desempenhar importante função alegórica, tornando-se um espelho da própria humanidade através da qual se sustenta.

Palavras-chave: Literatura vampiresca. Sexualidade. Alteridade. Hibridismo. Literatura distópica.

ABSTRACT

The present work aims at looking at the figure of the vampire in literature as powerful means of reading and interpreting the fears and anxieties of a specific socio-cultural space. By looking at the evolution of the literary vampire through the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries, we are able to notice that each of its incarnations dramatically differs from the previous one, and as vampires are reinvented, they engage in a coherent dialog with issues pertaining to their times, in a way that they never lose their relevance. Their heterogeneous existence, explicited in the dissertation primarily through Sheridan LeFanu's *Carmilla*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Richard Matheson's *I am Legend*, Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* and Octavia Butler's *Fledgling*, and the different theoretical questions brought on by each of them – such as sexuality, alterity and hybridity – will lead us to the understanding that the vampire may potentially function as a powerful allegory as it becomes a mirror of the very humanity on which its life depends.

Keywords: Vampire literature. Sexuality. Alterity. Hibridity. Dystopian literature.

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INTRODUCTION

The monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment – of a time, a feeling and a place. The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety and fantasy (ataractic or incendiary), giving them life and an uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the monstrum *is etymologically "that which reveals".*

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen

"There is no such creature as "The Vampire"; there are only vampires", claims Nina Auerbach[1] in the introduction to her book *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (1995, p.5). Considering how representations of vampires have evolved right up to the present century, agreeing with such a statement would be undoubtedly safe. Nevertheless, amidst the plethora of variations breaching out of the vampire mythology, there certainly seems to be a sort of quintessential vampire figure permeating the mental image we all have of vampires, based on what and how much we have been exposed to. "The Vampire" has now achieved the status of a powerful iconic figure that can promptly be acknowledged, even if this Frankensteinian vampire is indeed a patchwork composed of varied sources, so much so that it becomes tricky to precisely pin-point its precise source material.

In the twenty first century, the turmoil of vampire-related fiction has stricken mass media, through both the literary and cinematic realms, making it very difficult for us to think of someone who would not be able to relate the word "vampire" to a complex set of ideas, ranging from what they are supposed to look like to what ultimately drives them – even if this person has somehow managed not to be directly exposed to any of these works.

But the fascination for the figure is by no means new. As we look back into the history of the vampires – not only in the Arts, but also into the mythology and superstition that have surrounded them for centuries – we will be able to see that the vampire has had the unique distinction of being one of very few iconic monstrous figures who managed to shatter not only temporal, but also all sorts of geographical and socio-cultural borders.

[1] Auerbach is a Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Pennsylvania. She has published, lectured, and reviewed widely in the fields of Victorian literature, theater, cultural history, and horror fiction and film.

This could be, in part, due to the fact that vampires represent one of the ultimate transgressions – power over death, which is our inexorable destination. They may never die, and they do not ever grow old. This is one of the most fundamental human anxieties: the fear of growing old and withering, for death stands for the absolute unknown. Of course, that which is unknown is, at the same time, both frightening and also incredibly stimulating. In his essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature", H.P. Lovecraft seems to agree with this idea when he says that "when to this sense of fear and evil the inevitable fascination of wonder and curiosity is superadded, there is born a composite body of keen emotion and imaginative provocation whose vitality must of necessity endure as long as the human race itself" (Lovecraft, 1987, p.367). More than a specific cultural manifestation, this feeling is intrinsically human. For centuries, to hear or read about those who have actually come back from the dead has proven to be widely exciting, especially because, in the case of vampires, rarely do they have the same thing to say.

However, the lasting and continuous relevance of the vampire should not be perceived as so punctual, and it surely owes a lot to the vampires' ability to adapt, mutate and evolve in accordance with the specificities of a given socio-cultural environment, unlike many other monsters. "Each time the grave opens and the unquiet slumberer strides forth ("come back from the dead, / Come back to tell you all"), the message proclaimed is transformed by the air that gives its speaker new life" (Cohen, 1996, p.5). Every vampire appearance tends to be different from its previous incarnation, and it is precisely that ability to reinvent itself that keeps it fresh and exciting for different audiences.

In the essay "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)", Jeffrey Jerome Cohen[2] proposes that monstrous characters are powerful means of reading culture, and therefore, "must be examined within the intricate matrix of relations (social, cultural, and literary-historical) that generate them" (id, p.5). Only by analyzing the specific contexts of production will one be able to truly grasp the layers imprinted by each of the authors, who give their own vampires unique identities, sets of morals, senses of purpose and degrees of interaction with the human race. That way, a "discourse extracting a transcultural, transtemporal phenomenon labeled "the vampire" is of rather limited utility, even if vampire figures are found almost worldwide, from ancient Egypt to modern Hollywood" (id.).

[2] Cohen is a Professor at the George Washington University, and obtained his PhD in English and American Literature and Language at Harvard University. In his research, Cohen deals with what monsters reveal about the cultures that produce them.

This point of view will largely be applied to the analysis of the vampire novels in this dissertation, as such specific contexts will largely be considered as means of trying to delve into what matters the vampire characters may be embodying, whether more explicitly or implicitly. Cohen is, though, far from being the only one to explore this particular take on the vampire.

> the vampire's *nature* is fundamentally conservative – it never stops doing what it does; but *culturally,* this creature may be highly adaptable. Thus it can be made to appeal to or to generate fundamental urges located somehow 'beyond' culture (desire, anxiety, fear), while simultaneously, it can stand for a range of meanings and positions *in* culture (Gelder, 1994, p.141).

In *Reading the Vampire*, Ken Gelder[3] tackles the place of vampire within culture, whether as the outsider or as the product of domesticity. Either way, the vampire would still function as means to comment, characterize, or even criticize that given socio-cultural space.

Carol A. Senf[4] mentions that "Seventeenth century peasant, nineteenth century poet, or twentieth century teenager – we see in the vampire something different – something that we often fear, sometimes desire" (Senf, 1988, p.16), further expliciting the high adaptability of the vampire; in tune with Nina Auerbach's idea that every age embraces the vampire it needs.

Cohen's, Gelder's, Senf's and Auerbach's are only some of the prominent voices we are going to hear in a chorus of authors pleading that there is much more to these sharp-fanged creatures than most people might assume. It is one of the main goals of this dissertation to discuss how vampire novels in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries are corroborating with their ideas.

In order for us to account for this diversity and range through which vampires are able to manifest themselves, it becomes only reasonable to focus on multiple primary sources as we develop our discussions. Hence, within each of the chapters of this dissertation, we will be dealing with different novels, which will, in turn, unveil the mind-sets and source of anxieties of their particular ages, conjuring up themes as varied as the power of transgressive sexuality, different ways of dealing with alterity and the implications of dystopian scenarios, to name a few. All of the themes and theoretical questions that the novels pose are going to be articulated to the 'socio-culturally sensitive' vampire that Cohen deals with.

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[3] Gelder is a Professor at the University of Melbourne. His research and publications cover genre studies, popular fiction – including the Gothic and crime fiction – and postcolonial studies.

[4] Senf is a Professor and Associate chair in the School of Literature, Media, and Communication at the Georgia Institute of Technology. She is a recognized expert on the biography and works of Bram Stoker.

Both the heterogeneity of incarnations and the different theoretical standpoints that result will be crucial so as to explicit the numerous faces of the vampires and how authors have dialogued with particular issues that proved to be both fear-inducing and thought-provoking for their times, through vampire narratives.

That way, as we consider the fact that we will be making use of five different novels as our primary sources, it is important to underline that we will be focusing mostly on specific aspects of a socio-cultural nature that each of the novels bring forth, in line with the critical standpoint we are assuming in this work.

Also, it is important to acknowledge the fact that these novels were carefully selected not necessarily because of how popular they were in their immediate context of reception, but, instead, because of their ability to trigger a dialogue that is unique and consistent with relevant issues of its specific time. That is the reason why multi-media sensations like the *Twilight* saga were opted out. *Twilight*'s strongest features are *timeless*, like the young girl's desire for a love that knows no bounds, for someone who would protect her from the dangers of the world, and for someone whose love goes beyond the limits of human life and is willing to die for her. That way, in spite of its undeniable popularity, we could attribute *Twilight*'s success not to a twenty-first-century-specific matter, but to the timelessness of the issues it works with, in a way that twenty-first-century girls can still relate to. There are works whose themes speak more prominently to their times, and these are the works we are going to investigate.

Before we deal with the actual literary works, however, we are going to focus, on the next chapter, on a concise genealogy of the vampire, from actual source of fear to literary source of wonder and entertainment. As we move through the vampire chronology, we are going to acknowledge some of the oldest entities to which the vampire owes striking characteristics; we are going to deal with the "vampire craze" that took Europe by storm in the eighteenth century, and we will finally land in the nineteenth century, to perceive how Romantic authors had appropriated those myths and superstitions to the benefit of their aesthetic creations. We will also present, in this chapter, one of the principal theoretical grounds on which this dissertation will stand, and that will permeate the analysis of all the novels, regardless of their specificities which will, in turn, raise other theoretical standpoints.

Once that is established, we will finally begin our analysis of the novels, with a look at nineteenth century vampire literature. That look will be guided by the analysis of two milestones in vampire literature: Sheridan LeFanu's *Carmilla* (1889), which firmly places the vampire as a character of considerable allegorical value, and also introduces many ideas that would be fully developed a few years later, in what is probably the most famous vampire novel of all time, Bram Stoker's masterpiece *Dracula* (1897), the focal point of our reading of nineteenth century vampire literature. We are going to investigate them separately, but we are also going to be able to realize to what extent these works may be dialoguing with one another in their characterization of vampirism.

Then, we will be moving on to the twentieth century, where our discussion will shift to Richard Matheson's innovative *I am Legend* (1954), which introduces a dystopian post-apocalyptic scenario caused by a unprecedented plague that turned humans into vampires; and also Anne Rice's wildly popular and revolutionizing *Interview with the Vampire* (1975), one of the first accounts of a vampire's story as seen from his very own point of view. Even though these novels were written within the span of only a couple of decades, it is easy to see that they present positively different vampires, dealing with completely different issues.

Finally, as we arrive in the twenty first century, our discussions will focus on Octavia Butler's final book, *Fledgling* (2005). Among the wide variety of vampire-related fiction that came up during the past few years, *Fledgling* stands out as truly innovative and thought-provoking, as it appropriates the vampire mythology by infusing it with a powerful racial commentary, while dealing with Hibridity in a unique, ever-changing way.

Hopefully, by the end of this work, we will have journeyed through different centuries in the sometimes fun and exciting – and some other times just plain terrifying – company of vampires, being able to tell a story that could make sense in its apparently chaotic parts. Even though we will be analyzing the figure of the literary vampire through multiple perspectives, it is the extraction of their allegorical role, functioning as a mirror image of the conflicts that the living they coexist with display, that will work as our main thread to bring together all these multiple, unique and fascinating vampire narratives.

1 FROM FOLKLORE TO FICTION: A CONCISE GENEALOGY OF THE VAMPIRE IN MYTH, FOLKLORE AND ITS EARLY LITERARY MANIFESTATIONS

Long before they began to be primarily associated with works of fiction, vampires had already been alive in folk tales and mythology for thousands of years. The account on the belief in blood-sucking creatures that, returning from the dead, tormented and prayed on the living, can be traced back to ancient times, and is widespread worldwide. The modern vampire character, which owes a lot to English Romantic Poetry as we are going to see, seems to have incorporated defining characteristics of various entities from all over the globe.

Even though it may not be the easiest of tasks to establish a close relationship between some of these entities to the vampire as we know it – and that labeling them 'vampires' could turn out to be controversial – it is also clear to see that they share with vampires a number of characteristics that simply cannot be overlooked, making it reasonable for us to acknowledge them as, at least, possible precursors to our modern vampires. Let us take a brief look back, then, at some of these mythological and legendary figures that have populated the minds of different peoples over time.

Greece has been especially prominent when it comes to discussing early vampiric entities, for we find their presence in both folklore and mythology. In Greek folklore, the widely popular *vrykolakas* (βρυκόλακας) has interesting correspondences with the vampire character. They are creatures who do not ever decay, and are known for rising from their graves and going from house to house, knocking on people's doors late at night, calling out their names, craving for their blood. Small superstitious communities would only open their doors at the second knock, since it was believed that the *vrykolakas* would knock only once, and then go on to the next house. According to Plancy's *Dictionnaire infernal* (1863, p.346), the etymology of the word traces back to a mud-filled tomb.

In Greek mythology, we can find the *lamia* (Λάμια), a child-eating daemon, whose main characteristics, "apart from their thirst for blood, are their uncleanliness, their gluttony, and their stupidity" (Lawson: 1910, p.174). The lamia is commonly associated with the sexually-driven and also extremely predatory Lilith (לילית), from Jewish mythology. They are both female characters who had met disgrace due to their transgressions – the lamia, cursed for having an affair with Zeus and bearing his children; Lilith, for refusing submission to Adam in the Garden

of Eden. The female vampire has recently been depicted as sexually predatory, a femme fatale, but considering both the lamia and Lilith, we could argue that, to some extent, such idea had been around long before Stoker revamped the issue through characters like Lucy in *Dracula*.

Vampire-like creatures had always been considered dangerous, threats, often functioning either as cautionary tales or means to maintain social control, since they "warned maidens in their post-pubescent years not to stray from the counsel of their elders and priests and to avoid glamourous visiting strangers who would only lead to disaster" (Melton, 1999, p. xxii). The fact that female vampire-like entities like Lilith were considered transgressive and predatory in their sexual lust may also be indicative of this reinforcing of social control.

Norse mythology also featured its own vampire-like character, the *draugr*, or 'the one who walks after death', in a literal translation; a figure that not only fed on raw flesh and blood, but also displayed supernatural strength, being able to control the weather and shape-shift, all of which became largely linked to the vampire in future literary works, as we are going to see.

Stories of the resurrected dead were prominent in Ancient India through the oral tradition. They told of demonic beings that could reanimate the corpses of humans, using their bodies to destroy others and viciously drink their blood. Also popular in Indian folklore is the *BrahmarākŞhasa*, a vampire-like creature commonly depicted with intestines circled over its head, holding a human skull from which it drank blood.

In the Americas we have the myth of the Soucouyant, also commonly referred to as loogaroo – in its turn derived from the French *loup garou* – in several locations like the Caribbean, Haiti and Trinidad and Tobago. It was later taken to regions such as Louisiana, in the United States, as a consequence of the flight of Haitian refugees after the Haitian revolution of 1804. The soucouyant was believed to drink blood from its victims' arms and legs while they were asleep, either killing them or turning them into soucouyants themselves.

The myths and folk tales go on. While sometimes they may indeed be depicted as the bodies of the dead returning, they may also be seen as disembodied demons, who may take possession over one's body. Amidst these various portrayals, there seems to exist a few points that bring most of these entities and myths – and others spread through the globe – together with the literary figure of the vampire we know nowadays.

Mainly, we can point out to the fact that they crave human life, they need human blood to survive and multiply their influence as they perpetuates their seed. If one gets killed by these

entities, it is likely that he or she will become a vampire him/herself. It all clearly sets them apart from other supernatural entities like ghosts, traditionally referred to as the spirits of the dead, for example, seeking to settle some earthly unfinished business. They are also mainly nocturnal creatures, unable or not entirely able to function during daytime. These characteristics are shared by all vampires we are going to deal with in this dissertation. Other paraphernalia commonly associated with vampire folklore, like garlic, crosses, mirrors and stakes will depend on the author's own idea of what his or her vampire is standing for.

As for the legends and myths presented here, it is true that all of them might as well have been precursors of the current vampire, but the figure only started taking its modern form in the eighteenth century onwards, and that was to a great extent due to the largely acknowledged phenomenon of vampire hysteria that seemed to take Eastern Europe by storm in the eighteenth century.

> A wave of virtually identical accounts [of alleged vampire attacks] swept through vast areas of Eastern Europe […]. A wide variety of terms developed for these beings, such as variations of the Serbian *vukodlak* (taken from the word for werewolf. Another term used in Serbia, *vampir* (of debated origin), and related words (such as the Russian *upyr*) also spread widely (Melton, 1999, p.x)

These creatures began to be referred to by parallels to the Serbian *vampir* in most Slavic languages, like *uppyr*, *upyr* and *upir* (Czech, Slovak, Ukrainian and Russian languages to name a few). According to etymology dictionaries, The English *vampire* appears to have derived from the French *vampyre*, which in turn derives from the German *vampir*, borrowing the vocabulary from the Serbian language. The precise meaning of *vampir/upyr* has been widely debated, with some pointing out to the Kazan Tatar *ubyr* (meaning "witch") but no consensus has been achieved.

Melton argues that in eighteenth-century Eastern Europe, "unexplained illnesses and deaths in a particular locality could trigger a hysteria over vampires and result in the exhumation and destruction of numerous bodies" (id.). It was during this time of hysteria that infamous cases such as Arnold Paole's became widely known. Paole was a Serbian who once claimed to have been bitten by a vampire. He later came to obit, in 1731, and his village of Maduegna saw many of its inhabitants die shortly after. Many suggested that he had come back from the dead to prey on the living. His body was exhumed, and seemed to be extremely well preserved. Blood was noticed in his mouth. That was considered evidence of vampirism, and so he was staked to the

ground so as to never get out. Blood spurted out as the act was performed, which fueled speculation.

Johannes Fluchinger, surgeon from the Austrian government, shocked Europe with his detailed anatomical reports on the Paole case and vampirism, relating the unearthing of suspected vampire bodies and how they seemed to be "unnaturally fresh" (id.), moaning when they were staked to the ground, with non-coagulated blood spurting out. It sufficed for them to consider these as proof of vampiric activity. Of course, nowadays, coroners would quickly dismiss such 'proof'; the "moaning" of the dead body would be nothing but a result of the dislocation of air within, while non-coagulated blood is not unusual. Under some soil or coffin conditions a body may take years and years to decompose. But, at the time, the stories began to spread quickly from Eastern Europe to Western Europe.

So much so that one of the first vampire novels, Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla,* actually makes explicit reference to both the cultural belief – "You have heard, no doubt, of the appalling superstition that prevails in Upper and Lower Sytria, in Moravia, Silesia, in Turkish Serbia, in Poland, even in Russia; the superstition, so we must call it, of the Vampire" (LeFanu, 2005, p.141-142) – and the need to exhume the bodies of suspect vampires, as the novel's climax indicates.

Once vampire superstitions arrived in the West, they would soon begin to come up in literature, first in Romantic poems and short extracts, then in novellas, and finally in fully-developed novels. Vampires found in Romantic poems a fitting setting to be brought (back) to life, since a lot of that aesthetic shares with Gothic writings – a genre which would later prove to be a perfect locus for the vampire to manifest itself, as we are going to see with *Dracula* – an ideology of resorting back to stripped-down human characteristics, that are not always pretty. They actually deal with the ugliness that lies behind the social masks we put on every day, and what happens when the ugliness takes over.

Romantic poets like William Blake and Samuel T. Coleridge were all influenced, to different extents, by Gothic works, helping to shape the tradition itself. The expression 'graveyard poets' came from their interest in graveyard and death-related vocabulary and themes, as exemplified below in "Thel" (1789) by Blake.

> She wandered in the land of clouds, through valleys dark, listening
> Dolours and lamentations; waiting oft beside a dewy grave
> She stood in silence, listening to the voices of the ground,

Till to her own grave plot she came (Punter; Byron, 2004, p.13).

Perhaps more prominently, there is Lord Byron, who proved to be of singular importance for the popularization of the vampire figure in British Literature, not only because of his poem “The Giaour” (1813) – one of the earliest and perhaps most recognized poem dealing with one’s encounter with a vampire – but also because he was to be the role model for *The Vampyre* (1819), Polidori’s unique account of a vampire entering the realm of English society.

“The Giaour” is often seen as a product of Byron’s touring of Europe, a couple of years before its publication. Byron became acquainted with customs of Eastern Europe, foreign to his own, including the belief in Vampires, which he incorporated as part of his narrative.

The poem tells, from a multitude of voices, the story of Leila, who decided to escape with her lover (*giaour*, which derives from the Turkish word for unfaithful, or ‘one that does not believe’), causing the wrath of her master, Hassan. Hassan has Leila killed, and disposes of her in the sea, with her body wrapped in a bag (another local custom Byron learned). The Giaour avenges Leila’s murder by killing Hassan. For his vengeful deed, the Giaour is cursed to become a vampire.

But first, on earth as vampire sent
Thy corse shall from its tomb be rent:
Then ghastly haunt thy native place,
And suck the blood of all thy race;
There from thy daughter, sister, wife,
At midnight drain the stream of life;
Yet loathe the banquet which perforce
Must feed thy livid living corse (Byron, 1960, p.259).

The poem achieved immediate notoriety, becoming very successful, and raising interest on the vampire character. Byron would later revisit the theme in his “Fragment of a Novel” (1819), a piece that describes its narrator’s journey with an older man to Turkey. The older man dies, and it was supposedly Byron’s intention, had he finished the story, to have the man reappear alive after his burial.

John Polidori, Byron’s own traveling companion and physician, inspired by this fragment, developed the short story “The Vampyre”, a turning point for vampire literature, since it is then that the vampire finally enters the realm of society and aristocracy.

Polidori was clearly inspired by the figure of Byron himself while creating his antagonist, Lord Ruthven. “His peculiarities caused him to be invited to every house; all wished to see him,

and those who had been accustomed to violent excitement, and now felt the weight of ennui, were pleased at having something in their presence capable of engaging their attention" (Polidori, 1998, p.3). This is how the narrator of *The Vampyre* describes Ruthven, but it might as well have been an accurate description of Lord Byron, considered to be a mysterious, magnetic and charismatic figure himself.

The moment Ruthven makes his appearance in English society, everyone seems to be both puzzled and instigated by his unique character. One young man in particular, Aubrey, who had also just come to London, becomes instantly fascinated by his presence. "He watched him; and the very possibility of forming an idea of the character of a man entirely absorbed in himself […], he soon formed this object into the hero of a romance, and determined to observe the offspring of his fancy" (id., p.5). Aubrey deliberately sought Ruthven's attention and soon became acquainted with him, receiving a surprising invitation to join Lord Ruthven in his European tour.

As his travelling companion, Aubrey notices Ruthven's attraction to "centres of all fashionable vice" (id., p.6), but he always maintained an impassive attitude towards society, as if he were merely observing from the outside, and not actually taking an active role in it. This unnatural distancing kept Aubrey interested, but at the same time, it began to dawn on him the idea that there might be indeed something supernatural about Ruthven. As they arrive in Greece, Aubrey hears of the "Vampyre" for the first time.

> Her earnestness and apparent belief of what she narrated, excited the interest even of Aubrey; and often as she told him the tale of the living vampire, who had passed years amidst his friends, and dearest ties, forced year by year, by feeding upon the life of a lovely female to prolong his existence for the ensuing months, his blood would run cold. […] She detailed to him the traditional appearance of these monsters, and his horror was increased, by hearing a pretty accurate description of Lord Ruthven (id., p.9).

As they continue their journey, Aubrey and Lord Ruthven are unexpectedly attacked by robbers, who shoot Ruthven and leave him apparently badly hurt. Aubrey looks after him, and, as Ruthven's vitality seems to be vanishing, the latter forces Aubrey to make an oath as to save his honor.

> You may save me – you may do more than that – I mean not my life […] but you may save my honour, your friend's honour. […] I cannot explain the whole – but if you would conceal all you know of me, my honour were free from stain in the world's mouth. […] Swear that, for a year and a day you will not impart your knowledge of my crimes or death to any living being in any way, whatever may happen, or whatever you may see" (id., p.15).

Ruthven dies shortly after, and Aubrey returns to England in a disturbed, melancholy state of mind. Some time later, there is a social event which Aubrey attends. As soon as he realizes that was the same place he had first seen Ruthven, he is seized by the arm and someone whispers to him the words, “remember your oath” (id., p.18). Aubrey did not have to lay his eyes on the figure to know that it had been Ruthven, again, risen from the dead. He goes on a downward spiral, becoming physically ill and mentally unstable.

Hearing of Aubrey’s condition, Ruthven assumes it is because of him and pays him a visit. He soon becomes friendly with Miss Aubrey, Aubrey’s sister. To Aubrey’s dismay, there is nothing he can do to alert his sister of Ruthven’s nature, he is bound by the oath he had made and, for him, it was stronger than anything else.

Auerbach claims that “the oath signifies instead a bond between companions that is shared and chosen, one far from the Dracula-like mesmeric coercion we associate with vampires today” (Auerbach, 1995, p.14). It is proof of the intimacy of the relationship they had shared, and though it was his own sister’s life at stake, Aubrey could not force himself to break the oath, as it would destroy and erase their bond completely.

Time passes and Ruthven was to marry Aubrey’s sister, just before the oath expired. Aubrey wrote a letter to his sister, begging her to postpone her marriage for a few hours. The letter never made it to her on time. She got married and left London. On their wedding night, Aubrey’s sister is found completely drained, having “glutted the thirst of a VAMPYRE!” (id., p.23).

There are a few important points we should consider in *The Vampyre*. First, the very fact that the vampire character has successfully mingled in society is of significant relevance. It is no longer the gut-wrenching creature that lurks on its prey at night, when no one is watching. It has revealed itself and made itself the target of the others’ gaze. It raises interest and it is intriguing. It wears the same sort of social mask everyone else does, in order to protect its true nature. It observes society, and, in doing so, it is much closer to actually being able to reflect upon it.

The Vampyre surely takes from the folkloric vampire, but at the same time, it moves away from it, categorically defining what was to be the model for most vampires that would appear in English literature later on. Ruthven is, above all, a seducer. He seduces all people around him, including Aubrey himself. He functions as catalyst for underlying desires. The homoerotic bond we can perceive between Aubrey and Ruthven, though, is never fully realized into a homosexual

act. “Same sex desire between men can be encoded only through women, as Aubrey’s and Lord Ruthven’s relationship must be negotiated with Aubrey’s sister in Polidori’s *The Vampyre*” (Punter; Byron, 2004, p.270).

The same cannot be said about the next big step in vampire literature, which is arguably one of the most important works of the genre to date. Though it has not become as famous as its successor *Dracula*, it paved its way with ideas that were thoroughly explored in the latter. The year was 1872, and it saw the first publication of Sheridan LeFanu’s *Carmilla*, responsible for the materialization of many of the ideas we have come to associate with our modern vampires. Carmilla will, thus, be the starting point of our literary analysis as of next chapter, fully dedicated to nineteenth century vampire literature.

2 THE VAMPIRE IN NINETEENTH CENTURY LITERATURE

Decaying, bleak, and full of hidden passageways, the castle was linked to other medieval edifices – abbeys, churches and graveyards especially – that, in their generally ruinous states, harked back to a feudal past associated with barbarity, superstition and fear. [...] The pleasures of horror and terror came from the reappearance of figures long gone. None the less, Gothic narratives never escaped the concern of their own times, despite the heavy historical trappings.

Fred Botting

The Victorian Age, a long period of time ranging from the eighteen thirties to the early nineteen hundreds has always been highly associated with the Puritan code of morality, which at the time was promoted by Protestant groups, "righteously censorious of worldliness in others" (Abrams, 2000, p.739). Such code had a pivotal role in establishing strict social conduct, low tolerance for sexually-related topics and innuendos, and "intense concern for female innocence – or, as its opponents contended, female ignorance" (id., p.740). Victorian asceticism was supposed to dictate the way middle-classes should behave and measure themselves and their families by.

Against this strict ethos as background, we have, at the same time, on the literary front, the amazing popularity of Gothic novels, which had proved themselves popular since the publication of Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) in the previous century. Gothic novels were focused on disrupting the very ideal of social order – or the apparent social order – that the Victorian Age dictated. Whether the goal is to question these values – "uncertainties about the nature of power, law, society, family and sexuality dominate Gothic fiction. They are linked to wider threats of disintegration manifest most forcefully in political revolution" (Botting, 1996, p.5) – or to try to reestablish them – "Gothic writing became a powerful means to reassert the values of society, virtue and propriety: transgression, by crossing the social and aesthetic limits, serves to reinforce or underline their value and necessity [...]. Gothic novels often adopt this cautionary strategy" (id., p.7) – Gothic fiction had placed itself as a potentially thought-provoking genre that dealt with real social anxieties, which varied "according to diverse changes: political revolution, industrialization, urbanization, shifts in sexual and domestic organization, and scientific discovery" (id., p.3) through colorful, sublime, supernatural scenarios.

In their introduction to *The Gothic*, Punter and Byron claim that "one can also point to the extraordinary persistence of certain motifs – the vampire, for example, or the monstrous potential of science and technology – and as well as to the way in which these motifs seem to be recycled in the 'Gothic textual body'" (Punter; Byron, 2004, p.xix). It is not by chance that Vampires appear more than often in Gothic works. Both the Gothic Genre and Vampires were to share the abilities of changing and reinventing themselves, not to mention a prominent tendency to transgress all sorts of conventions.

It is our belief that it is precisely because of the Victorian age's rigidity when it came to sexual matters that the vampires that rose from the age were so intrinsically related to both sexuality and crossing forbidden boundaries. With *Carmilla*, Sheridan LeFanu[5] paved the way for many other vampire works, notably *Dracula* (1897), by Bram Stoker[6], regarding the fact that it brought the vampire's latent sexual component to the surface, thoroughly exploring the erotic experience through vampirism.

In this chapter, then, we are going to investigate how both of these vampire novels, especially the enormously popular *Dracula*, can be read as unique portrayals of the social space or times in which they were written – and consequently, a commentary on the values, morals and beliefs so inherently intertwined. For that, we are going to delve into the idea that the vampires in the novel can be interpreted as mirrors of the human anxieties that permeated the British society in the late eighteen hundreds.

2.1 Sheridan LeFanu's Awakening of the Female Erotic in *Carmilla*

The monster of prohibition exists to demarcate the bonds that hold together that system of relations we call culture, to call attention to the borders that cannot – must not – be crossed. Primarily these borders are in place to control the traffic in women, or more generally to

[5] LeFanu (1814-1873) was a prolific Irish writer of different genres of fiction, but is best know for his incursions in Gothic tales and mystery novels. He is considered to be one of the leading ghost-story writers of the nineteenth century.

[6] Stoker (1847-1912) was both a novelist and a short story writer. Before writing "The Un-Dead" (later to be retitled Dracula), he is known to have extensively researched the character of the vampire in European folklore and myth.

establish strictly homosocial bonds, the ties between men that keep a patriarchal society functional.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen

Sheridan LeFanu's description of the setting in which *Carmilla* takes place undoubtedly evokes the Gothic tradition, as the narrator, 19-year-old Laura, tells us of the land she lives in, "a feudal residence […] nothing can be more picturesque or solitary. It stands on a slight eminence in a forest" (LeFanu, 2005, p.11). Having lived in a castle and surrounded by old chapels and ruined villages, Laura's existence had always been a lonely one, completely controlled by her father and her *gouvernantes,* her only companion.

Being alone had always been natural for her, but she started dreading it after an incident, one of the earliest ones she recalls from her childhood, happened. Laura was six, and found herself alone in the nursery, a part of the castle she had all for herself. Feeling neglected, Laura began to whimper, but the appearance of a figure in her room soon caught her attention.

> I saw a solemn, but very pretty face looking at me from the side of the bed. (…) She caressed me with her hands, and lay down beside me on the bed, and drew me towards her, smiling; I felt immediately delightfully soothed, and fell asleep again. I was wakened by a sensation as if two needles ran into my breast very deep at the same moment, and I cried loudly (id., p.14)

Her maids were soon in the nursery, but nowhere was anyone but Laura to be found. They did realize, though, that there had been a warm spot in Laura's bed, where someone else had lied. For years, Laura would never sleep alone again, and was terrified to be left by herself. She knew, in spite of what others might have told her to comfort her, that it had been real.

As of the time the main events in the novel take place, Laura has been able to get over her trauma and leave the incident in the past, where it belonged. That was until another incident put Laura face to face with the very same beautiful young woman she had seen that night, so many years before.

Laura, her father and the maids had all been out on an especially beautiful night of full moon, when they realized that an imposing carriage seemed to be out of control. The carriage crashed, but there were no fatalities. A young girl, though, was passed out, and her mother

seemed to be deeply worried – not about her daughter's recovery, but instead, about the accident having caused a delay in her arrival at her destination, "a journey of life and death, in prosecuting which to lose an hour is to lose all" (id., p.25).

The woman asks Laura's father where the nearest village is, so as to leave the daughter taken care of, and being able to resume her journey. Laura immediately begs her father to allow the girl to stay over their watch while her mother is away, to which he concedes. The girl's mother hesitates only for a moment, but before long, she is up in the carriage again. Before leaving, she tells Laura's father not to ask her daughter any questions regarding where they come from and where they were bound to, for their journey was a secret. She assures him, though, she would go back for her daughter in three months.

The mystery left all intrigued, but the girl's tremendously beautiful figure soon won all them over. When Laura finally has the chance to take a good look at the girl, she is more than perplexed.

> I saw the very face which had visited me in my childhood at night, which remained so fixed in my memory, and on which I had for so many years so often ruminated with horror, when no one suspected of what I was thinking. It was pretty, even beautiful, and when I first beheld it, wore the same melancholy expression (id., p.35-36).

And that was how Laura met Carmilla. The latter's 'return' also marked the return of the experience that the former believed to be overcome; the moment Laura realized Carmilla was the same person that had come to her bed years before, the same strong and strange feelings took hold of her as though they had been present all along.

To Laura's surprise, Carmilla also acknowledges the experience, remembering her face from a dream, to which Laura replies that "Twelve years ago, in vision or reality, I certainly saw you. I could not forget your face. It has remained before my eyes ever since" (id., p.36). The acknowledgement on Carmilla's part had somehow a soothing effect on Laura, who felt immediately drawn to her.

> I don't know which should be most afraid of the other", she said, again smiling – "If you were less pretty I think I should be very much afraid of you, but being as you are, and you and I both so young, I feel only that I have made your acquaintance twelve years ago, and have already a right to your intimacy; at all events it does seem as if we were destined, from our earliest childhood, to be friends. I wonder whether you feel as strangely drawn towards me as I do to you: I have never had a friend – Shall I find one now?" She sighed, and her fine eyes gazed passionately on me (id., p.35-36).

Laura’s own feelings towards Carmilla were contradictory. She did feel as ‘drawn’ to Carmilla as she said she was towards her, but the very nature of this feeling was confusing to her. Laura felt both compelled and repulsed by Carmilla, but having shared such an experience linked them both in a way that Laura simply could not, and would not, deny, for Carmilla was someone who appeared to desperately need her just as much as Laura had wished for Carmilla.

The fact that the adjective “strange” is often used to describe both Laura’s and Carmilla’s feelings towards one another is also very perceptive. It will be helpful for us to bring the psychoanalytical idea of the “uncanny” (translated from the German *unheimlich*, often translated as “strange” in other languages) to the discussion, so as to try to shed light onto what makes their relationship “strange”.

In his essay, “The Uncanny” (1919), Freud states that the apparent opposition between the *Heimlich* and *Unheimlich*, or the familiar and unfamiliar, may be blurred since the unfamiliar is brought forth once you have the return of something familiar that had been previously repressed. This is what ultimately produces the uncanny effect.

> Every emotional affect, whatever its kind, transforms itself into anxiety, if repressed, then among such cases of anxiety there must be a category in which the anxiety-provoker can be shown to come from something repressed which returns. This kind of anxiety would then be no other than what is uncanny; [...] this uncanny is, in reality, nothing new or foreign, but instead something familiar and old, long before established in the mind, that has been estranged only by the process of repression (Freud, 2006, p.258, my retranslation).

Even though they were supposed to be strangers to one another, it is the sense of familiarity that immediately connects Laura and Carmilla. The fact that they shared the same dream over a decade before and are still able to remember each other’s faces also produces an uncanny effect.

Freud goes on to explain that the *Unheimlich* is something that should have been kept in the dark, but came to light. When he refers to “the dark”, Freud is alluding to the depths of our consciousness, to the repressed content that should not have emerged. There are different ways the repressed can manifest itself, sometimes it is during a dream or even a therapy session, but in our case, it was Carmilla herself who evoked Laura’s earliest childhood memories, which had been traumatic but then overcome; by doing so, a sense of strangeness was established, which was, at the same time, familiar.

Also interesting is the fact that Auerbach points out the fact that the word "strange" was, itself, an "euphemism for homosexual love" (Auerbach, 1995, p.40). While it is true that in the previous century Polidori portrayed a male vampire as the focal point of attention of other male character, that relationship was absolutely different from the one LeFanu is describing.

Even though Aubrey was definitely captivated by Lord Ruthven, not once did the latter sink his teeth into the former. Male vampires did not make male victims, but the same could not be said about Carmilla, who "alters the strictly heterosexual behavior of Lord Ruthven […] by choosing only women as victims" (Senf, 1988, p.51). Auerbach goes on to compare male and female vampires, stating that "everything male vampires seemed to promise, Carmilla performs: she arouses, she pervades, she offers a sharing self. This female vampire is licensed to realize the erotic, interpenetrative friendship male vampires aroused and denied" (Auerbach, 1995, p. 38-39).

> From these fooling embraces […] I used to wish to extricate myself, but my energies seemed to fail me. Her murmured words sounded like a lullaby in my ear, and soothed my resistance into a trance, from which I only seemed to recover myself when she withdrew her arms.
> In these mysterious moods I did not like her. I experienced a strange tumultuous excitement that was both pleasurable, ever and anon, mingled with a vague sense of fear and disgust (LeFanu, 2005, p.45-46).

As Laura and Carmilla's relationship gets more and more intimate, Laura finds herself unable to resist Carmilla's influence, collapsing into a frenzy of bodily sensations she did not know at all. When Carmilla finally visits Laura at night to consume her desire for the latter, Laura's description of her experience is nothing but enlightening.

> Sometimes there came a sensation as if a hand was drawn softly along my cheek and neck. Sometimes it was as if warm lips kissed me, and longer and longer more lovingly as they reached my throat, but there the caress fixed itself. My heart beat faster, my breathing rose and fell rapidly and full drawn; a sobbing, that rose into a sense of strangulation, supervened, and turned into a dreadful convulsion, in which my senses left me and I became unconscious" (id., p.77).

It becomes clear that the whole experience of the vampire attack is comparable to the ecstasy of a sexual climax, though Laura would not be able to make such connection as she had never experienced it herself.

The female vampire in the nineteenth century was a catalyst of the repressed sexuality women experienced in the Victorian Age, and through vampirism women could break with patriarchal conventions being able to realize the erotic. In the text "The Erotic as Power" (1997),

Lorde argues that the erotic "is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced, we know we can aspire. For having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self respect we can require no less of ourselves" (Lorde, 1997, p.278), and perhaps it is precisely because Carmilla is completely in tune with the erotic within herself that she, according to Auerbach, is "one of the few self-accepting homosexuals in Victorian or any literature" (Auerbach, 1995, p.41).

Fulfilling the erotic, for Lorde, meant empowerment, and also noticing all the possibilities and potential for change that lied within oneself. Of course, empowered women in a male world were going to be perceived as dangerous, which is precisely what is going to happen to Carmilla next.

But before we move forward, it is important for us to acknowledge that the erotic disruption of the established male-oriented social order is not all the female vampire might bring out; according to Senf, the vampire might also be read as a commentary on the larger female role in Victorian times. She draws a comparison between women and vampires stating that

> both vampires and women are parasite creatures, the one by nature, the other by economic necessity. Both are dead, the one literally, the other legally. Both are defined primarily by their physiology rather than by their intelligence or emotions. Finally, however, both have a latent power to influence the lives of others (Senf, 1988, p. 53-54).

When Laura starts to feel ill and look pale, a Doctor is brought in to check in on her, and confirms his suspicion when he sees the bite marks on Laura's neck. He begs her father not to leave her alone for a second, while Laura is kept in the dark as to what they think the matter with her is. Then, Laura and her father are visited by General Spielsdorf, who had lost his daughter months before and has been, ever since, pursuing the 'monster', as he calls it, who betrayed his trust and desecrated his daughter's innocence. It all leads him to the old ruins of the Karnsteins, where the tombs of an extinct family stand to the present day, surrounded by a forsaken village and chapel. As the symptoms which afflicted the General's daughter were very reminiscent of Laura's own, Laura's father joins the General as he ventures through the forest in search of the old Karnstein ruins.

There, they met a woodsman, who was familiar with the area and knew how the village came to be deserted. "It was troubled by revenants, sir; several were tracked to their graves, there

detected by the usual tests, and extinguished in the usual way, by decapitation, by stake, and by burning; but not until many of the villagers were killed" (LeFanu, 2005, p.127). It is interesting to notice the use of the word "usual" in this speech, which implies a certain understanding that most people are already familiar with the cases of vampire hysteria that plagued Europe and were described in the previous chapter.

Together, the men formed a sort of league against the "forces of evil", which was to be fully reenacted in Stoker's *Dracula*. Gelder argues that while in *Carmilla* – unlike previous vampire tales – desire between two people of the same sex is licensed, it will then be "managed or regulated (by 'eliminating' its object)" (Gelder, 1994, p.61), precisely by this male league. We will go back to this idea and explore its possible repercussions as we discuss Lucy's storyline in *Dracula*.

The general's confrontation with Carmilla allows everyone to witness how impossibly strong the girl is considering her size. They are also astonished to learn that Carmilla was the same girl who had been invited into the General's house months before, then known as Millarca. After they gathered what they considered to be enough proof of Carmilla's vampirism, she was killed, staked through the heart.

We may argue, though, that Carmilla's passing was not the end of her existence at all. Even though Laura was ultimately aware of the fact Carmilla had been a vampire, she did not feel differently about her. As a matter of fact, Laura's last words in the novel suggest that Carmilla continues to live within Laura.

> To this hour the image of Carmilla returns to memory with ambiguous alternations – sometimes, the playful, languid, beautiful girl; sometimes the writhing fiend I saw in the ruined church; and often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing room door (LeFanu, 2005, p.151).

Carmilla's presence was as alive as ever for Laura. The feelings and sensations which had been experienced by her could no longer be denied, and, as Lorde pointed out, once the erotic is indeed accomplished, one gains a power that cannot be taken away. When Carmilla, in one of her intimate moments with Laura, told her that "You are mine, you *shall* be mine, you and I are one forever" (id., p.46), among whispers and kisses, she may have had the idea that Laura's existence would melt into her own, and that they would indeed be one forever. Still, Carmilla's dispatch accomplished the same result; but it was Carmilla who ended up melting into Laura's existence,

creating a double. There was the Laura that returned to her pre-Carmilla state total paternal rule, but there was also a part of Laura that was able to transcend the boundaries of homosocial relationships.

In "The Uncanny", Freud mentions the phenomenon of the double, and states that such a phenomenon manifests itself when "we have characters that should be considered identical because they look equal. This relationship is underlined by mental processes that are projected from a character to the other […] in a way that the one possesses knowledge, feeling and experience in common with the other" (Freud, 2006, p. 252, my retranslation).

Carmilla is strange to Laura, in the first place, precisely because of the childhood experience they had both shared. It represented the unexpected return of the long-lost familiar, which caused a strangeness that was both compelling and repulsive. At the same time, Laura found in Carmilla what she had so dearly longed for: a companion, that would speak to her in levels neither her father nor her maids could; someone to share her coming-of-age experiences with. For Laura, Carmilla met all these expectations, also introducing her to a deeper knowledge about herself and her body that led to her being in touch with the erotic within. It was as though Carmilla was the bond that was missing in order for Laura to find completeness, and once their bond was established, it could not be broken.

As Auerbach points out, "Le Fanu's Laura never stopped feeling Carmilla's feelings inside her, nor did she bother to question whether those feelings were good" (Auerbach, 1995, p.59). They were there, no longer repressed, and it was all that mattered.

The vampire figure in this context can be read as a catalyst for desire and feeling that lie within each and every one of us, but would not have come to surface due to regulating external forces or systems. The vampire offered a powerful bond, developed through "an interchange, a sharing, an identification, that breaks down the boundaries of familial roles and the sanctioned hierarchy of marriage" (id., p.47), and this bond might just have been the only way for these characters, chained by Victorian morality, to fully experience the erotic.

2.2 Vampirism as Liberation: A Look at Repressed Sexuality in Victorian England through Bram Stoker's *Dracula*

We distrust and loathe the monster at the same time we envy its freedom, and perhaps its sublime despair.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen

Dracula's first line reads "Left Munich at 8.35 p.m. on 1st May" (Stoker, 2003, p.7), marking the beginning of Jonathan Harker's account of his leaving to Transylvania, where he, a British lawyer, would meet nobleman Count Dracula, who was to purchase an old London estate. It seems to be more than appropriate, though, that Stoker chose to open his novel with that particular line, since I would like to approach *Dracula* as a series of departures. I would like to do so for a series of reasons.

We are immediately departing from the familiar, civilized world and fast approaching the wilderness of the Carpathians. As we journey into the "wildest and least known portions of Europe" (id., p.8), not only are we departing from the English community geographically, but also, and perhaps more significantly, there is a moral departure, as we witness the suspension of the Victorian ethos and the way that the newly-established Transylvanian code threatens to rule over the former, showing its possible cracks under the surface of perfection. We, in accordance with *Carmilla*, depart from old depictions of vampires solely as repugnant creatures, uncovering layers that allow them to become tempting and seductive – a source of great internal conflicts, as we are going to see. We also depart from traditional portrayals of male and female characters, as we notice reversals in gender-based relations. It does not take long before we depart from the gloomy castle and rocky environment of the Carpathians, which had been popularized by the early Gothic fiction, to go back to the urban environment – only now we are bringing the vampire, along with everything it stood for, and having the action happen right within the realm of the familiar.

The novel form was clearly privileged in nineteenth century English literature, as it provided the means for its target and expanding audience, the middle-class, to identify with the characters and the social context described. The novel was to mimic life as it was, for the reader

"wanted to be close to what he was reading about, to have as little suspension of disbelief as possible, to pretend, indeed, that literature was journalism, that fiction was history" (Daiches, 2002, p.1049).

Dracula, in that sense, is not a typical novel. It begins by offering the reader the opportunity to cling to Jonathan Harker, an ordinary Victorian young man, as a sort of 'relatable' character, but, much like the audience itself, Jonathan embarks on a journey that will lead him to unknown places full of the superstition and free from the morals which were so consistently embedded in his life in London. Its roots are firmly established in the Gothic tradition with its awe-inspiring scenarios, foreign and primitive lands in which civilized rules did not always apply, and the supernatural element as a force to be acknowledged.

As Carol A. Senf describes, Stoker managed to successfully mingle the realm of the familiar and the foreign, "to have his vampire as well as 'characters acting under the ordinary agencies of life" (Senf, 1998, P.37). The 'realistic' makes itself present in the story not only through the modern London setting, but also through the way Stoker structured the narrative. The story is told from multiple points of view through journal entries, letters, diaries, newspaper clippings – which corroborates the idea of 'literature as journalism' – and even phonographs, in accordance with the latest technological developments, and it makes up for a sense of a factually-based story, attempting to make the reader embrace these events as real, however supernatural they might be.

The rupture with the familiar realm begins with the overpowering influence of the setting on the English man, but is only consolidated through the mirror device. Early on the narrative, we find Harker shaving in front of a mirror, whose reflection covered the totality of the room, when suddenly he is startled to feel Dracula's hand right over his shoulder. He describes on his journal entry, "the man was close to me, and I could see him over my shoulder. But there was no reflection of him in the mirror! The whole room behind me was displayed; but there was no sign of a man in it, except myself" (Stoker, 2003, p.32).

Stoker's idea that the vampire cast no reflection on mirrors, which seems not to have "any precedent in either vampire folklore or the earlier vampire short stories and dramas" (Melton, 1999, p.467), was thoroughly incorporated into the vampire mythology, becoming one of the main characteristics usually associated with vampires. The folklore around mirrors themselves, however, may be a way of interpreting Stoker's idea, which is never explained in the novel.

> Mirrors were seen as somehow revealing a person's spiritual double, the soul. In seeing themselves revealed in a mirror, individuals found confirmation that, that there was a soul and that hence life went on. They also found in the reflection a new source of anxiety, as the mirror could be used negatively to affect the soul. The notion that the image in the mirror was somehow the soul underlay the idea that breaking the mirror brought seven year's bad luck. Breaking the mirror also damaged the soul. Thus, one could speculate that the vampire had no soul, had nothing to reflect in the mirror (id., p.467).

This could very well be an explanation for the vampire's lack of a reflection; but, perhaps more meaningfully, we could say that the vampire casts no reflection because it is a reflection itself. If when we look at the vampire, all we can see is *ourselves*; there must be a reason for that, and it could be that these rich creatures of the night have become powerful means to deal with our own most primitive anxieties.

The vampire in this environment may be interpreted as more than just a mere supernatural invader. Its allegorical role, with which we are most concerned, can be a source for dealing with "matters that are hidden beneath the social surface" (Senf, 1988, p.27) of the Victorian times.

As we know, the Puritan values, preached by the age, were thoroughly spread in the literature of the time. *Dracula'*s creator, Bram Stoker, had always been known as the average, typical citizen, a "pillar of late Victorian respectability" (Stoker, 2003, p. ix). But deep within Stoker's unconscious, and unveiled one night during his sleep, was the figure of a man, both evil and powerful, who claimed from a girl ownership over another man. That dream made a strong impression on the author, and that small seed would later germinate into the characters of Dracula, Mina, and Jonathan Harker, respectively. Years before the publication of *Dracula*, Stoker had the following passage, a quick reminder of the dream's most impressive aspects, written on a draft notebook with ideas for the novel.

> Met at station storm arrive old Castle – left in Courtyard driver disappears Count appears – describe old dead man Styria Castle, no one left but old man but no pretence of being alone – old man in waking trance – Young man goes out sees girls one tries to kiss him not on the lips but throat. Old Count interferes – rage & fury diabolical – this man belongs to me I want him (id., p. xxxiv).

There have been many readings of Dracula's lust for power over Jonathan as a representation of homosexual desire, the threat that "Dracula will seduce, penetrate, drain another male" (id., p.xxxiv). If indeed we were to read the character through that perspective, it may be

interesting to see that such character took its form only through the author's dream, an outlet of the subconscious, letting the repressed be known. Of course, as we tackle these ideas, it will be relevant to comment on psychoanalytical readings of the characters, which became fruitful since the nineteen seventies.

Before we actually deal with a reading inspired by some ideas of psychoanalysis, it is important to point out that even though the homosexual reading would simply be one of many possible readings, it had been simply unheard of a vampire victimizing – or 'penetrating' – another male, as previously pointed out in our discussion of *Carmilla*. Yet, what we are going to be dealing with, primarily, is the fact that the sexuality that flourishes from within the characters was considered as devious sexual behavior by the Victorian morality. If men should never have sexual impulses towards another man, then women, on the other hand, should not have sexual impulses, or at least act upon them, at all. We can perceive "Dracula as a moral threat" (Senf, 1998, p.59), one that hides within darkness, but may take absolute control over one's body.

In 1908, Stoker published an article called "The Censorship of Fiction", in which he clearly attacked texts that he thought "would be a disgrace to any country even less civilized than our own. The class of works to which I allude are meant by both authors and publishers to bring to the winning of commercial success the forces of inherent evil in man" (Stoker, 2003, p.427). It is absolutely clear in this article that by 'evil' he means 'sex'; and the texts he specifically attacks are those of a more sexually-explicit nature, even though he does not name any particular texts. "A close analysis will show that the only emotions which in the long run harm are those arising from sex impulses, and when we have realized this we have put a finger on the actual point of danger" (id., p.425). Sex was the ultimate "evil" force that haunted Stoker.

It may seem quite contradictory that he would be blatantly attacking such work, considering that it is extremely difficult for a modern audience to think of *Dracula* without the now-commonplace sexual connotations. But we must also remember that one of the functions of Gothic fiction may be to reinforce the boundaries of the morally acceptable precisely by crossing them, describing the dangers in doing so.

> The fair girl went on her knees, and bent over me, fairly gloating. There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white sharp teeth. Lower and lower went her head as the

> lips went below the range of my mouth and chin and seemed to fasten on my throat. […] I closed my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited – waited with beating heart (id., p.45-46).

In this particular moment, Jonathan meets the three vampire women that inhabit Dracula's castle for the first time. The "languorous ecstasy" that the scene depicts is very sexually-charged, and made even clearer by how the author himself both phrased his ideas ("went on her knees", "lower and lower went her head", "licked her lips like an animal") and chose his vocabulary ("voluptuousness", "scarlet lips", "red tongue"), which can all be semantically associated with sex.

The apparent contradiction that lied within Stoker could be representative of the contradictions within his society. If on the one hand it was widely preached that one should be concerned with conveying an image of respectability and abstention of pleasures, on the other hand, it is a fact that the Victorian age saw a great number of prostitutes, brothels and taverns, sometimes even elapsing the number of churches, as pointed out in Steven Marcus' *The Other Victorians* (1966), a study of the sexual habits of mid-19th century Victorian society, which contradicts some of the suppositions we have about Victorian asceticism.

Stoker did acknowledge the fact that one cannot stop oneself from feeling or being subject to 'the workings of imagination', but that should not mean one should externalize those feelings, whether through actions or artistic means.

> The individual producer or recorder can control his own utterances; he may have to feel, but he need not of necessity speak or write. And so individual discretion is the first line of defense against such evils as may come from imagination – itself pure, a process of thought, working unintentionally with impure or dangerous material (Stoker, 2003, p.424).

If we look back at Stoker's dream, the one that originated the main characters of the novel, we may be sorely tempted to look at both the 'girl' character, who tries to kiss the young man "not on the lips but throat" and the 'old man' character as embodiments of that anxiety that derives from a sexual place. It may be true that *Dracula* cannot be compared to the texts he was criticizing, but could it be that he was actually unaware of how sexualized the vampire could be?

In his text "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1899), Freud deals with the idea that all dreams have both a manifest content, which we are actually able to remember, and a 'latent' content, lying within the manifest content, and responsible for infusing the former with its real meaning. It might not be possible to actually understand the manifest content by itself were we

not to consider what each element could in fact represent, as parts of a puzzle. He states that "If we attempted to read these characters according to their pictorial value instead of according to their symbolic relation, we should clearly be led into error" (Freud, 2000, p.131). Arguably, the 'latent content' might not have been clear for Stoker himself, but it seems appropriate to assume that there is more to the dream and the idea that rose from it than what lies on the surface.

Stoker states that "Restraint may be one of two kinds – either that which is compelled by external forces, or that which comes from within. In art the latter in its usual phase is known as 'reticence.' […] and where such self-restraint exists there is no need for external compelling force" (Stoker, 2003, p.421). Perhaps, the only way the author could actually represent in art that which he was sure should be repressed was through an actual 'evil', diabolical figure – and thus, the vampire.

His mention of "self-restraint" could surely be associated with Freud's idea of the *ego*, one of the three parts of the individual's psychic apparatus. "The ego is that part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world. [...] The ego represents what may be called reason and common sense, in contrast to the id, which contains the passions" (Freud, 1984, p. 363-364).

The 'external influence' to which Freud refers encompasses the *superego*, which "also takes on the influence of those who have stepped into the place of parents — educators, teachers, people chosen as ideal models" (Freud, 1973, p.95-96). The id, then, consists of our most primitive drives, is ruled by the pleasure principle and has no inhibitions. It is what Freud calls the 'primary process'. The superego embodies the whole body of social expectations and rules, functioning as a repressive force. Finally, the ego is the individual trying to mediate the relations between both id and superego. That would be the 'secondary process', intervening as a system of control and regulation, in favor of the reality principle.

In practical terms, if we were to apply these three theoretical constructs to the specific situation we are analyzing, Dracula, the character, and the vampires he created, would compose the id, primitive, governed by the pleasure principle; Victorian society and its puritan code would encompass the superego, which is directly associated with all the rules, morals and impositions; and, Stoker himself (or his fictional alter-ego, Jonathan Harker) is the ego, desperately trying to keep the id repressed, but doomed not to be able to do so. When Harker says that "I am all in a sea of wonders. I doubt; I fear; I think strange things I dare not confess to my own soul. God keep

me" (Stoker, 2003, p.25), he does nothing but externalize his fear that the id might eventually take control over him.

> The primary processes are then expelled by the process of repression, held back at lower levels of psychical development and kept away from, to begin with, the possibility of satisfaction. If they succeed subsequently, as can so easily happen with repressed sexual instincts – [...] that event, which would in other cases have been an opportunity for pleasure, is felt by the ego as unpleasure (Freud, 2006, p.20, my retranslation).

It becomes clear that when the repressed breaks through the unconscious and is actually fulfilled, it is unlikely that the individual, because of his/her awareness of the secondary process, would be able to experience the primitive drive as pleasurable, even if it is regulated by the pleasure principle itself. Again, if we go back to Harker's meeting with the vampire women, the scene starts as his ego is working violently, trying to mediate both id and superego, and this is evidenced even by Stoker's choice of vocabulary. "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" (Stoker, 2003, p.45, my italics). But by the time the vampires start touching him, it is clear that his id had won the battle, turning Harker into a sort of hostage of himself, unable to act, merely waiting.

But as he looks back on the experience, his position is quite different. Distanced from the allure of bodily sensations, it is the voice of the superego that is thoroughly heard through his ego, as he states that "nothing can be more dreadful than those awful women" (id., p.48) and describes them as "the three ghostly women to whom I was doomed" (id., p.53) and "those awful women" (id., p.61).

Freud comments that "when people unfamiliar with analysis feel an obscure fear, a dread of rousing something that they think is better left sleeping, what they they are really afraid of is the emergence of this compulsion with its suggestion of possession by a sort of evil power" (Freud: 2006, p.47, my retranslation). It is, at the very least, suggestive that, a mere few lines after Harker describes the women as "awful", he goes on to say that "The devil and his children still walk with earthly feet" (Stoker, 2003, p.61). It becomes clear that the "id" is a part of the individual that should not find its way out; but when does, it may even be attributed to an evil, demonic force.

We could argue that what the vampires do, then, is to bring out the pleasure principle that lies numb, controlled within people; but, as this principle is still subject to the repressive

secondary process, it creates severe psychological conflicts. “Bodily desires and their satisfaction have always been a tricky problem for Christianity, historically a religion which has tended to damn sexual impulses as an evil consequence of man’s disobedience to God.” (id., p. xviii) The vampires, however, live solely by the pleasure principle and do not feel guilty or ashamed of their actions. That, of course, would be interpreted as ‘demonic’ by traditional standards of morality, such as the Victorian one.

Dracula tells Jonathan that “Our ways are not your ways, and there shall be to you many strange things. Nay, from what you have told me from your experiences already, you know something of what strange things here may be” (id., p.28). What Jonathan fears the most is that once Dracula leaves Transylvania, he will spread his evil ‘seed’ on to London, creating then a society free from the superego. Dracula’s arrival in London would, much to Harker’s dismay, confirm his fears.

As we depart Transylvania and journey back to London, both the narrative focus and tone change considerably as we move through the story from the points of view of Mina Murray and Lucy Westenra, which are both representative of the Victorian ideal of female virtue; and the noble men who are infatuated with the latter – Quincey Morris, Arthur Holmwood and Dr. Seward. The men are portrayed as reasonable, the women as pure and devoted, and society as apparently orderly; but the shadow of chaos is cast the moment the Demeter, the vessel that the Count used to travel from abroad, arrives ashore.

Lucy and Mina are directly opposed to the other female characters we had dealt with previously in Transylvania, the vampire women. While the latter are overly sexualized predatory creatures, the former are depicted as idealistic, virtuous female characters, and their relationship with men echoes the romanticized view of courtly love, and its expression through woe and endless admiration by men. Evidence of this can be found as Quincey Morris tells Lucy he “ain’t no good enough to regulate the fixin’s of your little shoes” (id., p.66), while Van Helsing describes Mina as “one of God’s women, fashioned by His own hand to show us men and other women that there is a heaven where we can enter, and that its light can be here on Earth. So true, so sweet, so noble, so little an egoist” (id., p.201). By opposing these two groups of female characters, we come to understand that under Dracula’s influence, women would ‘fall from

grace', becoming impure and profane. He threatened what was *considered* to be the ideally virtuous female character.

When Dracula arrives in London, it is Lucy who falls immediately under his spell, demonstrating an unusual 'restlessness' during nighttime. While both Lucy and Mina are representative of the Victorian ideals, Lucy seemed to have a more progressive – or perhaps more adequately *transgressive* – attitude that conveyed a certain degree of openness to bodily desires. She kisses one of the men that she dismisses as her future husband, and wonders "Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble? But this is heresy, and I must not say it" (id., p.67). That way, it becomes easier to understand why she was the one more easily inflicted by the 'disease' of Dracula.

During a specific night, Mina notices Lucy's bed is empty, and, aware of the fact her friend has been sleepwalking, goes out looking for her. It is then that, for the first time, we have evidence that Dracula actually touched Lucy and Mina becomes aware of a strange presence.

> It seemed to me as though something dark stood behind the seat where the white figure [Lucy] shone, and bent over it. What it was, whether man or beast, I could not tell. [...] I was filled with anxiety about Lucy, not only for her health, lest she should suffer from the exposure, but for reputation in case the story should get wind (id., p.101, 103).

It is interesting to point out Mina's concern with the fact that Lucy, the 'white', pure, innocent figure, has been touched by a 'dark', bestial-like figure, for it clearly conveys the Victorian obsession with appearing respectable. But the damage had already been done, as she notices that "the skin of her throat was pierced […] for there are two little red points like pin-pricks, and on the band of her nightdress was a drop of blood" (id., p.103). It certainly is appropriate to suggest that the vampire contact has a lot of sexual connotations, alluding to the sexual intercourse itself, with its exchange of bodily fluids through penetration. The fact that Lucy's white nightgown is stained with blood would then represent her loss of purity, of virginity.

In his text "Narrative and the Body" (1993), Brooks states that "signing or marking the body signifies its passage into writing, its becoming a literary body, and generally also a narrative body, in that the inscription of the sign depends on and produces a story" (p.3). The idea is relevant for us since it is through the markings on Lucy's body that Dr. Van Helsing, who is brought once she becomes weaker and weaker, starts to think of a supernatural agent behind it.

"The narrow black velvet band which she seems always to wear round her throat […] was dragged a little up, and showed a red mark on her throat. Arthur did not notice it, but I could hear the deep hiss of indrawn breath which is one of Van Helsing's ways of betraying emotion" (Stoker, 2003, p.133).

The wounds on Lucy's neck function as a sort of "scarlet letter", telling of her flawed character and propensity to sin. As we could notice, Lucy maintained her neck covered at all times, in a clear Victorian fashion to hide imperfections, but eventually, these imperfections would undoubtedly come to surface. Brooks' work is also interesting for us in a broader sense, since he claims that

> representation of the body is part of representing "external" reality as a whole. […] the body is at least our primary source of symbolism – an intimation that anyone sympathetic to psychoanalysis will readily accept – and that literature, in its use of creation and symbols, ever brings us back to this source, as that which its representations ultimately represent (Brooks, 1993, p.3-6).

His claim that the individual body can be representative of the greater social, 'external' space is in accordance with our idea of the vampire bodies as ways of looking back to a specific society in a different light. In that perspective, Lucy's body would be telling of flaws which cannot be singularly attributed to her character, but instead, to Victorian society as a whole, and the moral imperfections that are hidden beneath its surface.

A battle begins, then, between the Victorian forces represented by the men trying to save Lucy, and the transgressive forces, represented by Dracula, trying to lure Lucy into the darkness. This battle takes place with the constant blood transfusions Lucy receives. Van Helsing says that "a brave man's blood is the best thing on this earth when a woman is in trouble" (Stoker, 2003, p.160), which makes us draw a parallel between these transfusions and the process of hemodialysis, which filters, cleanses the blood, freeing it from that which makes it impure. Only by the infusion of the blood of noble men would Lucy have a shot at defeating the disease.

At this point, Lucy is placed in a thoroughly passive position, in which she can merely wait for the noble men to try to help her, rescuing her from the danger that lurks in the darkness. She embodies the role of the *damsel in distress*, and it seems that in that state, the men become more and more willing to do anything for her.

If we look back at Jonathan's journey in the beginning of the novel, we can see that he found himself positioned in a similar place. From the moment he arrived in Transylvania, he was

no longer the noble man in charge of the situation, as he notices “the general superstition about midnight was increased by my recent experiences. I waited with a sick feeling of suspense” (id., p.18). As he becomes imprisoned and at the mercy of the Count in the castle, he acknowledges he had no other choice but doing whatever it was the Count wanted him to do. “What could I do but bow acceptance? […] The Count saw victory in my bow, and his mastery in the trouble of my face” (id., p.39). As he faces the vampire women, we can see that he is also left in a passive position, which is endorsed by his declaration “I closed my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited – waited with beating heart” (id., p.46).

For John to be placed in such a passive role was notoriously transgressive, while for Lucy it was simply desirable. In the novel, the only way women could break free from the strict code of Victorian morality and its expectation of a flawless female passivity would be through vampirism. Consequently, near the end of her human life, Lucy begins to display the first signs of breaking with these social conventions.

> Arthur’s presence, however, seemed to act like a stimulant; she rallied a little, and spoke to him more brightly than she had done since we arrived. […] In a sort of sleep-waking, vague, unconscious way she opened her eyes, which were now dull and hard at once, and said in a soft, voluptuous voice, such as I had never heard from her lips: - ‘Arthur! Oh, my love, I am so glad you have come! Kiss me!’ (id., p.164, 172).

For the first time, we witness Lucy being referred to as ‘voluptuous’, an adjective that immediately takes us back to the description of the vampire women**.** A more seductive behavior transpires, and along with it, a more explicit sense of desire. We tend to believe that, in that moment, Dracula had successfully infiltrated and made an assault on the Victorian social order. After Lucy dies, she returns as the ‘bloofer lady’, a nocturnal figure that seems to lure children away from their houses, leaving them with small markings on their necks. Her going after children can be read, of course, as a straight-forward threat to innocence, and the spread of Dracula’s evil blood.

On the other hand, it can also be read as the lifting of the impositions that bounded Lucy to the passive role to which she had always been assigned; and now, without the *superego* to influence on her decisions, she could finally and fiercely flourish as the woman she always was essentially, but could never be.

Brooks comments that the erotic body – and in this case we are reading the vampire body as erotic – “disrupts the social order” (1993, p.6), and it is through this disruption that Lucy could

then fully express her innate sensuality and sexuality that were kept repressed all along, as evidenced by the previous quote from *Dracula*. Corroborating with this idea is Lorde's text "The Erotic as Power" (1997), previously mentioned in our discussion of *Carmilla*, that perceives the erotic as means to grasp our innermost, truest feelings, and that by doing so we conquer power over our own bodies and lives. The text is all for embracing the erotic, leaving behind restrictive and deceitful male-oriented ideas of what it is. "In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial" (Lorde, 1997, p.281).

As Lucy, 'the bloofer lady', gains power, and therefore is perceived as dangerous, we fall back into the same narrative format described in *Carmilla*. It was up to Doctor Van Helsing, another paternal figure, and the only one who was immediately willing to accept the supernatural element in explaining what was happening to Lucy, to make the other men – who would ally in the same type of 'league' against the forces of darkness detailed in *Carmilla* – aware of the evil that Lucy had become. Accepting Van Helsing's theory, however, was not an easy task for any of the men. He argues, "Do you not think that there are things which you cannot understand, and yet which are, that some people see things that others cannot? […] Ah, it is the fault of our science that it wants to explain all, and if it explain not, then it says there is nothing to explain" (Stoker, 2003, p.204).

Again, this is another issue very evocative of a Victorian anxiety, that which lied in the conflict between reason and religion. If on the one hand the feats of Victorian technology and advancements in science were leading to a mentality guided by reason only – and thus, "was religious belief useful for the needs of a reasonable man? […] religious belief was merely an outmoded superstition" (Abrams, 2000, p. 734) –, on the other hand, the voice of Puritan-preaching religious groups "came to represent if not a numerical majority at least the most potent voice in Victorian England" (id., p. 739).

The men's inability to accept the fact that Lucy had changed lied precisely in the conflict. They had to be exposed to "facts" – Lucy's body appearing and disappearing from the coffin; her body not having decayed, quite on the opposite, it is seemingly more vivid – before they decided she had to be exterminated. When they finally confront vampire Lucy, she is very different.

> The sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness. […] Lucy's eyes unclean and full of hell-fire, instead of the pure, gentle orbs we

> knew. At that moment the remnant of my love passed into hate and loathing; had she then to be killed, I could have done it with savage delight (Stoker, 2003, p.225).

An overtly sexualized female was not to be 'loved', but 'loathed'; that is obviously transparent in the previous extract. This, however, is a description that is absolutely different in tone to vampire Carmilla's. While both characters, Lucy and Carmilla, had fully embraced the erotic, how they are perceived is completely dependent on the beholder. Carmilla was seen from another woman's eyes, Laura's, who focused on Carmilla's astonishing beauty and persuasiveness. Lucy, however, is being described through a male perspective, and the focus of this description is mainly sexual.

It seems that the 'reasonable' man describing the scene, Dr. Seward, would gladly stake this 'voluptuous being' with 'savage delight', which carries strong sexual connotations; and the fact that he would do it in a 'savage' way tells us of Dracula's potential to disrupt the orderly and reasonable ways of Victorian men. We could, to a certain extent, say the very same thing about sex, and how it may numb the minds of people, leading them to resort to irrational, primitive impulses.

Vampire Lucy attempts to seduce Arthur one final time, as she begs him to "Come, and we can rest together. Come, my husband, come!" (id., p.226). Again, it is hard not to think of a sexual innuendo in her words, as she would be pleading for him to surrender to the pleasures of the flesh. Van Helsing interferes once again, preventing her from "multiplying the evils of the world" (id., p.229). The following night, they all gather together as Lucy sleeps, and Arthur finally has the chance to pierce the wooden stake through Lucy's chest, strucking her with "all his might" (id., p.230). Once Lucy is brought to her final rest, the men perceive the woman as different, again.

"There, in the coffin lay no longer the foul thing that we had so dreaded and grown to hate […], but Lucy as we had seen in her life, with her unequalled sweetness and purity" (id., p.231). We can notice that Lucy had been restored her 'purity', but perhaps more significantly, her passivity, her inability to free herself from any social conventions. She had returned to the Victorian model of female virtue, in her true death.

Mina, the ultimate Victorian model of female virtue, "pearl among man" (id., p.233), possessor a "man's brain" (id., p.250), would be targeted next. Even though the men all acknowledge Mina's intelligence and motherly ability to comfort them, they do not let her join

them in their pursuit of Dracula, for she is “too precious to us to have such a risk” (id., p.258). If on the one hand the attitude could be interpreted as zealous, on the other hand it also carries an element of inequality, a ‘you are not one of *us*, it is not *your place* to do this’ embedded within it. Mina, virtuous as she is, feels disappointed with the decision but relates, “I could say nothing, save to accept their chivalrous care of me” (id., p.258). Her husband could not have been more pleased with her attitude, as he demonstrates in his journal entry, “I am so glad she consented to hold back and let us men do the work” (id., p.264).

But Mina’s realization that the unusual dreams she had been having the previous nights were actually caused by Dracula, and she had, like Lucy, been feeding him with her blood, is nothing less than startling for her. She had never thought it possible, and though she was shocked, she admits that she “did not want to hinder him” (id., p.306). Dracula had a unique effect on her, and she attributed it to the spell the vampire casts on his victims. She felt her “strength fading away” (id., p.306), and was forced to drink Dracula’s blood, actively sucking from his open chest. For Dracula, she was now “blood of my blood; kin of my kin; my bountiful wine-press for a while; and shall be later on my companion and helper” (id., p.306, 307).

In order to protect Mina from further attacks as the men continue on their mission, Van Helsing places a Sacred Wafer on her forehead; but, the moment it touches her forehead, Mina screams, for the Wafer had burned it. Desperate, she calls herself “Unclean! Unclean!” (id., p.316), as she knows what it means. While Lucy had been able to cover the markings caused by the vampire on her body, Mina was forced to permanently display her ‘scarlett letter’, letting all know that she had been touched by the ‘impure’ blood of Dracula.

The men’s struggle to destroy Dracula was now, more than anything, a struggle to restore Mina to her purity, to overthrow his threat to virtue. Also, since she had drunk Dracula’s blood, Mina had been given an amount of power none of the men had, by sharing a connection with the Count. While such connection was providential in tracking him down, the same connection meant she now had a more privileged position than they had. She could no longer be left home, waiting for her ‘knights’ to save her from danger. She was no longer passive.

We could clearly read this struggle as representative of a male Victorian fight for control over women, that would only end with Dracula’s eventual demise. When he is finally killed, Mina’s scar immediately disappears, cleansing her body and soul from evil.

Considering this reading, Dracula and all vampires are both feared and hated because of their ability to function as catalysts of sexuality – perhaps more specifically in the novel, of female sexuality, which was desirably inexistent, at least in 'decent' women. Like Cohen states in "Monster Culture", "Deviant sexuality is susceptible to monsterization" (1996, p.9), and in this case vampirism is precisely the form of monsterization that brings out whatever is kept repressed within the deep unconscious structures of the individual, and that would never be released otherwise, because of social constraints.

Dracula embodied Victorian people's denied sexuality, surely contained within each and every one of them. The fear to acknowledge its presence on broad daylight created a shadow, a darkness that remained hovering over their heads; here, this darkness is conjured up through the figure of the vampire.

3 THE VAMPIRE IN TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE

Vampires go where power is: when, in the nineteenth century, England dominated the West, British vampires ruled the popular imagination, but […] they migrated to America in time for the American century.

Nina Auerbach

As we move forward the timeline and arrive in the twentieth century, we witness a great number of events that completely changed the dynamics of the world. The Wars, of course, profoundly affected the lives of people all over the globe. Millions were killed, many other millions suffered with the loss of loved ones, and many more were indirectly victimized by the poor wartime conditions – starvation and the eruption of diseases left people in a troubling passive situation for a long time.

Power relations were also different. While Britain had been the world's most powerful nation at the beginning of the period, it lost its title to the United States by the end of the Second World War. As a consequence of rising as a potency, Americans were trying to find a voice of their own, a voice that was independent from the British influence.

In a post-war scenario, we also begin to notice a strong movement towards social change, through the liberation movements that targeted at putting an end to the discrimination of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion and others that had been so ubiquitously widespread before.

Among so many other changes, perhaps one of the most striking ones has to do with the incredible development of science, departing from the progress that the previous century had experienced and leading it to whole new ideas and concepts in physics, astronomy and biology. New vaccines and antibiotics were being tested as medicine became more and more specialized, as it studied bacteria and other infectious diseases. The progress, at this stage, may have been a bit too overwhelming as its pace was incredibly fast. People simply could not know what else to expect from science, or where medicine would go.

This very fact proved to be a major twentieth century anxiety. War had left on the air the pervasive idea that things were ephemeral, that the world – or at least *your* world – could completely change or vanish in a moment. Science, even if it was supposed to be in favor of

humanity, posed as a question mark when it came to how reliable it should be, how far it should go.

Many authors of the time appropriated that feeling in the construction of narratives that began to be referred to as Dystopian, which "respond to the air of crisis that has pervaded much of the twentieth-century thought. […] The "flood" of dystopian works by writers like Zamyatin, Huxley, and Orwell provides one of the most revealing indexes to the anxieties of our age" (Booker, 1994, p.4). It surely comes as no surprise for us, then, that vampire narratives eventually began to appropriate some of those very anxieties which were so firmly placed in the society. Richard Matheson[7]'s apocalyptic vision of the near-future in *I Am Legend* is a pioneer in the field and a turning point in vampire literature.

3.1 "I dub thee *vampiris*": Approaching the Vampire through a Scientific Perspective in *I am Legend*

"The strength of the vampire is that no one will believe in him." Thank you, Dr. Van Helsing, he thought, putting down his copy Of "Dracula". [...] It was true. The book was a hodgepodge of superstitions and soap-opera clichés, but that line was true; no one had believed in them, and how could they fight something they didn't even believe in?

Richard Matheson

By focusing their critiques of society on imaginatively distant settings, dystopian fictions provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable.

M. Keith Booker

[7] Matheson is a widely notorious writer in the fields of fantasy, horror and science fiction. Popular writers such as Stephen King and Anne Rice have listed him as a major creative influence on their own works.

Within the very first page of *I am Legend,* there is a lot we could point out as relevant for the specific matters we will be tackling. First, we can notice that, by having the action start in 1976, we are going to deal with the author's interpretation of a future time (considering, of course, that the reader is aware of the fact that the book was written in the fifties). The action also starts *in media res*. When we are introduced to the main character, Robert Neville, he is already dealing with the consequences of some big event that took place in the past. We witness what seems to be his (un)usual daily routine of checking if the windows are still properly boarded-up to prevent future attacks from happening and deliberately choosing not to move far from the house on cloudy days. It sets the eerie tone of the narrative while leaving a lot unexplained, at that point.

Also, we notice that even though Neville seems like a loner, he is not really alone. The narrator says, "Neville was never sure when sunset came, and sometimes *they* were in the streets before he could get back" (Matheson, 1995, p.13). What is interesting to point out here, and clearly emphasized in the beginning by the author himself through the use of italics (p.14, p.22), is the use of the pronouns "*they*", "*them*", "*their*" to refer to these others, and the focus on these language items has a clear semantic function, which is to place Neville as opposed to these others.

The first two aspects carry, at first, a dystopian element, which will be providential for our discussion of *I am Legend*, as they are going to be fully developed as the novel progresses. The latter aspect will also be essential considering its ability to comment on the figure of "the other", which was largely acknowledged and dealt with in the twentieth century.

Before we delve into more specific issues of the dystopian narratives, let us explicit what exactly it is that we usually tend to consider as a dystopian narrative. Lyman Tower Sargent, a pioneer in the field of utopian studies, defines dystopia as "a non existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended the contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which the reader lived" (Sargent, 1994, p.9). *I am Legend* meets all of these aspects usually associated with dystopian scenarios.

Society as we know it has collapsed and a new order has risen. In the world of *I am Legend*, the only rule Robert Neville lives by is the rule of survival. He is the one responsible for protecting his own house, finding his own food during the day, keeping himself company at

nights. There is no one else to run any errands, as there is no official government to provide a sense of security for the citizens. It is a world governed by the primitive rule of "kill or be killed" and there is no vestige of old society values. "Morality, after all, had fallen with society. He was his own ethic" (Matheson, 1995, p.62).

The narrative is clearly located both in time and space. There are clear references to names of roads, streets, neighborhoods and specific locations through the novel that lead to the understanding that we are supposed to be dealing with a post-apocalyptic Los Angeles. Finally, it is unquestionable that Matheson intended that his readers perceived that environment as worse than our current state of affairs.

One thing is true about the dystopian narrative: It has both a social awareness and a special significance within a specific context. When authors create dystopias, they bear in mind that this mode, even though highly creative and imaginative, should always be rooted in reality. That way, dystopias may potentially be means to critique some poor condition (whether socio-political, religious, moral, economical) of the author's present time, as they depict a scenario where things have spun out of control – all deriving from that very present current condition.

Dystopias have flourished in the twentieth century, as an artistic response to capitalism, neo-imperialism, the vast changes that were happening in a short time span and the human difficulty to cope with it all. It is safe to assume that it was much more difficult to imagine the future as being so different from the present time in the nineteenth century than it was in the twentieth century, and this inability to foresee the near future would make up for an essential anxiety that is dealt with in dystopias.

> The dystopian narrative is largely the product of the terrors of the twentieth century. A hundred years of exploitation, repression, state violence, war, genocide, disease, famine, ecocide […] and the steady depletion of humanity through the buying and selling of everyday life provided more than enough fertile ground for this fictive underside of the utopian imagination (Moylan, 2000, p.6).

Even though it is not a rule, it is usual that the dystopian narrative starts *in media res*. We are not told by the narrator straight-forward what it was that caused things to be the way they are now, and we do not fully appreciate the scope of the situation until later on the narrative. "The generically informed reader of such a text therefore learns the strange new world not by way of a condensed reality briefing but rather by absorbing and reflecting upon pieces of information that titrate into a comprehensive pattern" (id.).

This is also true for *I am Legend*. It is a discourse of the aftermath, one that lingers beyond what we would consider the 'end'. The end has come and gone, but the protagonist managed to stand in the same place. As we move forward on the narrative, we get small hints, indications, that function as pieces of a puzzle that we continuously try to put together in order to be able to fully understand what the social order we are dealing with is really like and what may have happened so that things could be the way they are now. In the novel, we are able to deduce quite early what the nature of these others might be, based on these hints, way before the word "vampire" is actually mentioned for the first time (on page 27). "It was the last damned mirror he'd put there; it wasn't worth it. He'd put garlic there instead. Garlic always worked" (Matheson, 1995, p.14) and "No matter how many stakes he made, they were gone in no time at all" (id., p.16) are examples of these indications.

But as for what really caused the apocalypse through which Robert Neville survived, the hints come much later in the narrative and are not so clear; this seems to corroborate the idea that people did not have enough time to really understand what was happening to them before it was too late. No medical or scientific progress was enough to prevent whatever it was that was happening from continuing happening.

> They had known it was something, but it couldn't be that – not *that*. *That* was imagination, *that* was superstition, there was no such thing as *that*. […] And, before science had caught up with the legend, the legend had swallowed science and everything (id., p.29).

The hints come as Neville forces himself to revisit his past, something he had consciously repressed in order to be able to go on living and not lose his mind. He needed answers he could not find in the present, and thought that looking at the past with a distanced perspective would maybe lead him in the right direction.

> "I'd like to know what this is going around," she said. "Half the people on the block have it, and you say that more than half the plant is absent."
> "Maybe it's some kind of virus," he said.
> She shook her head. "I don't know" (id., p.54)

The quote illustrates the first symptoms that his late wife, Virginia, showed; and it also contains the first reference to the possibility of a virus being responsible for whatever it is that is causing people to fall sick. Viruses are common catalysts for the apocalypse in dystopian narratives, and we are going to deal specifically with them later on.

> "Maybe the insects are… What's the word? Mutating."
> "What's that?"
> "Oh, it means they're… changing. Suddenly. Jumping over dozens of small evolutionary steps, maybe developing along the lines they might not have followed at all if it weren't for…"
> Silence.
> "The bombings?" she said.
> "Maybe," he said.
> "Well, they're causing the dust storms. They're probably causing a lot of things" (id., p.56).

Speculation seems to rule over certainties as health authorities fail to make an official report and sooner than later people start coming up with several different ideas. It seemed appropriate, though, for the characters to relate the unusual events of late to the "bombings" that had occurred previously, and how they might have altered the biology of living matter.

This is the expression of a particular anxiety of a time that felt constantly threatened by the possibility of a nuclear war in a post-World War II scenario, haunted by the Cold War. A few years before *I am Legend* was published, author George Orwell published an essay in the British newspaper *Tribune* that began by stating that "Considering how likely we all are to be blown to pieces by it within the next five years, the atomic bomb has not roused so much discussion as might have been expected" (Orwell, 1945). The essay was to become relevant as it both embodied and anticipated the feeling of fear and powerlessness that permeated the following years.

I am Legend was, that way, part of the early literature to deal with this very anxiety. What was even more striking in this particular case was that Matheson managed to incorporate that element while appropriating the myth of the vampire through a very modern perspective.

He created then a 'vampire dystopia' – that imaginative mode that illustrates an alternative version of life, slowly but surely built on the grounds of what is real and problematic in the present, with the addition of the vampire element as the consequence of that which is rooted in the present.

As we move on in the narrative, we witness the death of Neville's wife because of the disease and the urge he has to give his wife a proper burial, even though by that time it was absolutely forbidden to do so. People who had died because of the disease needed to be taken to a bonfire, described as "a hundred yards square, a hundred feet deep" (Matheson, 1995, p.73). At that point we learn that he had already lost his daughter also, her corpse taken from him by force. He could not imagine losing another beloved one to a communal fire, where the dead were just

bodies deprived of any trace of identity and significance. As pointed out in "The Plague of Utopias: Pestilence and the Apocalyptic Body" (2000), the contagious body is, after all, "reduced to a raceless, genderless statistic" (Gomel, 2000, p.416).

But the fire was also "the only way they knew now to prevent communication. Only flames could destroy the bacteria that caused the plague" (Matheson, 1995, p.73). By this point, it had already been established that it was not a virus that caused the rise of the vampires, but a bacteria.

Either way, pestilence has become a rich source for apocalyptical visions in literature, and there are different ways it can be approached. Of course, on the one hand, there is the widespread Christian-based perspective that Pestilence would be associated with one of the four Horseman of the Apocalypse. Through this perspective, the apocalypse comes as divine punishment for mankind's sins, and leads to purification. This perspective would lead to a *utopian* scenario. On the other hand, it may be approached as a disaster caused by mankind for their toying with natural laws and disrupting the environmental balance. This perspective would lead to a *dystopian* scenario. In *I am Legend*, both perspectives are tackled, even if the latter clearly rules over the former.

> "God has punished us for our great transgressions! God has unleashed the terrible force of His almighty wrath! God has set loose the second deluge upon us – a deluge, a flood, a world-consuming torrent of creatures from *hell*! He has opened the grave, He has unsealed the crypt, He has turned the dead from their black tombs – and set them upon us! And death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them! That's the word of God" (id., p.113).

As he recalls the time near the apocalypse, the memory of religious leaders out on the streets preaching to desperate crowds to the very last moment is quite vivid. They truly believed that the Horsemen – all of them, War, Famine, Death as well – had been let loose on Earth and there was no way but to beg for salvation. However, considering we are witnessing the situation focusing on Neville's character, that perspective seems widely inappropriate as it was irrelevant for him, and he deliberately "escaped, weak and trembling, stumbling away from them" (id., p.114). He had lived through the apocalypse, and there had come no judgment day for him. The order that had been established after the apocalypse was truly dystopian, and there was hardly any room for hope left.

> The position of the plague witness is ambiguous. On the one hand, to fulfill their task the narrators must be granted (at least temporary) immunity. On the other hand, by identifying with the collective body whose dissolution they chronicle, they experience its protracted agony. […] The fictional chroniclers […] are suspended between life and death, historians among the graves (Gomel, 2000, p.411).

This deliberate distancing from religion is evidenced in *I am Legend* even through the approach the author takes on the vampires. These vampires are not a product of a foreign culture and centuries of history; they are simply *infected bodies*. “All without blood-eyed vampires hovering over heroines’ beds. All without bats fluttering against estate windows, all *without the supernatural*” (Matheson, 1995, p.88, my italics).

Garlic, crosses and mirrors repel vampires. Wooden stakes and sunlight kill them. These ideas are all strongly associated with the vampire mythology, and they are still valid in *I am Legend*. But, through a *scientific* perspective, free from superstition and the religious bias that had always been associated with it, how would one explain the vampire’s aversion to the cross, for example? As Neville began to feel compelled to find out the reasons why vampires responded negatively to these items, we, as readers, are treated to a unique approach in which there should be a perfectly observable explanation to account for the rise of the vampires and their physiology.

“For seven months now he’d strung them together into aromatic necklaces and hung them outside his house without the remotest idea of why they chased the vampires away. It was time he learned why” (id., p.59). The new-found interest was a project Neville completely embraced, as he gradually started enveloping himself in books, going to the old Los Angeles Public Library, researching any material that he considered suitable for his purposes. “The characteristic odor and flavor of garlic are due to an essential oil amounting to about 0.2% of the weight, which consists mainly of allyl sulphide and allyl isothicyanate. […] Allyl sulphide may be prepared by heating mustard oil and potassium sulphide at 100 degrees” (id., p.60).

If something was on Neville’s side, it was time. To accomplish his project, he had complete availability to experiment over and over again. If he needed mustard oil, potassium sulphide and the proper equipment to make that particular experiment, he could go over a phone directory and hours later have the allyl sulphide inside a hypodermic syringe. And there were plenty of vampire bodies to experiment on. “Morality, after all, had fallen with society. He was his own ethic” (id., p.62).

Even though he was no expert, Neville’s method of working can be dubbed scientific as he tries to apply the theory he’s been exposed to the practicality of empirical observation. After

making isolated and failed experiments with allyl sulphide, which in itself seemed to have no effect when injected in a vampire's body, Neville decided to perfect his research, reading all he could about blood and blood-related diseases.

In the process, he comes across pieces of information that demand attention as they seem to be more than fitting, such as "Strong sunlight kills many germs rapidly and…" and "Many bacterial diseases of man can be disseminated by mechanical agency of flies, mosquitoes…" (id., p.81).

> Bacteria. Viruses. Vampires. Why am I so against it? He thought. […] He didn't know. He started out on a new course, the course of compromise. Why throw out either theory? One didn't necessarily negate the other. Dual acceptance and correlation, he thought. Bacteria could be the answer to the vampire. Everything seemed to flood over him then. […] Only if you accepted bacteria could you explain the fantastic rapidity of the plague, the geometrical mounting of victims. […] The flies and mosquitoes had been a part of it. Spreading the disease, causing it to race through the world. Yes, bacteria explained a lot of things; the staying in by day, the come enforced by the germ to protect itself from sun radiation. A new idea: What if the bacteria were the strength of the true vampire? (id., p.82)

The voice of the narrator, in this particular stance, functions as a sort of stream of consciousness, following Robert's reasoning from idea to idea as he makes connections and comes to realizations – as if light bulbs were being lit inside his head. But the true acceptance of such a theory, however rational, would only come after Robert could actually prove it as fact, especially considering that a bacteria could not be responsible for the vampire's aversion to crosses and mirrors. Surely, his next step was to find a microscope; and after he actually manages to handle one, he has a valuable confirmation.

> The moment arrived; his breath caught. It wasn't a virus, then. You couldn't see a virus. And there, fluttering delicately on the slide, was a germ. I dub thee *vampiris*. […] By checking in one of the bacteriology texts, he'd found that the cylindrical bacterium he saw was a bacillus. […] All he could think was that here, on the slide, was the cause of the vampire. All the centuries of fearful superstition had been felled in the moment he had seen the germ (id., p.86).

The realization of the vampire as, possibly, as much of a victim as its own victims changes Neville's perceptions considerably. The villainy is transferred to the germ, not its carrier. He was a step closer to finally understanding the relation between garlic and the germ. Later on the novel, we learn that "garlic was an allergen […]. When the system was exposed to garlic, the stimulated tissues sensitized the cells, causing an abnormal reaction to any further contact with

garlic. That was why putting it into their veins had accomplished little. They had to be exposed to the odor" (id., p.129).

But Neville still found himself unable to explain the relation between the cross, the mirror and the bacteria. As science could not possibly explain such relations, he ultimately decided there had to be a psychological aspect embedded within them. So, he came to think back on the religious frenzy that rose towards the end of the plague, and its discourse thoroughly permeated by fear and hate. "Do you want to fear the holy cross of God? Do you want to look into the mirror and not see the face that Almighty God has given you? Do you want to come crawling back from the grave like a monster out of hell?" […] "No!" the people erupted, terror-stricken. "No, *save* us" (id., p.112).

In despair, people blindly clinged to it, adopting its absolute aversion to the vampires. They had died loathing and fearing the vampire, only to become vampires themselves. "They died with terror in their hearts, with a mortal dread flowing in their veins. And then, Robert Neville thought, to have this hideous dread vindicated. […] To find themselves clawing up through the earth, their bodies driven now by a strange, hideous need" (id., p.114).

The shock of becoming that which they had feared the most could have had lasting psychological repercussions to the new vampires, and that could be a starting point for us to understand their fear of religious symbols like the cross, for example.

> Once they were forced to accept vindication of the dread of being repelled by an object that had been a focal point of worship, their minds could have snapped. Dread of the cross sprang up. And, driven on despite already created dreads, the vampire could have acquired an intense mental loathing, and this self-hatred could have set up a block in their weakened minds causing them to be blind to their own abhorred image (id., p.115)

The idea seemed to perfectly account for the vampires' aversion to their own reflection on the mirror – it was not that they did not cast a reflection, now; it was simply that they despised that very reflection – and though it also made up for an interesting argument as to their aversion to crosses, he would need to confirm his idea through experimentation. After all, it could not account for vampires who had been atheists, or whose religions did not attribute to the cross its Christian significance. Neville decided, then, that he would experiment his theory on Cortman, whom he knew to have been a Jew.

"When I showed him the cross," he said, "he laughed in my face". […] "But when I held a torah before his eyes, I got the reaction I wanted. […] I had tied him up, but when he saw the

torah he broke loose and attacked me" (id., p.140). He understood that the cross had been a Catholic symbol of 'defense against powers of darkness', and its power lied not on the symbol itself, but instead, in the minds of the vampires. The same would be true for any object in which they had deposited their faith during their human lives, as the torah.

Neville's quest for finding the truth behind the legend turned out to be fascinating in its unique interpretations of why the vampires responded to these items the way they did, starting a process of demystification that would be prominently dealt with in subsequent literature.

Now let us move on to the idea of the vampire as "the other". If we look back at Stoker's *Dracula*, we can perceive the title character as a typical "other", not only because his ways are different, but also because he is a foreigner, who simply did not belong or fit in that society. This is something that the character of Dracula himself demonstrates to be well aware of.

He tells Jonathan that "I know that, did I move and speak in your London, none there are who would not know me for a stranger. That is not enough for me. […] I am content if I am like the rest, so that no man stops if he see me, or pause in his speaking if he hear my words, to say, 'Ha, ha! A stranger'" (Stoker, 2003, p.27).

To Victorian England, Dracula represented the unfamiliar, embodying the dangerous "they" as opposed to "we". His different ways (religious, moral, socio-cultural) had no place in that space, and he had to be banished not to spread his unwanted seed. But under the light of the twentieth century, the will to include "the other" – whether "other individuals, other groups, other species, the other of 'the West', the other of Europe" (Powell, 1998, p.151) – and to understand other realities was exponentially increasing.

If we look back at the fact that, in *I am Legend*, the narrator keeps a steady use of "they" to refer to the vampires, and considering the idea that "as long as other cultures are always "they" and never "we" and "us" to a person from a majority group or a minority group anywhere today, that person is psychologically, emotionally, aesthetically, and morally handicapped" (Ong, 1982, p.7), we might think, at first, that not much had changed in-between the writing of the novels, and that a similar attitude would prevail in *Legend*.

That is not the case. For starters, the vampire is not the product of a foreign, "other" culture. The vampire had once been our neighbor, our friend, our loved one. It had been part of our own community, in spite of differences in upbringing, such as the religious one we can notice

between Cortman and Neville. That might have had an impact on the way Neville perceives these "others"; while they are, indeed, others who do not get the opportunity to actually voice their perspectives, we have the main character undergoing a mental process of questioning this very otherness and placing himself in the other's shoes.

> Are his needs any more shocking than the needs of other animals and men? (…) Really, now, search your soul, love – *is vampire so bad*? All he does is drink blood. Why, then, this unkind prejudice, this thoughtless bias? Why cannot the vampire live where he chooses? Why must he seek out hiding places where none can find him out? Why do you wish him destroyed? (Matheson, 1995, p.32, my italics).

His thesis that 'vampires are prejudiced against' comes to him while he is drunk, and though it is not fully developed in the book, it is an idea that proved to be innovative and original for its time, as it would largely anticipate vampire narratives that would appear decades later, like *Interview with the Vampire* (1976). Also, it is important to mention that Neville eventually finds that due to a bacterial mutation, a group of the infected has found a way to live with the germ, and not die from the disease.

> We are infected. But you already know that. What you don't understand yet is that we're going to stay alive. We've found a way to do that and we're going to set up society again slowly but surely. We're going to do away with all those wretched creatures whom death has cheated. And, even though I pray otherwise, we may decide to kill you and those like you. […] You may not believe that we can live with the germ now. That's why I'm leaving one of my pills" (id., p.155).

Neville was to be placed in the same position of the vampires that stood outside his house every night, that is, "the other". He was going to be the absolute minority in a newly established and well-organized society of infected people depending on a drug that both fed the germ and prevented its multiplication. "They're terrified of you, Robert, they hate you. And they want your life" (id., p.168).

When the members of this new society finally come to his neighborhood, we can see that, like many other societies before, it would also be established through nothing but great violence. "Did they have to do it like this, with such a black and brutal slaughtering? […] There were looks of vicious triumph on their faces, white and stark in the spotlights. […] He realized that he felt more deeply towards the vampires than he did towards their executioners" (p.158).

Vampires were not violent because they liked the feeling of it; they were mere animals who had not been fed and needed blood in order to survive. But what Neville saw in those

infected ones was completely different; they were savage terminators, relentless executioners who took pleasure in the mere act of killing the other. If the future was indeed on the hands of these people, then it was going to be the ultimate dystopian experience.

In death, Robert was to become a "legend", the subject of superstition, the daywalker who did not need pills and was not infected. In other words, the other. If in this particular narrative 'the other' is largely persecuted, we can be certain that Matheson problematizes the issue in an interesting way, creating a full-circle story in which the position of the other is ultimately inverted.

Finally, considering our discussions on how the novel appropriates the dystopian element to deal with an anxiety that was largely felt in America in the fifties; how it makes use of its age's scientific approach to shed new light on the vampire mythology; and how it tackles the modern issue of the other, we can safely consider *I am Legend* to be a vampire narrative that is representative of its time.

3.2 Subjectifying the Vampire: Alterity and Anne Rice's "Vampire Chronicles"

I would like to tell you the story of my life, then. I would like to do that very much. [...] Believe me, I won't hurt you. I want this opportunity. It's more important to me than you can realize now

Anne Rice

The monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us. In its function as dialectical Other or third-term supplement, the monster is an incorporation of the outside, the beyond – of all those loci that are rethorically placed as distant and distinct but originate Within.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen

The concept of polyphony is one that is intrinsically related to the final decades of twentieth century and its artistic representations. When dealing specifically with literature, we can notice how strong the idea of providing both a voice and opportunities to interpret life according to different points of view and realities had become around the time.

The liberation movements that arose then, even more so in a post-war scenario, underlined the struggle for the acceptance of pluralism, giving groups that were kept at the margin of the hegemonic power a chance to find their own voices, (re)writing history in their own words. As a result, there was a great amount of work that focused on the specific struggles that many counter-hegemonic groups, like feminists, African-Americans and the homosexuals had been facing.

In tune with that very trend was American author and New Orleans native Anne Rice[8], who became interested in the vampire as "a metaphor for the outsider" (Carter, 1997, p.27), as a symbol of these repressed groups who had always listened to historical accounts of their existence, but had never had the opportunity to tell those stories from their unique perspectives. That is why vampire Louis, the tragic hero of Rice's first vampire novel, *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), seems so eager and determined to finally be able to share his endless torment and suffering. Our discussion of the novel will focus on this very point, the vampire as an embodiment of these new points of view and concepts of realities brought on by these counter-hegemonic groups.

Interview was the first in a series of novels called "The Vampire Chronicles", all written by Rice in the following decades. The simple, yet absolutely decisive fact that vampires are the ones telling these stories opened up a world of literary possibilities which had not been explored before. The series, perhaps because of its appealing approach but also because of Rice's undeniably engaging writing, has become extremely popular – next to *Dracula*, *Interview with the Vampire* has proved to be one of the most popular vampire novels ever written – and has had a tremendous impact on all vampire-related works that came after it, when it came to the seductive characterization of vampires and their potentially tormented immortal nature.

The interview that the title refers to begins as of the very first line of the novel, as Louis, a centuries-old vampire, proves skeptical Daniel, the young interviewer, that he is indeed what he

[8] An American writer of Gothic fiction, Christian Literature and erotica, Rice is considered to be one of the best-selling authors in recent American History. Her books are reported to have sold around 100 million copies, with each new release proving a huge demand for Rice's fiction.

claims to be, by letting himself be seen in the revealing artificial yellow light of the San Francisco room in which they are talking. "The vampire was utterly white and smooth, as if he were sculpted from bleach bone, as his face was as seemingly inanimate as a statue, except for two brilliant green eyes that looked down at the boy intently like flames in a skull" (Rice, 1997, p. 4).

Taken aback, the boy is immediately both convinced and terrified, with not much left to do except to listen to Louis' story. This narrative strategy, according to Gelder, "emphasizes disclosure (through confession or revelation) and publicity. […] The reader hears the 'other' speaking first-hand; the vampire comes out of the closet and makes himself known" (Gelder, 1994, p. 109).

At once, Rice sets out to debunk many of the pre-conceptions her interlocutors might have had. Louis reveals that he had always been different in nature from the one who made him, Lestat. The latter seemed to find a fascination in the act of killing, making a sport out of it. For Louis, his behavior meant "revenge against life itself […]. The nuances of vampire existence weren't even available to him because he was focused with a maniacal vengeance upon the mortal life he'd left" (Rice, 1997, p. 46).

Louis, however, had always had a "high regard for the life of others" (id., p.16), and, in becoming a vampire, a being that essentially lives off the lives of others, he experiences feelings of negation, self-hatred and a torment that seemed to have no end. His awakening to the vampire experience, in this sense, can be seen as a parallel to the experiences of all those counter-hegemonic groups such as the homosexuals that, much like Louis, had had an extremely difficult time coming to terms with their nature, accepting what they were.

It is possible to apprehend the homosexual analogy in many other instances of Rice's work, starting with Louis' transformation into a vampire, a scene that Senf describes as "the first of a number of 'queer' scenes" (Senf, 1988, p.112).

> 'Now listen to me, Louis,' he said, and he lay down beside me now on the steps, his movement so graceful and so personal that at once it made me think of a lover. I recoiled. But he put his right arm around me and pulled me close to his chest. Never had I been this close to him before, and in the dim light I could see the magnificent radiance of his eye and the unnatural mask of his skin. As I tried to move, he pressed his right fingers against my lips and said, 'Be still'. I am going to drain you now to the very threshold of death, and I want you to be quiet, so quiet that you can almost hear the flow of blood through your veins, so quiet that you can hear the flow of that same blood through mine. It is your consciousness, your will, which must keep you alive.' I wanted to struggle, but he pressed so hard with his fingers that he held my entire prone body in check; and

> as soon as I stopped my abortive attempt at rebellion, he sank his teeth into my neck (Rice, 1997, p. 18-19).

It is very important for us to acknowledge the impact of such a scene in the whole of vampire fiction. We have previously dealt with Lord Ruthven and Aubrey's relationship in *The Vampyre*, which, at the same time, was filled with a sense of intimacy and fascination for one another, but, on the other hand, never physically realized this veiled desire. And while Stoker's inspiration for *Dracula* came in a dream that can surely be read as homoerotic, the novel itself makes use of mediating female vampires to "penetrate" the male character, John Harker.

In the first pages of Rice's novel, she presents a description of the vampire attack and transformation that is clearly meant to be read as a sexual-like experienced. Louis tells us, "I remember that the movement of his lips raised the hair all over my body, sent a shock of sensation through my body that was not unlike the pleasure of passion" (id., p.19). As a matter of fact, when Claudia asks Louis what the sexual experience was like as a human, Louis states that "it was the pale shadow of killing" (id., p.209).

After all, "the vampire's experience of erotic pleasure and its ability to reproduce are located orally, not genitally; sucking blood is the vampire's way of feeding, of gratifying itself, and of making other vampires" (Tomc, 1997, p. 99). By having Lestat consume his lust over Louis that early in the narrative and then thoroughly explore the dynamics of their relationship, Rice comes up with an original 'queer' narrative, opening up to issues that had not been dealt with in vampire novels.

The intimacy between males reaches deeper depths when, later on the narrative, Louis comes to Paris and finds Armand. Their relationship goes beyond the physicality previously explored, finding an admiration and passion that lead to love. Louis is immediately taken by Armand's appearance, as evidenced in

> I found him pressed against me, his arms around my chest, his arm around my chest, his lashes so close I could see them matted and gleaming above the incandescent orb of his eye, his soft, tasteless breath against my skin. It was delirium. I moved to get away from him, and yet I was drawn to him and I didn't move at all (Rice, 1997, p.229).

But his appearance was merely a fraction of Armand's allure. Louis emphasizes to the interviewer that while Armand was undoubtedly attractive, the love he felt for him had everything to do with the sharing of knowledge he never had experienced with Lestat. He states

that “For vampires, physical love culminates and is satisfied by only one thing, the kill. I speak of another kind of love which drew me to him completely as the teacher which Lestat had never been” (id., p. 254).

The word ‘queer’, used by Senf, though, may not be simply referring to the potential homosexual inclination of the novel, but instead, in a larger sense, it could refer to the novel’s attempt to break from conventional viewpoints, such as the very perception of gender roles, which are put to question in the dynamics of the Louis/Lestat relationship. These vampires are mostly oblivious to our notions of sexual orientation – they find beauty in both the male and female forms – and gender constraints.

Louis is described, all through the narrative, as more sensitive, delicate and willing to attribute meaning to Lestat’s apparently impetuous and chaotic actions. While the former would fit into the traditional female role, the aggressive latter would fit right into the male role. Louis’ dependence on Lestat was neither financial nor emotional, though, it was a dependence on knowledge, or at least the promise of it. Louis tells the interviewer that “there was always the promise behind his mocking smile that he knew great things or terrible things” (id., p. 37), but eventually came to the understanding that Lestat did not have any secrets to share, any sizable knowledge that he must know. Louis had been tolerant with Lestat because of self-doubt, because he did not believe he could survive on his own. And that was when he decided to confront Lestat.

> You couldn’t live by yourself, you couldn’t manage even the simplest things. For years now, I’ve managed everything while you sat about making a pretense of superiority. There’s nothing left for you to tell me about life. I have no need of you and no use for you. It’s you who need me (id., p.60-61).

Again, considering Louis as an embodiment of the female role in the dynamics of this relationship, it is not surprising that he would try to break free from this oppressive male figure in this nineteen-seventies narrative. The same idea is echoed in the character of Babette, whose brother, who ran a plantation in Louisiana, had been killed by Lestat. Sympathetic for the hopeless state in which she found herself, Louis appeared to Babette to let her aware of all the possibilities she had in front of her.

> Babette’s greatest problem was that she might succeed financially only to suffer the isolation of social ostracism. […] ‘Don’t expect people to understand it’, I told her. ‘They are fools. They want you to retire because of your brother’s death. […] You must defy them, but you must defy them with purity and confidence” (id., p. 58).

Louis again functioned as this liberating voice, who would no longer conform, and would also inspire others to do so. It was because of his appearance that Babette decided she was going to run the plantation on her own, shocking the southern society, but managing to save her family from ruin.

Unbinding himself from Lestat's influence, Louis found himself absorbed by his own puzzling nature. He knew he could no longer count on his maker to elucidate him, and all he was left with were questions. "I don't know what I am!" (id., p.70), "Am I damned? Am I from the devil? Is my very nature that of a devil? What have I become in becoming a vampire? Where am I to go?" (id., p.73). The despair experienced by this existentialist vampire is nothing but an original way of dealing with vampirism. The fact that he could see himself in the mirror was also confusing to Louis, as "he had expected that, as a vampire, he would be unable to do so. It means to him that perhaps he does have a soul and there are no supernatural powers at work" (Ramsland, 1993, p.301).

Rice follows the trend, as we witnessed in the discussion of *I Am Legend*, of enabling the vampire to cast a reflection in the mirror as a way of providing a sense of individuality that had not been previously acknowledged. The vampire is no longer a mere reflection of humans issues, it is a fully-formed three dimensional being whose own afflictions must matter. Of course, this very characteristic only confirms the vampire's closeness and reflection of humanity's embracing of polyphony.

While it is a human dream to attain immortality, Louis sees the 'gift' as a 'curse', an endless procession of meaningless days in which he has to take a life in order to sustain his own. With such a respect for human life, Louis was in a complicated crossroads – while he despised the idea of killing, it was, at the same time, the one thing that meant something. "I knew peace only when I killed, only for that minute; and there was no question in my mind that the killing of anything less than a human being brought nothing but a vague longing" (Rice, 1997, p.87).

Louis brought these questionings onto Armand later on the narrative. Louis is certain that he is "evil, evil as any vampire who ever lived! I've killed over and over and will do it again" (id., p.235), while Armand wonders why he "must make us gods and devils yourself when the only power that exists in inside ourselves? How could you believe in these old fantastical lies, these myths, these emblems of the supernatural?" (id., p.239). For Armand, there was no greater

power behind them, and what they did was not ‘evil’ because it was in their nature to do so. They hunt humans to survive like a lion hunts a deer in the wild.

We face, then, the concept of how differently we can perceive and attribute meaning to the world around us, to our own idea of ‘reality’. While Louis had immediately been able to sense the world around him as different – “I saw as a vampire […] And then I saw that not only Lestat had changed, but all things had changed” (id., p. 21) – , he carries on his sense of ethics from his previous incarnation to the current one, and they are inevitably conflicting ones. In spite of Armand’s attempt to enlighten Louis when it came to this new reality, constantly “forcing me into some acknowledgement of my powers, that the paths I’d normally chosen were human paths I no longer need follow” (id., p.278), Louis found it simply too difficult to embrace; as long as he failed to do it, he would constantly live in pain.

Coming back to our narrative, when Lestat realized he was going to lose Louis for good, his next move was a bold one. Aware of the fact that there was nothing he could say to persuade him to stay by his side, he appealed to Louis’ sensitive nature by turning Claudia – a 5-year-old girl who Louis had found crying by her mother’s dead corpse and ultimately fed on, to his own horror – into a vampire. Louis thought he had killed the little girl, but Lestat announces that “She’s there! He said. ‘Your wounded one, your daughter.’ (id., p.89).

Claudia’s first question as she returns to conscience as a vampire regards her mother, to which Lestat promptly answers that “Your mamma’s left you with us. She wants you to be happy. […] You’re our daughter, Louis’s daughter and my daughter, do you see?” (id., p.94-95).

This newly formed family is certainly an unconventional one, a “queer family” (Gelder, 1994, p. 113) in which two male parents are competing for the attention of the small daughter. Claudia, however, was to be a creature completely different from either, even if she shared with Lestat the fascination for “the hunt, the seduction, the kill” (Rice, 1997, p.101), and with Louis the respect for beauty and interest in the arts, as Louis was “constantly sounding the depth of her still gaze as she took the books I gave her, whispered the poetry I taught her, and played with a light but confident touch her own strange, coherent songs on the piano” (id., p.100).

But while Lestat’s plan worked for some time, it was Claudia herself who ultimately had the courage to put an end to the family. As she grew bitter to Lestat over the years for having turned her into a vampire – he would tease her for becoming a woman trapped in a little girl’s body – she decides Lestat has indeed nothing to offer them, and that only without him would they

be able to travel the world in search of other vampires who would hopefully bring some meaning to their existence. To Louis' horror, she then poisons Lestat and slashes his throat, disposing of the body in a Louisiana bayou.

It was neither the end of Lestat nor the end of their suffering, as they would learn eventually, once they went to Europe to find others like them. Louis finds Armand, who runs the *Théâtre des Vampires,* a theater hiding a vampire coven, and they fall for one another; but when Claudia is taken by force from him and is murdered – as he learned it was forbidden to make one so young a vampire for they were considered 'flawed' – Louis lost all capacity to love for good. It was long after he took his vengeance on the ones responsible for Claudia's death that Louis eventually managed to kill without the constant sense of guilt. But when, at the end of his narrative, Louis finds the interviewer so fascinated with the whole saga that he begs for immortality himself, Louis acknowledges that, in his purpose to share his story, "*I have completely failed*" (id., p.340).

All the interviewer could apprehend from the despair and tragedy of Louis' journey was the allure of it all, the idea of immortality and endless beauty that exhaled from his words. In a way, the interviewer seemed to anticipate many of the novel's readers' own amazement towards the story.

Louis' idea of immortality as a 'curse' in *Interview with the Vampire* would dramatically differ from Lestat's idea of immortality as a 'gift' in *The Vampire Lestat* (1985), its hugely anticipated sequel, told from Lestat's own point of view, in first person. We can point out to the fact that we no longer need a human to mediate the telling of the story; now the outsider has taken full control over his narrative. More than that, Lestat seeks out to completely "come out of the closet", proudly telling humanity of his vampire nature and welcoming the spotlight from which vampires have so willingly hid from for centuries.

This change of perspectives and points-of-view in the Vampire Chronicles may also be telling of their times, in that we may look at the seventies as only the beginning of the riots and liberation movements. If we look back at gay liberation in a post Stonewall scenario, we do see that gay activists were begging people to come out and step up, but at those early times it may have simply been too difficult for homosexuals to accept their own nature, let alone to come out to others. For many, it still is, up to this day. But in the eighties, as homosexuality was no longer considered a disease by the World Health Organization and the movements were more spread out

and established, people were starting to feel confident enough to considering actually being truthful to themselves, living up to what their reality, however ‘queer’, truly was. This way, yet again, it is possible to attribute this shift in the vampire narrative’s focus to the shift in attitude of the social world itself, and how it dealt with different realities and alterity.

4 THE VAMPIRE IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY LITERATURE: DISCUSSING HIBRIDITY IN A POST-MODERN VAMPIRE NARRATIVE

A mixed category, the monster resists any classification built on hierarchy or a merely binary opposition, demanding instead a "system" allowing polyphony, mixed response (difference in sameness, repulsion in attraction), and resistance to integration.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen

In the first decade of the twenty first century, we witnessed a notorious increase in the popularity of vampires. Its presence has been ubiquitous in pop culture, whether in graphic novels like Steve Niles and Ben Templesmith's *30 Days of Night*, movies like the highly acclaimed Swedish film *Låt den rätte komma in* (*Let the Right One In* in the United States), TV series like *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries*, or literary sensations like the *Twilight* saga. One could think that vampires have been more popular than ever, but, as we have seen throughout this dissertation, interest in vampires has been cyclical, with the figure being on the spotlight from time to time, and then fading out to darkness so as to carefully plot its return.

Amidst all these works, there is an idea that seems to fluctuate among them, with some merely hinting at it, while others make it the very foundation of its plot. And in order for us to see the vampire as mirror of a contemporary concern, it is precisely this idea that we are going to delve into – that of Hibridity.

In 2003, the movie *Underworld* was released to considerable success. That movie told of the centuries-old war that had been going on between two rival races of immortal beings – vampires and lycans (werewolves). The beginning of the war – which was made into a prequel titled *Underworld: Rise of the Lycans* in 2009 – explained that the werewolves were originally made slaves by the vampires. They were their castle's day guardians, and were looked down to as mere animals. It all changed when Sonja, daughter of the castle's Master, Viktor, fell in love with Lucian, a lycan himself.

The relationship was doomed from the start, but, when it was finally revealed, Viktor had to face a much bigger issue – his daughter had been impregnated by Lucian. Viktor considered her act as treason, and the child growing in her womb an abomination. He decided that the only

possible thing to do was to kill both his daughter and his grandchild, for he could not accept the outrage of letting lycan blood mingle with his royal family's blood. He has Lucian watch the whole scene.

That is when Lucian cries out the rebellion that would start the war: lycans would never again be passive servants to vampires, nor would they be treated like dogs. The rebellion was successful, but so was Viktor in having that first hybrid child – his own family – killed. Little did he know that, centuries later, it would be another Hybrid that would be partially responsible for his demise. The rise of hybridity was inevitable.

In the final Twilight saga book, 2008's *Breaking Dawn*, Bella, a human, finally marries the vampire Edward, and soon after, she gets pregnant. The baby's unpredictable nature soon calls the attention of old vampire covens like the Volturi, who decide they cannot risk being exposed to the world because of the baby. Bella and Edward soon start on a journey across the world to find out another Hybrid, to prove that Hybrids did not necessarily pose as threats to their species.

The fear of mixing blood and races has proved to be an issue widely discussed in the short years of the new century, and, for that reason, the novel selected to illustrate the vampire in the twenty-first century deals prominently with the concept of Hibridity and its repercussions.

In 2005, Octavia Butler[9] released *Fledgling*, her last book. If on the one hand the fact that it was a vampire novel seemed to be a departure from her previous science-fiction-oriented work, on the other hand, a closer look would lead us to perceive that her recurrent discussions of race, identity and science were at the very heart of that novel as well. Due to Butler's new and highly original take on the vampire myth, once again we are going to witness a discussion that rings true to humanity as a whole, farfetched as it might seem at first glance.

We are now going to investigate, then, how Butler appropriates the vampire to question Hibridity – and to what extent are we really willing to accept it – and also to present the always thought-provoking recurrent themes presented in her work, under brand new light.

On the outside, *Fledgling*'s main character, Shori, seems to be a young African American girl who awakes, without her memory and severely injured, in a pitch-black scenario. Her only

[9] Butler (1947-2006) was a widely recognized and awarded African-american writer who became famous due to her incursions in the science-fiction literary universe, a field that used to be dominated by white men.

drive, though, is to get fed. Her hunger is described as so overpowering that it seems to be tearing her apart from inside out. When she hears what seems to be an animal moving within the darkness, she immediately and instinctively waits until the perfect time presents itself to strike, much like a snake would. And that is how we learn that Shori might not be your typical girl, who would tend to fear the sounds of the unknown creature from within the darkness. Shori cherishes it. Shori needs it.

"I discovered that I was strong in spite of all the things that were wrong with me" (Butler: 2005, p.2). Her reference to her own strength comes once she successfully attacks and feeds on the animal, but it would not be a stretch at all to read much further into it. Shori's discovery is one that will tell readers a lot about her character, and about the situation she has been placed in. It sets the basic premise of the book as well, as we are going to see in due time.

Shori recovers impossibly fast, displaying a sharp hunting instinct. By exploring her surroundings, she encounters the smoking wreck of a village, which has been completely destroyed, and notices scents that indicated that people had died in the fire. But neither the place nor the objects seemed to ring any bells. She had no idea where she had come from, who her people had been, or what she was at all.

"Then the sun rose, and it burned my skin and my eyes. I climbed down and used a tree branch and my hands to dig a shallow trench. […] That and my clothing – I folded one of my shirts over my face – proved to be enough of a shield to protect me from sunlight" (id., p.6). The circumstances dictated what she needed to do in order to remain safe, it was pure self-preservation. Notably, considering readers of this paper have the previous knowledge that we are dealing with a vampiric character, we should point out to the interesting fact that Shori feels uncomfortable in daylight – but she is not killed by it, it does not destroy her. As it turns out, that will also prove to be a key plot point.

Everything changes when Shori meets a young man called Wright, described as white, strong and in his twenties. Shori bites him, but not to hurt him, this time. She is inexplicably drawn to him, and for some reason, Wright seems so too. Even though he cannot explain why as well, he finds it extremely pleasurable her licking of his wounds. Together they formed an odd couple. She does not know where she came from. He does not know where that potentially-doomed relationship would lead him to. Still, not only would they accept each other, but they would also immediately begin a relation of co-dependence. Trying to make sense of "what" she

is, Wright even jokes about her being a vampire, a concept which, in itself, completely escaped her.

> They drink blood, they have no reflection in mirrors, they can become bats or wolves, they turn people into vampires either by drinking their blood or by making the convert drink the vampire's blood. This last detail seemed to depend on which story you were reading or which movie you were watching. That was the other thing about vampires. They were fictional beings. Folklore. There were no vampires. So what was I? (id., p.16)

Shori posed as a character of instability. She drank only blood, she displayed remarkable strength, velocity and healing power. But she did not have the ability to shape shift, she could not turn others into vampires. She had mirror reflection. If vampires did exist, they were in fact worth of a mirror reflection. She could hold crucifixes, and not get burned. This is most definitely not Bram Stoker's rendition of the vampire as an evil creature, repelled by anything holy. And she did not get destroyed by sunlight. She made it hard for anyone to place any labels on her. She was definitely not human, but neither did she seem to be that which vampires are thought to be.

> The monster […] refuses easy categorization. […] This refusal to participate in the classificatory "order of things" is true of monsters generally: they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions (Cohen, 1996, p.6)

In his discussion of the place of monsters in culture, Cohen acknowledges that "monsters" tend to blur the lines between binary extremes, and in the novel, Shori functions precisely as that driving force shattering boundaries. Before she even realizes what she actually is, we can start to see the outline of what the author is setting out to problematize.

As Wright questions Shori about her being uncomfortable in the sun, especially considering the fact that she is dark-skinned, Shori tells him, almost mechanically, almost unveiling that piece of information to herself, that "I think I'm an experiment. I think I can withstand the sun better than… others of my kind. I burn, but I don't burn as fast as they do. It's like an allergy we all have to the sun. I don't know who the experimenters are, though, the ones who made me black" (Butler, 2005, p.31)

Her devotion to finding information about "her people" goes from library readings to internet research. She is dismayed to learn that "no one seemed to be writing about my kind" (id., p.33). That would not come as a surprise at all, since History tells us that the stories of "others", of any of many groups outside what was considered the dominant ideology, have been left out of

official accounts. And since Shori did not have any family to share her own history, her sense of identity had become fragmented, as she did not have any solid foundations whatsoever. Hence, we can surely understand her continuous desire to come across any piece of information that would be enlightening in that sense. What she does end up finding is information about the burned ruins, and learns that it was no accident, that it was definitely arson.

The journey to find out who and what she is leads her back to the ruins, where she finds a gunman, apparently protecting the area, who ends up shooting Wright. Shori manages to use her body as a shield, and bites the man before she herself collapses. When she wakes up, she tracks the man down and understands that once she bites a person, they become more than willing to do what she says or asks. Something in her saliva. Several bites would cause the person to be addicted to her, which explains Wright's attitude towards her. She tells the shooter to send a message to whoever sent him to guard the place, setting up a meeting. And that is how Shori Matthews finally meets her father.

The man, "blond and very pale-skinned" (id., p.61), is amazed to see his daughter alive, but dismayed to realize she has no recollection of him or her people whatsoever. The first of Shori's questions has to do with their nature, and why they are different from Wright. She wants to know what they are, to which Iosif, her father, answers

> Vampires, of course – not that we call ourselves by that name. […] We have very little in common with the vampire creatures Bram Stoker described in *Dracula* , but we are long-lived blood drinkers. […] We live alongside, yet apart from, human beings, except for those humans who become our symbionts. We have much longer lives than humans. Most of us must sleep during the day and, yes, we need blood to live. Human blood is most satisfying to us, and fortunately, we don't have to injure the humans we take it from. But we are born as we are. We can't magically convert humans into our kind (id., p.63).

It is interesting for us to mention that the text is overtly aware of vampire literature as a whole, but it is intentionally so in order to transgress it, exploring new grounds and standpoints. Intertextuality, "one mode of appropriating and reformulating – with significant change – the dominant white, male, middle-class, heterosexual, Eurocentric culture" (Hutcheon, 1990, p.129), takes an important part in the development of the novel. In *A Poetics of Post-Modernism*, Hutcheon goes on to tackle the interrelation between Post-Modern works and the Canonical ones, and her idea that Post-modernism "signals its dependence by its use of the canon, but reveals its rebellion through its ironic abuse of it" (id., p.129-130) seems to appropriately fit Butler's reworking of the vampire character.

The main figure in the novel is by no means a traditional character in vampire narratives: a young, child-like female black character, who is much stronger than any armed white males who may come to confront her. We are witnessing the birth of a new kind of vampire – or “Ina”, as they call themselves – and brand new rules about to be set.

But let us focus now on a crucial point for us in the novel. As Shori’s father fills the many blanks left in her memory, he ends up revealing something that further individualizes Shori, making her an oddity even among her own.

> Some of us have tried for centuries to find ways to be less vulnerable during the day. Shori is our latest and most successful effort in that direction. She’s also, through genetic engineering, part human. We were experimenting with genetic engineering well before humanity learned to do it – before they even learned that it was possible. […] We evolved right here on Earth alongside humanity as a cousin species like the chimpanzee. Perhaps we’re the more gifted cousin (Butler, 2005, p.66-67).

She thought her sense of being different would be lifted once she met one of her people; but it turns out that, being a true hybrid, she is different even among her own. Inas had found that melanin made it possible for them to be much less sensitive to the sun, and Shori had been the most successful attempt in that direction. Hence, she became the first true black vampire among her own, a unique creature, composite of both human and Ina, that blurred the borders between the species.

Even though the genetic experimenting was conducted by Shori’s family so that it could potentially benefit the species as a whole, not before long would she learn that not all Ina were perfectly content with such experiments, and that not all of them were willing to accept the inclusion of a “third” term, not Ina, not human, but a hyphenated product of them both.

The tension caused by Hibridity becomes a central matter in the narrative, and it further complicates Shori’s pursuit of an identity for herself. Her desire to establish her own hybrid identity is the desire to allow the polyphony to which Cohen refers to in his statement, and many prove to be contrary to its establishment.

Ever since last century’s development of a major Globalization, Hibridity, while not exclusively a twenty-first century concern, has increasingly taken up more space in society. García-Canclini connects both concepts by stating that

> the convergence of economic, financial, communicative and migratory processes accentuates the interdependence of nearly all societies and generates structures of supranational interconnection. In this process, more than substituting national cultures for those of imperial countries, a complex

> process of mutual change and Hibridity (even though asymmetric) begins (García-Canclini, 2000, p.2).

These new products resulting of the combination of distinctive parts are now widespread worldwide, noticeably as consequence of migratory processes that lead to the formation of hyphenated identities, such as Mexican-American or Japanese-American, begging for its own sets of standards – at the crossroads of two well established others, they do not perfectly 'fit' within either. Hence the notorious effort to create an identity of their own, by all and any means possible, even through literature.

> If Chicano literature has not entered the mainstream of American literature, neither has it become part of Mexican literature, in which it has its roots and from which it derives its inspiration. […] This desire to establish a separate identity has resulted in the creation of a literature that reflects a unique culture and possesses characteristics that differentiate it from other literatures (Leal; Barrón, 1982, p. 11-12).

Shori alone embodies a conflict that resonates with those of hybrid groups like Chicanos. She has her roots in Ina people, but because she has also a strong component of human genetics, she is made a pariah among some of her own Ina kind.

Geographical borders may have come crashing all the way down in recent times, but there is still significant resistance to demolishing other types of invisible borders. Powell corroborates to that idea when he asserts that "The world is shrinking. […] So much of Postmodern thought has to do with this encroachment of the Other – whether that Other is Other individuals, Other groups, Other species, Other races, the Other of "male", the Other of "the West" (Powell, 1998, p. 150). It is when the Other encroaches, trespassing usual borders, that the hybrid can potentially materialize.

It is interesting to consider Shori's skin color in this context of Otherness. According to Cohen, "Africa early became the West's significant other, the sign of its ontological difference simply being skin color" (1996, p.8). In *Fledgling*, discussions of race and the presence of racism are underlying the whole narrative, but it moves beyond skin color. "They're not human, Wright. They don't care about white or black" (Butler, 2005, p.168). Neither do they seem to care about homosexuality or polygamy, as those seem to be human preoccupations. But when the discussion shifts to a human-Ina being, anxiety runs high. Humans may be "good enough" for sex, essential for nurture, but not suitable for mixture.

The discourse of racial discrimination and of its ideas of hierarchy is how the tension between Ina and human is articulated in the novel, and we easily can transfer this conflict to many other instances. When Shori's father tells her that "Someone burned your mothers and your sisters as well as all of the human members of your family to death here. They shot the ones who tried to get out, shot them and threw most of them back into the fire" (id., p.64), it is hard for us not to relate these attacks to those of the Ku Klux Klan; or even to skinhead attacks at homosexuals that still happen to this day.

It becomes clearer and clearer as we move forward into the narrative that the attacks were not random vandalism, but that they did have a purist-bias. Short after Shori had been introduced to her father's community, it fell under the same kind of attack of her mother's community. In the aftermath, nearly all people, either Ina or human symbionts, were killed. Records of attacks like these were not nonexistent in Ina history. As a matter of fact, Shori is told that Inas, over the centuries, "usually looked like foreigners, and when times got bad, they were treated like foreigners – suspected, disliked, driven out, or killed" (id., p.130). It is true that history does have a tendency to repeat itself, but to have two of these attacks in such short time span, for no obvious reason, and intrinsically related to one person just had to be connected. Humans did not seem to be involved at all. Inas would now only mingle with those humans who became their symbionts, as they would avoid attracting much attention to their small, isolated villages or themselves.

Shori's last link to the Inas was the Gordon family's community, referred to by one of the symbionts living with Iosif. That was the last place she could think of seeking shelter with Wright and her new symbionts, the only survivors of the fire at Iosif's village. Not long after her arrival, the place fell under attack, but this time they were all ready, and soon the human attackers were overpowered. Once Shori bit one of the attackers, she realized they were mere tools on the hands of Ina. She went on to question him.

> "Do you know me? Who am I?"
> He surprised me. "Dirty little nigger bitch", he said reflexively. "Goddamn mongrel cub." […] "Didn't mean to call you that." He looked at me. "Sorry. Didn't mean it".
> "They call me those things, don't they?"
> He nodded.
> "Because I'm dark-skinned?"
> "And human," he said. "Ina mixed with some human or maybe human mixed with a little Ina. That's not supposed to happen. Not ever. Couldn't let you and you… your kind… your family… breed" (id., p. 173).

Shori clearly realizes there are Inas out there who are clearly bothered by the part of her that is human and will stop at nothing to prevent her from 'spreading' that which they consider to be an abomination onto her offspring.

Shori then asks him about the people who sent him and the others to kill them. The man did not seem to have much information on the shot-callers, but ended up providing a crucial piece of information, which was the location where they took him to. Shori did not know this, but the Gordons did – there was only one Ina family living above Altadena in the San Gabriel Mountains – The Silks.

And so it was that a Council of Judgment was brought forth. The Council was part of the Ina's legal system, in which thirteen of the oldest Ina families who shared a common ancestor with seven generations of the oldest families involved are summoned in order to decide on a matter of elevated importance. If found guilty, the whole Silk lineage could go on to completely disappear – the adults would be murdered, and the children would be dispersed among other families around the world.

Even though Shori was at the very center of the trial, her very presence seemed to bother Milo Silk, who, as the oldest Ina participating in the Council, blessed the meeting.

> "I have my doubts, Preston, whether this child should even be here", he said. "She has suffered terrible losses, and she admits that she hasn't recovered from her injuries."
> […] He was saying that my body was not Ina enough to heal itself, that the human part of me had somehow crippled me. […] "I am Ina, Milo."
> […] "You're not Ina! He shouted. He slammed his palm down on the table, making a sound like a gunshot. "You're not! And you have no more business at this Council than would a clever dog!" (id., p. 237-238)

It did not take long for the masks to start coming off. Even though Milo had previously stated that he simply did not care for the genetic experiments, now he had the chance to actually show the truth of his convictions. It became obvious that, for him, Shori was inferior, not even worthy of attending their meeting. She was as good as an animal, and had no place among the purity of their blood.

At one point during the trial, Katherine, a member of another family, the Dahlmans, goes on to tell Preston Gordon, "You want your sons to mate with this person. You want them to get black, human children from her. Here in the United States, even most humans will look down on them. When I came to this country, such people were kept as property, as slaves" (id., p.272).

Katherine's statement goes against Shori's initial idea that Inas did not care about race and skin color at all. Truth is, they did not have to care, because that was solely a human issue. It was true that they did not care about their human symbionts' race; but, once it was made possible for one of their own to have darker skin, it was suddenly an issue. Butler manages to echo both clearly and reasonably the notorious human attitude of acknowledging no prejudices, while saying "I have nothing against *them*, but never one of *my own*". The hybrid vampire body, here, brings out the latent, veiled anxiety caused by Hibridity in the beginning of the new century.

Fortunately, Katherine's and Milo's voices turned out to be a minority among members of the Council. One of the representatives of the other families counter-argues that "Over the centuries, I've seen too much racial prejudice among humans. It isn't a weed we need growing among us" (id., p. 274).

Before the verdict was to be announced, Milo took the chance he was offered to say some final words. He decides to talk about humanity.

> How many of us have been butchered in their wars? They destroy one another by the millions, and it makes no difference to their numbers. […] Their lives are brief and, without us, riddled with disease and violence. And yet, we need them. We take them into our families, and with our help, they are able to live longer, stay free of disease, and get along with one another. We could not live without them. But we are not them! We are not them! […] Nor should we try to be them. Ever. Not for any reason. Not even to gain the day, the cost is too great (id., p. 291-292).

It was almost as if the Silks were openly admitting to have committed the crimes, but that they needed to be forgiven since they did it for the sake of their species, for the purity of their lineage. Again, humanity is reduced to the status of pet animals – they can be affectionate towards them, they can maybe even love them, but never, ever, be one of them.

At last, the Silks were found guilty of their crimes, and the name "Silk" would be erased altogether from Ina history. The Silks, one of the oldest, most traditional lineages in Ina history, were made an example for all others. In trying to be as distant as possible from humanity, they ended up echoing themselves a very human tragic flaw – that of considering oneself greater, purer, more superior to others based solely on ancestry.

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha discusses Hybridity as catalyst of cultural uncertainty and instability. This space precisely denies the homogeneity of cultural identity in favor of a state in-between which is to be interpreted anew. When he states that "the liberatory people who initiate the productive instability of revolutionary cultural change are themselves the bearers of a

hybrid identity" (Bhabha, 1994, p.38), we can assertively relate that concept to Shori herself and the repercussions of her very existence.

When Shori was born, she created this space in-between two others of cultural instability. There were two well-defined species and, all of a sudden, there was a grey area. The Silks were probably most concerned with Shori because, had she had a child, it could be argued that Ina and humans were in fact a single species, and that it was all a matter of race after all.

As Butler wipes the existence of the Silk lineage out, her commentary is quite clear as to what the status of Hibridity should be like in the twenty-first century. There should be no concern with establishing "pure" or "authentic" identities. Instead, by the end of the novel, Butler presents a tentative scenario where all the advantages of diversity are embraced.

At one point in the narrative, one of the Inas themselves tells Shori that "They thought mixing human genes with ours would weaken us. You proved them very wrong" (Butler: 2005, p.225). Ultimately this is the standpoint Butler masterfully defends. Mixture can possibly enhance, being both fruitful and beautiful, and not something to dismiss as inferior. By tackling Shori's struggle with her identity, Butler appropriates the contemporary concern of coexisting with Hibridity – whether within oneself or on others – and its many possibilities. The monstrous figure is, at the end, not so much the vampire character itself, but the mechanisms of discrimination and prejudice that are still present in our society.

5 CONCLUSION

On October 26, 2012, *The New York Times* published a book review on Justin Cronin's *The Twelve*, in which critic Joseph Salvatore claimed that "these are confusing times to be a vampire" (Salvatore, 2012, p. BR12). His assertiveness is due to a comparison he draws between the "old" vampire and the trendy "new" vampire, a creature that XXI century audiences know all so well. On the former, he says that "In the early days, things were clearer: you were a filthy, exsanguinated revenant, doomed to wander graveyards […] and hiding your face from sunlight, mirrors and God. You were a rat whisperer. One step up from a zombie. You were neither rich nor sexy. You did not sparkle" (id.). The latter, however, "went from being an underground word-of-mouth legend to a supernatural star of page, stage, screen and cereal box. The newly industrialized culture was mesmerized by you. No longer a mere monster, you ascended to metaphor" (id.).

His idea fits beautifully in the whole of the dissertation as it summarizes the incredible journey through which the vampire character has taken over the course of the centuries, from a dangerous, menacing foreigner to an 'other' that is our own, that is ourselves. Salvatore's is but another voice to have joined the chorus made up by critics, scholars, authors and researchers who came to acknowledge the impressive power of the vampire as an allegory of humanity's anxieties and fears.

It is also easy to agree with him when he says that vampires often have a mesmerizing effect on people. After spending a unique evening absorbed by the fascinating story of Louis de Pointe du Lac, Daniel, the boy-interviewer of *Interview with the Vampire*, completely disregards the fact that the story is essentially punctuated by tragedy, loss and a sense of self-denial, as he tells Louis how he perceived the story, "an adventure like I'll never know in my whole life! You talk about passion, you talk about longing! You talk about things that millions of us won't ever taste or come to understand […] If you were to give me that power! The power to see and feel and live forever!" (Rice, 1997, p.339).

Author Anne Rice has recently asked her thousands of followers in social media like Twitter and Facebook the question, "Would you take the Dark Gift of Vampire Immortality from

Lestat, or Marius, or Armand or any of my vampires, if they offered it to you?"[10]. The large majority of responses, not surprisingly, was affirmative, that they would gladly take on the gift of immortality. Daniel's overseeing of Louis' drama is surely evocative of the fascination which vampires have brought out for centuries and continue to up to today. But immortality, as well as the idea of beauty successfully standing the test of time, which are quintessential human desires, are really only part of the appeal of the vampire.

A well delineated culture-sensitive character, vampires are able to "ask us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, our tolerance toward its expression. They ask us why we have created them." (Cohen, 1995, p.20). As we witnessed the evolution of the vampire character through the centuries, we notice that the answer to that question dramatically varies, for vampires are potentially as different, enigmatic, alluring, dangerous and seductive as humans can be.

The common assumption that vampires cast no reflection in the mirror fails if we approach them as reflections of humanity itself, an embodiment of an array of issues that have always provoked a sense of uneasiness in specific socio-cultural contexts. That seems to be the main reason why vampires have managed to remain relevant for so long, as they are able to adapt and reinvent themselves in each of their incarnations. It is the reason why the vampire has been on its journey for so long, like Salvatore pointed out in his *New York Times* review, with no sign of a final destination.

If Jonathan Harker saw himself in the mirror when he was looking for the Count's reflection in the scene where the Count suddenly appears in the bathroom, we could argue that this very scene is an appropriate metaphor for our discussion – the vampire was nothing but a reflection of the anxieties that lied within Harker himself, and the most frightening aspect of it all was not to notice the lack of a vampire reflection, but to find within oneself plenty to be afraid of. The vampire was a mere catalyst for that which remained repressed and would never have come to the surface otherwise, as we could take from the chapter dedicated to nineteenth century literature, focusing on both *Carmilla* and *Dracula*.

From the twentieth century onwards, though, the vampire was worthy of a reflection of its own. *I am Legend* made the vampire not exactly a villain, but a more of a victim of a bacterial infection. The vampire was no longer a foreigner, it was our own next-door neighbors, our own

[10] Rice proposed the question on her Facebook fan page on October 11, 2012. The discussion is available for viewing at <http://www.facebook.com/annericefanpage/posts/10151172275605452>. Retrieved October 12, 2012.

friends, our own families. It virtually could be anyone. It led us to question whether vampires were really ‘bad’, or if there were more to it than that shallow statement. The narrative, though, was still focusing on the main character’s point of view, not the vampire’s. That would soon change, as the last decades of the twentieth century saw the publication of Anne Rice’s “Vampire Chronicles”.

These books, starting with *Interview with the Vampire*, still conjured up human anxieties, but what it reflected was filtered by the vampire’s own dilemmas, a characteristic feature of the twentieth century’s exaltation of alterity and its different voices. The vampire eventually became, misunderstood as it was and outside the mainstream of humanity, a subject. And as such, we open up to the concept of different realities, different ways through which we perceive the world around us.

The inevitable consequence of coexisting with others – whether it is the other race, the other nationality or so many other ‘others’ – is the convergence of this otherness into Hibridity, a state of being that created plenty of tension and becomes more relevant in the twenty-first century, as cultures and peoples have never been closer to one another. This very anxiety was appropriated by Butler in her vampire narrative, *Fledgling*, the last novel we focused on in this dissertation, and that could not be more different than the works that the dissertation delved into in the previous chapters. The main character, Shori, a hybrid between humans and vampires, is ultimately portrayed as the *future*, as stronger than either species. Through Shori’s mixed genes, Butler demonstrates that the vampire has never been closer to humanity.

Finally, reading these plural vampire characters and looking at how they have evolved through the ages leads us not just to an understanding of a literary niche, but, more than that, it is an intriguing way to observe the ongoing transformations that have happened within society itself. As long as societies change – and they are bound to continue changing – there will always be a vampire around to shed some light into relevant matters of the age. They may fade from the spotlight in a few short years, as they wait for the perfect opportunity to make their sensational reappearance once again. After all, with vampires, there is never a final destination, never a full stop. There is only… ellipsis.

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