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Monstrous Figurations.

Notes for a Feminist Reading

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to Lina, Attilio, Matteo and Goran

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ABSTRACT

Human imagination is saturated with monsters. In order to be able to consider the Human, people have developed a very complex set of narratives both in their diverse literary traditions and, even more so, in their folklore. Therefore, to study monsters represents a way of exploring the different ways in which humans have not only defined themselves but the characteristics that they have attributed to those that were strangers to the human community. In particular, in this game of alterities in which the human stands face to face with his negative mirror image, female monsters have historically occupied a relevant position. Women have been historically represented as the Other in this human/nonhuman dyad. Starting from an etymological approximation to the word *monstrum*, I have argued that the monster is a complex, multi-layered cultural object that, due to its internal plasticity and its polysemic nature, has acquired over time a number of conflicting characteristics. Moreover, (female) monstrous creatures function as double edged devices that reveal the limits of *normativity* and simultaneously open up a space for *difference* to emerge. These preliminary considerations and nineteenth and twentieth century vampires' and zombies' narratives have guided my analysis of a contemporary neo-gothic artefact: *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* by Laurell Hamilton. In dialogue with a number of feminist contributions and considering queer notions of *fluidity* and *performativity*, I will argue that *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* represents a twenty first century series that questions social norms and envisions worlds of freedom.

Keywords: monster, resistance, normativity, liminality, vampire, zombie, race, sexuality, feminism, femininity & masculinity, queer.

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INTRODUCTION & METHODOLOGY

The seemingly banal pop cultural text, with its direct connection to mass culturally shaped assumptions, is [...] far more likely to reveal the key terms and conditions of the dominant than an earnest and 'knowing' text.

Judith Halberstam

Anxiety assaults me every time I enter a bookshop looking at the number of shelves stuffed with neo-gothic novels and urban fantasy-paranormal fiction. Despite the initial paralysis and the sense of being lost, I had -over time- no difficulties in finding books that could satisfy my craving for adventure, drama or romance. From the *Twilight* Saga to *Black Dagger Legacy* through *Sookie Stackhouse*, the neo-gothic cultural industry offers the reader a great variety of stories; my personal collection constitutes a sample of how beings that have been traditionally at war with each other coexist in the contemporary imaginary landscape. These creatures cooperate, fall in love or sacrifice themselves for the good of others in the new heteromorphous setting provided by serial paranormal fiction in the neoliberal era.¹ In other words, despite Callois' scepticism, monsters from

1. García Iñes, M., «Del Príncipe Azul al vampiro millonario: la alienación del sujeto femenino en las novelas del romance paranormal», *SIGNA: Revista de la Asociación Española de Semántica*, vol. 21 (2012), pp. 485-500.

horror movies exist side by side those that have historically belonged to the realm of science fiction or fantasy tales.²

The same feeling will probably assault anybody who wished to follow the development of vampire and other monsters' adventures on film: from the thirties on, the big screen has been invaded by all sorts of monstrous creatures: mummies, zombies, werewolves and the like.³ For this very reason, that is to say the abundance of artefacts concerned with monstrous creatures, monstrosity has represented a major enterprise for contemporary critics, particularly those working in the field of Cultural Studies. From anthropological explorations of monsters in traditional societies⁴ to the study of contemporary fiction as an expression of the impact of neoliberal economies and ideologies on human communities,⁵ academic libraries provide the neophyte with a great number of theoretical texts to start exploring a variety of issues:

What does the monster do? What does it represent?

These are indeed some of the key questions that pervade most analyses of the monster's phenomenon and, throughout my work, I will strive to answer some of them, considering *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* as a case study that will help me shed some light on how monsters operate. In this contemporary neo-gothic narrative –I understand the Gothic as an encompassing term that does not fit into the traditional organisation of genres and that opposes the dominant mode of realism⁶– two monstrous figurations, the vampire and the zombie, coexist alongside a number of other less common preternatural creatures (lamias, wererats, weretigers and wereleopards) that take an active part in this heroine's adventures. I provide a brief, general summary of the novels in order to orient the reader through my work. Nevertheless, I will not summarise nor consider Hamilton's body of work in full in the thesis. In fact, I will explore two aspects that have agglutinate vampire narratives since the nineteenth and early twentieth century: sexuality and race. In order to do that, I will select a variety of scenes from Hamilton's work that deal especially with these two issues.

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2. In a short essay edited for the first time in 1966, Roger Callois described the major differences between fairy tales and science fiction, suggesting that these creatures could not coexist in the same literary world. Recent literary creations have proven him wrong and have shown how the mixture of different genres is indeed very productive. Callois, R., *Dalla fiaba alla fantascienza*. Milano: Theoria, 1991.
 3. Skal, D., *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror*. New York: Faber & Faber, 1993.
 4. Asma, S., *On Monsters. An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 and Gilmore, D., *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.
 5. Giroux, H., *Zombie Politics and Culture in the Era of Casino Capitalism*. New York: Peter Lang, 2013 and McNally, D., *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012.
 6. Smith, A., *Gothic Literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007 provides a comprehensive and accessible introduction to Gothic literature and interesting insights on contemporary gothic sensitivity.

The *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* series takes place in a parallel world –a near future America– populated by humans that coexist alongside a number of preternatural creatures such as vampires and werewolves. Anita Blake, the main character that gives the series its name, is a young, *mestiza* girl of German-Mexican origins that dedicates herself to resurrecting the dead. She is in fact an Animator, a person that has been legally trained to work alongside the police and the preternatural squad to facilitate court trials involving people that have been either long dead or have died in obscure, unusual circumstances. She is not a policewoman herself but she enjoys some of the privileges of the profession. She is called to murder scenes, asked to attend court trials and to cooperate with the judges due to her training in preternatural biology/science and her innate abilities regarding the dead. While other animators must train to develop the skills required, Anita is a ‘natural’. In fact her Mexican origins, in particular, her connection to her voodoo ancestry have allowed her to control the dead since she was a child; at the age of twenty-eight she learnt how to control her talents and developed them into a profitable business. Anita is a very mature person and, having experienced discrimination because of her Mexican heritage as much as for her voodoo gifts, she appears as an extremely direct and strong willed woman that is capable of facing what most people would consider horrifying. She is a heroine that has been trained in several forms of combat and has been handling guns for most of her adult life. I would even say that she loves her guns more than she loves her multiple lovers. She is inclined to use violence to protect herself as much as to protect others despite her Christian background that somehow seems to orient her actions and shield her from bad vamps she is assigned to kill.

During the saga, she turns from a vampire hunter to a vampire lover and finally into a vampire servant, losing part of her autonomy to the Master of the City but acquiring, in the process, a number of abilities that help her in her work. She is in fact stronger, quicker and can sense emotions better than any other human she meets. On the other hand, her powers attract preternatural creatures: vampires, werewolves, wereleopards, werehyenas, wererats feel drawn to her and they seem unable to resist her supernatural charm. So much so that during the first four books she is infected with four or five strains of the lycanthropy virus and is constantly in danger of turning into a wereanimal herself in moments of rage or intense sexual drive. For this very reason, her home rapidly becomes a community for all wereanimals that have decided to live in peace and try to overcome the power struggles that normally mark the lives of preternatural creatures. Nevertheless, being originally a form of detective novel, the element of tension or threat is forever present in the development of the events. Bad guys always appear on the horizon. When there is a murder Anita, using her bond to the preternatural community as much as her own superpowers, is able to solve the mystery. The early novels focus

predominantly on crime-solving and action; from novel number ten the plot lines shift and Hamilton engages much more with private events which Anita has to deal with in her personal life in this vast community of werecreatures. Irony, cynicism and a great deal of humour accompany the reader through this long series of novels. The books are all narrated in the first person by Anita herself and, as readers, we are taking part in long dramatic monologues in which the main character reflects upon a number of issues, such as the moral implications of the use of violence and the significance of interpersonal bonding in violent contexts.

The great amount of violence and sex present in the narratives suggest that they have been conceived for an adult audience, even if contemporary preternatural novels nowadays tend to target 'young adults'. As one of her commentators remarked, Hamilton created a new genre –the urban fantasy adventure in the nineties with a *strong female leader* and built an audience for it exploiting the fact that there was not enough commercial fiction that appealed to women.⁷ In other words, readers, mainly women, were looking for a female lead, a strong character that could be as 'badass' as any male protagonist of traditional monster stories.⁸

Before I offer the reader a general outline of the thesis, I wish to start from some preliminary considerations on *female monstrosity*, *self-reflexivity* and *paranoia*.

FEMALE MONSTROSITY

As Gilmore, Asma and Braidotti⁹ have shown, human imagination is saturated with monsters. According to these authors, to be able to consider the Human, people have developed a very complex set of narratives both in their diverse literary traditions and, even more so, in their folklore. Therefore, to study monsters -that is to say a number of in-human/non-human creatures- represents a way of exploring the different ways in which humans have not only defined themselves but the characteristics that they have attributed to those that were strangers to the human community. In particular, in this game of alterities in which the human stands face to face with his negative mirror image, female monsters have historically occupied a relevant position. From mermaids, female

7. Mamatas, N., «Giving the Devil Her due. Why Guilty Pleasure isn't One» in Hamilton, L. K. (Ed.) *Ardeur*. Dallas: Ben Bella Books, 2010.

8. Ibidem.

9. Braidotti, R., *Madri, Mostri e Macchine*. Roma: ManifestoLibri, 2005.

demons, succubus and harpies to more recent female vampires, the 'generous' collection of female monstrosity has allowed critics to say that there is a strong connection between femininity and monstrosity. In other words, women have been historically represented as the Other in this human/nonhuman dyad. The constellation of Western notions revolving around the 'Human' have historically coincided with Man and man has operated as a general signifier for the species; women therefore have been put in close proximity to everything that was thought as nonhuman, no-Man as Beauvoir¹⁰ and, more recently, Irigaray have successfully argued¹¹. In other words:

Man' so often used as a generic term to signify 'humanity' only emphasizes the cultural and social exclusion of women where men are the 'norm' and where seemingly 'universal' values are in fact men's values.¹²

I argue that the understanding of this historical connection between femininity and monstrosity has been essential for female Gothic authors that have exploited monstrous figurations to re-invent or denounce their subordinate positions in the symbolic. In particular, starting from Foucault's reflections on monstrosity, I claim that female monstrosity has historically operated to provide a space for resistance and a site to articulate meaningful social criticism. The polysemic nature of the monster has in fact allowed female writers to employ it as an exit door to escape normativity¹³ and a way to give voice to 'women's dark protests, fantasies and fear'.¹⁴ In other words, in my reading, modern female monsters represent 'a point of exit from phallogocentric definitions of Woman' and a challenge to 'the images and representations that the (masculine) knowing subject has created of Woman as Other (of the Same)'.¹⁵ I argue that female monstrosity has emerged in the history of Western literature in the nineteenth and twentieth century as a *site* that simultaneously reveals and resists hegemonic discourses on femininity.

10. Beauvoir, S., *The Second Sex*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984.

11. Irigaray, L., *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

12. Whelehan, I., *Modern Feminist Thought. From the Second Wave to 'Post-Feminism'*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995, p. 9.

13. Foucault, M., *Gli Anormali*. Milano: Feltrinelli, 1999.

14. Showalter, E., *Sister's Choice, Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 127.

15. Braidotti, R., «Identity, Subjectivity and Difference: a Critical Genealogy» in Griffin, G. and Braidotti, R. (Eds.), *Thinking Differently. A Reader in European Women's Studies*. London: Zed Books, 2002, pp. 158-182, p. 171.

SELF-REFLEXIVITY

This work stems from my passion for Literature and it has been conceived as an 'auto-ethnographic' journey. I understand 'auto-ethnography' as an active engagement with reflexivity; stated differently, reflexivity represents a way to account for my position as a woman, a feminist, a postcolonial scholar and a 'political' reader/writer in the sense proposed by Jameson in his analysis of the 'cultural studies project' and clearly revealed in the first Cultural Studies collection ever published.¹⁶ Therefore throughout the work, I aim to expose the troublesome identity of 'the neutral observer' positioning myself clearly in the text. Furthermore, I will actively engage with the feminist notion of *self-reflexivity* in order to challenge the 'masculinist' separation between the private - represented by the intimate world of the researcher- and the public as the world of the 'activity of research' in the production of knowledge.¹⁷ This very commitment to feminist theory(s) and methodology(s) have fed my intellectual interest for female heroes and female monsters that proliferated in what I would define, from the seventies on, as feminist fiction.¹⁸ In particular, my trajectory in the field of postcolonial scholarship determines the forms in which I interrogate the texts and the ways in which I allow them to disclose their secrets.

PARANOIA

The second reason why I have chosen this particular narrative is that it provides an interesting challenge to conventional readings of vampires' and zombies' genres. In fact, as far as the bloodsuckers are concerned, most contemporary critics¹⁹ have either analysed *Dracula*, the archetypal vampire novel, or mass produced fiction for young adults effectively transforming the fascination for vampires into one of the many

16. Jameson, F., «On "Cultural Studies"», *Social Text*, No. 34, 1993, pp. 17-52.

17. Burn, D. and Walker, M., «Feminist Methodologies» in Somekh, B. & Lewin, C. (Eds.), *Research Methods in the Social Science*. London: Sage, 2005, pp. 66-73.

18. I am referring to a number of books produced during the seventies and the eighties that were claimed to be 'feminist' experimental/speculative novels. Margaret Atwood, Octavia Butler, Ursula Le Guin, Joanna Russ and Marcie Piercy are some of the most well known writers committed to social justice and concerned with utopian feminist futures.

19. I would like to remark that this tendency to read vampire fiction as a conservative, neo-liberal product is recent. In fact, this reading emerged from the notion of *backlash* promoted by Faludi in reference to the historical political and ideological reactions against feminism and its growing success among female intellectuals and the general public in the United States.

cultural manifestations of ‘being young’.²⁰ Ignoring how vampirism plays a part in many contemporary gothic artefacts for adults, they have created an almost-canonical reading of vampirism as a literary form to re-establish conventional ideas about female desire and love relations.²¹ Considering a corpus of novels that star young Anglo-American characters, they mainly suggest that current vampirism is an anti-feminist cultural product. I claim that this particular approach to vampire fiction is the result of an overwhelming tendency to adopt what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has identified –referring to Ricoeur’s coinage of the term ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’²²– with a ‘paranoid’ mode of critical understanding. According to her, critics have generated a methodological approach –especially when exploring popular/mass produced artefacts– that tends to promote a unitary and mono-dimensional reading that denies any ‘quality’ of the texts and highlights what is considered their overall *conservative outlook*. This ‘mood’ operates invisibly in cultural criticism and textual analysis, effectively reducing texts to an ideological by-product of the neoliberal global economy.²³ Sedgwick claims that there is, in the academic literary world, a tendency to split texts into ‘bad’ and ‘good’ rather than conceptualising them as complex and challenging for readers. Stated differently, despite different *corpora* under consideration and different audiences that the texts address, critics tend to relegate popular mass produced texts into all-or-nothing formulations and ignore their potential for change. Aggressive forms of criticism turn into fantasies of purism that effectively deny the recognition of the many tensions present in this type of literary product. From this perspective, what has happened recently in the field of neo-gothic contemporary (from the nineties on) criticism can be understood as the denial of the subversive potential of the monsters’ canon and as a shift towards a cliché mode that depicts them as reactionary. Therefore, through the work, I will strive to show that monstrous configurations are multi-layered: they provide contradictory elements to reflect upon and it is for this very reason that ‘female subalterns’ have appropriated them to question social norms and envision worlds of freedom. Following this line of

20. This emphasis on young adults’ consumption is justified by the ever-growing success of vampire serial literature that is currently flooding the market, best identified by the great success of the *Twilight* saga and its cinematographic adaptation.

21. McMahon, J. L., «Twilight of an Idol: Our Fatal Attraction to Vampires.» in Housel R. and Wisniewski, J. J. (Eds.), *Twilight and Philosophy*. Hoboken: Wiley and Sons, 2009, pp. 193-208.
Myers, Abigail E. «Edward Cullen and Bella Swan: Byronic and Feminist Heroes... or Not.» in *Twilight and Philosophy*, pp. 147-62 or Mukherjee, A., «Team Bella: Twilight Fans Navigating Desire, Security, and Feminism» In Parke, M. and Wilson, N. (Eds.), *Theorising Twilight*. New York: Jefferson, 2011.

22. Kosofsky, E., *Touching feeling. Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Duke University Press, 2003, p. 195-196.

23. For a recent bibliography on the impact of neoliberal production, distribution and marketing strategies on books –especially those marketed for young adults- see: Verboord M., «Market logic and Cultural Consecration in French, German and American Bestseller Lists 1970-2007», *Poetics*, 2011, N. 39 (4), pp. 290-315. Lehr, S., «The Hidden Curriculum: Are We Teaching Young Girls to Wait for the Prince?» in Lehr, S. (Ed.), *Beauty, Brains and Brawn. The Construction of Gender in Children’s Literature*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2001, pp. 1-20. Lluch, G., «Mecanismos de adicción en la literatura juvenil comercial». *Anuario de investigación en literatura infantil y juvenil* 3, 2005, pp. 135-156.

reason, I will claim that Hamilton, in her *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* series, offers to her readers an interesting character that represents a twenty first century adaptation of a successful feminist monstrous figuration and that, far from producing a cliché, a reactionary vampire figure that reasserts conventional notions of femininity, she uses Anita's vampire servant and zombie queen to create a *queer* narrative in which Anita constitutes a focus of resistance to normativity. According to my situated reading, Hamilton offers her audience challenging ideas of what a woman is and what she can do, adopting a 'monstrous location', to make the world a better place for herself and her community.

OUTLINE OF THIS DISSERTATION

I have structured the dissertation in a three-folded manner: chapter one, chapter two and chapter three are grouped under the heading *Genealogy*. In this first section, I set up the framework for the remaining discussions by presenting two complementary models to examine contemporary monstrosity and I have offered the reader genealogical reconstructions of two monster figurations that appeared in nineteenth and early twentieth century fiction and play a major role in *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter*, namely the vampire and the zombie. Both genealogies help me to reveal how the monster constitutes an epistemological tool to disclose that discursive formulations on the Self and the Other are deeply embedded in power relations and cannot be considered as manifestations of prior ontological 'essences'. Chapter four constitutes the second section of the work and I have named it *Cartography*. It is conceived as a transitional moment of my own critical itinerary into monstrosity and a key step in the formulation of vampires and zombies as sites for *feminist* and *indigenist* resistance. I have in fact used it to detail major challenges to the genres' *topoi* posed by the emergence of new subjectivities. In the last three chapters grouped under the heading *Crossroads*, I focus my attention on *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* and I strive to illuminate how the narrative border crosses race and gender and provides new insights into both normativity and resistance through the emergence of a heroine that speaks and acts from a monstrous location. Finally in the Conclusions, I sum up the major points of my work to claim the significance of this B-narrative as one of many possible manifestations of a new understanding of female subjectivity, power and intimacy in contemporary North America.

In further details, Chapter one, *Navigating Gothic Monstrosity* is aimed at framing some questions related to monstrosity in order to address in which ways and to which purpose monstrous creatures operate as paradoxical sites to rethink our notion of

'identity' and selfhood. I have taken into consideration two complementary models from the field of Philosophy and Anthropology to state that vampires and zombies can represent literary forms of subversion of a variety of discourses that invest our notion of Otherness dialogically connected to our understanding of the Self. Starting for an etymological approximation -the monster as the creature *that shows* and *warns*- I have claimed that, according to Foucault's understanding of power/knowledge as the source of normativity, monstrous figurations reveal the limits of *normativity* and emerge in opposition to socially accepted norms and hegemonic discourses. Furthermore, re-reading Turner's contribution to the study of the ritual process and of rites of passage, I have stressed how through those very figurations, society regenerates itself, incorporating chaos and change as transformative elements into the symbolic. Through the notion that the monster represents a paradox, I have stated that it represents a landmark in which differences can emerge, providing a preferential route to exit the pre-eminence of the Same.²⁴ In this sense, I have offered a reading of monstrosity as the perfect site to articulate a counter-hegemonic discourse on difference and Otherness and a (potential) escape-route from phallogocentrism and Patriarchy.

Chapter two, *Genealogy of Pleasure*, is framed as a genealogy of the vampire monster as a figuration of Otherness in the British Colonial Imagination. Moving away from the canonical reading of the psychoanalytic approach of some of the most influential feminist authors of the past three decades, I have suggested that the best way of looking at the monstrous creatures that populated Stoker's imagination is through the lenses of postcolonial reason. As Arata and Surrakay suggest, *Dracula* is a story that highlights some of the most intriguing strategies through which the British Empire has codified the presence of the Other and its colonial encounters in a regime of terror and fear for the Other, conceived as a discursive product of dialogical relations in a regime of power in which the West has been the domineering element. Far from being an escapist narrative as most contemporary critics suggest, at least in its original forms, vampire literature gives a significant insight into the desires and fears of (Western) civilization in crisis moments in which its economic, political and 'moral' supremacy had been put at risk. I have put a special emphasis on female monstrosity showing how the notion of pathological (sexual) behaviour has to be understood as the manifestation of a resistance to traditional gender roles and practices.

In Chapter three, *Genealogy of Fear*, I have claimed that the origins of vampire and zombie monsters' figurations in nineteenth century literature share the same ideological

24. Braidotti, R., *Metamorphoses. Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*. London: Polity Press, 2002.

origins. In both cases, they can be understood as representations of Otherness in the context of Anglo-American Imperial enterprises. Despite the current visibility of post-apocalyptic zombies' origins in Romero's appropriation of the genre, I claim that the elements that have surfaced in the long history of the zombie as a figuration of Otherness controlled by Africanism and anti-negro thought should not be forgotten because as Luckhurst highlights the legacy of slavery and domination is still traceable in contemporary uses of the zombie *topoi*.²⁵

Chapter four, *Playing in the Dark*, represents a bridge between the original versions of vampire and zombie *topoi* in literature and their adaptation in contemporary fiction. I have conceived it as a middle step essential to understanding the ways in which Hamilton reimagines and appropriates the Gothic. In this part of the work therefore, I have claimed that *The Gilda Stories* and the Haitian use of the zombie figuration in the *Indigenist* literary Movement pivot around the same effort to re-signify the xenophobic traditions of Imperial Britain and Nineteenth and Twentieth century United States. In other words, the emergence of 'black consciousness' and black pride as a discourse around the Pan-Africanist movement²⁶ have transformed both vampire and zombie narratives and turn them into self-affirmation strategies against those discourses that have historically legitimized white supremacy. Stated differently, I claim that this material I have selected aims, as a political agenda, at deconstructing the dialectical mode in which race and gender have been historically represented and at revealing the false universalism of the white male subject and to bring the Other into representation as the Master voice.

In the last three chapters, organised in the section *Crossroads*, I have finally focused on *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter*, the narrative that constitutes the main object of this long dissertation. Departing from some of the key theoretical elements I have identified in the genealogical works on the vampire and zombie figurations and my reflection on the evolution of the production in chapter four, I have structured the last part of the work around three key questions: race, masculinities and sex.

In *On the colour line*, I have analysed the ways in which Hamilton challenges the xenophobic elements present in the original formulation of the vampire canon through a female character that is a *mestiza*. I have argued that *mestizaje*, as it appears in Anzaldúa's

25. Luckhurst, R., *Zombies. A Cultural History*. London: Reaktion Books, 2015. On the same line of reasoning, but observing how metaphors of colour still operates in zombies' narratives see: Bakke G., «Dead White Men: An Essay on the Changing Dynamics of Race in US Action Cinema» *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 83, No. 2, pp. 401-428 and McAlister, E., «Slaves, Cannibals, and Infected Hyper-Whites: The Race and Religion of Zombies», *Division II Faculty Publications*. Paper 115, 2012.

26. Young, R., *Postcolonialism. An Historical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001.

theorisation works as a monster figure: it shows the limits of normativity in relation to race and helps the author to articulate new inclusive bodies of knowledge that could offer a radical alternative to a mode of thinking that has revealed its ethical limitations and that still relies on a hierarchical organisation of racial and ethnic differences.

In Chapter six, *The Remake of the Beastly Boys*, I have concentrated on Hamilton's redefinition of 'desirable masculinities' focusing my attention on two key characters, Jean Claude the Master vampire of the City and Richard, the *Ulfric*, king of the local werewolf clan and lover of our zombie Queen, Anita. Hamilton narratives offer a literary example of how the figure of the *androgyn*e allows forms of resistance and subversions to gender discursive practices, revolving around the Hard and the Soft alternatives, to emerge. In fact, the androgynous type provides a model for a *fluid* notion of personal identity not so inherently controlled by gender and it provides an alternative model-companion for a heroine that navigates the shifting array of gendered prescriptions, proscriptions, and desires.

In Chapter seven, *Let's talk about sex, baby!*, I have framed my intervention on sexuality in the context of the 'sex wars' and the general feminist debate on the role of sex, violence and its representation in the life of women. Anita's novels offer a number of elements that allow me to argue that Hamilton plays with two notions proposed by the militants of the pro-sex radical front: sexuality is, above all, an emancipatory force in the life of women and non-normative sexual practices –that question normative forms of intimacy– can be used to disrupt current power dynamics and, therefore, has to be regarded as *sites* that women could appropriate to free themselves from some of the restraints of Patriarchy. Stated differently, I claim that Anita's polyamorous community, her joyful sexual life combined with the representation of sadomasochism as a strategy to subvert traditional gender roles, make Hamilton's popular narrative a form of radical, *utopian feminist vindication*.

In the dissertation I will strive to prove that one can read the evolution of the vampire canon in dialogue with feminism. My hypothesis is that in *Dracula*, feminism appears as a form of feminine monstrous ideology that induced or legitimated deviant practices such as lesbianism and 'professionalism'. In the eighties thanks to the prior emergence of a strong popular feminist movement, the monstrous vampire became one of the sites to re-signify the historical connections that Patriarchy had traced between femininity, monstrosity and otherness. Hamilton's *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* represents, in my *Cartography*, the last step of this process. Moving beyond a militant approach to literature, Hamilton offers a much more ambiguous appreciation of the vampire figuration. Nevertheless, if one reads her work in dialogue with contemporary queer notions of fluidity and performativity and in tune with queer emphasis on non-normative sexual practice, Anita turns into a (post) feminist monstrous vindication.

METHODOLOGY

I have framed this work as a 'Cultural Studies' project. In line with the first developments of English Cultural Studies as an area of academic inquiry in which culture is understood as 'constitutive of and constituted by 'the lived', that is the material, social and symbolic practices of everyday life'²⁷, I have explored the narratives at hand in dialogue with a number of other texts and I have relied on insights on monstrosity from various disciplines: anthropology, sociology and philosophy. In order to understand the significance of the monstrous in contemporary paranormal fantasy, I have anchored my work to previous explorations of monster literature and I have conducted empirical research myself. The ethnographic work carried out in Madrid with two groups of feminist readers, between September 2012 and November 2014, is not reflected as a specific appendix or chapter in this dissertation. In fact I have decided to use it to *orient* my intervention into the significance of the Gothic genre and to contrast, playing with and testing some of the ideas I had, prior to my engagement with writing. This combination of very heterogeneous sources can illuminate the multi-layered configuration of the monster figuration and can offer meaningful insights of a cultural phenomenon that is neither stable nor unitary. In fact, going back to both *liminality* of monstrous creatures and *paranoia* as a hegemonic mode of cultural criticism, I argue that the monster's significance in contemporary culture may only be grasped through a kaleidoscope of visions and perspectives. In other words, my work may be considered as the result of a pan-textual approach that has allowed me to zigzag and leap from literary material to social reality, through ethnographic material –in the form of personal notes– that have been at the margins and yet central to this enterprise. In looking at these various sources, my hope is to share the beauty of a monstrous (female) creature that the 'humanist' project has been unable to foresee.

27. Gray, A., *Research Practice for Cultural Studies. Ethnographic Methods and Lived Cultures*. London: Sage, 2003, p. 1.

GENEALOGY



CHAPTER ONE

NAVIGATING GOTHIC MONSTROSITY

I will approach the issue of monstrosity and of a possible genealogy of the *monstrous* in contemporary (nineteenth and twentieth century) gothic texts, starting from some etymological considerations that will show the conceptual continuity of its figuration and that, I hope, will throw some light on its double nature as signifier of chaos and, at the same time, patroller of the limits of the legitimate. In this chapter, I will contrast two different modes of interpretation of the monstrous figuration: a *bio-political* approach using Foucault's analysis of power/knowledge as normativity and Turner's *liminality* as a theoretical model to account for the monster metaphor in Anglo-American culture.

The origin of the English term 'Monster', common to most modern European languages, can be traced back to the Latin word 'monstrum' and has which has its root in *monere* that we can roughly translate as 'to warn' or 'to show'. These two meanings are intimately related. On one hand they designate 'that which warns' and, on the other, 'that which reveals' or 'that which shows something'.

We can say that traditionally to be a monster is therefore to be an *omen*, a *warning* against certain behaviour or certain practices or, vice versa, a manifestation and a reminder (in the sense of *showing*) in the physical world of a breach of some implicit or explicit norm. Thus we can argue -at least etymologically- that *the monstrous* exists on the margin of the legitimate, working as a double-edged device: warning against danger and at the same time, showing through the body the consequences of an infraction that has already been committed.

In the context of *monster imagery* norms are always perceived as *natural* therefore by their very existence, (they) define the *natural* by providing a shocking contrast that is unnatural and confusing and horrifying¹.

As Asma highlights² in his historical reconstruction of modern monstrosity, monstrous births for example have been interpreted as bodily manifestations of a deviant religious behaviour of parents and severe physical alterations such as a shorter leg or a deformed skull could be read as signs of moral vices and spiritual infractions committed by members of a given community.

In other words, monstrous apparitions can be read as a clear sign of the disruption of an order: a mythic one in classical times, divine in the middle ages, natural in the sixteenth or seventeenth century and political or moral in the contemporary era.

As John Sadler states 'the outward deformity of the body is often a signe [sic] of the pollution of the heart'³ confirming the moral implications of the modern definition of monster and monstrosity. In fact, in the realm of the nineteenth and twentieth century imagination, even if at a first glance, it seems that the monstrosity of some could just be ascribed to physical appearance, we soon become aware that lack of morals, excessive ambitions or narcissistic inclinations to pleasure conform the world of someone that can be defined as monstrous.

In contemporary literature, maintaining the monster at bay or killing it corresponds to a textual strategy to preserve order and to guarantee foundational social values; if we consider the killing of Lucy and Dracula as absolute Others in Stoker's narrative, both acts can be described as the physical extermination of a threat, seen anthropologically as a symbolic strategy of dealing with marginality and endemic violence as Girard in his *Scapegoat* has clearly shown.⁴

Even if other figures/pictures of Alterity (namely the Scapegoat as it has been theorised by Girard and the Stranger described by Bauman⁵) have been used to describe transgression it seems that the notion of monsters and monstrosity that I disclosed above can contribute significantly to the understanding of some of the imaginary monstrous

1. Gilmore, D., *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003, p. 113.

2. Asma, S., *On Monsters*, pp. 141-162.

3. Sadler, J., *The sick woman's private looking-glass*. London, 1636 quoted in Asma, S., *On Monsters*, p. 143.

4. Girard, R., *Scapegoat*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986. According to the author there are two types of threats: an external and an internal one. In the case of *Dracula*, the novel that I will firstly consider in my genealogical work on vampire monstrosity, the external threat is incarnated in the monster (Dracula), while Lucy, a white middle class woman, embodies the internal menace due to her eccentric and abnormal behaviour.

5. Bauman, Z., *Postmodernity and Its Discontents*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007.

characters that populated nineteenth century gothic texts and the world of Bram Stoker and his Dracula in particular.

READING MONSTERS THROUGH FOUCAULT

'I would like my books to be a kind of tool-box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area... I don't write for an audience, I write for users, not readers.'

Michel Foucault

According to Foucault's reading of monstrosity, the monster could be interpreted as the bodily incarnation of a life resistance to bio-power. We need to understand bio-power as the complex interplay between power and knowledge in creating the modern subject. Against the traditional mode of interpretation that sees power as a repressive force that submits subjects to authority, Foucault thinks and reflects on power/knowledge as a generating principle that works as a core engine in defining contemporary subjectivity. In fact, starting from 'archaeological' and 'genealogical' descriptions of the way sovereignty was organised, Foucault analyses the ways through which, in modern times, the right to dispose of people-slaves or children-⁶ has been modified by the emergence of a new economy of life and death that he calls 'bio-power'. In his understanding power is related to knowledge and has to be conceptualised as distinct from the philosophical and juridical framework of the Enlightenment concerned mainly with the notion of a representative government.⁷

Power is deprived of any substantial content and is seen and theorised as a technology that allows the creation of discourses, practices and, in the extreme, the creation of subjects through its constant effort to manipulate, control, produce, denote and restructure life.

6. Foucault, M., *History of Sexuality 1. An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990, p. 135.

7. This element constitutes one of the major contributions of Foucault's understanding of how power functions in contemporary societies. According to the French philosopher, power cannot be understood as centralised and possessed by one entity/party/state as in the previous post-Enlightenment formulations, but it becomes a technology. For a brief summary of Foucault's key ideas see: Lechte, J., *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers. From Structuralism to Post-Humanism*. Abington: Routledge, 2008.

According to this explanation the interaction and intermingling of power and knowledge can be read as the source of *normativity* or of a set of rules and practices in which the subject is constituted, a network of power/knowledge relations inside which one can think him/herself as subject and can act and operate. If this new form of power upon life coincides with our notion of *normativity*, his further argument about power dynamics will constitute the essential element of my bio-political reading of monstrosity and female vampirism in Stoker's masterpiece.

In *The History of Sexuality* vol. 1 one reads:

one would have to speak of the concept of bio-power to designate what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of specific calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life. It is not that life has been totally integrated into techniques that govern and administer it; it constantly escapes them.⁸

What Foucault suggests is that discursive practices and power/knowledge technologies are incapable of creating a 'normative subject' totally submitted and altogether accountable for. Therefore, the historically plural manifestations of monstrosity would be a literary expression of the life resistance to this will to control, organise and regulate life.

Using this prism, I will try, in the following chapter, to present Lucy, Mina and even Dracula himself as characters that break away from the hegemonic discourse on femininity, female subjectivity and reproductive sexuality that dominated the British imagination at the end of the nineteenth century and I will picture them as transfigured subjects and '*bodies in resistance*' to *normativity*.

In this respect, if we look closely at Lucy, the female that turns into a vampire monster by the middle of the novel, she reveals the oppressive technologies and power/knowledge devices through which Victorian Britain constituted female subjects and, at the same time, she shows how a resistance to those same practices can be articulated through sexuality which for Foucault lays at the centre of the definition of the modern subject.⁹

As we will appreciate, her fall is deeply related to her inability to understand gender roles as they have been defined by a plurality of intertwined discourses at that time. In the context of a *normalized* sexual life –the life of a standard middle class heterosexual

8. Foucault, M., *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, p.143.

9. Ibidem.

family– she is suddenly perceived as an element of chaos and insubordination to the norm. Her sexual energy can be considered the cause of her malady: in fact, she has turned into a predator as dangerous as Dracula himself but her objects of desire are young children that cannot confront/defeat this alluring ‘Bloofer Lady’.

Being a child eater, *Lucy Monster* appears once more as the symbolic challenge to heterosexual Victorian idealised woman. Furthermore, being a hysterical body and a potentially homosexual subject when alive, her transformation into a monster is achieved thanks to a mirror-image-effect. She will become the negative *alter ego* of Victorian femininity and what had been a perverted sexual orientation turns into a predatory nature that can only be understood on the grounds of *Radical Otherness*. Instead of being a nourishing Mother, Lucy will be characterised as a devouring creature that preys on children to give way to that abnormal instinct that should have been controlled by heterosexual institutions (family).

According to Foucault’s interpretation, our cultural fascination with monsters as the symbolic manifestation of what is difficult to apprehend and to domesticate and, simultaneously, what threatens social and political order has been the core of most contemporary theorising on monstrosity in the field of cultural studies. The monster would represent the radical figure of marginality, a kind of limit case that can be understood as the epistemological device through which the construction of deviance and, simultaneously, of ‘the norm’ becomes possible.

For the French philosopher then, (hetero)sexuality constitutes one of the various grounds for defining men/women as subjects. As feminism has shown, our notion of womanhood discloses the strong link between heterosexuality and its norms as the foundation upon ideas about which it can be thought. ‘Woman’ as a sex/gender category has value just in the context of heterosexual and patriarchal norms and discourse. Following this line of reasoning, lesbian sexual orientation and freedom from heterosexuality and from the institutions that allow men’s control and discipline of the female social body (named the family and the household of the patriarch) allow non-heterosexual women to enjoy another space of socialisation virtually free of power struggles that are somehow implicit in the ‘war between the sexes’.

According to this theoretical understanding of sex/gender and social relations (discourse/bio-power and life’s resistance in Foucaultian terms) lesbians constitute themselves as ‘monsters’ in relation to sexual norms and sexual reproductive imperative that dominate patriarchy. The term monster acquires here a double meaning: on one hand it represents a figure that ‘shows’ the limits of sexual norms and the strategies through which the modern sexual subject is created and, on the other, it constitutes a focus of resistance to those very norms. Foucault’s grasp on the complex interplay

between power and knowledge appears here particularly useful to theorise how, in the symbolic realm, the lesbian body/subject is generated/described as a catalyst of terror and female non-reproductive sexuality is pictured as a threat (Lucy preys on children) for the rest of the population. In Cohen's words: 'The monster embodies those sexual practices that must not be committed, or that may be committed only through the body of the monster... The monster enforces the cultural codes that regulate sexual desire'¹⁰.

Thanks to Foucault's vision on how resistance can be articulated, we can appreciate how lesbian sexuality and the lesbian subject that in the narrative crosses over to the *monstrous* were perceived simultaneously as an attractive (her flirtatious nature will win her three suitors) and a dangerous element society had to deal with and constantly try to repress.

TURNER'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEBATE

Having reflected upon Foucaultian bio-politics as a theoretical model that appears particularly useful to explore monsters as cultural metaphors, as 'secondary bodies through which the possibilities of other genders, other sexual practices, and other social customs'¹¹ can emerge and challenge normative and hegemonic discourses and practices, I would like to suggest that *liminality* as Turner has theorised it in most of his academic work, can be as useful or even constitutes a complementary paradigm to understand and navigate contemporary monstrosity in its multilayered forms.

In order to be able to understand Turner's relevance in the field of social anthropology and the impact of his theorizing of *liminality* we need to trace his contribution back to van Gennep's understanding of *rites of passage* as it emerges in his work of 1909.

Van Gennep, a French anthropologist that has developed the bases for a systematic analysis of social structure and change, has pointed out in his seminal work that human lives are characterised by transitions from a place we legitimately occupy in society to another and that these very transitions mark our lives as humans belonging to organised communities since the moment we enter the world till the second we exit it through death. These transitions are made possible by rituals that, in order to favour social stability, promote regulated change. Our belonging to a social class or a particular

10. Cohen, J. J. (Ed.), *Monster Theory. Reading Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 14.

11. Ibidem, p. 18.

‘society’ –status– is marked by these very rituals that account for a variety of phenomena such as birth, puberty, marriage and death. Each passage from one status to another is guaranteed by a communal transition that allows individuals to be expelled from one symbolic place (the new born, the unmarried girl, the aging lady, the lifeless corpse) to be then reintegrated into another. In short, according to van Gennep, social structure is maintained through the regulated integration of chaos and change into our ritualised daily life and the ordered chaos of transition is guaranteed by several rites of passage. In his own words:

Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a man’s life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings: birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood [...] For every one of these events there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to one which is equally well defined.¹²

In fewer words, rituals accompany any transition: the shift from a symbolic place to another, from status to status, from one social position to another and from one age group to another that enjoys specific rights and is defined coherently according to the social structure as a whole.

Each innovation and change –perceived as part of the ‘natural’ evolution of beings and of the community they belong to¹³– could only be acknowledged thanks to rituals, both in ‘primitive’ and/or in ‘more complex’ societies; Van Gennep states that one of the major differences between one context and the other is that ‘primitive’ societies tend to be a lot more ‘attached’ to ritual processes than modern ones.

The relevance of his contribution to our understanding of society and its cultural strategies and devices to deal with change has been heavily recognised.

‘*Rites of passage*’ has marked the shift from a biologist paradigm that understood the different moments of entering or exiting social communities as ‘natural facts’ (birth and death as part of the biological life of beings common to animals and men both) to a mode

12. Van Gennep, A., *Rites of Passage*. London: Routledge, 2004, p. 3.

13. ‘In this respect, man’s life, resembles nature from which neither the individual nor the society stands independent. The universe itself is governed by a periodicity which has repercussions on human life, with stages and transitions, movements forward, and periods of relative inactivity’. Van Gennep, A., *Rites of Passage*, p. 3.

of enquiry of social structures and communities that stresses the importance of cultural formations and rituals in shaping our biological lives. According to van Gennep then and to more recent social anthropology 'coming to being' and being part of a human community is the result of a biological fact shaped into a particular form of cultural life. The lack of rituals and devices that each society has formulated to deal with change and chaos could implicitly lead to barbarism or destruction of a social formation. In this respect we can say that biology and natural facts dissolve in a culturally constructed time. Thanks to rituals we understand and integrate natural facts into social order.

Van Gennep divides rites of passage into a three-folded structure: rites of separation, rites of margin and rites of aggregation. For our purpose here, we will focus our attention exclusively on 'rites of margin' –also named *liminal rites*¹⁴– as they have been theorised by Victor Turner, one of the major interpreters of van Gennep in the Anglo-Saxon anthropological tradition. According to the British anthropologist, *rites of passage* can also be described as markers of human cultural time:

Human cultural time, which is history, can only proceed meaningfully by generating, by cultural facts, rituals and other genres of cultural performance, which deny quotidian systems of measuring or reckoning the passage of time any existential grounding.¹⁵

Turner, who has been particularly influential in the field of cultural critique and in the academic anthropological debates of the fifties and sixties, explores in great detail van Gennep's contribution on the importance of the interplay between structure and chaos in maintaining a dynamic social environment. The main part of his theoretic work has been focused on exploring in particular the moments and spaces in which the initiate loses his original bonds with a particular status, sector or occupation and moves to another, becoming somehow, for a limited length of time at least, a signifier of chaos and confusion. The ritual, in the transitional phase, helps the initiate to abandon his position and to form his new identity and status.

In *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure*, Turner points out that:

The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* (threshold people) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or

14. Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, p. 25.

15. Turner, V., «Images of Anti-Temporality: An Essay in the Anthropology of Experience», *The Harvard Theological Review* 75, N. 2 (Apr.), pp. 243-265.

slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.¹⁶

Liminality can be therefore understood as an ambiguous 'mode of being' thanks to which society is capable of regenerating and transforming itself, incorporating chaos and change to ritualized practices.

Liminal figures live in a 'space' that is not easily defined. In Turner's analysis that space would be a ritual one, a moment in time during which the separation between individuals and society is visible and the breaking of norms and restrictions is allowed in order to strengthen that very social formation. In this regard, liminal personae are essential to order despite the fact that their presence has to be constantly repressed given the threat that they represent. Their very existence guarantees that society can perceive and represent itself as stable both on account of the cathartic function of rituals, with their wide range of undefined possibilities, and due to the ability to re-group liminal figures into a higher group or status, to assert order over chaos. They are liminal because metaphorically they can 'transit' the ritual zone and re-appear in a predictable and prescribed position.

In a deconstructionist guise, we could easily argue that the invisibility/marginality of liminal 'passengers' constitutes the core of society and its norm in the sense that, through liminality, chaos is controlled and progress (both in status and organization) is made possible.

What seems to prevail, after examining Turner's work, is the dialectic relation between chaos and order and the essential role that liminal figures play in maintaining order. Victor Turner prefers speaking about structure instead of order but the picture he draws bear a close resemblance to an unstable and disorganized limen of time that opposes itself or is constructed ritualistically in contrast to an ordered and stable setting.

In my understanding, the 'liminal actor' is characterised by ambiguity as much as the monster. Both figures appear to be cultural devices destined to preserve society as we know it.

As I have shown, the monster appears to warn us against infractions or to show on the body the results of an infraction already committed. The monster seems to be nourished

16. Turner, V., *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1969, p. 95.

by possibilities; it lacks substance and its coming into being is heavily determined by the context as if it were the result of an evocation as in old tales: not here nor there but always potentially present. As Foucault has so clearly identified, bio-politics cannot fully control life and the life impulse to resist normativity (power/knowledge) can be thought of as constantly manifesting itself in this complex interplay of forces, discourses and social practices. In this very possibility of the emergence of a destabilising force –that acquire the features of the monstrous as a mark of the will to resist and change– lays its ability to generate terror and horror.

On the other hand, we can argue that liminal figures are also constantly present because, at least in Turner's understanding, social structure, in order to preserve itself, nourishes ambiguity as the potential ritual space and time where individuals can re-order or re-orient their sense of belonging. This impulse to resist and change, to break free of social bonds and limitations can express itself in the ritual and through the ritual annihilate the potential threat that it would represent if merely repressed.¹⁷

According to Turner, each society has 'nodes of affliction' that in the Victorian case or the indigenous Haitian response to American invasion can be read as the emergence of new sexualities and identities that needed to be released in order to smooth frictions between people and allow the body politics to work properly. On one hand, as I will described in the second chapter, the vampire will appear both as a manifestation of homoeroticism and a new form of femininity or as new political subjects that were claiming visibility and civil rights; on the other hand, new Creole and African-Caribbean identities struggling with the Africanist and Orientalist discursive legacies where claiming a new political space from which they could establish their right to autonomy. Liminal periods in rituals (and liminal periods as 'crisis period' in Victorian and colonial histories of the Anglo-American empires) constitute themselves as the times when those tensions are resolved and impulses that seem to constantly operate on a conscious or subconscious level can be expressed and reconciled.

The power of liminality is to be found in its release from normal constraints, making possible the deconstruction of the normal constructs of common

17. This coincides with the interpretation that has been offered traditionally by anthropologists to the complex interplay of oppressive social structure and disruptive forces that need to be integrated to maintain social order. A clear example of this reading is provided by De Martino, an Italian anthropologist particularly influential for his masterpiece on rural rituals and cults such as the Taranta as it is constructed and manifests itself in Puglia, southern Italy. De Martino, E., *La terra del rimorso. Contributo a una storia religiosa del Sud*, Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1961.

sense, ordinary objects are transformed into novel creations, some of them bizarre to the point of monstrosity.¹⁸

Monsters, as products of our imagination, and 'passengers', as individuals belonging to an organised society in transition, seem to be dialogically constituted around and against social norms and practices.

In both cases, they lack essences; they are not conceivable as 'ontological entities' since they appear totally relational: they both depend and act against social structures that, historically and symbolically, articulate them.

Monsters and power/knowledge as much as liminal figures and social structures are mutually dependent. Liminality in Turner's work could be the ground on which we can think subjectivities that are transitionally navigating between and betwixt structures and that have a huge potential for deconstruction and change:

Liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility, whence novel configuration of ideas and relations may arise.¹⁹

In a way, the constant presence of monsters as much as the 'structural' presence of liminal rites as they can be found both in oral history and anthropological works attest the interdependence of human societies and their monstrous/liminal creations.

I find myself able to justify the connection between monstrosity, 'life resistance' and sexuality in Foucaultian terms because the vampire's appeal, according to feminist readings of the phenomenon, has traditionally been interpreted as the clear countercultural resistance to *heterosexuality as a political regime*²⁰. Some have even argued that the very figure of Dracula, in Stoker's interpretation of a common folkloric *topos*, appeared as an emblem of homoeroticism that shaped intellectual life and male writers' academic circles at the end of the nineteenth century.²¹

18. Gilmore, D., *Monsters. Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003, p. 20.

19. Turner, V., «Betwixt and Between: the Liminal Period in *Rites of Passage*» in Mahdi, L., Foster, S. and Little, M. (Eds), *Betwixt & Between: Patterns of Masculine and Feminine Initiation*. Illinois: Open Court Publisher, 1987, pp. 3-22, p. 5.

20. Wittig, M., *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1991.

21. Showalter, E., *Sexual Anarchy. Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*. London: Virago Press, 1992.

The figure of the zombie, being a metaphor of otherness conceived and articulated on the ground of skin colour initially seemed a bit more complex to understand as a political 'resistance of life' to power/knowledge. Foucault's mode of interpretation of normativity and 'life resistance' when applied to the figure of the zombie as I will described it in my second chapter, it is not necessarily obvious. The connection between normativity and the zombie emerges when we look at the plurality of ways in which the Human coincides with the white male and therefore skin colour can indeed be read as a mark of resistance to the historical taxonomic effort that has posed no-whites as in-human or anti-human.

It could be argued that monstrosity is indeed a plastic form that has been able to account for a variety of aspects related to human interactions and social norms such as sexual orientation but also, or even more so, gender, race and class. I feel that in the case of race and/or class that play a fundamental role in the symbolic order where vampires and zombies are at odds with normativity and white supremacy, the Foucaultian bio-political model does allow me to think about the phenomenon in depth and, simultaneously, the notion of liminal creatures helps my questioning of their significance in contemporary fiction and their role in promoting 'communitas' in contemporary American Culture. Moreover, liminality can be a very useful 'tool' to understand what vampires and zombies have in common and therefore account for their simultaneous appearances in the *pastiche* creations of Laurell Hamilton.

NOT HERE NOR THERE: VAMPIRES AND ZOMBIES AS 'LIMINAL' CREATURES

Despite variations of the general undead theme, the most obvious element that vampires and zombies have in common would be that both groups of creatures are neither alive nor dead. They seem to exist and reproduce in a limbo, separated from mortals by light and night, desire and dreams and most certainly by their inhuman passion for flesh and blood.

The essential feature of these symbolizations is that the neophytes are neither living nor dead from one aspect, and both living and dead from another.²²

22. Turner, V., «Betwixt and Between: the Liminal Period in *Rites of Passage*», p. 16.

They are neither here nor there and they are both represented through symbols associated with death: the vampire is a 'living corpse' that does not perceive the passing of time and is frozen in an unnatural space between. The dead, instead of naturally abandoning this world, lingers at the margins, forgetting to choose the path to eternity unto another realm. The vampire torments the living and nourishes itself through blood; it is therefore far more conspicuous, far more dangerous and terrifying than the ghost, another popular presence in gothic and neo-gothic narratives, which stays in-between, refusing to transit and coming back, more often than not, to conclude some unfinished business with the living.

The vampire returns from the grave at which it becomes a creature with a greater command over its own dead body. It has the ability to interact with the physical realm that has been denied to ectoplasms and spirits that stay in this world but do not enjoy a body and are therefore unable to *properly* condition human actions. The vampire is a creature of the night; its very presence is 'unnatural' and the night traditionally offers sanctuary to all unnatural beings from demons to ghouls and werewolves:

They have physical not social 'reality', hence they have to be hidden, since it is a paradox, a scandal, to see what ought not to be there.²³

Colour metaphors are forever present in the Anglo-American tradition, as signifiers of Evil: the dark and the night in the vampire canon do not seem to be an exception.²⁴

On the other hand, zombies are dead bodies that putrefy at an unusual rate. They remain to a certain extent able to follow their own instincts and to perform basic actions such as eating and walking. They seem to be moved by a sort of practical rationality: they do not feel, do not think but they do not stop coming back for flesh.²⁵ Far more revolting than the average vampire in contemporary fiction, the zombie disrupts the sacred boundaries between life and death and constitutes a menace to the *unified human body*.

While the vampire seems to have retained a certain appeal, from the sixties onward, due to a certain beauty, related to his own exotic presence as the Other coming from the limits of the Empire, the rotting body (completely marginal to the erotic western imagination) marks the entrance of ugliness and disgust in the literary scene. If the

23. Turner, V., «Betwixt and Between: the Liminal Period in *Rites of Passage*», p. 18.

24. Teti, V., *La melanconia del vampiro. Mito, storia, immaginario*. Roma: ManifestoLibri, 1994.

25. Gilmore, D., *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors*, p. 113. The anthropologist states that, according to anthropological research, 'all the New World monsters are violent cannibals'. In this respect the zombie, as an all-American artefact, is not exception to the rule.

body of the vampire can still be represented as familiar despite its otherness due to his being a unified self, the zombie suggests a continuum between life and death where putrefaction represents the anatomical and organic base on which western imagination can project bare revulsion.

Both are monstrous creatures but while vampires appeal to our erotic fantasies and help us break sexual restraints,

Neophytes are sometimes treated or symbolically represented as being neither male or female [...] Since sex distinctions are an important component of structural status, in a structureless realm they do not apply.²⁶

zombies are constructed as symbols of degeneration and reminders of the ugliness of our own 'finitude'. While the vampire refers to a fantasy of transcendence in which we can escape death and retain our own bodies, the zombie helps our remembering that our bodies will eventually rot away no matter what we do to them or with them.

In both cases we face the meltdown of barriers between worlds but vampires have acquired, through the centuries, glamour while zombies remain living, smelling and decomposing animated corpses.

Nevertheless, if we think about vampires and zombies as liminal figures we are able to account for a vast number of characteristics deeply related to an *economy of death* and that make us perceive them as monstrous beings.

They are at once no longer classified and not yet classified. In so far as they are no longer classified, the symbols that represent them are, in many societies, drawn from the biology of death, decomposition, catabolism and other physical processes that have a negative tinge.²⁷

Despite their different historical trajectories, both creatures are clearly defined by their ability to evoke fear because 'monsters embody all that is dangerous and horrible in the human imagination'²⁸.

Moreover, liminal creatures associated with death seem to evoke a rather peculiar fear; on one hand the vampire and the zombie play with the idea of dead people coming

26. Turner, V., «Betwixt and Between: the Liminal Period in *Rites of Passage*», p. 49.

27. Ibidem, p. 48.

28. Gilmore, D., *Monsters: Evil Beings*, p. 1.

back to the living as an abomination and the disruption of a natural, cosmic order, on the other they seem to represent symbolically a deeper fear of contagion and infection. Kristeva, in her exploration of abjection, refers to this deep horror saying that the corpse 'is the most sickening of wastes'²⁹. It is 'the utmost of abjection... death infecting life'³⁰ and in this case the corpse of Dracula unattended, lying in an unburied coffin in the middle of a Victorian city or the zombie decaying and progressively putrefying show how easily infection can spill over into life.

In both narratives what is at stake is social safety and society as such; following this line of reasoning vampires and zombies threaten western civilization morally but, at the same time, their presence seems to be a lot more problematic. What is threatened here is the very existence of society as such. These newborn monsters –at least as they appear in the first narratives of the nineteenth century– constitute a biological menace. They put into question the very possibility of our species' reproduction through contagion.

To conclude I want to highlight that Foucault's interpretation of abnormal individuals and the various forms in which they have been historically represented seem to coincide with the way in which contemporary monsters appear in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, a threat to normativity and, in Anita Blake's narrative, a *locus* to imagine another possibility for communality.³¹

PROVISIONAL CONCLUSIONS ON MONSTROSITY

In her work *Madri, Mostri e Macchine* Braidotti highlights how the monster constitutes a 'difficult' object of scientific study due to its plasticity and its polysemic nature.³² In this chapter I have claimed that Foucault and Turner provided valid epistemological modes of interpretation of monstrous creatures that can account for the numerous and contradictory elements that constitute their figurations.

29. Kristeva, J., *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992, p. 3.

30. Ibidem, p. 4.

31. I have used the term 'communality' in reference to Turner's notion of *communitas*. The anthropologist defines *communitas* as the dialectical opposite of society; in *communitas* people experience an intense feeling of being together and a sense of belonging that helps society to renew itself. Turner, V., *The Ritual Process*, pp. 94-130.

32. Braidotti, R., *Madri, Mostri e Macchine*. Roma: ManifestoLibri, 2005. 'Disponiamo di resoconti medici sui mostri sin dal XVIII secolo, eppure penso che sia difficile parlare di un vero discorso scientifico in proposito [...] Significativa è la simultaneità di discorsi potenzialmente contraddittori sui mostri. Significativa e appropriata. Perché essere significativo e allo stesso tempo portatore di significati potenzialmente contraddittori è esattamente ciò che si suppone che debba fare il mostro', p. 109.

Foucault claims that monstrous apparitions have been historically interpreted as signs of the disruption of symbolic orders. According to the philosopher, contemporary monstrosity represents a challenge to our political and moral paradigms. I have argued that his notion of power/knowledge technologies as constituents of modern subjectivities and his emphasis on 'life's resistance' to these very technologies can be seen as a useful tool to read nineteenth century fiction. Foucault suggests that the monster shows the limits of *normativity* and that the monster emerges in oppositions to socially accepted norms and hegemonic discourses.

Furthermore, in order to articulate my critique of vampires and zombies, I have explored the notion of liminality as it appears in Turner's studies of ritual processes. According to Turner, liminality can be described as an ambiguous 'mode of being' thanks to which society is capable of regenerating and transforming itself, incorporating chaos and change to ritualized practices. Both readings highlight how monsters must not be conceived as ontological 'entities' since they are created and can survive in dialogical relations to prescribed sets of norms and practices in any given moment. They act and depend upon social structures and they have to be considered as symbolic effects and forms of resistance to those very structures.

In other words, I have claimed that the monster represents a paradox. In fact, it *shows* the limits of normativity by representing a site of resistance. The monster, operating from the margins of a culturally coded community, helps defining its own inclusive/exclusive potential. At the same time, the monster is the figuration through which *communitas* emerge; therefore it appears clearly duplicitous and ambiguous. In fact, it marks a landscape in which difference emerges. Zombies and vampires as liminal creatures are rejected but we cannot part from them because they reveal the ground on which our notion of the Human stands and indicate an imaginary landmark on which that very notion is transformed and redefine to include 'Others'. Paraphrasing Braidotti once more, the monster represents both the symptom of the crisis of dominant subjectivities and the altogether new subject-positions that so clearly emerged and conquer the popular imagination between the nineteenth and the twentieth century.³³

33. Braidotti, R., *Metamorphoses. Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*. London: Polity Press, 2002, p. 175.

CHAPTER TWO

GENEALOGY OF DESIRE

In this chapter I will introduce one of the mythical/liminal figures that dominates Anita Blake's narratives, namely the vampire, in order to start framing my investigation of Laurell Hamilton's paranormal fantasy novels and her original contribution to the vampire genre.

Through a first approximation to late-Victorian literary production, I wish to show how the bloodsucking monster emerged in the course of the nineteenth century as a response to the challenges posed by the problematic and simultaneously fascinating encounter with a number of external/internal Others in the context of the colonial experience.

In this chapter, I will deal with the figure of the vampire as it appears in Bram Stoker's novel in 1897, an artefact that represents the leap of the horrifying creature from folklore to the printed page.

Critics of the genre have offered a variety of interpretations but the psychoanalytical one has revealed itself to be the most influential one. I will therefore summarise it very briefly. The critics have focused on a psychodynamic model that stressed the relevance of fear, of the unconscious and the repressed in the creation of the vampire canon concentrating their attention on the theme of sexuality and perverted desire that dominated cinematographic adaptations of the late twentieth century.¹

According to this first reading, *Dracula* can be interpreted as the literary manifestation of the ancestral fear of incest and an expression of uncontrolled, pre-social and chaotic

1. A classic reading of the vampire monster from a psychoanalytical perspective is: Creed, B., *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, 1993.

forms of deep sexual drives.² The need to reinforce sexual mores in the context of socioeconomic changes and exogamic coupling would be the root of *Dracula*'s success as a pulp, two-penny novel. Moreover, according to a strict Freudian interpretation of polymorphous desires as expressions of the pre-social, Dracula constitutes the archetype of a Patriarch that is simultaneously the Father and the Brother of the female members of the human species.³ The vampire then violates the prohibition of the incest that has been considered the turning moment that established a shift from Nature to Culture, from the domain of the 'primitive' to the domain of the 'civilised' and the fight against it would be a struggle to preserve civilization as we know it. Embracing this reading of vampirism, feminist critics have suspended the novel in an historical and cultural void in which socioeconomic and cultural struggles implicit in the production of artefacts have been dissolved into an a-temporal dimension.

I suggest that there is an alternative reading of the vampire that seems much more profitable to understand the shifts in meanings and the different adaptations of the vampire figure through time. If we approach the issue from a postcolonial perspective, the creature appears as a figuration of Otherness that was strategically employed to re-define an ideal Self.⁴ As a matter of fact, this contribution to the critical (re)thinking of the genre would be much more fructiferous thanks to its emphasis on the notion of Otherness/Sameness as two poles of a mutually/dialogically constructed equation that can better account for the historical transformations that have invested its figuration. The growth of press capitalism, the progressive homogenisation of values and ideas that accompanied the emergence of middle-class hegemony and the first appearance in the public scene of feminism and working class movements in response to the growing number of people integrated in economic and social modernity are key elements to root this literary production in the context of colonial decadence. Accordingly, if one situates the emergence of the vampire canon at the crossroad between all these conflicting forces one can appreciate how *Dracula* allows to reflect on the (ethnographic) creation of Otherness and, at the same time, can help to dive into the popular imagination, specifically into the association that the middle class public traced between Otherness and the Uncanny.⁵

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2. Two classic readings that have set the bases for a psychodynamic approach to the novel are: Bentley, C. F., «The Monster in the Bedroom: Sexual Symbolism in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*», *Literature and Psychology*, 22 (1972), pp. 27-34 and Roth, P. A., «Suddenly Sexual Women in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*», *Literature and Psychology*, 27 (1977), pp. 113-21.
 3. Stevenson, J. A. offers a more recent contribution to the psychoanalytical reading of vampirism in «A Vampire in the Mirror: the Sexuality of *Dracula*», *PMLA*, vol. 103, No. 2 (March, 1988), pp. 139-149.
 4. 'It also tries to show that European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self.' In Said, E., *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books Editions, 1979, p. 21.
 5. Freud, S., *Il perturbante*. Roma: Theoria, 1984.

To illustrate my point, I will start by recalling some moments in the novel that set the tone of the narrative as a journey into the 'wild' and that in turn mark the entrance of Dracula on stage. I will then show how the notion of Otherness controls the whole narrative and analyse the specific forms in which Stoker portrayed his creature as a source of dread. I will then turn to the vampire's female victims and disclose how they are both presented as marginal subjects that fall prey of Dracula in a moment in which the Empire was experiencing a certain degree of instability.⁶ In the reading I will provide Lucy and Mina are associated to the notion of 'female malady' and professionalism respectively.

Through a close analysis of Stoker's masterpiece I wish to illuminate how the notion of the Monster works here as a double-edged device: to create the Other as a projected, mirror image of Victorian worst fears and to model an ideal Self incarnated in a Western, middle class (average) white man, an emblematic hero who fights to free the land from danger embodied in a monster and its dreadful offspring.

DRACULA: NOTES ON THE IMPERIAL CONSTRUCTION OF OTHERNESS

Teti's interpretation of the vampire figure –both in folklore and in the Anglo-Saxon literary tradition– constitutes a good starting point for my reflection of the genre's *topoi*. As the anthropologist has shown, the genealogy of the folkloric vampire is quite old.⁷ Nevertheless, the literary inclusion of the creature in the pantheon of British figuration of the monstrous transforms it significantly; from a brutal beast totally in-human, Stoker's vampire re-appears as a *fin de siècle revenant* who disturbs, spreads contagion and kills the living. Dracula has to be understood as one of the literary re-interpretations of the dead that preys on the innocent that played such a big part in the folkloric tradition of Central and Eastern Europe before the Lights but it is less distant from a recognisable human being. In fact, while in traditional and 'primitive' societies the vampire constitutes an archetypal monster that threatens social order through blood consumption and extreme violence against defenceless populations, in the literary

6. 'The decay of British global influence, the loss of overseas markets for British goods, the economic and political rise of Germany and the United States, the increasing unrest in British colonies and possessions, the growing domestic uneasiness over the morality of imperialism, all combined to erode Victorian confidence in the inevitability of British progress and hegemony. Late-Victorian fiction in particular is saturated with the sense that the entire nation - as a race of people, as a political and imperial force, as a social and cultural power - was in irretrievable decline.' So clearly summarised by Arata, S. D., «The Occidental Tourist: "Dracula" and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization», *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Summer, 1990), pp. 621-645, p. 622.

7. Teti, V., *La melanconia del Vampiro*.

world the vampire appears as a much more complex metaphor. In Teti's contribution to the study of the vampire, its popularisation as a figure of terror is described as the result of the progressive erosion and disappearance of a world in agony that fights against Modern Reason to preserve a cosmogony in which the monster, above all the witch, was to account for death, illness and periodic famines. The vampire allows for the creation of a new symbolic order in which the agonising of the old and the painful affirmation of the new merge to create a very powerful symbol in which elements of Evil, the Devil, the stranger, the exiled, the seducer and the lover combined into one narrative. In other words, the vampire represents a unique and unrepeatable 'phenomenon' that has marked the decline of millenarian traditions and the dawn of the Modern Era that wished to remove fear, darkness and ignorance from the (European) human experience. Stoker succeeded to the extent of offering a metamorphosed creature that, as the reader will see, occupies a much more ambiguous position; the vampire survives in a territory between horrid fear and titillating attraction.

Looking at the text for clues, I should start with Mr Harker's journey to the East. As a matter of fact, *Dracula* starts with Jonathan Harker's long journey to Transylvania, a far away territory that lies at the crossroad of a number of countries. Due to the progressive erosion of the Ottoman Empire, this part of the globe was suffering constant unrest and interethnic conflicts.⁸ The young solicitor has been appointed by a London firm to offer Dracula, a powerful Count of that land, a variety of properties for sale. From the beginning the journey creates a certain sense of estrangement and confusion, due to the peculiar descriptions of places and a certain sense of bewilderment at differences in landscapes, people and customs that Jonathan reflects upon in his writing. In fact, Stoker's narrative is organised as an epistolary novel in which intimate letters are mixed with fragments of news reports and personal diaries that offer a precious insight into the main characters' minds. In turn, the characters' notes constitute the only source of information the reader has about the Count and, ultimately, a priceless tool to understand Dracula's moves and motives and to frame him as a source of danger and pollution.

The structure of Jonathan Harker's diary evokes the first ethnographic diaries of those anthropologists who during the nineteenth century travelled to Asia and Africa to meet and portrait people that belonged to 'very removed' worlds. The point of departure in both cases –the academic anthropological accounts and the fictional encounters in the diary– is a world of progress, industry and liberal mores/ideas that Jonathan leaves

8. Walker, G. and Wright, L., «Locating Dracula: Contextualising the Geography of Transylvania» in Davidson, C. M. (Ed.), *Bram Stoker's Dracula. Sucking Through the Century, 1897-1997*. Oxford: Dundurn Press, 1997, pp. 49-77.

behind in his quest for economic and professional success. The landscape outside the window is stunning and this Nature, in the East, is Other:

All day long we seemed to dawdle through a country which was full of beauty of every kind. Sometimes we saw little towns or castles on the top of steep hills such as we see in old missals; sometimes we ran by rivers and streams which seemed from the wide stony margin of each side of them to be subject to great floods. It takes a lot of water, and running strong to sweep the outside edge of a river clear.⁹

A land removed in space and cut out in time that evokes strangeness, marvel and an unsettling fear of the unknown has substituted the English countryside with its reassuring combination of controlled wildness and familiarity. The people and the faces of those he encounters on his journey, inspire disbelief in Jonathan and he appears unable to find his bearings:

The strangest figures we saw were the Slovaks, who are more barbarian than the rest, with their big cowboy hats, great baggy dirty-white trousers, white linen shirts, and enormous heavy leather belts, nearly a foot wide, all studded over with brass nails. They wore high boots, with their trousers tucked into them, and had long black hair and heavy black mustaches. [...] They are, however, I am told, very harmless and rather waiting in natural self-assertion.¹⁰

Nevertheless, his reactions to these encounters are quite intelligible for the reader; at the beginning of this 'journey of initiation' the inexperienced man tries to assert that, despite their appearance, the inhabitants of the place are peaceful and that he has nothing to fear from those he does not know, in this place he can hardly 'navigate'. The attempt to create a feeling of security and to appear self-assured are tested when he meets the Count and his brides; from doubts and discomfort, Harker will rapidly move to horror. During his long stay with the Count in the castle, he will eventually experience the same sense of irresistible attraction towards the vampires that will mark Mina's and Lucy's encounter with the creature. While reading the novel, one realises that the contradictory feelings

9. Stoker, B., *Dracula*. London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994, p. 11.

10. Ibidem, p. 11.

that characterise the first few chapters turn into the controlling elements of the whole plot; discomfort, fear and desire are constantly at play.

The notion of the Other as a barbarian renders Dracula a speechless, voiceless creature that can only be apprehended and known through the words, letters and annotations of others. The vampire appears as a '*locus*', a reflection of the anxieties of a decaying imperial society in its problematic encounters with colonial others that start, after the golden age of expansion, to directly oppose the Raj and its economic and political supremacy. Dracula in fact is a silenced character that is spoken of and is symbolically exploited to consolidate an image of the Other as a predator and a pernicious threat to the colonial order. In short, Stoker deals with alterity picturing a disastrous confrontation between a British, trustworthy subject and an imperial, colonised Other that takes the shape of a mute monster that transgresses a number of boundaries, primarily the ones established around the notion of white middle class man as the incarnation of the Human.¹¹

As much as anthropologists in their ethnographic diaries are the creators of a Truth about a silenced Other,¹² the nineteenth century author forges a persistent image of a threatening outsider that will colonise the popular imagination up to the middle of the twentieth century when the vampire will turn into a pop icon, an exotic object of consumption and/or a locus for feminist resistance.

If we attend to Said's reading of Orientalism, the vampire can be understood as an effect, on a literary level, of discursive colonial powers.¹³ On the other hand, taking into consideration postcolonial contributions to the analyses of Orientalism, the difficulties that the Others had in establishing themselves as 'narrative voices' in the context of the imperial imagination give shape to this monster as a voiceless creature.¹⁴ In other words, Dracula, despite his centrality in the narrative, occupies a marginal position for a number of reasons. First of all, as a colonial subject, he does not enjoy a high degree of power in the metropolitan context, despite his heritage and the fear or respect he instils in his servants in his homeland. Moreover, when displaced to the big city, although he has a good command of the imperial language,¹⁵ he appears unable to grasp the set of basic rules that govern 'civilised' socialisation:

11. Braidotti, R., *The Posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity, 2013. Introduction.

12. Clifford, J. and Marcus, J. (Eds.), *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

13. Said, E., *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books Editions, 1979.

14. Spivak, G., «Can the Subaltern Speak?» in Nelson, C. and Grossberg, L. (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988, pp. 271-313.

15. 'A vast number of English books, whole shelves full of them [...] all relating to England and English life and customs and manners. There were even such books of reference as the London Directory, the 'Red' and 'Blue' books, Whitaker's Almanack, the Army and Navy Lists, and [...] the Law List'. Stoker, B., *Dracula*, p. 30.

We are at all times only too happy to meet your wishes. We beg, with regard to the desire of your Lordship, expressed by Mr. Harker on your behalf, to supply the following information concerning the sale and purchase of No. 347, Piccadilly. The original vendors are the executors of the late Mr. Archibald Winter-Suffield. The purchaser is a foreign nobleman, Count de Ville, *who effected the purchase himself paying the purchase money in notes 'over the counter,'* if your Lordship will pardon us using so vulgar an expression...¹⁶

Therefore, as much as the imperial experience of Otherness at the end of the nineteenth century shows, the novel is best characterised for the absence/silence of the main figure that gives it its name.¹⁷ The contemporary reader soon realises that Dracula is never perceived 'objectively' and that his actions are recorded in full details by those who seek his destruction.¹⁸

For the inability to account from a Truth that goes beyond what is recorded in intimate diaries and conversations – a Truth that could not transcend what is already inherent to writing – the characters seduced by the vampire question their own ability to judge and report the sense of their civilizing 'mission'. In fact, at the end of the novel, when the danger has been annihilated, Jonathan will still wonder about the possibility of telling the Truth about his own experience:

We were stuck with the fact, that in all the mass of material of which the record is composed, there is hardly one authentic document; nothing but a mass of typewriting, except the later notebooks of Mina and Seward and myself, and Van Helsing's memorandum. We could hardly ask anyone, even did we wish to, to accept these as proofs of so wild a story.¹⁹

Thanks to this rhetorical device and the strategic usage of an intriguing literary style, at the end of the story the readers wonder about Dracula's existence, his adventures in the metropolis and the (perverted) fantasies of those that promoted a quest for order and purity. In this perspective I claim that the novel's voices appear as hallucinations of a group

16. Stoker, B., *Dracula*, p. 256. Emphasis mine.

17. Said, E., *Orientalism*.

18. Senf, C., «"Dracula": The Unseen Face in the Mirror», *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Fall, 1979), pp. 160-170.

19. Stoker, B., *Dracula*, p. 449.

of men that armed with the most advanced technologies and with an unbreakable faith in God/Good fought to destroy the Evil Other in the guise of a decadent, bloodthirsty Count that lived and operated in the dark. An Other that can be seen as the projection of a negative mirror image of their own perception of themselves.

Following my line of reasoning then, *Dracula* represents an inner journey at the heart of the colonial imagination, an exploration of what it means for late-Victorian Britain to be Human and also a literary effect of contacts with 'monstrous' others that were characterised as inherently threatening. The whole novel appears to address issues related to this very notion, thanks to characters that one way or another strike me as eccentric and bizarre. It is indeed a fantasy journey through the fascinating territory where the Other is 'created', recorded, feared and ultimately destroyed.

Going back to Jonathan's diary, in the first few pages the reader cannot fail to notice the monstrous appearance of the Count that so closely resembles people from 'somewhere else' with whom the West has been in touch for the first time recently²⁰ and to those that have historically been represented as Others –the Jews²¹– in the context of Continental Europe:

Within, stood a tall old man, clean-shaven save for a long white moustache, and clad in black from head to foot, without a single speck of color about him anywhere. [...] holding out his hand grasped mine with a strength which made me wince, an effect which was not lessened by the fact that it seemed as cold as ice- more like the hand of a dead than a living man, [...]²²

I had now an opportunity of observing him, and found him of a very marked physiognomy. His face was a strong, a very strong, aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils, with lofty domed forehead, and hair growing scantily round the temples but profusely elsewhere. His eyebrows were very massive, almost meeting over the nose, and with bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion. The mouth, so far as I could see it under the heavy moustache, was fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth. These protruded over the lips, whose remarkable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality in a man of his years. For the rest, his ears were pale, and at the tops extremely pointed. The

20. Maxwell, A., *Colonial Photography and Exhibitions. Representations of the "Native" and the making of European Identities*. London: Leicester University Press, 1999.

21. Gelder, K., *Reading the Vampire*. London: Routledge, 1994.

22. Stoker, B., *Dracula*, p. 26.

chin was broad and strong, and the cheeks firm though thin. The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor.

Hitherto I had noticed the backs of his hands as they lay on his knees in the firelight, and they had seemed rather white and fine. But seeing them now close to me, I could not but notice that they were rather coarse, broad, with squat fingers. Strange to say, there were hairs in the centre of the palm. The nails were long and fine, and cut to a sharp point. As the Count leaned over me and his hands touched me, I could not repress a shudder. It may have been that his breath was rank, but a horrible feeling of nausea came over me, which, do what I would, I could not conceal.²³

In the following part of the novel, when the vampire has already established himself in metropolitan London, his look and appearance does create the same sense of estrangement. Despite his desire to mime the styles and customs of his surroundings, the vampire is substantially unable to fit in. His clothes, his accent and his walk all reveal that he does not belong; moreover, these details scattered along the pages are used to comfort the reader about the possibility of detecting the insidious, foreign creature. The narrator seems to suggest that the perverted Other can trick us when we pay no attention to detail. The Other cannot have a good command over the cultural codes of the place he chooses to thrive on, since this very place (the metropolis) is ontologically superior to his native land.²⁴

Dracula's Landscape: 'Fossils' and 'Shadows'

In other words, Dracula as a native/primitive other appears as the literary manifestation of what Sundar Sarukkai describes as a 'fossil notion of the Other'.²⁵ According to this reading, a society reinforces its own perceived superiority with the creation of scientific discursive practices and interprets different social formations as irrefutable proofs of that

23. Ibidem, pp. 28-29.

24. This idea is amply explored by Said. He states that Arabs and people from the East 'are presented in the imagery of static [...] and neither as creatures with a potential in the process of being realized nor as history being made.' In this respect, the London, in the novel, is discursively represented as the land of progress and potentiality while the East and its inhabitants are destined to live out of time, crystallised in their own underdevelopment. Said, E., *Orientalism*, p. 294.

25. Sarukkai, S., «The 'Other' in Anthropology and Philosophy», *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 32, No. 24 (Jun. 14-20, 1997), pp. 1406-1409. 'In the discourse on progress, development and rationality which had become characteristic of the west as described by themselves. The search for the basic human condition gave rise to the fossil other. [...] Thus, the idea of the non-western people as the living fossil drew support from the historical and biological theories of the times', p. 1406.

very superiority. The 'contemporary' Other would be the living demonstration of that superiority in time (primitive societies versus modern ones) and space (underdeveloped others that exist here, now *but* somewhere else). As already mentioned, this notion of hierarchically organized alterity that is constructed from a Western 'I' –theorized as superior– invests in both dimensions and links the notion of superiority with the present, effectively legitimizing colonial domination and exploitation.

Therefore, the relationship between the 'I' and the 'Other' remits to an '*ideal type*' that the West promotes of itself with an equally idealized and coherent (degenerated) image of the Other/Orient, revealing that the encounter is inevitably mediated, appropriated and understood in relation to a Self that enjoys a strategically superior power position. Such a notion of mutually constructed types (the West and its Others) has been successfully and brilliantly explored by Said in his famous *Orientalism*, a concept that allowed the author to refer to an entire *discourse* through which the Orient was apprehended and represented during the eighteenth and nineteenth century colonial enterprise.²⁶ Positioning representation at the core of his analysis, Said stresses the need to approach the cultural production of that particular moment as a political matter and defies any interpretation that attributes essential qualities or characteristics to the so called West/East.²⁷ According to Said then, the enormous historical effort of Western intellectuals to understand the East, has to be recognised as an attempt to invent an-Other that did not exist prior to this very effort.

As a result, the progressive ordering, classification and labeling of a plurality of aspects under the headings of race, religion, customs and language has allowed the consolidation of a discourse that opposed a superior West, civilized, enlightened and rational to an inferior Other, barbaric, underdeveloped and fossilized in a 'natural state of development'.²⁸

Dracula, written in the historical setting of the decline of England as the major international Great Power, represents a key example –in the literary field– of this

26. Said, E., *Orientalism*: "Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient–dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient... My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage –and even produce– the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period", p. 20.

27. Said challenges most of the academic works produced in England and France during the eighteen/nineteenth century by the so called 'Orientalists', intellectuals as famous as René Guénon that dedicated most of their lives to the study of oriental doctrines and religions.

28. Different strategies that controlled the creation of imperial dominions are explored by Anderson, B., *Comunità immaginate. Origine e diffusione dei nazionalismi*. Roma: Manifesto Libri, 1996. On religion as a central empirical taxonomy and so central to the development of Stoker's narrative: Young, R., *Orientalism and Religion. Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'*. London: Routledge, 1999.

process of westernization/orientalisation and, simultaneously, a ground-breaking attempt to picture the foreigner as a monster that will bring death and destruction to the Motherland.²⁹

Once more Jonathan's diary constitutes a useful source to give voice to the unsettling fear of the Eastern Other:

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

The very thought drove me mad. A terrible desire came upon me to rid the world of such a monster.³⁰

In other words, the progressive decline of England's political power on the international scene manifests itself symbolically through an increasing anxiety towards the Other as a potential invader, an 'Imperial Object' that, thanks to the rupture of hegemonic relations of power, turns into the Subject of 'reversed colonialism':

The colonizer finds himself in the position of the colonized, the exploiter becomes exploited, the victimizer victimized. Such fears are linked to a perceived decline – racial, moral, spiritual – which makes the nation vulnerable to attack from more vigorous, "primitive" peoples.³¹

Despite the fact that Said's interpretation might be considered dated, his emphasis on the elements that allow a dialogical reading of the phenomenon still appears extremely fruitful to understand the object of the present study.

The concept of Orientalism that I have disclosed above, resembles the notion of Shadow, 'the repressed side of the personality, often experienced as negative'³² that marks out

29. Some of the topics explored in *Dracula* are already present in *Carmilla*, a female-vampire novel written by Le Fanu in 1872. I have personally chosen *Dracula* instead of *Carmilla* for its wider success to establish a prototypical image of the vampire as male and foreign that still dominates both literary and cinematic production.

30. Stoker, B., *Dracula*, p. 75-76.

31. Arata, S. D., «The Occidental Tourist: "Dracula" and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization», p. 623.

32. Wehr, D., «Jung, Carl Gustav» in Wright, E. (Eds.), *Feminism and Psychoanalysis. A Critical Dictionary*. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992, pp. 188-190.

the Jungian psychoanalytical approach to psychodynamic theorising. In other words, according to Jung, the Shadow would be that part of ourselves that we abjure or we try to suppress and hide because it operates against that which we perceived as our *true* selves or against social norms that we have interiorised as legitimate.

The shadow represents qualities, unknown or little known attributes of both individual and collective egos. When we explore our own shadow we become aware (often with shame) of those qualities and impulses that we deny in ourselves but that we can clearly see in other people.³³

My interest lies in the social dimension of the Shadow, the collective ideal type that is the result of discursive practices and institutions that regulated the lives of individuals belonging to the community and forged those very subjects. From this perspective, those characteristics that conform the public notion of the modern West (liberal, progressive, secular, egalitarian and guarantor of freedom) define the Orient as an alter-ego on which the opposed qualities can be projected. The nature of the nineteenth century 'scientific' discourse on the Other hides this particular dichotomy and allows for the hierarchical articulation of differences as if they were ontological ones. In other words, as Veronica Hollinger emphasises, Dracula 'in its role of evil Other, necessarily guarantees the presence of the Good'.³⁴

As much as these notions of Orientalism and the Shadow has been essential to apprehend the vampire as a figure of terror because of its implication with radical Otherness, it becomes useful when considering the two female characters of the novel: Lucy and Mina. The female heroines constitute key pieces in the analysis of social evils and collective fear directed towards female sexuality and women's role in a rapidly changing and declining society. In the following pages, I will focus my attention on the way in which Lucy is constructed in the novel. I will illuminate how certain traits of her personality are heavily in debt with the nineteenth century notion of female hysteria and I will then concentrate my attention on how the author deals in the text with such an eccentric, difficult young lady.

33. Definition provided by Carl Jung in 1916 at a conference of Analytical Psychology that will be further articulated years later in his work on the Self and the Unconscious. Online: <http://humanismoyconectividad.wordpress.com/2007/09/03/la-sombra-de-jung-en-las-organizaciones/>. For further exploration: Zweig, C., and Abrams, J., *Encuentro con la sombra. El poder del lado oscuro de la naturaleza humana*. Barcelona: Kairós, 1994.

34. Hollinger, V., «Fantasies of Absence: the Postmodern Vampire», in Hollinger, V. (Ed.), *Blood Read. The Vampire as Metaphor of Contemporary Culture*. Philadelphia: Penn, 1997, p. 202.

LUCY WESTERNA OR THE FEMALE MALADY

Bram Stoker introduces Lucy quite early on in the novel. She writes a letter to her best friend Mina with whom she entertains an intimate correspondence that will constitute one of the major elements around which the story develops. Lucy lost her father when young. She is a single child that lives with her sick, old mother. From her first appearance she stands out as a peculiar character: the author tells us that she is a young woman without tutelage and that she lacks strong social connections in the form of a powerful, rich family and/or a father figure that could help her enter late Victorian society. The absence of a male that could supervise her love-life leads Lucy to adopt ambiguous behaviour that will expose her to vampiric seduction and will turn the young lady into his first victim. In other words, the intimate bonds she has forged with Mina, her fiancé and with Van Helsing's followers are not enough to protect her from Dracula and from her own shadowy self that early on reveals some monstrous traits.

In the first of the letters that I mention above, Lucy describes her first encounter with one of the men that will constitute the inner circle of Van Helsing's supporters who will engage, with all his might, in the fight against the threat of the vampire. This young suitor works as a doctor in 'an immense lunatic asylum' of the Capital.³⁵ She describes him as 'an excellent parti, being handsome, well off, and of good birth. He is a doctor and really clever. Just fancy! He is only nine-and twenty'.³⁶ His penetrating look, his power to decode a secret language he shares with his patients make him a very attractive partner for this young lady that could turn into an interesting 'object of study'.³⁷ The attraction between the doctor and a (potential) patient is therefore mutual; the young fellow detects that something appealing but troublesome marks Lucy, whose name evokes Light and operates as an icon of Western Civilization.³⁸

Later on, those signs that have been scattered through the pages, fall together to offer a picture of Lucy as a young lady that already shows all the symptoms of an incipient schizophrenia and that of an 'hysterical condition'. This feminine mental disease became very popular at the turn of the century to classify what was considered

35. Klinger, L. (Ed.), *The New Annotated Dracula/Bram Stoker*. New York: Norton & Company, 2008, p. 107. The book provides a brief description of the complex history of English mental institutions.

36. Stoker, B., *Dracula*, p. 80.

37. 'He says that I afford him a curious psychological study, and I humbly think I do'. Ibidem, p. 80.

38. Lucy comes from the Latin word for "light," and her surname Westerna clearly refers to the West; for this reason I claim that the combination of the two suggests that Lucy operates in the novel as an icon of Western civilization and as a prototype of western women seduced by the vampire (Eastern) stranger.

abnormal/undesirable behaviors and doomed middle class women to institutionalized segregation.³⁹

Her somnambulism, which becomes evident after the first encounters with Dracula, is a sign of her psychic fragility and, according to the medical knowledge of the period, is associated with uncontrollable sexual drives. Abnormal passions of young middle class women could not be expressed in their conscious lives but were relegated to their unconscious and acquire maximum strength in the dream world. We should not forget that Freud's discoveries and subsequent exploration of the unconscious were published for the first time at the beginning of the twentieth century and represented a turning point in the theorizing of the relation between removal, repression and female subjectivity.

According to Showalter, the medical establishment still shared the belief that irrationality had to be considered mainly a feminine trait and that it closely pertained to female Nature. Anxiety, somnambulism and inflammation of the pelvis were all regarded as symptoms of that very 'displacement of the uterus' that caused female hysteria.⁴⁰

Fin de Siècle insanity: Some Impressionistic Sketches

It is essential, in order to understand the phenomenon and its effects on the literary production of the *fin de siècle*, to look at some of the socioeconomic transformations that asylums and mental institutions underwent during the same period.

On an administrative level, the institutions were reorganised according to private/state funding criteria denying access to economic support to those religious charities that have been traditionally in charge of mental care. On the other hand, on a more 'political' level (the one that invested in the very definition of who was to be considered a potential patient), the administrative impulse to manage and classify the insane led to the 'pathologization' of a large section of the population, especially women, that lived in the poorest district of the country. In this respect, Showalter's analysis reveals how class,

39. The term 'hysteria' comes from the Greek word '*hystera*', uterus/womb and denotes everything that has to do with the uterus as an organ; literally what 'derives from the uterus'. It has historically been used to signify a complex set of undesirable behaviours and symptoms associated with the feminine. Through the invention of modern psychiatry and the consolidation of popular prejudices about the (apparent) relation between femininity and irrationality, the term *hysteria* has acquired a central status in the medical discourses of the end of the nineteenth century. For a critical reading of psychoanalytical /psychiatric use of the term: Ramas, M., «Freud's Dora, Dora's Hysteria: The Negation of a Woman's Rebellion», *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Autumn, 1980), pp. 472-510 and Ragland-Sullivan, E., «Hysteria» in Wright, E. (Eds.), *Feminism and Psychoanalysis. A Critical Dictionary*. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992, pp. 163-166. Specifically on the malady in England: Showalter, E., *The Female Malady. Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980*. London: Virago Press, 1987.

40. Showalter, E., «Victorian Women and Insanity», *Victorian Studies*, vol. 23, No. 2 (Winter, 1980), pp. 157-181.

as much as gender, has to be taken into account while exploring the social dimension of insanity.⁴¹

Women that in religious institutions had been in charge of providing care and support to the mentally ill were relegated to marginal roles and secondary functions⁴² while the number of female patients increased dramatically until they became almost the sole users of State facilities.

Charles Dickens, just few years before the publication of *Dracula*, noted

The experience of this asylum did not differ, I found, from that of similar establishments, in proving that insanity is more prevalent among women than among men.⁴³

This tendency to medicalise and control the social body of women through psychiatric practices/discourses corresponds to a tendency of privileged middle class men as the only members of the medical establishment, through gender discrimination in the field of higher education.

Women became dangerous social subjects through the association between femaleness and insanity and were portrayed as 'out of control' when their sexual drives deviated from the accepted norm of the bond of the heterosexual married couple, defined as the only legitimate institution that could guarantee some sort of control over them. As a result, reproductive sexuality in the context of the house was the ideal redeeming model for a whole generation of authors concerned with social evils such as 'the spread of urban slums, the growth of the 'criminal' classes and the proliferation of deviant sexualities.'⁴⁴

If one attends to Lucy's own words

41. Showalter, E., «Victorian Women and Insanity», p. 161: "It can be readily observed that social class and income were major determinants of the individual's psychiatric career, and that the increase in female patients was related to the enormous expansion of asylum facilities for the poor. Pauper lunatics, whose numbers quadrupled between 1844 and 1890, formed the overwhelming majority of the total inmate population, and by 1890 they were indeed ninety-one percent of all mental patients. *Simply being poor made them more likely to be labelled mad.*"

42. '[...] led the Commissioners of Lunacy to announce in their 1859 report that they were considering granting new licenses only to medical men, and women applicants were thereafter discouraged, although not always refused.' Ibidem, p. 164.

43. Dickens, C., *Charles Dickens: Uncollected Writings from 'House-hold Words' 1850-1859*, edited by Harry Stone. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968, vol. 2, pp. 387-388.

44. Arata, S., *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. II.

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.⁴⁵

We become aware that she shows a certain difficulty to grasp gender implications as far as sexual 'normalcy' is concerned and the role of marriage as the sole territory in which sexual encounters could be fully explored.

Lucy -with her three suitors- questions the legitimate function of the mononuclear family as the foundation/perpetration of the capitalist mode of production. Her will to seduce, shows a dangerous proclivity to promiscuity that characterizes pathological female subjectivity according to contemporary norms. Therefore, the violation of two elements –weak sexual desire as a sign of female good health and the bond with just a sexual partner under the seal of the patriarchal family– are interpreted here as signs of the rupture of a natural order that guarantees social harmony and stability.

In the novel, the male characters uphold social norms and prescriptions through the final annihilation of the female monster in defense of race and family as sacred institutions:

But Arthur never faltered. He looked like a figure of Thor as his untrembling arm rose and fell, driving deeper and deeper the mercy-bearing stake, whilst the blood from the pierced heart welled and spurted up around it. His face was set, and high duty seemed to shine through it. The sight of it gave us courage so that our voices seemed to ring through the little vault. And then the writhing and quivering of the body became less, and the teeth seemed to champ, and the face to quiver. Finally it lay still. The terrible task was over...[...] He reeled and would have fallen had we not caught him. The great drops of sweat sprang from his forehead, and his breath came in broken gasps.⁴⁶

In the previous lines, Lucy disappears as a character and her figure acquires the symbolic status of a sacrificial victim. According to Kathleen Spencer that refers simultaneously to Douglas' theorising on purity and danger and Girard's reflections on violence and the sacred, Lucy's represents a paradigmatic (literary) example of social exclusion and

45. Stoker, B., *Dracula*, p. 87.

46. Stoker, B., *Dracula*, p. 259.

emblematises the ways through which an individual is turned into a scapegoat to protect the community against an external threat.⁴⁷

Being a marginalised woman that does not enjoy strong social connections and due to her behaviour that is at odds with the ideal role of the 'Angel of the House', Lucy constitutes an archetypal scapegoat. She belongs to a community but she is somehow located at its margins. According to Girard's reading of the 'scapegoat', there are two types of social threat:⁴⁸ an external one that we can easily identify in the Other/Dracula/foreigner and an internal one represented by a white, middle class woman that can easily be identified as one of 'us'. Nevertheless her disturbing and 'monstrous' behaviour allows the author to position her ambiguously between the vampire's breed and 'us'. Her loyalty is clearly disputed. Her example creates a fracture in the popular imagination, highlighting that Victorian society might not be such a secure space after all. What the novel reveals is that social and economic transformations allowed for a wider spectrum of individual behaviours and question the possibility of communitarian protection without the use of brutal force. The ideological force of the stigma⁴⁹ has being historically paired with the physical reclusion of a high number of the so-called *hysterical* women in mental institutions for the insane. Furthermore, the medical establishment has promoted the constant repression of those whose behaviour was perceived and describe as socially threatening:

In presenting textbook cases of female insanity, doctors usually described women who were disobedient, rebellious, or in open protest against the female role.⁵⁰

These practices reveal that the Victorian response to female madness and eccentric sexual mores (its direct manifestation) have to be inscribed into the growing regulation and constraints of gender roles supported by state institutions and implemented through the use of force. Patriarchal domination, exercised in the novel by Van Helsing's supporters, is articulated around the notion of appropriate/natural behaviors and others that were collectively understood as pathological. These boundaries in turn controlled social interactions on a day-to-day basis.

47. Spenser, K. L., «Purity and Danger: Dracula, the Urban Gothic, and the Late Victorian Degeneracy Crisis», *ELH*, Vol. 59, No. 1, Spring 1992, pp. 197-225.

48. Girard, R., *Scapegoat*.

49. Goffman, E., *Stigma. Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. London: Penguin Books, 1990.

50. Showalter, E., «Victorian Women and Insanity», p. 172.

Lucy's conscious desire to marry several men (the same desire that marks her as a predatory/unnatural sexual being) represents the first sign of an internal threat posed by a female character. In the central part of the novel –when she has already been turned into a vampire and has to be considered as one of ‘them’– Lucy is described as a voluptuous creature that seduces with a sweet, malicious smile.

Lucy-vampire, as well as Dracula, seduces her prey at night; the nocturnal Lucy represents a mirror image of the Lucy-before-dark as if the heroine alive was a totally different person that allowed the author to stress the monstrous effects of the polluting contact of the vampire enemy.

The destruction of the female body –in other words the annihilation of someone that surrenders herself to the foreign monster– constitutes the only form through which the natural order could be reasserted. Moreover, thanks to the massacre of a powerless figure in a coffin, the protagonists simultaneously free the world of the threat represented by a sexually active and voracious female creature and by a woman that could not have been shared by many. With a single act, Stoker eliminates a threat to social peace represented by the monstrous Other (Lucy-vampire) and by male competition for the young lady's attention (Lucy-human).

In other words:

In sacrificing Lucy, the four men purge not only their fear of female sexuality generally, of which she is the monstrous expression, but also-and more importantly-their fear of their own sexuality and their capacity for sexually-prompted violence against each other.⁵¹

In *Dracula* the association between race and blood is crucial. The need to offer protection to the female protagonists and the will to marry them out to one of the members of the same ethnic group is revealed as a key ingredient in the development of the plot. In fact, just through a close defense of sexual resources (women), Van Helsing's supporters can guarantee the purity of their superior race and the inviolability of the West. Indeed, the mixture of blood with a foreigner's could represent one of the many steps that lead to race degeneration and turn a dominant civilization into a decadent one.⁵²

51. Spenser, K. L., «Purity and Danger: Dracula, the Urban Gothic, and the Late Victorian Degeneracy Crisis», p. 212.

52. I will extensively comment on this aspect in the following chapter when I deal with the issue of zombies and race in the genealogy of colonial fear.

Another key element to sharpen one's understanding of the novel is represented by the idea that the victims are themselves responsible for their fall. While Lucy and Mina are the objects of (vampiric) desire, the polluting meetings only happen with their consent. In fact, in order to enter the intimate space of the Victorian house, dominated by the wife/female Angel, the vampire has to be invited in by his prey. What Stoker suggests here is that the vampire and his victims are already united –before the sexual encounter takes place– by *desire*. This shared attraction constitutes the ground on which Lucy and Mina can be apprehended as Others. In a wider sense, I would say that this very desire is conceived and interpreted as evidence of an unified (sole) essence. This reading provides an interesting twist to the notion of female 'lack' that I have mentioned before.

These parallelisms and analogies grant the plot a certain degree of coherence and they appear systematically reinforced until the very end; Good/Evil, Us/Others, Sane/Mad, Monstrous/Normal are just some of the many dichotomies that crisscross the text and that I will explore in further details in the following section.

To summarise the roles of Dracula and Lucy in Stoker's novel I will refer to Prescott and Giorgio's words:

Dracula functions as a successful scapegoat narrative that safely and efficiently identifies deviant insiders and monstrous outsiders in order to cleanse the men's society and remove the marks of sin.⁵³

It is interesting to note, as a last remark, that the shift between the 'deviant insider' to the 'monstrous outsider' takes the form of a woman that turns into a voiceless subaltern. The monster once more is represented as a Radical Other that has no voice and no language that can qualify it as belonging to the (human) community. If we attend to the implications of Foucault's theorizing on the notion of Humanity as a discourse, indeed the monster, in the nineteenth century imagination, represents an *in-human/anti-human* creature whose existence threatens the well-being of the community and its norms.

Let's look now at the other female character in order to illuminate the ways in which this notion of an in-human/anti-human monster is at play when describing an intelligent and self-assured woman, well removed from the weak and sickly young Lucy.

53. Prescott, C. E., and Giorgio, G A., «Vampiric Affinities: Mina Harker and the Paradox of Femininity in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*», *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol 33, No. 2 (2005), pp. 487-515, p. 505.

MINA HARKER OR A 'NEW WOMAN'

The concept 'New Woman' was popularized in England in the middle of the nineteenth century by Sarah Grand in her famous essay *The New Aspect of the Woman Question*.⁵⁴ Despite the fact that the term has been used to define a huge variety of feminine behavior, its introduction to popular language reveals a profound rupture in the traditional appreciation of women's attitudes. In a strictly political sense, the definition does not represent any significant novelty in women's position in the mundane world. In fact, those that enjoyed a wealthy position (considerable family income) could enroll in secondary educational institutions, could sit Cambridge and Oxford's examinations and had already entered the public administration as civil servants. Nevertheless, what the term explicitly designates is the new, unrecognizable manners in which women dealt with private affairs and expressed a certain degree of dissatisfaction with the role they had been assigned in the patriarchal middle class family. These very attitudes towards personal/intimate relations indicated a wider margin for individual freedom that had historically been denied to women: to live independently, to move freely without male chaperones and to actively question sexual norms that were presented as the only legitimate ones. In England, a virulent conflict emerged between prescriptive patriarchal values that dominated the ascent of the middle class and the female population of that very class.

The progressive ascension of the middle class with its set of values and prescriptions had corresponded to the redefinition and marginalization of women's dreams, expectations and necessities. This historical marginalization of women corresponded to the emergence of the first forms of female socialization in clubs, that is to say political organizations that, modeled on the French example,⁵⁵ constituted an alternative to the traditional networks of family relations. In other words, the female clubs in late Victorian England exemplified a collective strategy to improve their social and political condition as women.⁵⁶

Aguhlon describes the club as a place that promoted democratic forms of socialization between members of the same class and a middle class re-invention of the aristocratic *salons* in which superficial conversations and games of cards were replaced by intense

54. Sarah Grand, «The New Aspect of the Woman Question», *The North American Review*, Vol. 158, No. 448 (Mar., 1894), pp. 270-276. For a short analysis of the concept see: Mitchell, S., «New Women, Old and New», *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (1999), pp. 579-588 and Showalter, E., *Sexual Anarchy. Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*. London: Virago Press, 1992.

55. On the notion of sociability see: Aguhlon, M., *Il salotto, il circolo e il caffè. Luoghi della sociabilità nella Francia borghese (1810-1848)*. Roma: Donzelli Editore, 1993, Introduzione.

56. Solé Romeo, G., *Historia del feminismo (siglo XIX y XX)*, Pamplona, Eunsa, 1995.

debate on the state of the nation and exciting dialogues on the newest technological discoveries. He posits the club as the landmark of modernity and of political modernity in particular. The same could be said of female associations that appropriated the model of the clubs but represented a clear programmatic attack on patriarchy and its social institutions (namely the family and the Church). The clubs contributed to the history of modern political organizations posing intimate bonds between the members as essential for the organizations to thrive. Vice versa, in male organisms emotions and affects were clearly theorized as pertaining to the private and to the family and where therefore discouraged.

The popular press, in turn, described these feminine intimate bonds ambiguously. They were simultaneously seen as innocent or perceived as threatening.

Prescott and Giorgio highlight that

In the cultural climate of feminist reform, sexology, and degeneration anxiety, however, the essential inviolability and asexuality of female friendship comes under suspicious attack.⁵⁷

In other words, those unions that under family supervision were perceived as benevolent, in the context of a higher degree of freedom and independency turned perverse or even monstrous. In most cases, the homosexual nature of these friendships was implied with the consequence of being regarded as unnatural and contaminating for other women when exposed to them. Nevertheless, in a way the conservative notion of the 'good (middle class) woman' as an asexual being that operated in the medical literature of the time, guaranteed for a brief period of time that women, given improved economic circumstances and new rights of female inheritance, could overcome the traditional segregation they had been submitted to and guarantee that homosexual unions passed unperceived for a short while.

These bonds between women characterized by horizontality and intimacy rapidly turned in the center of their intimate lives.

Using once again Prescott's and Giorgio's words

for a brief period at the end of the last century, social innocence –or denial– about female sexuality, combined with increased economic opportunities

57. In Prescott, C. E., and Giorgio, G. A., «Vampiric Affinities: Mina Harker and the Paradox of Femininity in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*», p. 493.

and independence, permitted a generation of middle- and upper-class women to make intimate same-sex relationships the emotional, if not the erotic, center of their lives.⁵⁸

In this particular context a diverse world of literary production –written by women– emerged. From Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*, through Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* to Barton's *The Woman Who Did*, a fructiferous generation of female authors offered a complex 'ideal' of womanhood that clashed with the simplistic (hegemonic) model offered by male authors and by the national Press.

Contrary to the monolithic image created by the conservative press, late-century feminists and New Woman authors themselves differed widely on their views of who the New Woman was and what she stood for, especially on questions of sex.⁵⁹

Despite a high degree of fragmentation that characterised this production though, all the literary works of the period –that rapidly turned into *fin de siècle* best sellers⁶⁰– shared a common denominator: they portrayed female characters that were independent, intelligent and free from social conventions.⁶¹ The heroines –as much as the authors in real life– explored alternative life styles and rejected marriage and motherhood as core elements that had come to define 'femininity'. Moreover, in their books, they engaged in the discussion of a wide range of topics that varied from contraception, to sexual violence, to the impact of sexually transmitted diseases on the lives of middle and working class women.⁶²

Dracula's Professional Lady Love

Mina Harker, our second female lead represents, in the economy of the novel, an ambivalent account of the New Woman; she is in fact a source of dismay and attraction

58. Ibidem, p. 493.

59. Ibidem, p. 489.

60. On the strategic marketing of a literary artefacts written by female authors and the emergence of the 'best sellers' as a cultural phenomenon see Stetz, M. D., «Sex, Lies, and Printed Cloth: Bookselling at the Bodley Head in the Eighteen-Nineties», *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Autumn, 1991), pp. 71-86.

61. Showalter, E. (Ed.), *Daughters of Decadence. Women Writers of the Fin-de-Siècle*. London: Virago Press, 1993.

62. Senf, C., «“Dracula”: Stoker's Response to the New Woman», *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (autumn, 1982), pp. 33-49.

at the same time. I think that this ambivalence can be interpreted simultaneously as the result of contradictory feelings that the author experienced towards real new women in his life⁶³ and as a general social ambivalence that Victorian society manifested towards those women that were so audacious to challenge social prescriptions and risk ostracism.

Mina is Lucy's best friend. Their relationship appears, from the very first letter, as an intense and intimate conversation between elected souls. They write to each other about love, fashion, social conventions and, through their letters, they fully reveal themselves to each other. 'My Dearest Lucy' are the words that Mina uses most frequently to address her friend. Besides:

I am longing to be with you, and by the sea, where we can talk together
freely and build our castles in the air.

While observing her friend sleeping, Mina defines Lucy as 'so sweet' and speaking about one of her friend's suitors she wonders:

If Mr. Holmwood fell in love with her seeing her only in the drawing room,
I wonder what he would say if he saw her now.⁶⁴

Mina shows an unusual attraction towards her friend; the allure manifests itself as the will to take care of her, to be with her while she sleeps. There is a constant erotic tension in the narrative and the two female characters enjoy a degree of intimacy that is strikingly absent when looking at the other characters' interactions. Their passion is as present as Mina's total lack of sexual interest in her fiancé is absent. In fact, *their* bond rather than the one with Jonathan, is the only one that could possibly stand against the allure of the vampire. Jonathan and Mina's relationship is mainly a fraternal one that will be definitely consecrated to care when the female 'survivor' will have to nourish him to health at the end of the story.

According to Victorian discourse on marriage, the role of a good middle class wife would be to control, suppress or at least manage the sexual drives of her husband. In the novel then, Mina exquisitely executes her duties as wife. The only moment in which

63. According to Belford, Stoker's mother and wife were both sympathisers of feminist activism for social and political reforms. In her book she repeatedly refers to them as living examples of the New Woman and her commitment to social justice. Belford, B., *Bram Stoker and the Man Who was Dracula*. Cambridge MA: Da Capo Press, 2002.

64. Stoker, B., *Dracula*, p. 111.

the sexual nature of Jonathan is revealed are those in which he has to face Dracula's three brides while his relationship with Mina wears out from afar in aloof passions. Stoker informs us that their union is the one that allows Jonathan to survive the brides' attack. The *mystique*⁶⁵ of a chaste heterosexual bond represents the only tool to fight the influence of the vampire and a solid alternative to the polluting element implied in homoerotic female affinities.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, due to the homoerotic elements that characterized Mina's appearance and her lack of interest for her legitimate partner, she represents initially a prototype of the New Woman as it emerged in the *fin de siècle* press. The very fact that the relationship between the two female characters does not turn into a homosexual affair– yet retains all the ambiguities of a frivolous seduction– is used by Stoker to save Mina that will eventually renounce passion and desire to settle into a heterosexual reproductive family union.

A second element that clearly contributes to her definition as a 'New Woman' figure is her professionalism and her central participation in Van Helsing's quest to destroy the vampire intruder. As the secretary of the group, she stands openly against the notion of the 'Angel of the House' because she enjoys a wider circle of friends outside her own family and because she is able to travel and socialize freely against her husband's veto.

Mina, despite her profession –she is a primary school teacher as many women of that generation were considered particularly good for their 'innate' maternal ability to take care of others⁶⁷– shows a peculiar tenacity and an adventurous attitude that are indeed remarkable in such a young lady. The very fact that she is so busy and that she rather dedicates herself to the search of the vampire –instead of many other activities that were considered a lot more appropriate for women of her class– highlights that she does not represent a 'typical' woman.

65. I used the term here in reference to Betty Friedan's notion: "The feminine mystique says that the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfilment of their own femininity [...] Beneath the sophisticated trappings, it simply makes certain concrete, finite, domestic aspects of feminine existence [...] into a religion, a pattern by which all women must now live or deny their femininity". Friedan, B., *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: A Dell Book, 1974, pp. 37-38. In this case the *mystique* of heterosexuality appears as the only prescribed norm, the model bond for all women. In fact, I have already extensively explored how homosexuality coincided with the monstrous.

66. According to Sahli, N., «*Smashing: Women's relationships before the Fall*», *Chrysalis* 8 (1979), pp. 17-27, p. 27: "As long as women loved each other as they did for much of the nineteenth century, without threatening the system itself, their relationships either were simply ignored by men or were regarded as an acceptable part of the female sphere." Thanks to economic independency and the consequent autonomy of women from the heterosexual family, Victorian society started a campaign to discredit homoerotic bonding as degenerate and threatening social peace.

67. Faderman, L., *Surpassing the Love of Men. Romantic Relationship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present*. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1981, p. 185.

Forgive my long delay in writing, but I have been simply overwhelmed with work. The life of an assistant schoolmistress is sometimes tiring.⁶⁸

All the activities she is involved in, speak about an independent, well-informed woman ahead of her time that can express very sound opinions on the state of affairs of the country, on new technologies⁶⁹ and can discuss the complex position of the New Woman and/or that of women in general.

Furthermore, my will to understand Mina as a literary 'New Woman' is altogether supported by a number of references to this figure in the novel. Let me refer to some of them. The first allusion appears in the text at page 110:

We had a capital 'severe tea' at Robin Hood's Bay in a sweet little old-fashioned inn, with a bow window right over the seaweed-covered rocks of the strand. I believe we should have shocked the 'New Woman' with our appetites. Men are more tolerant, bless them!⁷⁰

Few pages later we read:

Some of the 'New Women' writers will someday start an idea that men and women should be allowed to see each other asleep before proposing or accepting. But I suppose the 'New Woman' won't condescend in future to accept. She will do the proposing herself. And a nice job she will make of it too!⁷¹

68. Stoker, B., *Dracula*, p. 70.

69. On the role of new technological developments in the novel's makeup Wicke, J., «*Vampiric Typewriting, Dracula and its Media*», *ELH*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (Summer, 1992) pp. 467-493. In this article the author highlights how technologies occupy a central stage in the formulation of Stoker's novel. In particular, the use of technological devices shows how the novel has to be understood as a modern artifact in which the clash between modernity and tradition –in the guise of folkloric elements– is emblemized. "The social force most analogous to Count Dracula's as depicted in the novel is none other than mass culture, the developing technologies of the media in its many forms, as mass transport, tourism, photography and lithography in image production, and mass-produced narrative", p. 469.

70. In this short paragraph, Mina refers to those New Women that stressed the need to exercise and to be healthy in order to maintain an active and independent life. Those elements were paired with a great emphasis put on the need to practice sports out door in order to exit the claustrophobic family environment and the Victorian House, forever under attack.

71. Stoker, B., *Dracula*, p. 111. This paragraph can be read as a cross-reference to two extremely popular books of the period written by Olive Schreiner –*The Story of an African Farm*– and by Sarah Grand –*Heavenly Twins*– in which the protagonists dress up as men.

The irony in her words is striking. She will eventually marry Jonathan at the end of the novel having accepted her fiancé's infidelities with the brides and having renounced her central role in the hunting expedition. This element is key if we consider that only through her hypnosis the Van Helsing's group is able to locate Dracula in the Carpathians and that her work in collecting evidence of his moves is central to his defeat. The adventurous, courageous and independent Mina Harker is indeed a New Woman involved in the dangerous business of vampire hunting.

If we consider that Mina has accepted Dracula's seduction, the pattern of vampire interaction predator/prey that I have previously identified, reappears as a strong element to understand the relationship between womanhood and vampirism.⁷² Once more Stoker remarks on the affinities between the vampire and women as preferential prey, an intimate bond that men clearly perceived as dangerous and threatening. Mina succumbs initially to the irresistible Dracula, nevertheless her conscious self decides to fight alongside the Men of Light to protect Western civilization against the alien creature.

While Lucy affectively shifts from 'us' to 'them', turning into a voluptuous creature that preys on children and seduces grown men, Mina embraces her (pseudo)Humanity till the end, asking to be exterminated if turned into a vampire.

In the last few scenes, we meet her again, this time holding her baby tenderly.

The last pages of Jonathan's dairy remind the audience that most of this adventure has been motivated by the love for this amazing being that is his wife and that many valiant men loved her dearly:

This boy will some day know what a brave and gallant woman his mother is. Already he knows her sweetness and loving care. Later on he will

72. Stoker, B., *Dracula*, p.242-243: 'I closed my eyes, but could still see through my eyelids. (It is wonderful what tricks our dreams play us, and how conveniently we can imagine.) The mist grew thicker and thicker and I could see now how it came in, for I could see it like smoke, or with the white energy of boiling water, pouring in, not through the window, but through the joinings of the door. It got thicker and thicker, till it seemed as if it became concentrated into a sort of pillar of cloud in the room, through the top of which I could see the light of the gas shining like a red eye. Things began to whirl through my brain just as the cloudy column was now whirling in the room, and through it all came the scriptural words "a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night." Was it indeed such spiritual guidance that was coming to me in my sleep? But the pillar was composed of both the day and the night guiding, for the fire was in the red eye, which at the thought got a new fascination for me, till, as I looked, the fire divided, and seemed to shine on me through the fog like two red eyes, [...]The last conscious effort which imagination made was to show me a livid white face bending over me out of the mist. I must be careful of such dreams, for they would unseat one's reason if there were too much of them'. This fragment of Mina's diary shows that she does not try to fully resist the vampire; on the contrary few lines later, she plans on hiding the vampire's presence in her room to the other members of Van Helsing's group.

understand how some men so loved her, that they did dare much for her sake.⁷³

The heroine is not sacrificed on the altar of western civilization and sexual mores but she has to renounce a part of herself in order to survive the wrath of Van Helsing and the group of acolytes. She has to deny her New Woman's personality, interests and passions and turn into the Angel of the House and the Loving Mother, against which her actions were originally pictured in the form of an active working and relational life outside the Patriarchal family. While New Women denounced motherhood as one of the major sources of female oppression, Mina happily embraces it and abandons that part of herself that had allowed her to become the vampire's psychic double.⁷⁴

Before I conclude, I think it is essential to mention that the character, throughout the pages, shows a variety of attitudes that can be described as 'masculine' –her activism, her professionalism, her interest for technological devices and her will to succeed– are appreciated as traits of a very strong personality quite inappropriate to define a young woman at the end of the century. Stoker cleverly stretches the limits of 'womanhood' to include a heroine that apparently is not quite a woman of her time, due to her practical intelligence and a high degree of canniness; in the public domain she acts as a man but she has to make great sacrifices to conform to middle class conventions. In the realm of intimacy, Mina –despite her bravery– can not move beyond the role and margins traced by Victorian society and that defined so strictly appropriate behaviours and possibilities of freedom inscribing them in the bodies and souls of women of that time.

PROVISIONAL CONCLUSIONS ON IMPERIAL OTHERNESS

This chapter has allowed me to introduce the figure of the vampire that, over a century later, plays an important part in most neo-gothic literary production.

73. Stoker, B., *Dracula*, p. 353.

74. I am referring to the psychic communication between Mina and Dracula that will allow Van Helsing to discover the exact location of the vampire and lead the expedition that kills him. The use of hypnotherapy to locate the monster can be read as another sign of its innovative approach to a genre that had already produced a number of interesting vampire creatures. For a short introduction to the canon see: Ballesteros, A., *Vampire Chronicle. Historia natural del vampiro en la literatura anglosajona*. Zaragoza: unaLuna Ediciones, 2000 and the (pioneer) cultural analysis of Auerbach, N., *Our Vampires, Ourselves*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995. For a stimulating reading of the monster in relation to technological development read: Halberstam, J., «Technologies of Monstrosity: Bram Stoker's "Dracula"», *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 3, *Victorian Sexualities* (Spring, 1993), pp. 333-352.

Through a genealogy that identifies *Dracula* as the foundational moment in the consolidation of the vampire genre, I have explored issues related to the Imperial Imagination and the notion of Otherness. *Dracula* is a story that highlights some of the most intriguing strategies through which the British Empire has codified, in a regime of terror and fear, the presence of the Other and its colonial encounters. Through an anthropological reading of this literary phenomenon that has had a great impact on the popular representation of this monster both in literature and on the screen, I have highlighted how the notion of Otherness provided a negative alter-ego that worked as a mirror image of what Britain defined as the Self. Far from being an escapist narrative, reading *Dracula* gives us a significant insight into the desires and fears of British civilisation at the end of the nineteenth century, a crisis moment in which the economic, political and 'moral' supremacy of the British Empire had been put at risk.

Moreover, through the analysis of Mina and Lucy I have shown how 'eccentric' women were perceived as (potential) monsters, that is to say marginalised creatures that questioned the limits of normativity and had therefore to be kept at bay or eliminated.

The story of *Dracula*, Lucy and Mina appears as a fantasy articulated around late Victorian collective shadow. Despite of the obvious differences between the three, *Dracula* the vampire, Lucy the madwoman and Mina the Good Woman (as opposed to the New Woman she fails to fully embody) share a threatening essence. In other words, these three figures operate as icons of 'diverse subjectivities' in the guise of a crazy woman, a rampant professional and a man that was coming from 'somewhere else' and from a non-dominant class.

Finally, Stoker's novel still offers a meaningful insight into some of the key elements, namely race and sexuality, that dominate vampire production over time and that I will consider while illuminating Hamilton's contribution to the genre.

CHAPTER THREE

GENEALOGY OF FEAR

The zombie is a 'person from whom a sorcerer has extracted the soul and whom he has thus reduces to slavery. A zombie is to a certain extent a living corpse.

Alfred Metraux

In this third chapter I wish to explore some of the key elements that characterised the zombie's¹ literary production from the late eighteenth century to the most recent contributions to the genre. If we consider the whole body of work involving zombies, we find a number of short stories and novellas in which the monster appears as a polysemic figuration that has metamorphosed through time turning from a creature of Haitian oral folklore to a symbol of literary resistance in the work of black intellectuals from the Caribbean.²

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1. 'Possible African linguistic candidates for the origin of the word include *ndzumbi* ('corpse' in the Mitsogo language of Gabon), *nzambi* ('spirit of a dead person' in the Kongo language of the Congo) and *zumbi* (a fetish or ghost in the kikongo and Bonda languages). In the Caribbean, speculations on the origin of *zombi* include sources in Arawak (*zemi* means spirit) or even a Kreyól derivation from the French *les ombres*.' Luckhurst, R., *Zombies. A Cultural History*. London: Reaktion Books, 2015, p. 14. In the thesis, I have consistently used the English/American adaptation of the word.
 2. To start with, I wish to disclose that accessing the *original* material (primary sources) –short stories, novellas and magazine's contributions- has been extremely complicated. Most of my readings therefore rely on secondary readings, in particular Mimi Sheller's summary, Markman's work on ancient sources and Danticat's books which constitute a contemporary attempt to provide international audiences with an easy but basic access to Haitian Classics.

The zombie could be best defined as a creature that changes to adapt to the diverse narrative needs of a number of cultural agents. I will articulate the chapter as if it was a 'journey of discovery' from the first 'horror stories' of white travellers -that used the zombie to evoke fear against blackness- to the literary contribution of indigenous artists that denounced the colonial experience in the Caribbean archipelagos. Therefore, trying to account for these various shifts in its appropriation, I will present a genealogy of the zombie starting with some fragments that marked the entrance of the putrefying body on the literary scene at the beginning of the nineteenth century. I will then concentrate on *The Magic Island* written by Seabrook and its adaptation for the big screen in 1932. Throughout the work, I have employed the notion of Orientalism proposed by Said to locate the emergence of the monster as a Radical Other and Mudimbe's definition of Africanism to highlight the cultural and political impact of the Anglo-North American imagination in the creation of 'zombie literature and filmography'.

ORIENTALISM AND AFRICANISM IN THE CREATION OF HAITIAN SUBJECTS

European and North American travel writers especially employed Africanist discourses in relation to Haiti, the only independent 'Black Republic' in the colonial era, and long feared by Europeans. [...] Haiti was explicitly associated with cannibalism and African barbarism.

Mimi Sheller

I think that the best way to approach the subject at hand will be to revise some of the basic notions that allow for the construction of the Caribbean and of Haiti as 'magical' lands towards which the erotic/exotic white male imagination was carefully directed. A particular form of knowing and accounting for the Other emerged at the point where Western imagination met the Haitian exotic landscape, populated by native bodies that were rapidly reduced to already known *topoi* of alterity. To start my analysis, I will briefly refer, once more, to Said's definition of *Orientalism*.

In Said's theorizing, *Orientalism* appeared as an epistemological tool to account for a discourse that was produced in Europe about the East and that emerged as a cluster of negative projections that conflicted with an ideal West as the *locus* of Rationality and Morality. According to the Palestinian critic, through complex strategies that allow to

control, appropriate and consume colonial subjects, these images of the Other (place and people) acquired the status of an ontological Truth and determined, to a large extent, the forms in which populations from the colonial margins have been historically represented.

In Said's own words, *Orientalism* would be the discourse within Europe for the production and constitution of the Orient as the object of a particular form of colonial power and knowledge.³

Furthermore

(It) is a discourse which represents the exotic, erotic, strange Orient as a comprehensible, intelligible phenomenon within a network of categories, tables and concepts by which the Orient is simultaneously defined and controlled⁴

Nevertheless, through the extension of colonial domination, European Empires had to face the need to account for a wider number of Others from a variety of territories that moved beyond Asia and the East. The progressive colonization of Africa and the Caribbean force European Powers to articulate a number of discourses arranged around different taxonomies to detail a great diversity of 'local' contexts. While Orientalism represents a groundbreaking contribution, we need to move beyond it in order to understand the specific and somehow *local* forms through which domination has been ideologically legitimized during the course of the nineteenth century.⁵

All these colonial enterprises shared the will to create an ideological framework in which the Other could be relegated, pigeonholed and ultimately expelled from the category of the Human. This ideological construct symbolically reduced the potential threat represented by 'Otherness', guaranteed the persistence of the idea of a stable European subject and favored European discourses on freedom and equality as sources of legitimate forms of government.

In a context of imperial expansion, the Orientalist narratives seemed inadequate to represent new subjectivities that had been recently 'discovered' through the colonization of Africa.⁶ By way of explanation, the African continent was constructed as a third space between Europe and the East; while the Orient was represented as a unified territory

3. Said, E., *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books Editions, 1979.

4. Turner, B., *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 21.

5. Anderson, B., *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1983.

6. Appiah, K. A., «African Identities» in Castle, G. (Ed.), *Postcolonial Discourses*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, p. 221-231.

ontologically opposed to the West, Africa was conceived as the third element in a triadic taxonomy in which different African ethnic groups and cultural traditions were diluted to reemerge as a unified block in the European imagination of the period under consideration.

Each time we are faced by an other whom we cannot recognise, we seek to find other ways of achieving recognition, not only by re-reading the body of this other who is faced, but by telling the difference between *this* other, an other others.⁷

Appiah states it clearly when he writes 'to speak of an African identity in the nineteenth century [...] would have been 'to give a airy nothing a local habitation and a name'⁸. This new Africa –an ideological– ideally located between Europe and Asia, will turn into the land of tribalism, of danger and terror populated by 'savage others' as Conrad's masterpiece, published at the end of the century, elucidates.⁹

In this complex network of conflicted, but mutually contracted, images and economic, political and social nexus, the Caribbean Islands and Haiti occupy a very peculiar location. Haiti in particular, due to the extensive presence in its territory of ex-slaves and black bodies that disturb the puritan European and North American imagination, generated a hybrid narrative in which the attraction for the 'feminine' East merged with the Africanist fear of the black savage. While the Oriental subject was imagined as a wise man (following the archetype of the wise Chinese or the wise *sadhu*¹⁰) in the case of 'African' people or of African descendants their stereotyped images were articulated around the 'savage body' as central discursive elements. The experience of the white settlers in the Caribbean is reflected in writing as a weird combination between the appreciation of a luxurious nature and the riches of the plantations mixed with the fright that the view of so many dark bodies induced.

Those bodies 'stood as signifiers of darkness, irrationality and terror'¹¹ and worked in the narratives as markers of the Africanist presence with its discursive connotation of danger and tribalism. Voodoo in particular, as the religion that designated the specificity

7. Ahmed S., *Strange Encounters. Embodies Others in Postcoloniality*. New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 8.

8. Appiah, K. A., «African Identities», p. 223.

9. Achebe, C., «An image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*» in Castle, G. (Ed.), *Postcolonial Discourses*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, p. 209-220. '*Heart of Darkness* projects the image of Africa as "the other world", the antithesis of Europe and therefore civilization, a place where a man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality', p. 211.

10. Young, R., *Orientalism and Religion. Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'*. London: Routledge, 1999.

11. Sheller, M., *Consuming the Caribbean. From Arawaks to Zombies*. London: Routledge, 2003, p. 138.

of the Haitians, has been progressively turned into the focus of terror towards the savage Other that threaten us due to his preferential access the realm of the dead.

Among a number of narratives, I will shortly focus my attention on those that refer to the zombie as an African artefact and to the *bokor* (magician/warlock/practitioner), its creator.¹²

A CORPSE WITH NO NAME: FIRST HORROR STORIES

The zombie appears for the first time in the recorded stories of landlords and slave owners and turned rapidly to one of the foundational myths surrounding the reality of slavery in the context of the colonial plantations.¹³ According to these records, through evil witchcraft, the *bokors* turned able bodies into putrefying corpses totally submitted to their will. White settlers described the zombie as a tool that allowed the barbarians to oppose the 'legitimate' control of their land by the colonizers. This representational dimension is born from the terror experienced by the settlers that substantially represented an organized minority opposed to a great mass of slaves. Many critics of the colonial experience of the Caribbean have highlighted that the *body* occupies a central position in the white imagination of the European and North American subjects. A body that has to be dominated with the whip, that has to be voluptuously stroked and from which we have to escape in our nightmares.¹⁴

The body is quite clearly one of the first markers of alterity. It seems significant that most researches on 'other cultures' contained detailed descriptions of physical traits, features and detailed references to skin colour.¹⁵ Furthermore, these anatomical differences are 'moralised' to represent behaviours related to an ethical dimension.

12. Thornton, J., «Cannibals, Witches, and Slave Traders in the Atlantic World» in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 60, No. 2 (Apr., 2003), pp. 273-294. In this article Thornton explores the complex cultural heritage of social and religious practices that re-emerged in the storytelling and mythology of the Caribbean in the form of a zombie dominated by the evil *bokor*, a Congolese word.

13. Sheller, M., *Consuming the Caribbean*, pp. 143-174.

14. Ahmed, S., *Strange encounters*, p.48-49. Ahmed speaks of an 'ethics of touch': 'we could also ask about the different ways in which bodies touch other bodies, and how those differences are ways of forming the bodies of others.' From this point of view, the colonial encounters have to be understood as tactile as much as visual experiences. Through this notion we can filter different degrees of proximity that characterised colonial societies as a whole. For this very reason some critics have been talking about *pornotropos*, tropics crisscrossed by these dimensions related to proximity/possession and ultimately the occupation and/or rape of the colonised bodies.

15. A classic example of this tendency to focus on body traits, as 'markers of alterity', would be the first photographs of Others nineteenth century anthropologists collected. For a critical analysis and an overlook at the phenomenon see: Maxwell, A., *Colonial Photography and Exhibitions. Representations of the "Native" and the making of European Identities*. London: Leicester University Press, 1999.

According to these stories, the first rebellions of indigenous populations or of slaves in the context of colonial plantations appeared, to the white imagination, as the fusion of black bodies into an army of animated corpses under the direct order of an evil, magical force. In these nightmarish visions, the degeneration of the slave population and its will to do evil is best understood if we take into account how different races were represented. Instead of moving towards a critique of Imperial Reason and an analysis that attributed the present condition of the locals to the colonial system of exploitation, these narratives reinforced the idea that their poor social and living conditions had to be attributed to their 'racial inferiority' and their African origins. Africans in fact had historically been unable to develop forms of centralised government, 'vertical' architecture and none of the institutions that the West considered as natural markers of a superior civilization.¹⁶ In this respect, the zombie became one of the creatures symbolically used to reinforce a variety of discourses about the colonised as a subject with a 'natural' (biological) inclination to evil doings.

As Markman clearly explains:

The zombie, like the cannibal, is an ideologically motivated rhetorical device deployed to demonstrate and establish the moral superiority of civilised colonial authority over the barbarous slaves. This moral superiority –formalised into scientific theories of racial superiority– justified the continuous use of military violence and legal process to maintain colonial authority.¹⁷

In other words, it constitutes a dispositive that legitimised the atrocities of the colonial adventure; it worked as a reminder of the terrifying nature of the locals that had to be kept under control through the imperial use of brutal force in order to protect the government and its emissaries. The narratives add some gore elements of voodoo religious ceremonies, officiated by the *bokor*, to the fear of the ex-slave or 'the malicious contrivances and diabolical arts of some practitioners of Obeah, a term of African origin, signifying sorcery and witchcraft'.¹⁸

16. This representation of African civilizations and its people has been heavily questioned and refuted. Evidence has been provided that support a much more complex representation of the African territories in their variety and forms of social development. Thornton in his article «Cannibals, Witches, and Slave Traders in the Atlantic World» shows how slave trade was possible thanks to the active support of local kingdoms that strategically used it to remove populations from overpopulated border zones constantly at war.

17. Markman, E., *The History of Gothic Fiction*, p. 208.

18. Ibidem, p. 209.

According to some commentators of Haitian colonial history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, African religions worked on the enslaved population as a power system of identification and resistance to such an extent that they were 'so powerful on the negroes, as to bias, to a considerable degree, their general conduct, disposition, and manner'.¹⁹

Therefore, even official reports on slave rebellions or skirmishes between planters and locals were tinged with Gothic, dark colours and dramatic terms. In fact, most of these documents abound with the vocabulary of fear inspired by radical Otherness embodied in the 'negro that dedicates himself to the black arts'. Blacks are evil and treacherous:

Those Africans who in that island practice witchcraft or sorcery, comprehending also the class of what are called Myal-men, or those who, by means of narcotic potion, made with the juice of an herb [...] which occasions a trance or profound sleep of a certain duration, endeavor to convince the deluded spectators of their ower to re-animate dead bodies.²⁰

Despite the fact that in very old texts there are numerous references to the putrefying bodies, these are never named as zombies until 1819 when Robert Sounthey in a *History of Brazil* used the term somehow differently from the definition I have previously embraced. According to Sounthey, the King of a rebellious community of slaves had been honoured with the title 'zombie'.²¹

In other words, in the period under consideration, both oral narratives and written sources compiled by colonial administrators offer the image of the rotting body as a simulacrum of the counter power of traditional healers and *bokors* that descended from the first slave labour force. Moreover, voodoo practitioners were identified with active resistance to colonial domination. According to planters, the warlocks were recognised as local leaders that, according to popular belief, had the ability to 'transform the world'

19. Markman, E., *The History of Gothic Fiction*, p. 209.

20. Ibidem, p. 209. Markman refers to the same commentator, Bryan Edwards, over and over again.

21. 'Nzombi is the word for deity...*caripemba* is the Devil. It is not used in the sense of the Lord, which might explain its application here without any religious import...but of *Deity*'. Quoted in Markman, p. 212. Even if the zombie is the name that defines the 'not dead' and this meaning identifies a deity and a superior being, the nexus between these two semantic constellations is evident. In both cases, the slaves had rebelled against the colonial white government. In the first usage, what has been highlighted is the tribal magic that operates on bodies while in the second the emphasis is on magic as the sole element that could guarantee freedom from a superior, military force. In both cases what is at stake is the use of magic and witchcraft for evil bidding.

and 'control the elements'. In turn their supernatural powers guaranteed an unlimited source of charisma and the unconditional fidelity of the masses.

It does come as a surprise to notice, how in most of the narratives, a heavy weight is put on the African elements of the local cultures and a population made up primarily by inter-raced people. The narratives constantly refer to a stable African identity that has been generationally passed on and to a pre-slave society –removed both in time and space– that kept marking the existence of the indigenous population of Haiti. These ideas are clearly related to the Africanist discourse according to which such a thing as a unified African identity existed and was not susceptible to changes despite its numerous encounters with other civilizations such as the Spanish, the French and most recently the Anglo-American.

This constellation of elements was rhetorically employed to discourage any attempt to support forms of self-government and organization in the area. The underlining message was that they had been historically unable to produce forms of rational government in Africa and therefore they could not possibly be capable of anything different here,²² especially considering that the mixture of blood had had an abominable effect on a social psyche of the locals.

Some decades later, after the instalment of a legitimate government on the island, the *black republic* was still welcomed with scepticism and suspicion even by those that in America were supporting the liberal faith, as Sir Philipp Mitchell's words show:

The West found itself in control of millions of people who had never invented or adapted an alphabet or even any form of hieroglyphic writing. They had no numerals, no almanacs, or calendars, no notation of time etc. These people had built nothing, nothing of any kind more durable than mud, poles and thatch. There was nothing, nothing at all before the rubbish dumps of modern colonial towns.²³

I would like now to refer to another element that was added to the usual collection of degrading images that made up the body of knowledge on the colonized subjects of the Caribbean. The accusation of *cannibalism* filtered through the sensationalist press and turned, during the following century, into one of the central elements of the zombie figuration in popular fiction in the West.

22. Appiah, K. A., *In My Father's House. Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

23. Mitchell, P., 'Africa and the West, in perspective'. *Africa Today*. Baltimore, 1955, p. 12.

Behind the immorality, behind the religiosity, there lies active and alive the horrible revival of West African superstitions: the serpent-worship, the child sacrifice, and the cannibalism. There is no room to doubt it.²⁴

Sir Spenser Buckingham reported in animated tones that the indigenous population of Haiti, organized around voodoo, practiced child sacrifice and cannibalism in furtive ceremonies promoted by secret societies that controlled and regulated religious devotion in the area.²⁵ Cannibalism was obviously perceived as representing the antithesis of human accepted behaviours and appears in the history of a number of civilizations as one of the strongest accusations of inhumanity against other ethnic groups.²⁶

All these elements, scattered throughout a vast number of documents, reiterated this original idea that the afro-descendent natives were the natural heirs of that form of barbarism and savagery that still characterised African people in the Dark Continent. Moreover, the obvious racial intermingling that had occurred locally for a number of centuries was regarded as another source of danger. Far away from the motherland, the colonial administrators were encouraged to regard *mestizaje* as an aberration of natural laws that prescribed race segregation and a threat to the colonial social order because it rendered impossible to clearly place bi-racial and mixed raced people in rigid taxonomies articulated around skin colour. Miscegenation laws were indeed already in place in the United States from the seventeenth century.²⁷

FROM 'ANTI-NEGRO THOUGHT' TO MILITARY OCCUPATION

Mimi Sheller, referring to white upper middle class young American narratives of traveling to the tropics during the nineteenth century, reports:

24. Quoted in Markman, p. 214.

25. Ibidem.

26. We just need to remember the example of the way in which Jewish communities were accused in Christian territories of practicing human sacrifices or how Romans represented early Christian communities as anthropophagus. If we look specifically at the Caribbean Todorov, in his classic book *The Conquest of America*, collects a number of fifteenth and sixteenth century sources in which the natives were depicted as cannibals. Todorov, T., *The Conquest of America: the Question of the Other*. New York: Harper & Row, 1984.

27. One of the most interesting paradoxes of the American discourses on Race concerns the preference attributed to pure black versus mixed race immigrants coming from the Caribbean. While in Haiti the black element had to be understood as a source of danger, in the United States blacks that were coming directly from Africa at the end of the nineteenth century were to be regarded as better labour force for their pure blood and their apparent lack of knowledge in matters related to civil liberties. Dain, B., «The Horrors of St. Domingue» in *A Hideous Monster of the Mind. American Race Theory in the Early Republic*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, pp. 81-112.

[this] touristic^{28*} outlook in which hearsay was used to reinforce racist beliefs in African barbarism. Each tourist went in search of barbarism and cannibalism, perpetrating previous myths.²⁹

The author, in her book, notices that the 'negrophobic' element is forever present in the diaries of the youth. This same xenophobic culture that characterised colonial encounters will be exploited to justify the military occupation of Haiti and to disguise as humanitarian the strategic interests of the United States in controlling the area of the Gulf. According to the Monroe doctrine in fact, the United States were entitled to control directly or indirectly the zone to protect their own land. Furthermore, this very doctrine has been the one employed to justify most of the military interventions in the area.³⁰

A blind terror towards others and the generalised fear against a black self-governing nation at the front door remained as the agglutinating nucleus in propaganda before and after the military occupation.³¹ It is important to notice that Haitians, as black ex-slaves, were not the only victims of this imperial discourse. The Dominicans for example were described in the propaganda press as a disastrous mixture between Negros and Hispanic. In the *Review of Reviews* we read:

Complete incapacity for self-government is the most salient feature of the Dominican character... the political helplessness of the Dominican people is not merely the result of unfortunate circumstance; it springs from their very nature.³²

In the press, the history of these two countries is summarized as a long list of bloody revolts, barbaric and destructive that only the civilizing efforts of the United States through military occupation or direct control in the area could end.

I wish to add another element to this picture I have already presented and that I hope will throw some more light on the complexity of the 'anti-negro thought' and its

28. I understand that the numerous references of Sheller to tourism have to be interpreted in an analytical framework of 'rites of passage'. According to this theoretical understanding the desire of encountering the Other was the supreme object of the Africanist and Orientalist imagination as revealed by a vast number of representations Sheller collects in her work.

29. Sheller, M., *Consuming the Caribbean*, p. 135.

30. Schmidt, H., *The United States Occupation of Haiti 1915-1934*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995.

31. Blassingame, J. W., «The Press and American Intervention in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, 1904-1920», *Caribbean Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2 (Jul., 1969), pp. 27-43.

32. Quoted in Blassingame, p. 30.

strategic deployment. The same Africanist elements were exploited to deal ideologically with internal conflicts regarding the African-American population. It was key to keep legitimizing black slavery in the South and essential, until its eventual abolition, to maintain emancipated blacks segregated from whites in public spaces. In an article of 1905, the *Tribune* explicitly refers to the Haitian stereotyping as a model of anti-negro thought that helped intellectuals to understand the condition of blacks down south and the open hostility with which their freedom was viewed.³³

In other words, the North American invasion of the island is designed as a geopolitical strategy to guarantee stability and good government in the area. Simultaneously, Roosevelt's imperial propaganda was directed against (possible) German and French expansion. According to the American establishment, American security was at stake. Through constant references to the two countries (Haiti and Santo Domingo) shattered by political turmoil and easy prey for Great European Powers, the press generated a collective psychosis that led to the American support of a ferocious dictatorship in Haiti that was so described by a commentator at the time:

The [*first*] five years of American occupation [...] have served as a commentary upon the white civilization which still burns black men and women at the stake.³⁴

In a matter of just few years, more than three thousand Haitians were killed in war actions and the *corvée*,³⁵ a form of slave labour, was reintroduced in the island.

I have summarized some of the key elements of Haitian contemporary history in the hope of highlighting how the political and social climate of the region had a huge impact in the re-emergence, once again, of the zombie as a symbol of Haitian resistance to a legitimate 'invasion'. More than a hundred years from its first appearance as a figure of terror, the zombie in the thirties in the North American discourse represents an indigenous/ethnic strategy to resist the pacifying mission of the Marines. Zombies

33. Quoted in Blassingame, p. 30. An interesting journey through the development of the anti-negro imagination and the growth of white supremacist ideologies is provided by Newby, I. A., *Jim Crow's Defense. Anti Negro Thought in America, 1900-1930*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965.

34. Seligman, H. J., «Conquest of Haiti», *Nation*, CXI (July 10, 1920), p. 35.

35. In 1919 the United States revised the Haitian constitution. In the modified version they passed the same year, intensive agriculture was implemented through American investments with the consequent collapse of an economic system based on the ownership of small/medium size plots of land. Moreover, the new Constitution legitimised the transfer of vast property to foreign landlords that implemented this form of forced labour. Montague, L. L., *Haiti and the United States 1714-1938*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1940.

appear in 'military' narratives, such as *Black Bagdad*, as mindless corpses in the hands of an elite of corrupted mixed raced people, the Creole.³⁶

The vivacity that characterized the zombie in the first three decades of the nineteenth century does not betray the historical legacy of white Africanism and its focus on primitivism as a marker of Haitian Otherness. On the contrary, the anti-negro legacy appears fortified by new forms of writing and reporting that are heavily influenced by realism and are pervaded by an 'ethnographic' tone that aspired to create an unquestionable scientific discourse and a supposedly objective representation of the natives. This effect is primarily achieved through the use of the first person singular in the narratives of young Marines describing their own experiences in a foreign, hostile territory. As Wade Davis³⁷ shockingly reveals in a long interview:

The US Marines occupied Haiti in 1915, and everyone above the rank of sergeant got a book contract. These books [...] were full of zombies crawling from the ground, voodoo dolls- '...- children bled for the cauldron, and so on; and they collectively bore one message to the American public- any country where such abominations occurred could only find its redemption through military occupation.³⁸

While the Marines were commissioned to produce short novellas and 'first person' accounts of the events taking place in Haiti, Seabrook published a very successful book that somehow marked a turning point in the 'Africanist legacy' I have been concentrating on so far. In the following section, I will therefore illuminate some of the most important challenges this novel poses to the Africanist and xenophobic heritage that had so far characterized Anglo-American narratives revolving around Haitian folklore and cultural history.

36. Craige, J. H., *Black Bagdad. The Arabian Nights Adventures of a Marine Captain in Haiti*. New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1933. This volume constitutes the best and most famous example of this type of narratives.

37. Wade Davis is a by now well known ethno-botanist that in 1982 revolutionised the scientific world thanks to his work on *tetrodotoxin*, a toxin associated (according to his study) to the progressive zombification of people. The substance was employed with *datura stramonium* to produce a toxic powder that local *bokors* used to create the horrifying creature of folk tales. His discovery has been used as a story line for a famous eighties' movie: *The Serpent and the Rainbow*.

38. Press, M., «American Scientist Interviews: Wade Davis on zombies, folk poisons, and Haitian culture» *American Scientist*, Vol. 75, No. 4 (July-August 1987), pp. 412-417.

THE CLASSICS BETWEEN ETHNOGRAPHY AND CAPITAL CRITIQUE: THE MAGIC ISLAND

Zombie is one of the African words. I didn't invent the word zombie, nor the concept of zombies. But I have brought the word and concept to America from Haiti and gave it to the American public –for the first time. The word is now part of the American language. It frames in neon lights for names in bars, and drinks [...]. The word has never appeared in English before I wrote *The Magic Island*.³⁹

Mimi Sheller's analysis of Seabrook's contribution to the genre support his claim; according to the sociologist, *The Magic Island* constitutes a form of pseudo-anthropological narrative and a literary initiation to the mysteries of *exotic displacement* in which the zombie is properly named for the first time and displays some of the essential characteristics it will retain through time. The book presents itself as a journey to the Heart of Voodoo.⁴⁰ Thanks to a first person voice reporting on the experience, to the presence of a native informant as in modern ethnographies and to the ambiguous positioning of the author himself between two worlds, Seabrook successfully filtered the figure of the putrefying corpse and the evil *bokor* to the artistic and cinematic vanguard of the States. In this particular context, participant observation is perceived as the ground zero of subjectivity, the dissolution of the discursive interest of the traveller and as primacy of the Real.

Nevertheless despite Seabrook's efforts, before the final appropriation of the figure by Hollywood, the interest in Haitian customs, religious practices and political reality manifest itself in two opposite directions. On the one hand, the renewed anthropological and ethnographic interest that mobilized white researchers to look for first hand accounts of the zombie's existence and of cannibalistic practices of secret societies in Haiti; on the other, in the development of a trans-African consciousness among the intellectuals of Harlem's Renaissance that promoted the coming together of African-Americans and the Caribbean diaspora in the States.⁴¹

39. Seabrook's words are quoted in Luckhurst, R., *Zombies. A Cultural History*. London: Reaktion Books, 2015, p. 22.

40. Seabrook, W., *The Magic Island*. New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1929.

41. Lowney, J., <<Haiti and Black Transnationalism: Remapping the Migrant Geography of Home to Harlem>>, *African American Review*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Autumn, 2000), pp. 413-429. Interesting works on African-American folklore and Voodoo for their originality and the author's creative use of fieldwork techniques are provided by Hurston, Z. N., *Mules and Men and Tell my Horse*.

With these words the journal *Man* reviewed in 1929 the publication of Seabrook's masterpiece:

a full and illuminating account of the Voodoo ceremonies and beliefs practiced by the negro inhabitants of Haiti [...] Mr Seabrook was admitted to the ceremonies he witnessed as an initiate [...] this privilege has enabled both authors to observe and place on record rites and ceremonies about which we should otherwise be almost totally ignorant.⁴²

In another review of the book, one reads:

it is, [...], a safe guess that the book more vividly conveys to the reader the character of Haiti.⁴³

Moreover, *The New York Times* commenting on the author's experience states that Seabrook has

travelled deeply. It is apparent that he has penetrated as few white men have done, perhaps as no white man has done in so short a time, to the soul of Haiti.⁴⁴

Through a complex usage of folk songs, interviews and intriguing images that accompany the narrative, Seabrook's work stands out for originality and force despite the fact that most of his material describes voodoo as the *site* that designates Haitian reality. As far as the originality of the artifact is concerned, it is essential to note that the author depicts himself as an 'initiate' to the mysteries of voodoo. As one critic suggests, he wished to 'escape modernity through initiation into blackness.'⁴⁵

This indeed constitutes a key element that was totally absent in the previous works under consideration. The author's personal authority is centrally embedded in the narrative and the account is therefore crisscrossed with an indissoluble tension that I wish to consider shortly. The tension refers to the curiosity experienced by the young white male and the discourse on rationality as the preferential vehicle to knowledge.

42. Dawson, W. R., «The Magic Island, by W. B. Seabrook», *Man*, Vol. 29 (Nov., 1929), pp. 198-199.

43. Redfield, R., «The Magic Island by W. B. Seabrook», *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Sep., 1929), pp. 315-317.

44. Markman, E., *The History of Gothic Fiction*, p. 220.

45. Zieger, S., «The case of William Seabrook: Documents, Haiti and the Working Dead», *Modernism/Modernity*, XIX/4 (2013), pp. 737-754, p. 745.

In the narrative curiosity appears in the form of personal interests and motivations of a young Seabrook that has been recently initiated to the mysteries of voodoo and to a world that is indeed marvelous.⁴⁶ This element of passion and personal enthusiasm clashes with the ever-present discourse on rationality as the sole element that allows for a 'proper' understanding of the world. This conflict creates a narrative tension that reveals a much more sophisticated approximation to Haitian reality in comparison to the previous narratives substantially obsessed by a 'reductionist' will to pigeonhole a whole civilization to barbarism. In the second part of the text, the zombie appears as an undead worker used as brute labour force in the cotton fields. It is important to highlight that the description of the undead that Seabrook basically extorted from his informer, Constant Polynice, is preceded by a short description of other monstrous figures of Haitian and North American folklore.

Constant Polynice and I sat late before the doorway of his *caille*, talking of fire-hags, demons, werewolves, and vampires, while a full moon, rising slowly, flooded his 'sloping cotton fields and the dark rolling hills beyond [...] He had been telling me of fire-hags who left their skins at home and set the cane fields blazing; of the vampire, a woman sometimes living, sometimes dead, who sucked the blood of -children and who could be distinguished because her hair always turned an ugly red; of the *werewolf—chauceli* in creole—a man or woman who took the form of some animal, usually a dog, and went killing lambs, young goats, sometimes babies. All this, I gathered, he considered to be pure superstition.⁴⁷

According to the author, werewolves, redheaded vampires and wizards enrich the vast world of superstitions, while the zombie, *Made in Haiti*, is characterized by its authenticity, that is to say by its being a possessed man and not a fantastic creature.⁴⁸

The narrative is articulated in three parts: the first 'porch' conversations, the second narratives that inspire a certain degree of mistrust in the reader and the final climax. The supreme moment revolves around a life experience in which Seabrook, through his sense of 'realism', assumes that a number of able bodies have been drugged and their vitals had temporally collapsed.

46. 'Seabrook was immersed in a strand of Modernism that expressed its disgust of bourgeois civilization after the Great War by embracing what is perceived as the 'savage' vitality of the primitive black world as an answer to Western decadence and decay.' In Luckhurst, R., *Zombies. A Cultural History*, p. 24.

47. Seabrook, W., *The Magic Island*, p. 92.

48. Ibidem, p. 94-95.

In opposition to the records I have previously analysed with their great emphasis on barbarism and tribal brutality, Seabrook creates a modernist survey 'dramatising and extrapolating a wider contest between rival forms of thought, between rationality and mysticism, between history and modernity'.⁴⁹ Moving beyond a simulacrum of Haitian alterity, the author engages with the complex interplay between Western curiosity as the engine that might favour the encounter with the Other and the historical form in which our conceptualization of the world appears as the only legitimate one.

Voodoo as an 'ethnic religion' is symbolically transformed into an effective tool to organise dissidence and to promote a notion of local autonomy. *De facto*, from now on, in 'white' narratives on Haitian reality, voodoo will become undistinguishable from a notion of political rebellion against the modern plantation system and its abuses.⁵⁰ In the plantations in fact, as *The Magic Island* reminds us, the labour force is made up of 'the dead working in sugar cane fields'. The working-zombie does not only refer to slavery (formally abolished in the island in 1794) but also to the suppression of civil liberties that was orchestrated by the colonial power and the American government during the occupation.

ZOMBIES GO TO THE MOVIES

I wish to end this chapter taking into account another artefact that will help me reinforce my previous reading of the phenomenon. I will in fact focus my attention on the adaptation of Seabrook's novel to the big screen. I have already pointed out the originality of Seabrook's contribution to the genre and the relevance of this initiate's narrative to remove some of the Africanist elements that have characterised the genre so far. Through the use of pseudo-ethnographic techniques and the constant reference to an informer that provides a better insight on the native culture and social existence, the author struggles to offer a counter-account of the mysteries of voodoo and of the enriching experience of coming into contact with another culture.

The Lumière brothers had organised the first public screening in Paris in 1895 and less than thirty years later, alongside an amazing collection of vampires, mummies, invisible men, werewolves,⁵¹ *White Zombie* consecrated the zombie as one of the leading uncanny

49. Markman, E., *The History of Gothic Fiction*, p. 227.

50. Ibidem, p. 219.

51. Filmography: *Dracula* by Tod Browning (1931), *Frankenstein y The Invisible Man* by James Whale (1931, 1933), *The Mummy* by Kart Freund (1932) y *The Werewolf of London* by Stuart Walter (1935).

creatures destined to gain immense popularity in our times as the diverse production of TV series currently exemplified. *White Zombie* is a film based on the script of pulp writer Garnett Wilson how used Seabrook's narrative as a source of inspiration. It was finally produced and directed by Victor Harperin. The movie shows a clear continuity with the Africanist legacy, being heavily in debt with the narratives produced during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by White travellers/tourists in the Caribbean. I wish to illuminate how this adaptation of Seabrook's *The Magic Island* was conceived as an Africanist artefact thanks to the employment of a great rhetorical emphasis on the ever-present black native and the corrupt bokor. The purpose of this work is not to provide the reader with a formal critique of the work (evaluation of settings, lights, photography and so on) but to use two particular scenes to demonstrate the continuity and therefore the strength of the anti-negro legacy that results in the peculiar atmosphere of the cinematic tropics. Nevertheless, the creative potentiality of the Seabrook's narrative was transformed in the cinematic adaptation in a form of implicit modernist critique of the evils of capitalism and alienation that the authors were experiencing in the metropolis.

***White Zombie*: Universal Studios, 1932**

The movie narrates the adventure of a couple, Neil and Madeline, that during their long journey to the States, meet an Haitian landlord that invites them to spend some time in his plantation in the Haitian capital. Beaumont secretly hopes that Madeline will break her engagement with Neil and will decide to marry him instead. The creepy desire of this corrupted aristocrat to possess the young lady and his will to get her by any means necessary, constitute the pivot round which the plot revolves.⁵² In order to effectively carry out his plans, he decides to employ the services of a powerful bokor, a voodoo wizard, to turn the sweet Madeline into a zombie. She is therefore separated from her partner and turned into a breathing corpse thanks to a mysterious white liquid and an enchanted voodoo doll. Madeline appears as an 'apparently-dead person deprived of her will, an automaton that is incapable to show any human emotions having been deprived of her soul.'⁵³ Thanks to Legendre's powers she is turned into a modern, zombified Galatea, a fleshy simulacrum of a once young and lively lady, now totally deprived of her free will. Beaumont, faced with the lifeless body, appears incapable of dealing with

52. Luckhurst highlights how the story line follows closely Tom Browning's adaptation of *Dracula*. 'The plot essentially followed the Browning *Dracula*: a young white couple due to be married, the woman imperilled by a foreign desire exercised through supernatural means, her fiancé temporarily unmannered but aided by a Van Helsing type to vanquish the un-Christina foe.' Luckhurst, R., *Zombies*, p. 75.

53. Serrano Cueto, J. M., *Zombie Evolution. El libro de los muertos vivientes en el cine*. Madrid: T&B Editores, 2009.

the consequences of his heart's desires and asks the *bokor* to re-establish the good health of the girl. Only now the real intentions of the wicked wizard became clear: he wishes to control Madeline and have her for himself. In order to dispose of the young lady he needs to get rid of the landlord and therefore he will once again use his voodoo magic. Only Neil's audacity and the help of a missionary that has spent thirty years in Haiti will save the lovers, restore Madeleine's health and kill the wicked Legendre and his legion of soulless corpses.

Despite the fact that, as Juan Andrés Pedrero has rightly pointed out, the artistic value of this screen adaptation of Seabrook's novel is almost none,⁵⁴ its analysis provides a number of keys to comprehend the complex relation between Imperialism, Representation and Colonial Otherness that I have defined as key axes of my approach to the genre. While the novel represents one of the first historical attempts to break free of the Africanist legacy and to offer a settle account of the initiation of a white man to the mysteries of the island, the movie with its exotic scenery and a plurality of references to voodoo established, once again, a deadly and uncanny alterity at the centre of the North American cultural production.

Background Curtain: Haiti

*I have lived in this island for a good many years and I have
seen things with my eyes that made me think I was crazy*

Doctor Bruner

Night scene.

The two lovebirds, recently landed on a boat, are received by a black coachman and transported in an old fashion carriage that will take them at the Beaumont Mansion. They hug each other and they dream their future wedding that will be celebrated in this enchanting, exotic and remote place. In the distance drums beat at the rhythm of an ancestral music. The coachman stops and the couple observe from their window a group of

54. Pedrero Santos, J. A., *Terror Cinema*. Madrid: Calamares Ediciones, 2008, p. 52: 'se nos antoja más histórica que de otra índole al estar su fama íntimamente unida al hecho de constituirse como la película inaugural del subgénero consagrado a los zombis.'

natives dancing and singing in the moonlight. Neil and Madeline are spectators of funeral rites celebrated in the middle of the road for fear, according to the coachman, of 'those evil men that steal corpses from the graves to turn them into the living dead', powerless labour force to be exploited in the local sugar cane fields.

Right from the beginning, Haiti appears as a mystic territory, mysterious to the foreign eyes of white travellers that have come to enjoy a short and pleasurable stay.

The first images of the Harperin's adaptation evoke the same exotic/erotic fantasies of the Western traveller that have characterised written and oral narratives between the nineteenth and the twentieth century. At night the island landscape, the first encounters with dark people dramatically contrast with the light colouring of the two main characters and their discreet whispers clashes with the noise coming from outside, where a party of people dressed up with 'traditional' African costumes literarily occupy the main road. In this first filmic adaptation of the genre topoi one can recognise those elements that constitute the Oriental/African discourse that by now we are so familiar with: a virgin land, native people dominated by barbaric superstitions and occult practices that scare the white imagination and make Madeleine hug her fiancé in search of reassurance. This representation suggests that the Other can only be feared, seduced or rejected but never understood or cared for. Accounting for white supremacy means being able to acknowledge that these fantasy visions work as projections of the hegemonic imagination of the conqueror.⁵⁵

Remembering once again Mimi Sheller words, black bodies functions as powerful contaminating elements in the narratives under consideration. In this particular case, their power manifests itself on the bodies and souls of those whites that have been in contact with the locals for a very long period of time.⁵⁶ Despite the fact that Legendre and the other European resident, Beaumont, are both light skinned men, they manifest through their behaviour a high degree of degradation due to their constant contacts with blacks and their full immersion in the life of the island.

55. Belli, S., López, C. y Romano, J., «La excepcionalidad del Otro», *Athenea Digital* 11, 2007, pp. 104-113.

56. The repeated exposure to the tropics and the contact with the natives have dreadful consequences on the body and psyche of the white planters. In Beaumont, for example, the long lasting relationship has turned him into a corrupted and immoral man and his progressive zombification –clearly identifiable in the distorted limbs and slack facial expressions- generates disgust and a sense of dread in the audience. Madeleine, on the contrary, does not appear as a revolting creature; she still retains some of the glamour of her youth.

The Bokor, Voodoo and Haitian Alterity

Night scene.

A skinny man, with a pointed goatee and an eccentric hat that covers his face completely, approaches the carriage in which Neil and Madeleine are travelling. Legendre in this first scene is accompanied by a legion of walking dead. Taking advantage of the initial estrangement of the couple due to this bizarre meeting, the bokor steals a silk scarf from Madeleine. Some moments later, our heroine, with a broken voice, tells her lover about her irrational fear at the sight of the man and of a feeling of 'hands that were grabbing my throat'.

If in the previous written narratives, the zombie appeared as a tool in the hands of evil warlocks fighting against the Imperial domination, in *White Zombie* they have been turned into senseless creatures to satisfy an abnormal and perverse desire to exercise total control over others.

A clear distance separates Seabrook's narrative from this Universal Studio's production. While in *The Magic Island* the undead appears in the last section and its existence does not represent the major concern of the author, in this version, its representation as labour force in a modern sugar factory owned by Legendre constitutes a red threat that articulates the whole narrative. In Harperin's imagination, zombies are forced to work endlessly till they drop and some of the elements of traditional slave narratives of the island turn into a modern critique of factory work and alienation.

The reference to factory work was already present in Seabrook's *The Magic Island* as a reference to the multinational Hasco that hired rural labour to work in the fields, from dawn to dusk, for the minimum wage. These men were the bodies/corpses 'exhumed from the graves, recently dead, and forced to work as slaves under the terrible sun of the tropics'.⁵⁷ The zombie resurfaced in Seabrook's anti-modern critique as labour force with no rights and appears as a metanarrative of the slave trade and plantation system. The major focus lays on wealth, particularly its production and redistribution.

Nevertheless, if we observe the ways in which this concern with the mode of production and the system of labour exploitation in the cinematographic adaptation, we cannot fail to notice that it has acquired central stage.

57. Seabrook, W., *The Magic Island*. New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1929, p. 97.

In Patricia Chu's words:

In one of the most striking sequences of the film, zombies labourers walk around a bi-level mill inside a large stone building. On the top level, zombies carrying baskets of what is presumably sugar cane balanced on their heads walk slowly, staring into space, stiff-legged. [...] They stare unseeingly into space as they walk their endless circle.⁵⁸

In this context of proto-capitalist exploitation, Murder Legendre, the owner of the mill, is portrayed as a complex character.

Lugosi in fact interpreted the role of a white 'foreigner' that uses those black bodies to satisfy is insane desire for power and total control. What is at stake in the narrative is once more fear of reverse colonisation, contamination and, more evidently in this artefact, terror at the loss of autonomy.

In fact, these three elements simultaneously agglutinate the zombie narrative. On one hand, one of Harperin's central concerns is the progressive zombification of a male, while character. Beaumont appears under the sway of the warlock, almost incapable of reacting; the attributes that modernity has defined as pertaining to the Subject are disappearing with the progressive erosion and distortion of his physical foundations. *Personhood* is clearly under attack and the notion of a *free (European) subject* is undermined.⁵⁹ On the other, contamination lays at the core of the narrative. If one looks once more at Beaumont, his lack of respect for the bond that Madeleine and Neil shared, appears as the result of a long-lasting presence of the landlord in Haiti. The constant and promiscuous contact with the degenerated races could not but determine the moral collapse of the European and North American settlers. Moreover, reverse colonization appears as a deep fear in the narrative. The destiny of the black slaves totally deprived of their autonomy/subjectivity in the context of the pre-modern slave economy seems to be spreading to the whites that inhabited the island or to accidental tourists that dare to spend some times at the tropics. The narrative reflects, to a certain extend, the scepticism that vanguard intellectuals from a variety of locations expressed towards capitalism, at

58. Chu, P., *Race, Nationalism and the State in British and American Modernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 21.

59. Ibidem, p. 5.

the edges of the democratized, institutionalized and mechanized citizen's peripheral vision [...] Supernatural monstrosity emerges alongside rationalised production and organization.⁶⁰

The positive mirror image of this lack of morals and respect for European traditions and values is represented by the figure of Brumer, a white missionary that thanks to Faith, will retain a notion of his own humanity that allows him to do good and to reinforce European moral standards. As much as in the first cinematic adaptations of *Dracula*, people with faith are those that will effectively fight against Evil, in *White Zombies* the sceptic missionary will re-establish order –a Divide sort of order exemplified by the loving wedded couple- helping Neil to conquer his fiancé back and eliminating once and for all the threat represented by the black sorcerer and its army of undead. In other words what best characterised Harperin's adaptation is the way in which he persistently intertwines the technological and the mechanical and the primitive.⁶¹

Another element that it is worth of our attention is the apparent desire of Madeleine to be seduced by the landlord. She accepts with enthusiasm Beaumont's offer to visit the island while she is travelling on her own to New York. Once again the idea of a young woman in need of protection works as the excuse to turn her responsible for her own faith. As much as Lucy has been seduced by the vampire because of her eccentricity and her lack of powerful family connections, Madeleine is ultimately exposed to the power of the *bokor* because of her will to explore the world on her own; an improper desire if we attend American's prescriptions on female appropriate behaviour at the time. Madeleine represents another of these female characters that share a certain degree of resistance in adapting to social and gender norms. In Western literary tradition and in this filmic approximation to monstrosity, the inability to live according to patriarchal norms is the foundation to women's fall. In this particular case, Madeleine will turn into a monster, a putrefying automaton that is depicted as a shadow of her own lost self. As much as Lucy is portrayed as the negative mirror image of the ideal woman, Madeleine's body appears as a fathom presence, a bride that is unable to retain her own desire, willingness and, therefore, her sense of *humanity*. Paradoxically, her inability to recognised her husband –rather than being able to remember her life or her surroundings– marks her lack of subjectivity. Once again, for women in the Anglo-American nineteenth and early twentieth century traditions, being able to settle in their marital status functions as a mark of their ontological 'normality'.

60. Chu. P., *Race, Nationalism and the State in British and American Modernism*, p. 37.

61. *Ibidem*, p. 38.

To sum up, I would say that in *White Zombie* we are facing three peculiar Others: the black natives that are wearing traditional costumes, dance and sing at the rhythm of drums. They evoke that sense of remoteness in *space* and *time* that characterised the Orientalist and Africanist legacy. They do not speak; the only black person that speak is the coach man and we can guess that his ability to express himself is related to his training and his proximity to the whites. Later in the movie, two characters emerge that have been corrupted by their long staying in the tropics. Legendre and Beaumont represents the major focus of contagion: in fact they inhabit a world of moral decadence and corruption; an underworld in black and white that appears dominated by alienation and death. The last element that works as a subtext is the way in which Harperin depicts desirable womanhood and the implicit fear of eccentric feminine behaviour that works as the detonator of the narrative plot. The lack of judgement and moral righteousness of the Madeleine that induces her flirting with Beaumont is easily identified as the source of her downfall. A pious man, that distrusts everything ‘*made in Haiti*’ as superstitions will allow true love to triumph and Madeleine’s ‘delivery’ to the arms of her ‘uncontaminated’ husband.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS ON THE ROTTING CORPSE

In his work on Gothic narratives/Gothic History, Markman offers an inclusive definition of the modern zombie as a creature that embodies ‘a constellation of gothic properties related to slave culture in the Caribbean: the leader of maroon rebels, a ghost or a revenant, or a demon-lover in the shape of an impossibly seductive young woman.’⁶² I acknowledge his attempt to coagulate all these aspects that I have been referring to in a unified definition that can work as a background to understand the phenomenon

62. Markman, E., *The History of Gothic Fiction*, p. 218. Through this chapter I have not analysed the relation between the zombie monster and femininity. In my investigation I have come across a limited number of sources that refers to it. Nevertheless, I wish to share one of the few short stories in which the parallelism is quite clear. I found particularly fascinating a narrative that Lafcadio Hearn –a Harper’s magazine journalist– re-tells in his text ‘*la Guiablesse*’ in which a peasant is seduced by a she-devil and follows her to his death.

“And she, suddenly,—turning at once to him and to the last red light, the goblin horror of her face transformed,—shrieks with a burst of hideous laughter:

—“*Atò, bô!*”

For the fraction of a moment he knows her name:—then, smitten to the brain with the sight of her, reels, recoils, and, backward falling, crashes two thousand feet down to his death upon the rocks of a mountain torrent.’ Version online: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/6381/6381-h/6381-h.htm#link2HCH0004>. Last viewed 05/04/2014. In a future research project, I would like to explore the nexus between rituals that originated in the African heritage controlled by female figures. One example, that I have already mentioned, is provided by the fact that Madá Celié initiated Seabrook to the mysteries of voodoo.

in its plurality of manifestations but help us focused on a common denominator. Nevertheless, the elements that have surfaced in the long history of the zombie as a figuration of Otherness should not be forgotten. In the first part of the chapter I have highlighted how Africanism emerged during the colonial era as a peculiar discourse on African countries and people reduced to a degraded mirror image of the Western ideal Self. Africanism has historically controlled the forms in which Anglo-North American authors have spoken about people from the Caribbean –especially Haitians- defined as barbarians and incapable of self-government due to their African heritage. In these first ‘horror stories’ the zombie appeared as the putrefying corpse at the hand of evildoers fighting against the legitimate control of their land by foreign powers. This meaning is the one that has settled throughout most of the nineteenth and twentieth century in Haitian cultural/intellectual history and it is the one contested by native authors in a clear ‘game of alterity’ to which I will dedicate the second part of chapter four.

Vice versa, the connotation that has remained in ‘our’ cultural history and popular culture –‘us’ as white middle class people coming from the West- is the result of a progressive depuration. In fact, the zombie is primarily or, I would even say exclusively, a one-dimensional corpse, degenderized and desexualized. The subversive potential that it might retain as a ‘monster figure’⁶³ is represented by the fact that it is indeed a liminal creature that lives between worlds. It does not fear Death because it is not fully alive but still enjoys the power of acting in the world of the living and therefore it is represented as a dangerous and even contaminating creature. This characterization as a ‘limbo’ monster has allowed for it to be turned into a metaphorical critique of contemporary capitalism. Due to its internal plasticity, the zombie appears in the late twenties as a much more complex ‘cultural idea’. In its first cinematographic adaptation, *White Zombie*, some revolutionary elements are introduced. The horror experienced by the settlers in Haiti is paired by the recognition of the dangerous effect of capitalism on modern subjectivity. Moreover, the original fear towards black others is replaced by a sense of threat that accompanied the economic and social transformation of the mode of production. The movie highlights how the newly developed mechanization of labour could affect dramatically our notion of autonomy and freedom as (European) subjects. In this historical adaptation of the late twenties, the first *white zombie* appears. Forty years later, Romero will take on the creature and indeed turn the zombie narrative into a critique of consumerism as a ‘*total social fact*’. As a matter of fact, far from the original zombie/Other that characterized nineteenth century narratives, in most of Romero’s filmic works, the zombie appears has a bio-machine launched to consume human flesh in the context of massive, alienating malls.⁶⁴

63. Please note my analysis on ‘monster figures’ and ‘liminal creatures’ as a site of resistance in chapter one.

64. Fernández Gonzalo provides a good guide to Romero’s fiction. Nevertheless, his reading of the phenomenon, totally decontextualized, does not appear particularly persuasive. Fernández Gonzalo, J., *Filosofía Zombi*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2011.

CARTOGRAPHY



CHAPTER FOUR

PLAYING IN THE DARK

I have conceived the fourth chapter as a *cartography* of my itinerary into monstrosity. I used the term here in reference to Rosi Braidotti's definition: a cartography is 'a way of embedding critical practice in a specific situated perspective, avoiding universalistic generalizations and grounding it so as to make it accountable'.¹ In order to put my analysis into perspective then, I will introduce the reader to some other artefacts –produced in the United States– which represent interesting and challenging innovations to the genres and can account for further evolutions that I will consider later, in chapter five, six and seven while analysing Hamilton's production. This chapter is divided in two sections; the first one deals with *The Gilda Stories*, a novel published in the eighties in which the main character is a black vampire woman that directly opposes Stoker's legacy. In the text the author, Jewelle Gomez, struggles with the notion of a degraded race and the moral implications of such a representation of Otherness in the canon. In Gomez' work, the Orientalist discourse on a subaltern Other that preys on Western men and women is dramatically subverted through a variety of elements that altered this image of the vampire predator forever. Gilda is a black woman, a speaking subject that tells her own story, shares her torments and her desires through impressionistic sketches of her past experiences and stories of a near future. Her humanity challenges the limits posed by traditional vampire narratives and Gilda, as a speaking black character, question the notion of a white (hegemonic) western subject opposed to a speechless subaltern in the guise of a bloodsucking creature.

1. Braidotti, R., *Transpositions*. London: Polity Press, 2006, p. 79.

The second part is articulated around a critical reading of the Haitian literary resistance to the degraded images Anglo-American authors offered of the natives. I have considered the authors belonging to the *Indigenist* vanguard through one of their canonical texts, *Ainsi parla l'oncle, Essais d' Ethnographie*, written by Price Mars, a distinct voice in the insular literary scene. Both parts have been structured around the idea that vampires in the eighties and zombies from the Haitian occupation till the late sixties have been used as sites of resistance to the hegemonic discourse on Otherness that I have illuminated in my genealogical work. Despite the different locations considered –the States and Haiti respectfully– and the time lengths under consideration –the eighties and the period prior/post the American Occupation– what the two instances have in common is the attempt to conquer the popular imagination and reverse the degraded images and transform them in signs of a powerful, oppositional (national/cultural) identity.

In this first part, I will briefly sum up some of the key elements of my previous analysis of Stoker's archetypal female figures in order to locate my reading of Gomez's fiction against to and in tension with these two nineteenth century monsters. I will then move on to illuminate key social and political struggles that helped this new characterisation of the creature to emerge.

FIRST LANDMARK: SCARY SEXUAL CREATURES

In *Dracula*, Lucy is depicted as the embodiment of uncontrollable sexual drives that turn her into an hysterical subject incapable of submitting to a male authority and unwilling to choose a heterosexual, monogamous couple over a number of male partners she wish to seduce. Her entrance in the real of the monstrous turns her into a voluptuous and malicious creature that feeds on defenseless children, that is to say into a mirror image of desirable femininity. Mina, in return, represents a new woman, socialized in a male dominated environment in a moment in which the Angel of the House represented the privileged and desirable model of identification for middle class white women. She resists her final transformation through the renunciation of her autonomy and her conversion into a loving Mother. In her case then, reproductive sexuality marks the border she does not wish to cross in order to fully turn to vampirism. We are faced here with two different aspects of femininity that were perceived as seriously disturbing by the vast majority of male authors of the Victorian period. In both cases, Stoker manifests great horrors towards illegitimate sexual desire exemplified in the text by the homoerotic tension between the two female characters and by the unions of Dracula,

the prototypical outsider, the foreign-Other, with Lucy or Mina, his females of choice. The preoccupation with abnormal sexuality is paired with fear for female 'closeness' that manifests itself through a degree of intimacy unknown in men-women relations as the 'cold' engagement between Mina and Jonathan clearly reveals. If Dracula's sexuality pointed at an external thread, a possible corruption of purity through vampire's touch, Lucy's and Mina's intimacy gives voice to a more subliminal hostility towards a desire conceived as primordial, linked to an age of innocence, to an everlasting memory of care and familiarity. The duplicity of lesbianism, source of terror and desire for a voyeuristic male gaze (according to feminist critics), is rooted in this unbreakable bond that men envy and fear at the same time. It represents an autonomous sphere of self-definition that cannot possibly be subjected to their gaze or power. In Stoker's work we can trace a strong homophobic feeling and a hostile reaction to the emergence of women's bonds of affection and complicity outside the traditional family environment. Considering these terms of the question posed by the gothic literary tradition and by vampire literature in particular, Gilda constitutes a focus of resistance to a variety of elements that define the tradition itself, namely lesbianism as a source of terror/desire and race as one of the boundaries the vampire monster explicitly disrupts.

SECOND LANDMARK: COLOURED METAPHORS

I have previously illustrated how in the Haitian context, the emergence of black pride and national consciousness had coincided in the first half of the twentieth century with the re-valorization of anything *Made in Haiti*, perceived as authentic and generated by the African genius. African descendants were symbolically used to anchor the national struggle in a process of reinvention of a golden age prior to the imperial experience. What has happened in the context of American literature has been quite similar if one considers the attempt to overcome the Africanist tradition that lies at the core of North American imagination. According to the African-American writer Toni Morrison, blackness constitutes the backbone of most North American classics written by white male authors. In *Playing in the Dark* Morrison states that 'blackness' and black people as Others have been essential to the development of American cultural history, despite the fact that a wide number of critics are firmly persuaded that Africans and African-Americans play no part on the origins and development of their national literature. The presence of 'blackness' manifests itself both in terms of black characters key to the evolution of the plot and as a series of language metaphors related to colour that 'can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony,

and dismissive “othering” of people”.² The social marginality of blacks and other *people of colours* does not reflect as absence in a literary tradition dominated by white male views, genius and power; on the contrary it is ‘central to any understanding of our national literature and should not be permitted to hover at the margins of the literary imagination.’³ In her terms, the very existence of a coherent American literary tradition is the result of codes and norms of symbolic exclusion of a part of the population perceived as unsettling and unsettled due to the social position it historically occupied. Thanks to the constant marginalisation of blacks in the symbolic, America has been able to create its *ideal-type* and has succeeded (to a certain extent) in imagining a territory where the Other as black coincides at times with the *monster* –as we have seen to a close exploration of the zombie’s representation– or with a man that does not quite belong. The critique to such a complex racialized discourse has been recently approached both in terms of academic writing on the matter and through the analysis of a number of literary/filmic figures that account for a variety of experiences and emotions related to blackness. Academics have been working for decades on a militant critique of the negatively stereotyped notion of black Others as no-humans or sub-human that has dominated the popular imagination. At the same time, some feminists have successfully deconstruct the all-too-familiar images of black women in particular as serviceable and over-caring *mammies* that have so seriously impaired several generations of black women in the States.⁴ All these authors have stressed the importance of understanding the American discourse on blackness in the context of an economic and social system –slavery– based on the constant and massive exploitation of the population of colour, guaranteed by its theoretical and symbolic exclusion from the category of people. These discursive elements have guaranteed its persistency and success through time.⁵ The disappearance of slavery after the Civil War did not coincide with the progressive inclusion of blacks in the mainstream cultural entourage nor to the emergence of a dramatically different representation of blackness in the media.

If we compare the relative progress African Americans have made in education and employment to the struggle to gain control over how we are

2. Morrison, T., *Playing in the dark. Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. London: Harvard University Press, 1991, p. X.

3. Idem, p. 10.

4. Hill Collins, P., *Black Feminist Thought. Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 69.

5. Hill Collins, P., *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism and Feminism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006.

represented, particularly in the mass media, we see that there has been little change in the area of representation. Opening a magazine or book, turning on the television set, watching a film, or looking at photographs in public spaces, we are most likely to see images of black people that reinforce and reinscribe white supremacy.⁶

Nevertheless, a new access to cultural resources guaranteed by an easier entrance into the educational system and, later, into consumerism of cultural artifacts created the preconditions for a serious questioning of slave narratives with their emphasis on blacks' hyper-sexualization, charms, laziness, naivety and a supposed propensity to sexual violence.⁷ In this complex setting that shows the emergence of Black consciousness, black consumerism of cultural artifacts and of a lively middle class struggling with its own self-image, Gilda could be considered as one manifestation of this recently acquired 'public' consciousness. In fact, to the stereotyping of black people and to their historical marginality both in the political scene and in the literary realm, Jewelle Gomez's work opposes a black-monster who struggles to assert herself as a member of the human community to which she is bound by affection, communion and desire for care.

FEMALE VAMPIRES PLAY IN THE DARK

In 1991, Jewelle Gomez, a completely unknown African-American writer belonging to the militant Gay and Lesbian Community of San Francisco, was awarded the Lambda Literary Prize for a collection of neo-gothic short stories named *The Gilda Stories*. Since then, Gomez has established herself as an influential author and a reference for Gothic Fans thanks to several adaptations of two episodes of her, by now, well-known book in which we are told the adventures and misfortunes of an African-American vampire. In the novel, we follow Gilda through America in a journey that lasts over 150 years; we celebrate her transformation from a young slave to a *madame* in a brothel and, while she holds our hand, we navigate the difficult situations she encounters being a lesbian and a black in contemporary and near-future America. In my cartography, the novel

6. Hooks, B., *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press, 1992, p. 1.

7. Gilroy, P., *Against Race. Imagining political culture beyond the colour line*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.

represents a brave attempt to reinvent and imagine a fantasy world where vampires are less brutal and removed from the Gothic literary production of the past and Stoker's treatment of female vampirism that I have analysed in chapter one, *Genealogy of Desire*.

In Gilda's words:

There are only inadequate words to speak for who we are. The language is cruel, the history false. You must look to me and know who I am and if the life I offer is the life you choose. In choosing you must pledge yourself to pursue only life, never bitterness or cruelty.⁸

The author posits her novel as an experimental approach to the vampire figure. While Stoker rescues some of the features of the folkloric creature to portrait his Victorian monster, Gomez's narrative is totally removed from the beastly world dominated by violence that has characterised the previous treatment of the genre. Nevertheless, certain similarities can be detected if we consider that race is central to both literary works. If Stoker's novel relays on a fossil, primitive Others from somewhere else, Gomez responds to the powerful Africanist legacy that has historically forged representations of black as inhuman and monstrous. In the first few pages we read about the abuses she has to suffer at the hands of white people, portrayed as beasts and rapists. Playing with the notion of the black rapist,⁹ Gomez introduce us to the horror of slavery and to the dangers of being a young black girl in Louisiana in 1850s:

She looked up at the beast from this other hand, as he dragged her by her leg from the concealing straw. His face lost the laugh that had split it and became creased with last. He untied the length of rope holding his pants, and his smile returned as he became thick with anticipation of her submission to her [...] He bent forward on his knees, stiff for conquest, already counting the bounty fee and savouring the stories he would tell.¹⁰

At the same time, Gomez does not relay simply on a game of reverse strategy, she make her narrative a lot more unsettling introducing in the same episode a white woman saviour that will reveal herself as a vampire and her future companion. Playing with the

8. Gomez, J., *The Gilda's Stories. A Novel*. New York: Firebrand Books, 1991.

9. Davis, A., *Women, Race and Class*. New York: Vintage Books, 1983.

10. Gomez, J., *The Gilda Stories. A Novel*, p. 11.

white, imperial master's narratives on race, Gomez inverts the paradigm and unsettles the historical identification of the vampire with a monstrous other by picturing the first Gilda as a white vampire, 'fully' American. After this first encounter she is introduced to the feminine world of the vampire, a peculiar community of strong willed women that speak and behave like men but still care for each other dearly. They are a nineteenth century American (imagined) version of the British New Woman, in a homosocial and free-from-patriarchy utopian space:

These women embodied the innocence of children the Girl had known back at the plantation, yet they were also hard, speaking of the act of sex casually, sometimes with humour. And even more puzzling was their debate of topics the Girl had heard spoken of only men. The women eagerly expressed their views on politics and economics: what slavery was doing to the South, who was dominating politics [...]¹¹

The Girl settles in comfortably and these people will turn into her family. She is as much an unprotected, lonely youngster as Lucy in Stoker's narrative. Nevertheless, when she is turned, she becomes a powerful, caring, speaking subject that relay on a feminist notion of 'femaleness' and female communality as a site of resistance to a patriarchal masculine Self, bloodthirsty and inclined to violence.

There are those of our kind who kill every time they go out into the night. They say they need this exhilaration in order to live this life. They are simply murderers.¹²

Kill him! He'll haunt our every step if you don't." Her urgency made her voice become more shrill. "How can we live if we don't rid ourselves of him right now?" [...] "How?" Gilda screamed at Eleanor. "I don't think we can live at all if we do this."¹³

The lesbian vampire is pictured in *humane* terms. It is far removed by the stereotypical figure of the predator and the bloodsucking monster that was so characteristic of the previous production:

11. Gomez, J., *The Gilda Stories. A Novel*, p. 20.

12. Ibidem., p. 45.

13. Ibidem, p. 99.

In our life, we how live by sharing the life blood of others have no need to kill. It is through our connection with life, not death that we live.¹⁴

Her adventures take place in a cruel world in which the boundaries between the 'monstrous' and the 'normal' are not so clearly identifiable. The struggle between the vampire and the Others is conceived in moral terms but this time, the main character speaks for herself and constitutes the main voice narrating the events. Gilda denounces the horrors of the very civilization Stoker was so eager to defend. If ancient vampires were creatures that did not hold on to their humanity and were overwhelmed by primordial instincts that transformed them in dangerous thirsty beasts, Gilda is an all-too human(e) creature. I argue that the definition of Human corresponds to a Subject located in a female morphology that has displaced Reason in favor of affection and care. In fact, she redefines and re-invent a form of being humane in a community of affects that moves beyond the 'colour line' through deranged notions of time and space. She still is a vampire that hungers for blood as her ancestors did, but the relationship she tries to build with her partners is now based on understanding of each other needs. Her take of blood appears as a *gift* in the anthropological sense given by Marcel Mauss to this practice across cultures and the society here envisioned is one built around a notion of complete reciprocity.¹⁵

Far from been just a one-way transaction, Gilda takes blood but in exchange she infuses her people with warmth and a sense of belonging that is otherwise alien to them:

Daily married life remained unchanged: her husband replaced her father as patriarch, guiding her along a preordained social path. The death of her parents and her husband left Aurelia financially comfortable but with little direction. She began to see the poverty and fear of the newly arrived blacks who lived in marginal farms with insufficient yields or labored in St. Louis factories for the lowest wages. Gilda's steely calm made these new shadows less frightening [...] their mutual enjoyment of small pleasures rekindled Aurelia's hope.¹⁶

14. Gomez, J., *The Gilda Stories*, p. 45.

15. Mauss, M., *The Gift. The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*. London: Routledge, 2002.

16. Gomez, J., *The Gilda Stories*, p. 107.

Through her, humanity can feel whole for the first time.

Gilda felt such sorrow at this diminished capacity for life, she had to restrain the impulse to shake her awake and preach her about the need for dreams. Instead she held her in the sleep and pulled her into her arms (...) she held the girl's body and mind tightly, letting the desire for future life flow through them both, a promising reverie of freedom and challenge. The woman absorbed Gilda's desire for family, for union with others like herself, for new experience. Through these she perceived a capacity for endless life and an open door of possibility.¹⁷

Gomez challenges American literary tradition that heavily relies on Africanism resisting the discursive practices on blacks as marginal that define power relations between majority and minority groups in United States' society at the time. She offers a *countercultural narrative* that stages the adventures of a black main character, ironically playing of the notion of black as a site of monstrosity. Moreover, she makes it a lesbian, displacing two *topoi* of the genre simultaneously. In fact, she portrays a powerful vampire that is a lesbian but, as we have seen in the previous fragments I have offered, cannot be assimilated to the devouring, mindless and abject creature Stoker created.

A New Vampire Self: Lesbianism as a Site of Resistance

Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is not a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically. For what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man, a relation that we have previously called servitude, a relation which implies personal and physical obligation as well as economic obligation ("forced residence," domestic corvée, conjugal duties, unlimited production

17. Gomez, J., *The Gilda Stories*, p. 123.

*of children, etc.), a relation which lesbians escape by
refusing to become or to stay heterosexual.*

Monique Wittig

Starting from the assumption that lesbians have been historically excluded by the category of women,¹⁸ Gomes embrace the monster-lesbian to suggest an economy of feelings in which patterns of behavior that were previously recognized as malevolent or perverted, are seen as a generous attempt to communicate and share in an anti-hierarchical manner. While observing the ways in which the author depicts various communities of lesbians through time, one cannot fail to notice a clear shift in the direction of a more equalitarian bond between the vampire and her companions.

If Stoker's vampire was *glamouring* defenseless humans, taking away their free will and, therefore, betraying a desire to dominate and render us non-human (autonomy understood as the distinctive and constitutive element of humanity), Gilda asks for blood and offer something in exchange. Trying to break the dichotomy between submission and dominance, Gomez bet it all on a new way of defining relationships:

Gilda decide to do something she has been warned against by both Sorel and Bird- to break silence with someone outside the family. She did this for Aurelia's sake and for her own. Trust had to follow the path cut by love.¹⁹

It is not by pure chance that the main characters of her novel are lesbians. The first reason that could have motivated this choice is that the author is a lesbian and an African American herself and wants to picture a world in which black lesbians are not marginalized but can live accordingly to their own wishes and desires. Nevertheless, I will argue here that, if one observes the cultural context in which the novel was first gestated, one can trace back its origins to the general debate that was, at that point,

18. Wittig, M., *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1991. Simone de Beauvoir considers the category of 'woman' as a social formation controlled by Patriarchal ideology and that social relations between 'men' and 'women' are the results of a 'heterosexual contract' in which men gain power over women. Wittig theorises that lesbians 'are not women' because of their marginal position both in relation to the notion of 'woman' that identifies heterosexuality as the core of the definition and because of their denial to enter in what she describes as the *political regime* of heterosexuality. In *The Straight Mind*, Wittig remarks that lesbians live in a liminal space, neither women nor men, and in liminality resides their deconstructive potential and their similarity with the monster figure. For an interesting contribution to this debate see: Balza, I., «Hacia un feminismo monstruoso: sobre cuerpo político y sujeto vulnerable» in Suarez, B. (Ed.), *Las lesbianas (no) somos mujeres. En torno a Monique Wittig*. Barcelona: Icaria, 2013.

19. Gomez, J., *The Gilda Stories*, p. 128.

dominating the feminist movement and 'lesbian separatism' in particular.²⁰ The novel's plot and setting is not just an effect of the particular subject position of the author but can best be understood as an expression of a general cultural climate that she experienced as a black/lesbian militant.

Thanks the growing emphasis on the 'personal' as opposed to the 'public', women demanded free access to *pleasure* and to a satisfactory sexuality that was not subordinated to reproduction or legitimated by the heterosexual dominant model. Embracing the modern advancements of science and technology,²¹ some feminists promoted a new discourse on women as active sexual subjects that should not be bond to heterosexual and reproductive norms governing the family, perceived as a patriarchal institution based on the systematic exploitation of female work and body. Orgasm and pleasure enter the arena of public psyche and turned into the focus of much debate and theorizing from the field of anthropology to philosophy. Nevertheless, from the second half of the twentieth century and thanks to the considerable contributions from female writers and critics during the seventies and the eighties (with the newborn philosophy of Gender and the critical enquiry into the social and political relations between the sexes) sexuality has finally been recognized as a key element to interpret human behaviour and has acquired a central status in the reflections on human relations and love ones in particular. Moreover, sexuality has been described as the *locus* of everlasting power struggles understood as the embodiment of the existing dichotomy between domination and submission. In particular this dichotomy has been represented critically as a manifestation of patriarchy or a mode of social relation based on inequality and a hierarchical order where women are oppressed and men are the ever-domineering subjects. As a response to hegemonic *heteronormativity*, the problematic knot of gender domination and female submission, lesbianism became, politically, the only countercultural practice that could resist this dichotomy and establish a new realm where relationships were based on interchange and on a symmetrical bond between the parties involved. For a vast proportion of radical feminist activists, homosexual relations between women were the only ones

20. Whelehan, I., *Modern Feminist Thought. From the Second Wave to 'Post-Feminism'*. Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1995 offers an extremely useful introduction to the feminist debates of those years. Johnston, J., *Lesbian Nation. The Feminist Solution*. New York: Touchstone Book, 1973 and Rich, A., «Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience», *Signs*, Vol. 5, No. 4, Women: Sex and Sexuality. (Summer, 1980), pp. 631-660 provide essential, classic readings to understand the ways in which lesbianism was theorised and appropriated as a political/social and personal identity by some American feminists.

21. Bailey, B., «Prescribing the Pill: Politics, Culture, and the Sexual Revolution in America's Heartland», *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 30, No. 4, Summer 1997, pp. 827-856.

able to guarantee a real break with submission and dominance that characterized the heterosexual world; a true feminist choice.²²

A movement had emerged which relied heavily on the idea that women constituted a unique identity, that we had special moral attributes, and that being or becoming a “woman-identified-woman” was the best and most effective way to express feminist politics.²³

In this respect, Gomez inherited this attitude towards homosexuality and lesbianism, which characterised some of the radical feminist positions in the debate of the previous decades. Gilda resists Gothic Tradition that disqualifies female homosexuality as perverse and represents it as an abomination and reads it as a tool for symbolic emancipation. Inheriting ‘radical feminists focus on sexuality as an arena of victimization and oppressive inequality for women’²⁴ Gomez pictures a bucolic landscape where elective bonds of love and consensual sharing between women have replaced the tyrannical dichotomy. On the other hand, she interprets creatively the ‘libertarian feminists focus on sexuality as an arena of constructive struggle’²⁵ turning her characters into problematic self-questioning beings that use sexual encounter as terrains for promoting a new ethic vision of human relations where passion almost disappears and it is replaced by a generic ‘feeling of affection’²⁶ between members of the new vampire *kiss*.²⁷ I find this ‘game of reverse’ enchanting. In fact, if family was identify originally as one of the most powerfully institution that promoted gender inequality and domination over women, Gomez uses the word and the concept repeatedly in her alternative vampires’ narrative subverting dramatically its understanding. From a ‘place’ of domination, these families become the only hope for establishing new equalitarian bonds. We have shift from blood relations and kinship to a ‘matriarchal mode’ where each member feels attached to others through this sense of elected community, a nurturing group that closely resembled the

22. Douglas, C. A., *Love and Politics. Radical Feminism and Lesbian Theories*. San Francisco: Ism Press, 1990.

23. Rudy, K., «Radical Feminism, Lesbian Separatism, and Queer Theory>>, *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Spring, 2001), pp. 190-222, p. 191.

24. Berger, R. J., Searles, P. and Cottle, C. E., «Ideological Contours of the Contemporary Pornography Debate: Divisions and Alliances», *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2/3, Spirituality, Values, and Ethics, 1990, pp. 30-38, p. 33.

25. Ididem, p. 33.

26. In order to understand my use of ‘feeling of affection’ in the context of feminist debates and lesbianism see the notion of *continuum* in Rich, A., «Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience», *Signs*, Vol. 5, No. 4, Women: Sex and Sexuality. (Summer, 1980), pp. 631-660 and the reflection on the *the erotic* by Lorde, A., «The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power» in Lorde, A., *Sister Outsider. Essays and Speeches*. New York, The Crossing Press: 1984, pp. 53-60.

27. *Kiss* is sometimes the name used to refer to a preternatural family: the vampire matriarch and her offspring.

countercultural commune as an institution opposed to the State, the Church and kinship. To the author, 'family is more than a unit designed to uphold the idea of capitalism'²⁸; it is a 'foundation', a community of affects that helped her to survive and helps Gilda to resist the ups and downs of being alive for more than hundred years.

On Vampirism: Reflections on Nurturing and Devouring

In her short article *La madre vampira*, Pilar Pedraza shares her understanding of the complex genealogy of female vampires. Their power resides in their ambiguous nature and in their liminality. That ambiguity has allowed our imagination to turn them into horrid dead spouses, terrifying lovers, diabolical human-looking machines or devouring mothers. According to Pedraza, heavily conditioned by traditional psychoanalytical critique, the most horrifying and abject representation of the female vampire is the devouring Mother. She states that the lesbian element that I have analysed through Lucy, and Gilda, constitutes just a superficial aspect of female vampirism or one of its many masks, but its real power resides in its being a metaphor of the double-faced archetypical of the Mother as nurturer and destroyer. The constant clash between normality and eccentric behaviour, between terror and unsettling aspects of the gothic narratives on one hand and a possible disappearance of threats on the other, constitutes the power engine that sustains the master narrative. If we consider Pedraza's contribution then, the disappearance of the destructive Mother and the emergence of a caring female figure such as Mina in *Dracula*, ends this tension and therefore brings the novel to an end. In effect, for the economy of the texts considered, the female figures that do not lose themselves to the nurturing aspect of their ambivalent nature will end up killed or exterminated. I wonder though how we can place Gilda in this field of enquiry. She does not share this ambivalence; nevertheless we can still see how 'motherhood' constitutes the core of the narrative. Gilda is portrayed as a caring creature, a self-sacrificing woman constantly preoccupied with the well being of those she is in charge of, or those she perceives as weak or in need of protection. They represent her metaphorical children. In order to deconstruct the devouring aspect of the Maternal, Gomez embraces the most traditional, conservative and impairing aspects of femininity as it has been defined by the patriarchal dichotomical tradition. In her attempt to question the Gothic, Gomez portrays a woman that, without giving up her never ending life, will never constitute a threat to society as we know it or to its impairing stereotypes and gender roles. In

28. Interview with Jewelle Gomez in 1993: <http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/Gomez/GomezInterview.html>. Last viewed 28/11/2015.

fact, instead of collapsing this dichotomy, Gomez just embraces what she considers the positive side of it. Killing the demonic, abject aspect of the Mother understood as foundational to female identity, she stands with the nurturing, candid version of the angelical. Paulina Palmer appears fascinated with Gomez's character. To Auerbach's critique of Gilda's lame and anti-antagonistic response to macho ideologies present in vampire texts, Palmer states that Gilda represents a queer narrative of transgression and tension that is still there in the form of internal and external difficulties in defining self-identity as transitional and performative.²⁹ Nonetheless, if we had to place Gilda among the powerful female figures that dominate our imagination it would be a difficult task. In her struggle for identity she does not appear heroic. She is neither a fascinating monster nor a troubled being at the verge of the abyss. Being used to a mode of Gothic Literature dominated by patriarchal violence, one might not be capable of recognizing the power of Gilda as a revolutionary alternative to the canon. My feeling is that taking away terror and ambiguity and reinforcing therefore a traditional vision of femininity based on an economy of affection and love, Gomez impairs her character and makes her disposable. It seems to me that in order to subvert the canon we need a character that does not remove antagonism (I agree with Auerbach here) and who still retains a strong power of attraction. I wish to show in the third part of my work how Anita Blake represents a successful example of such a powerful female (non canonical) monster. Bearing in mind Gomez redefinition of blackness as a site to rethink the *humane*, in the following sections I will explore the response of black intellectuals to the Africanist discourse in the Haitian context, referring primarily to their reconceptualization of folklore. In particular, I will focus my attention on Haitian literary production during and after the military occupation. My major concern here will be the use of the rotting corpse as a form of symbolic resistance to the great geopolitical powers in the area and a form to assert black pride.

RE-SIGNIFYING THE ZOMBIE: ON NATIONALISM AND IDENTITY

*It is necessary to draw the substance of our works
sometimes from this immense reservoir of folklore in
which the motives for our decisions are compressed alter
centurias, in which the elements of our sensibility are*

29. Palmer, P., *Lesbian Gothic. Transgressive Fictions*. London: Cassell, 1999, p.

*elaborated, in which the fabric of our popular character,
our national mind, is structured.*

Jean Price-Mars

As I have shown in chapter three, the Africanist discourse that had dominated oral and written tradition of white Americans travelling to Haiti has remained unquestioned until the emergence of a new sensibility in the late 1920's during the catastrophic occupation of the island by the United States that lasted more than a decade and had horrible consequences for the locals.

Political turmoil shaped in a variety of ways the forms in which native Others have been historically represented in 'white' literature as zombies or perverse *bokors* moved by an uncontrollable desire for power. We have to wait until the late thirties to see how the zombie became a symbol of national resistance against the West and a figuration of national pride due to its roots in African folklore and legends.

In the next section, I will focus my attention on the use of the rotting corpse promoted by an intellectual movement known as the *New Indigenism*, a wave of theorists from the margins that used the artefact to design their identity politics as a form of resistance to the Great geopolitical Powers of the region.

Kaiama Grover in his short text on Haitian literary tradition and on the zombie during the Duvalier's years emphasised the need to understand folklore and oral narratives as a preferential form to involve a large part of the population in political struggles. According to his reading, the opposition fought ideologically against the authoritarian and bloodthirsty regime that had been politically endorsed by the Creole elites³⁰ through the use of popular mythology rooted in voodoo and in the African heritage.

In this newly born national narrative the zombie became a device through which the middle and upper class intellectuals could relate to the vast mass of black descendants stripped of their basic human rights. Their emphasis on voodoo rituals and pantheon has to be understood in light of the ever-growing influence of voodoo religion on the rural population, virtually excluded from other discourses on identity and national rights that had impacted the urban areas and the middle, westernised classes.³¹

As Coulthard remarks, the *Indigenists*:

30. Glover, K., «Exploiting the Undead: the Usefulness of the Zombie in Haitian Literature», *Journal of Haitian Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Fall 2005), pp. 105-121.

31. Chatterjee, P., *The Nation and Its Fragments. Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993.

aim at [...] the loosening of the strong-hold of European or 'Western' (and this includes the United States) culture, weakening the prestige of European civilization with its claims to exclusive cultural tutelage, and the affirmation of a new and distinctive cultural perspective based on native, and often racial foundation.³²

In order to question and demolish the Africanist legacy and the favour it still enjoyed in the press and between the Creole elites, the *Indigenists* –painters, writers and essayists– stressed the importance of Haitian African heritage as an indicator of national pride. Adopting a parodist 'game of reverse' those same ingredients that had been used as symbols of social and political ontological inferiority, in the *Indigenist* propaganda turned into a mark of the Haitian specificity and into an 'excuse' to promote self-government.³³

This context of ideological mobilization and militant anti-imperialism favour the dawn of literary experiences such as the *La Revue Indigène* (1927) and the recompilation of texts such as *Ainsi parla l'oncle* by Jean Price-Mars (1928) that rapidly became a native Manifesto.

Price-Mars stresses the value of Haitian folklore and promotes a renewed respect for voodoo as *the* brand of Haitian identity and position in the international world. In the extensive introduction to the English edition, one reads:

By elevating the pride of Haitians in their folkloric past and racial competence, Price-Mars hoped to encourage a national spirit that would weld the intellectual elites and illiterate peasants together and to inspire Haitians as a whole to resist oppression of any kind.³⁴

Price-Mars' text exemplifies the common discursive elements present in the intellectual projects of those affiliated to the *La Revue*. On the one hand, *Ainsi parla l'oncle* can be considered a modern ethnographic work in which the author engaged with Haitian customs and the folkloric traditions of African descendants from a 'scientific' and

32. Coulthard, G. R., «Parallelisms and Divergences between "Negritude" and "Indigenismo"». *Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Apr., 1968), pp. 31-55, p. 31.

33. Lerebours, M., «The Indigenist Revolt: Haitian Art, 1927-1944». *Callaloo*, Vol. 15, No. 3, Haitian Literature and Culture, Part 2 (Summer, 1992), pp. 711-725.

34. Price-Mars, J., *Ainsi parla l'oncle. Essais d' Ethnographie*. New York : Parapsychology Foundation Inc., 1928. I have been working on the English edition – *So Spoke the Uncle*. Washington D. C.: Three Continents Press, 1983- with an introduction by Magdaline Shannon.

well documented perspective. The main difference between his work and Seabrook's narrative lies in the fact that Price-Mars provides very detailed information on the African Continent, its many regions, its different ethnic groups and is firmly anchored to a clear desire to demolish the stereotypical, unified vision most authors privileged. On the other hand, the text provides (in chapter six) an extensive analysis of modern theories regarding possession and animism alongside personal appreciations derived from Price-Mars' fieldwork. This Manifesto explicitly opposed the prevailing 'collective bovarysm' that dominated traditional artwork of Haitian intellectuals. According to Price-Mars in fact, the whole literary (written) tradition of the island has to be read as the expression of a will to emulate French Literature and to routinely denigrate any artifact Made in Haiti. Convinced of their own superiority as educated 'coloured Frenchmen' the elites and Haitian intellectuals considered Haiti as part of the French periphery, a 'spiritual dependency' that had to be conceptualized as totally disconnected from its African heritage.³⁵ In this sense, Price-Mars regards literary artefacts prior the Indigenist contribution as blatantly anti-Haitian. The obsessive presence of stereotyped metropolitan landscapes and the total removal of insular details would be the main cause of Haitian intellectuals' failure to establish themselves in the international literary scene. According to Price-Mars then, the only guarantee of literary success was the conscious recovery of an indigenous patrimony, namely its African roots:

From that point on, Africa, people of African descent, the Haitian countryside and the Haitian peasant would be the center of Haitian Literature.³⁶

Haitian self-aware artefacts had to be characterized by new styles; new genres had to be adopted or invented to account for this novel sensitivity and the centre of any truly Haitian narrative had to be constituted by a *tragic subject*, the victim of absolute injustice.³⁷

35. This notion appears as a reflex of French self-image. According to the imperial ideology, the French colonial experience was able to wipe out the identity and previous history of the colonised populations.

36. Price-Mars, J., *So Spoke the Uncle*, p. 711.

37. Jonassaint, J., «Tragic Narratives: The Novels of Haitian Tradition», *Callaloo*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Winter, 2003), pp. 203-218. In this short essay, the author traces the genealogy of the 'tragic subject' between 1901 and 1961, through a number of authors that represented the best examples of Haitian literary artefacts. According to the author most of the literary production under consideration could be described as 'memory narrative' centred on *fatal loss*.

In other words:

The new literature, fighting for the triumph of the exploited, would want to be anti-capitalist, anti-bourgeois and anti-Christian.³⁸

The narratives were oriented towards those religious practices articulated around the voodoo faith that could answer the many questions posed by African descendants on their living conditions.³⁹ Moreover, according to the *Indigenist* critique, this lack of interest for their national/African roots, their failure to commit to the national cause and their parroting of European styles and behaviours had to be considered responsible for the mediocre results of most Haitian authors. In this sense the movement, in its cultural and political dimensions, resembles most nationalist movements of the same period that invested colonial or postcolonial territories. Smith, in his article *Culture, Community and Territory: the Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism*, highlights how the recovery of cultural and religious items characterised the diverse anti-colonial international movements of the twentieth century.⁴⁰ In fact, according to the author, a newly conceived 'autonomous self' juxtaposed with a 'colonizing other' was at the core of many emancipatory strategies. The emergence of the 'autonomous self' corresponded to the reinvention of a golden past to be re-conquered in a moment of decadence and degeneration. Freedom appears as a naturalised element to which people were universally entitled to and of which they have been deprived by the brutal colonial yoke. What is central in the *Indigenist* discourse is not the distinction between fiction and reality, history and storytelling as much as the process of signification of Haitian cultural memory and its uses in modern political struggle.⁴¹ In this sense, to further explore the importance of the zombie artefact, one has to focus on this memory element as a constant reference to the past and to the identity of a people that in the process of keeping alive its patrimony can experience on the 'social body' a form of resistance to colonial domination.

38. Lerebours, M., «The Indigenist Revolt: Haitian Art, 1927-1944», p. 712.

39. Alexis, J., «Crónica de un falso amor» in *Romancero de las estrellas*. Montevideo: ARCA, 1970. This short story is a classic example of how the theme of a corrupted Creole elite was woven into popular fiction. A very young girl is turned into a zombie to satisfy the greed and will to power of her family.

40. Smith, A. D., «Culture, Community and Territory: the Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism», *International Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, Ethnicity and International Relations. (Jul., 1996), pp. 445-458.

41. Hobsbawm, E. and Ranger, T.(Eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Identity is a symbolic construction which to survive has to be based, among other things, on memory.⁴²

According to another contributor, Assmann, the relation between identity and memory constitutes a 'connective structure' that allows for the social and the temporal dimension to unite:

What binds [the individual] to this plural [the community] is the connective structure of common knowledge and characteristics – first through adherence to the same laws and values, and second through the memory of a shared past.⁴³

In other words, we could say that The *Indigenist* intellectual movement explores and illuminates the residual elements of African tradition(s) and translates them to employ some of its figurations to describe the present and articulate its vision of the future.

Young Haitian intellectuals responded to the Occupation by rejecting both the elite French cultural values of the old regime and the pragmatic, materialist American values that have displaced them, instead affirming a new national identity rooted in Haiti's black African heritage.⁴⁴

Using this strategy, *Indigenism* creates a field of sovereignty *inside* the colonial context. The distinction between 'us' and 'them' to which I have dedicated part of my genealogical efforts is pared with the recognition of two different spheres. On one hand, the colonial economic exploitation and political subalternity to which the natives had to submit and on the other the spiritual world made up of symbols and rituals that constituted a national culture *in fieri*.⁴⁵

I wish to conclude highlighting how the experience of *La Revue*, despite the populist tones of its supporters, remains an experience of a minority in the cultural context

42. Fabietti, U., Matera, V., *Memorie e identità*, Roma: Meltemi, 1999, p. 23: 'L'identità è una costruzione simbolica che per sussistere deve fondarsi, tra l'altro, sulla memoria'. Translation mine.

43. Assmann, J., *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization. Writing, Resemblance, and Political Imagination*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 3.

44. Lowney, J., «Haiti and Black Transnationalism: Remapping the Migrant Geography of Home to Harlem», *African American Review*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Autumn, 2000), p. 419.

45. This approach has been successfully theorised by Chatterjee in his marvellous *The Nation and Its Fragments. Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. On the problems posed by the very notion of a nation see Bhabha, H., «DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation» in Bhabha, H. (Ed.), *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge, 1990, pp. 291-322.

of twentieth century Haiti. Lerebours notices that the vast mass of illiterate Haitian peasantry that (ideally) constituted the audience of the *Indigenist* artwork could not access written material or fully appreciate a political proposal promoted by the sons and daughters of that same corrupted oligarchy that these artists were denouncing. According to the critic, 'the ideas expressed presented no danger to Haitian society and its organization' due to their incapacity to really mobilise those they were, in theory, representing.⁴⁶ Moreover, despite the emphasis of Price-Mars on the need to communicate in the native tongue, most of the literary work was still in French and not in Creole, a language that could at least be understood if not read by most non-educated men and women. This constitutes a clear example of how, far from being a political and cultural vanguard connected to their people, the *Indigenists* remained blind to the real living conditions of the mass of 'oppressed' peasants of the island with whom they share neither class nor language. In harsh tones, he remarks at the end of the essay that *Indigenist Literature*

[...] wanted to be realistic and socially and politically involved. And believed it was capable of posing the problem of the disadvantaged and exploited Haitian countryside; it was quite often content with cheap local color.⁴⁷

FROM BLACK SHAME TO BLACK PRIDE: PROVISIONAL CONCLUSIONS ON THE RE-SIGNIFIED UNDEAD

As we have seen, Gomez attacks the patriarchal Gothic narrative from several fronts. She creates a novel in which the main character is a black woman, breaking up with the invisibility of African descendants in the American literary imagination. Furthermore, she takes away violence and terror -fundamental to vampire encounters- and ruptures the dichotomy predator/prey that structure most of the Victorian vampiric narratives. Gomez replaces the tension present in the unsettling proximity of a non-human creature with a vision of the monster as the best embodiment of our desire for contact and love. In doing so, the Vampire, the Stranger, the Outsider, the immortal Seducer disappears and we are left with a creature that tries to turn

46. Lerebours, M., «The Indigenist Revolt: Haitian Art, 1927-1944» p. 713.

47. Ibidem, p. 722.

the world into a secure place for herself and those she is intimately attached to; an utopian community where *femininity* becomes the accepted and desirable norm. On the other hand in the second part, I have looked at the evolution of the zombie genre from the military occupation of Haiti until its appropriation by the Indigenist Movement. For the Indigenist and for Price-Mars blackness, associated to Caribbean African roots, has pivoted the fabrication of a positive self-image to use against the imperial discourses that have historically legitimated North American foreign policy in the area. Moreover, folklore figures have been conceptualised in the Indigenist project as symbols to anchor the vast majority of the population of African origins to political modernity. The Haitian narratives and the Gomez's production have revealed a similar political stance on Alterity and on 'Black as Other'. In both cases what is at stake in these approaches to monstrosity is the attempt to deconstruct the hierarchically organised dichotomies of race (white/black) and gender (male/female) and their representations through an inversion of the figuration of the monster as a site of resistance and as a positive vindication of difference. In both scenarios, the authors aim at revealing the false universalism of the white male subject and to bring the Other into representation as the Master voice.⁴⁸

48. Braidotti summarises the significance of this theoretical/political move in feminism in her «Becoming Woman, or Sexual Difference Revisited» in *Metamorphoses. Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*. London: Polity Press, 2002, pp. 11-65.

CROSSROADS



CHAPTER FIVE

ON THE COLOUR LINE

In the last three chapters of the work I will introduce the character of Anita Blake as she emerges and evolves through the novels that compose the saga. I will not analyse the novel systematically; on the contrary I will focus my attention on details scattered through the whole collection that will help me show how Hamilton assimilates and tries to reinvent some of the racist and homophobic *topoi* of vampire canon but fails to resist traditional notions of cultural differences as the source of monstrosity that have been so dear to this literary tradition. I will analyse Hamilton's contribution highlighting some of the continuities and ruptures considering two key elements that have constituted the backbone of the canon since *Dracula*: Race and Sexuality.

In order to map the preeminent novelties that mark this production I will zigzag between Anita's preoccupations and desires and some of the feminist key debates of the past few decades when the novels were originally conceived, launched and developed.

ANITA BLAKE: VAMPIRE HUNTER/ZOMBIE QUEEN

The first novel that displayed the character of Anita Blake, a *mestiza* vampire hunter and a zombie queen came out in 1993 as an urban fantasy and turned immediately into a big success.¹ Lauren Hamilton, the author, creates a parallel world in which all the different creatures that have inhabited popular imagination and gothic traditional

1. Hamilton, L. (Ed.), *Ardeur. 14 Writers on the Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter Series*. Dallas: BenBella, 2010.

narratives were coexisting and negotiating their respective positions in a society where humans are just one of the many species that inhabit our planet.

In fact, vampires and wereanimals- werewolves, wererats, wereleopards just to mention some- exist alongside regular humans. To earn a living Anita uses her super natural abilities to re-animate corpses turning them into zombies for a short period of time to question them in Court and she helps the preternatural squad in investigating murder scenes in which vampires or any other 'super/magical being' might be involved.

As the series develops, she acquires several forms of lycanthropy and the focus of the narrative switches from the crime-related investigation to her intimate interactions with all the monsters of this grotesque scenario.

Her ability with the Dead manifests itself both as the power to raise zombies and gives her a limited control over vampires. In turns, her affiliation with the Master vampire of the city constitutes the ground on which she attracts and has some influence over were-animals. Later on, this attraction is replaced by the recognition of her own lycanthropy. But lets start from the *mestiza* configuration.

LOCATING MESTIZA: A CARTOGRAPHY

In order to map the origin of Anita as a 'white woman of colour'² in the nineties, I will refer to two different sources, namely an academic short collection of brilliant essays and a series of news articles that pictured the emergence of a new social/political and visual subject in the American public scene: the mestizo.

In 2000 Mike Davis wrote a fast-paced account of several transformations that had occurred in six cutting hedge internationalised cities in the States trough the last decade. The book was destined to contribute significantly to the debate on how the increasing presence of Latinos was reshaping dramatically the 'face'³ of the nation in terms of visual perceptions of whom the American 'average' person was and how this very present was destined to alter the urban look in the near future. Due to the constant influx of people coming from 'non-white territories'- more exotic, chaotic, dirty and the like- and the increasing numbers of American born Latinos, the urban landscape

2. This is a definition of light-skinned women that Julia Alvarez provides in an essay with the same title: «A White woman of color» in O'Hearn, C. C., *Half and Half: Writers on growing up biracial and bicultural*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1998.

3. *The Times*, «The New Face of America», Nov, 18th 1993, vol. 142, N. 21. Image on the front page available on-line: <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19931118,00.html>. Last viewed 23/11/ 2015.

had suffered a progressive ‘Latinization’ that was going to change not just the face but also the body of the nation, forcing the establishment and the general public to redefine the notion of a shared American identity that could encompass the already striking differences existing between white Americans, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, African-Americans, Asian-Americans that composed what was then defined by most white liberals the American ‘melting pot’. In particular, the primacy of the English language over a constellation of others –Spanish obviously being the first and ever-growing competitor- was questioned. Davis dealt with the political complications represented by a second generation of Latinos that perceived themselves as Americans but not ‘Anglos’ and were clearly resisting conventional forms of assimilation, forcing scholars to reconsider how a notion of ‘white’ America was invisibly embedded in public discourses and practices in the form of a ‘melting-pot’ concept modelled on European experiences with diversity.⁴ The civil right movements and scholars from the African-American community had already revealed how public imagination and rhetorical discourses on a much dreamt liberal multicultural America in turn made exclusion and the high degree of marginalisation, suffered by those very groups, invisible. The visible booming of Latinos, their exotic presence in some pockets of the metropolitan context as of now diverse city *melange* and their inclusion in cutting edge sectors of the national and international market had the potential of turning them into valid institutional interlocutors, able to shape the debate on linguistic institutional recognition, trade unionism and ghetto urban politics.

According to Davis, Latinos were ‘remaking urban space in novel ways that cannot be assimilated to the earlier experiences of either African-Americans or European immigrants.’⁵ And the different ways they were using to reclaim space were an expression of differences in communities and settling strategies in this collective force made up of different national belongings and a plurality of cultural identifications. If all these elements allowed for a very “multicultural mosaic” visual experience⁶, nevertheless the key shifts that their very presence induced in the post-Fordist organisation of the labour market were deeply troubling if compared with Latinos’ correspondent lack of political power and social recognition. Nonetheless, while we fast paced through strikes, working class meetings and a display of the inherent power of the emergence of a working class

4. Davis, M., *Magical Urbanism. Latinos Reinvent the U. S. Big City*. London: Verso, 2000, p. XIII.

5. Ibidem, p. 39.

6. Davis notes how the form of appropriating space defers from the Anglo Saxon Americans and the Latinos. Middle class White Americans tend to abandon metropolitan areas and move to suburbs or enclosed secured neighbourhoods while Latinas privileged urban areas and public places for socialisation, (parks, libraries and markets among others) allowing indirectly the preservation of what he called the American urban commons. Davis, M., *Magical Urbanism*, p. 48.

consciousness I cannot fail to notice the optimism that controls Davis' narrative: the future is looking up and justice will finally triumph.

If, by contrast, we look at some of the national papers of that decade the positive and inspiring analysis of Davis- addressing migration and Latinization as a productive cultural shift and a ground to redefine working class actions and dynamic alliances- turns into a much more cautious and wary appreciation of those very differences. In this respect, it is interesting to note how the *Time* in April 1993 displayed on its front cover the face of a 'new American' synthesized by computer technologies:⁷ the picture shows a *light-skinned* woman obtained by the artificial mixing up of distinctive racial traits of a variety of ethnic groups located in the USA.⁸ The image expresses both a wish 'that American racial categories will have to be reinvented as tending towards whiteness or lightness' and the uneasiness that mark the entrance of a plurality of others, neither black nor white in the cultural symbolic, and a possible disappearance of whiteness as such.⁹ In other words this conflicting modes of reading the existence of national others in the USA territory –Latinos more precisely in Davis's work– is described both as a great opportunity for national nourishment –cultural, political and economic– and is frowned upon as a possible source of conflict and social unrest. We read:

The "browning of America" offers tremendous opportunity for capitalizing anew on the merits of many peoples from many lands. Yet this fundamental change in the ethnic makeup of the U.S. also poses risks. The American character is resilient and thrives on change. But past periods of rapid evolution have also, alas, brought out deeper, more fearful aspects of the national soul.¹⁰

'A lot of people are trying to undermine the foundations of the American experience and are pushing toward a more Balkanized society. I think that would be a disaster, not only because it would destroy a precious social inheritance but also because it would lead to enormous unrest, even violence.'¹¹

7. I first saw the reference to this picture in Bost, S., *Mulattas and Mestizas. Representing Mixed Identities in the Americas, 1850-2000*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2003, Introduction.

8. Available online: <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19931118,00.html>, last view on the 18/06/2015.

9. Berlant, L., «The Face of America and the State of Emergency» in Nelson, C., and Gaonkar, D. P., *Disciplinary and Dissent in Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 397- 441, p. 420.

10. Henry III, W., «Beyond the Melting Pot», *The Times*, April 9th, 1990. Available Online: <http://www3.pittsfield.net/sandbox/groups/noellalallatin/wiki/306fb/attachments/ae895/Beyond%20The%20Melting%20Pot.pdf>, p. 5. Last viewed 18/06/2015.

11. Ibidem.

White Americans are accustomed to thinking of themselves as the very picture of their nation. Inspiring as it may be to the rest of the world, significant as it may be to the U.S. role in global politics, world trade and the pursuit of peace, becoming a conspicuously multiracial society is bound to be a somewhat bumpy experience for many ordinary citizens.¹²

What clearly emerges here is the fear that ethnic and cultural hybridity will force whites to become 'just another minority' and ultimately to lose their economic, cultural and racial supremacy. If we look at the academic scholarship we rapidly notice how the recognition of Latinos relevant numerical/visual presence came with the strong emergence of a new voice in the scholarly debate. The Latinos were taking central stage and speaking out problematizing the very definition of 'Latino' as an umbrella term under which different people from a variety of different national/cultural traditions could be agglutinated. Once more the taxonomies responded to a tendency to group different others into one homogenous block against which a solid white America could be constructed.¹³

The understanding of the sociological and anthropological implications of Latinos presence came with the realisation that the process went far beyond the established national borders and in fact affected the lives and dreams of those that have stayed behind, beyond the border zone. New telecommunications systems, diaspora and increased mobility in the border zone –back and forth– had foregrounded the shaping of a new transcultural identity zone, an America *in-between* that had evolved into an original political and social subjectivity.

At once I will look at how this America in-between and its racial *milieu* are appropriated by Lauren Hamilton. I'll suggest that Hamilton's creation of a mestiza, an American woman of German-Mexican origins represents an expression of that progressive visual and social 'Latinization' of America that Davis brilliantly described; Hamilton in fact was born and grew up in a southern state, Arkansas, on the border with Texas. Moreover, her decision to locate Anita's world in an area, Missouri defined by the intermingling of Mexican, Native American, Anglo and French cultures, has provided an ideal melange for a narrative in which *difference* is crucial.

12. Henry III, W. A., «Beyond The Melting Pot».

13. Landry, B., «Education in a Multicultural Society» in Hall, P., *Race, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism. Theory and Practice*. Cambridge: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997, p. 41-62, p. 51.

At the same time, the fact that she is a light-skinned character seems to be connected to that high-tech *TIME* cover that imagines a future American subject still designated by whiteness and lightness.

ANITA BLAKE BETWEEN ANZALDUA'S MESTIZA AND AFRICANISM

Instead of claiming a direct legacy from Gomes's vampire fiction, that was playing with the womanhood/blackness/otherness/monstrosity as positive interdependent concepts, Hamilton 'designs' a *mestiza* vampire hunter (that in turns becomes a vampire servant and shares some of the vampire powers without drawing blood) that is neither white nor black. She does not appropriate blackness to subvert the canon; instead she embraces the 'borderland' as an ambiguous territory where races intermingle and potentially create a 'third space'¹⁴ of dialogue. In fact Anita's mixed cultural and racial heritage is disclosed from the very beginning and there are constant references to it through the first two books, till the readers are settled in this twenty first century fantasy world.

Hamilton uses a *pastiche* narrative (so dear to horror postmodern writers) in which two separate traditions of monstrous others –the vampire and the zombie– collapse into one and the emerging narrative is not so easily pigeonholed.

In *Guilty Pleasures* we read:

The solid, nearly black-brown of my eyes matches the hair. Only the skin stands out, too pale, Germanic against the Latin darkness.¹⁵

A very exboyfriend once described me as a little china doll. He meant it as a compliment. I didn't take it that way. There are reasons why I don't date much.¹⁶

14. Homi Bhabha disclosed his notion of the Third Space as the site of hybridity that in turns is defined: 'But for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather *hybridity to me is the third space which enables other positions to emerge*. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives.' Furthermore, 'the process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation'. Rutherford, J., «The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha», in Ders. (Hg.): *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 207-221. Emphasis mine.

15. Hamilton, L., *Guilty Pleasures*. New York: Orbit, 1993, p. 7.

16. Ibidem, p. 8.

In *The Laughing Corpse*, when she is investigating a dreadful series of murders, one reads:

‘What have you done tonight, Anita?’ *Touchy, Mexican standoff*, whatever.
‘Why have you come to me then? What do you want?’¹⁷

She touched my hair with her free hand. “Black hair like the wing of a crow.
It does not come from any pale skin.” “My mother was Mexican.”¹⁸

I just stared at myself in the mirrors. My hair and eyes match, black hair,
eyes so dark brown they look black. They are my mother’s Latin darkness.
But my skin is pale, my father’s Germanic blood. Put some makeup on me
and I look not unlike a china doll. Put me in a puffy pink dress and I look
delicate, dainty, petite. Dammit.¹⁹

Later on in the series, the references to her mestiza condition will come sporadically as an external reminder: someone she is casually interacting with will ask her about her family or in the form of the ever present ‘mi petit’ that her vampire lover uses as an affectionate reference to her small body structure, her Latin look.

Since her first appearance then, Anita is defined as a racially marked woman, an *estravaganza* in a world of heroes/heroines in which Latinas did not occupy the central stage yet.²⁰ Her sinuous ‘Latin look’ works as a mark of her irreducible difference as much as her scars and damaged skin tissues work as reminders of her eccentricity. She is a stranger to the Anglo-American community: the daughter of a German father and a Mexican mother. Her somatic traits work as silent witnesses of her diversity. Anita is a very curvy woman, sensually framed by a long cascade of black, thick, curly hair and a direct look that challenges the reader and makes her feel uncomfortable. The *latinidad* wired in her body resides at her core; it takes the shape of an inborn power to call the Dead. She is a Zombie Queen.

Gloria Anzaldua in the late eighties, at the same time when Hamilton published the first novel of the series, offers an interesting interpretation of the *mestiza* metaphor that I will refer to in order to understand the deconstructive potential of the *mestiza* in Anita’s and of the borderland as a monstrous imagined territory: mestizas, according to

17. Hamilton, L., *The Laughing Corpse*. New York: Orbit, 1994, p. 29.

18. Ibidem, p. 32.

19. Ibidem, p. 11.

20. For a contemporary contribution to Latinas/Latinos representations in popular (visual) culture: Montilla, P., *Latinos and American Popular Culture*. Santa Barbara: Paeger, 2013.

Anzaldúa's writings, have the potential to dynamite the binary articulation of identities thanks to her heterogeneous background. In this potentiality to subvert and resist easy classifications structured around white/black, Self/Other resides her power as a metaphor²¹.

In Anzaldúa's writing the *mestiza* and the *mestizaje* are interdependent concepts that work in opposition to clearly differentiated notions of stable racial and cultural identities that were core to the definition of the vampire genre.

In her *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa codes *mestizaje* as a politically charged space between conflicting systems of identifications. The ground on which mestizas have to shape their own personal/social identities provides a conceptual space to break down restrictive and pigeonholed notions of self/others that have been historically framed by dominant groups. Theoretically the *mestiza*, being the subject that is constructed in between two opposite strongholds –namely the Self and the Other– constitutes herself as a deconstructive embodied metaphor of those very notions. In her academic and artistic writing Anzaldúa suggests that rethinking one's social and personal position from this borderland –that equates to the margin but also to the liminal space I have referred to previously–²² allows for the subversion of the paradigms that symbolically structure current relation of power. The *mestiza* then operates as a monster metaphor: on one hand, it can disclose how identity politics works and how the Othering of people is sustained by their symbolic exclusion from the realm of the Self, but it can also be the ground on which those limits can be exploited to create a new figuration that will, over time, reconfigure our imagination. Far from being just a physical 'body' easily located through racial assets (skin colour, hair and accents), the *mestiza* constitutes an appeal to the 'power of difference', not hierarchically organised, ab-normally coded. In order to present a *mestiza* that goes beyond, above and between racial and ethnic considerations and disclose her full potential Anzaldúa situates her in the *borderland*, that she defines as "a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural

21. For a critical approach to Anzaldúa's theorising see: Medina, R., «El mestizaje a través de la frontera: Vasconcelos y Anzaldúa», *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Winter 2009), pp. 101-123.

22. Mestizas/mestizos in «Betwixt and Between: the Liminal period in *Rites de Passage*» by Victor Turner are not liminal creatures because they do not transition but are rooted/located somewhere else. Nevertheless some commentators of Turner's work have suggested that there is a close link between his liminal theory and border theory as articulated at the end of the 80's. Weber, D., «From Limen to Border: A Meditation on the Legacy of Victor Turner for American Cultural Studies», *American Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Sep., 1995), pp. 525-536. The link between liminal and border figures would reside in their ability to disrupt and transform our dualistic system of interpretation and representation. As a figuration of resistance, the *mestiza* goes beyond and above the limitation of her own embodied experience as a subject from a geographical margin; *mestizaje* according to Anzaldúa is not inscribed in anyone's ethnic origins or national belonging as much as in the recognition of queerness and in the inability to squeeze in pigeonholed definitions that can not account for a plurality of dimensions involved in the definition/construction of someone's subject position.

boundary”²³. It seems relevant here to notice that indeed when Anzaldua speaks about boundaries she does not refer exclusively to geopolitical world maps -even if geography is one of the departing location of her cartographical journey (being herself a Chicana, Mexican-Indian American) but also to symbolical, psychological, spiritual, sexual boundaries that allow us to configure our presence in the world of human interactions.

In *Dracula*, I have argued, one of the most powerful fears that fuel the narrative is that of contamination through the possible sexual encounter of the two female idealised subjects, Lucy and Mina, and the vampire monstrous Other. The spectre of ‘miscegenation’ as a consequence of an abhorrent act threatening racial purity was holding the narrative together. This idea of miscegenation as the manifestation of impure sexual trafficking is attributed to the Victorian understanding of race as blood and white racial purity as the ground on which imperial superiority was established and maintained. On the contrary in this contemporary fiction, thanks to her mixed blood origins and a plurality of cultural alliances she has established, Anita/mestiza represents ideally a possibility of moving beyond these racial borders and therefore effectively subvert the genre *topos*.

If *mestizad* in Anzaldua’s life and work have allowed her to open up to dialogue with different others –with-in and with-out herself–, what I see in Hamilton’s material is by contrast an ambiguous positioning on the matter of race and cultural differences. Despite the fact that she appropriates the metaphor of the *mestiza* for her deconstructive potential that equates her to a monster figure and for the implicit fear that a liminal creature tends to induce in readers, the treatment she reserves to Anita’s *mestizaje* seems heavily in debt to Africanism.

As Anzaldua herself pointed out the embodiment of *un carácter múltiple* can serve either as a *barrera against the world* or a vehicle for greater awareness and knowledge of the world and self.²⁴ As far as non-white cultural and religious heritage is concerned, Hamilton shows a most disturbing colonial attitude to associate the foreign/voodoo body to evil in the forms of dark magic and hideous biddings. Despite the fact that she frames Anita’s powers as the elements that allow the narrative to evolve, they are presented as a metaphysical expression of the fact that she is a non-quite-white woman and are attributed to her cultural and racial ‘organic’/genetic history. The equation between the ‘unnatural’ power to raise the Dead and her Mexican/Caribbean/African heritage reflects the pull that traditional narratives of monstrous racial alterity still have here. It seems that this particular popular culture product implicitly construct cultural hibridity as problematic. I will contrast her mestiza’s condition to some other characters

23. Anzaldua, G., *Borderlands/La Frontera. The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Press, 1987, p. 3.

24. Ibidem, p. 35, 42 and 44.

that appear to have fully embraced voodoo without the reassuring and saving effects of her cultural exposure to whiteness: her German father and her Christian upbringing are in fact the source of the salvation of her soul. Whiteness constitutes the root of her moral superiority and of her will to do good, to resist vampire a-moral seduction and 'unmediated' blackness (in the form of a woman of Caribbean origins) is the source of Evil for its clear association with dark magic and voodoo, notoriously a religion of Black African descendants both in America and in Haiti.

Considering that mixed race people and interracial relationships are strongly underrepresented in media,²⁵ it seems indeed problematic that novels that have sold more than six millions copies can picture African heritage in these terms and indeed juggle with such a reactionary set of ideas.

DOMINGA SALVADOR VERSUS ANITA: WHITENESS SAVES YOU, CHICA

If we look at other Latinos/as in the books and at their powers we will see how there is clearly a negative flavour to the way Hamilton describes otherness associated to voodoo practices and to the African heritage.

In the usual gothic game of opposition, Anita's *mestizidad* is mainly constructed against the presence of two other voodoo practitioners, both from the Caribbean. Dominga Salvador and Manny Rodriguez are in fact the only other voodoo people Hamilton involves in Anita's crime adventures. Dominga is by far the most powerful and the most evil; furthermore, she is the only other voodoo *woman* we encounter at the beginning of our urban fantasy journey.

Let's look at Dominga and at how she is created in opposition to Anita: Dominga –a migrant from a distant land– has settled in America and lives in a nice, quiet neighbourhood in Saint Louis, Missouri, and has built herself an empire trafficking with dead bodies and practicing the 'dark arts' of voodoo.

To start with I would like to disclose the conscious or unconscious subtext of this choice of names: Lucy Westerna in *Dracula* is the incarnation of Light-Lucy and of Western civilization-Westerna and therefore her falling prey of the vampire is much more dramatic because it represents the fall of an entire civilization built on light as the source of good; here Dominga could stand for Santo Domingo with its dangerous proximity to

25. Chito Childs, E., *Fade to Black and White. Interracial Images in Popular Culture*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishes, 2009.

Haiti, the Black Republic and its overwhelming number of black bodies²⁶. If her name is an implicit reference to Santo Domingo/Haiti it could consequently justify the fact that she is a powerful voodoo priestess.

From the start, even before we meet her, we are informed that there is something frisky about this woman and that's the reason why Anita, in *The Laughing Corpse*, decides to go and question her while investigating a murder case.

A two-story house is on about a half acre of land. A nice roomy yard. Bright red geraniums flamed against the whitewashed walls. *Red and white, blood and bone*. I was sure the symbolism was not lost on casual passersby.²⁷

Dominga Salvador sat in her living room smiling. The little girl who had been riding her tricycle on my last trip here was sitting in her grandma's lap. The child was as relaxed and languorous as a kitten. Two older boys sat at Dominga's feet. *She was the picture of maternal bliss. I wanted to throw up*.²⁸

The only obvious difference between the two women when they first meet is that Dominga has a Spanish sounding name and uses Spanish a lot in her normal interactions. She calls Anita *chica* and works though no-creative, well-known expressions that can be easily understood by Anglo audiences. Spanish here operates as a sign of her distinction, a literary form of linguistic 'othering'²⁹. Spanish is obviously not been used here to communicate, instead it works as a queering element in the narrative that allows the reader to put some distance between herself and the voodoo woman: the familiarity that she can inspire is troubled by the use of a language that does not fit the overall style of the narrative itself. Furthermore, the suspicion she inspires in Anita and her reference to what might be floating just under the calm surface of a nice, small house and squeaky-clean walls help to build up the narrative tension, crucial to the outcome of this story of horrors. On the contrary (despite her Mexican mother), Anita states: "I'm sorry I don't

26. I have already analysed these elements in my chapter on zombies and Anglo-American travelogues in chapter three.

27. Ibidem, p. 29.

28. Ibidem, p. 187.

29. The same esoticizing of English as the familiar language happens when Anita interacts with her vampire lovers in this case through French. Jean-Claude always refers to her as 'mon petit'. This notion of English/Spanish melange as a form of turning others familiar (vice versa in Anita's case it turns people into strange others) is explored by Hoult-Saros, S., «Say Hello to my Little Friends: NonHumans as Latinos in U.S. Feature Films for Children» in Montilla, Patricia (Ed.), *Latinos and American Popular culture*. Praeger, Santa Barbara: 2013, pp. 135-161. She calls it *Border Patois* in her reading of popular characters such as Speedy Gonzalez in mainstream production for kids.

understand Spanish.³⁰ She is initially described as ‘one of us’ and her Mexican heritage does not translate into belonging to another community of speakers, an ethnic minority group in the context of a multicultural America. In this respect, she is described as fully assimilated, while Dominga is positioned somehow at the margins of the symbolic order that language creates. Even if Dominga looks like any other ordinary aging lady her use of Spanish places her beyond a familiar scenario. So from the first confrontation we have already a hierarchical order of differences forming. Through a ‘relational representation (multi-layered) strategy’³¹ on one hand we are faced with Anita, a Latina born in the USA and educated in the country that does not speak Spanish as a first language. She does wear some marks of difference in the way her body is literarily constructed through a Latin look, nevertheless she seems to represent a desirable combination of racial assets thanks to her very dark hair associated to sensuality/eroticism and an unthreatening white skin that displaces blackness. In other words, she is ‘nearly white but brown enough to count as different’³². She does not present a threat to a symbolic order (she is working alongside the police and testifying in Court) ‘of a nation that continues to see itself in terms of dominant white identity and a black minority’.³³ On the other hand, we have Dominga, a native other that is clearly defined by stereotypical negative images of migrants that contribute to destabilize the nation through their presence and their unwillingness to submit to assimilation. Everything speaks about this resistance: her suburban house with the colonial look –white walls and red flowers– her accent and the fact that, when we meet her, she is completely surrounded by a family/community of Spanish speakers.³⁴

By the time Anita questions her, we already know that she might be involved in mass murder and pretty soon we discover that she would do anything to satisfy her greed for money and power. During their first encounter, she offers to help if Anita undergoes some texting in exchange for her aid in solving the case. She does text Anita’s powers through a *gris-gris*, a voodoo charm. Anita has been raising the dead since the first few pages of the first book of the series. Raising zombies in this world has been described as a straightforward business. It is either an inborn ability or people can train and

30. Hamilton, L., *The Laughing Corpse*, p. 32.

31. Shohat, E., «Ethnicities-in-relation: Toward a Multicultural Reading of American Cinema» in Friedman, L., *Unspeakable Images. Ethnicity and the American Cinema*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991, pp. 215-247.

32. Valdivia, A. N., «The Location of the Spanish in Latinidad: Examples from Contemporary U.S. Popular Culture», *Letras Femeninas*, Vol. 31, No. 1, Número especial Encuentros Transatlánticos: La identidad femenina en voces españolas y latinas actuales (Verano 2005), pp. 60-78, p. 67.

33. Ibidem, p. 63.

34. It has to be noted that one of the everlasting stereotypes about Latinos in the US is articulated around this idea that Latina women are the last bastion of traditional femininity and family values and, therefore, could be admired or despised depending on the political and ideological inclination of the viewer.

acquire certain skills that will help them working as animators for the local or national Court. Waking the dead in fact is a constitutive part of the legal process: when people die in mysterious circumstances, the Court allows for the raising for questioning and to solve the case. Chickens and machetes are presented as the necessary tools for the practitioners. Nevertheless, what Dominga does is far removed from anything that would be accepted in a courtroom. She oversteps habitual procedures and produces artefacts that are instead a result of witchcraft and dark powers:

made of black feathers, bits of bone, a mummified bird's foot. I thought at first it was a chicken until I saw the thick black talons. There was a hawk or eagle out there somewhere with a peg leg.³⁵

There is something unsettling about it, unnatural. It is made up of dead pieces of meat and it still moves:

Frankly, there were things worse than zombies that could come crawling through your window some dark night. I knew as little about that side of the business as I could get away with. The Señora had invented most of it.³⁶

After the testing, during which Anita has shown her talents, Dominga invites her to move to the basement and there she makes a business proposition. This moment is key to the narrative because it reveals the whole set of implications that were already operating in the text: she offers Anita a post in her enterprise, selling zombie girls -that have retained their soul- to necrophiliacs and other wicked clients that would find the idea of female dead slaves either exiting or amusing. Dominga is clearly portrayed as a monstrous criminal³⁷ because of the way she uses her power, with no respect for the dead and for the integrity of the body. She is drawn to these wicked ways because she is a foreigner and her practices have not been mediated by any other religious tradition; while Anita has managed to save herself, her soul as she puts it, thanks to her grandmother's decision to remove her from the voodoo community in order to give her a Christian education, Dominga is literally the representation of an unmediated heritage, a radical other. As far as Anita is concerned we read:

35. Hamilton, L., *The Laughing Corpse*, p. 35.

36. *Ibidem*, p. 24.

37. I want to stress that according to Foucault contemporary monstrosity is wired as criminality. The criminal is the monster in a purely moral dimension that then translates into the physical realm. Foucault, M., *Gli Anormali*. Milano: Feltrinelli, 2009.

I had a sympathy with the dead, all dead. It was hard to be vaudun and a necromancer and not be evil. Too tempting, Grandma said. She had encouraged my being Christian. Encouraged my father to cut me off from her side of the family. Encouraged it for love of me and fear for my soul.³⁸

On the contrary, Dominga despises Christianity and its concerns with goodness and morality:

Dominga had sent me invitations to her home. To her ceremonies. I had politely declined. I think my being Christian disappointed her. So I had managed to avoid a face to face, until now.³⁹

Moreover:

“I have an inborn gift for raising the dead. That doesn’t dictate my religious preferences.” “You are Christian.” She made the word sound like something bad.⁴⁰

By the time we have discovered Dominga’s full involvement in the raising of a killer zombie that is responsible for the murders, we also know that she is prepared to commit human sacrifices and use the full potential of life energy.

As we have seen in the third chapter human sacrifices or consumption of human flesh have been a central element of colonial narratives on voodoo practices and therefore Dominga’s characterisation as opposed to Anita’s is heavily marked by Africanist legacies. Here human sacrifices appear as a strategy that only the wicked would employ to achieve their objectives. They are markers of unmediated voodoo and amoral believes that if culturally embraced could generate atrocious consequences in the lives of people as this particular case shows.

Hamilton suggests through this complex treatment of cultural hybridity in the construction of Anita’s *mestizad* and Dominga’s alien authenticity that a process of partial assimilation (in ‘liberal’ terms and away from the utopian dimension present in Anzaldua’s writing in the form of a plurality of identifications and in constant becoming) is possible. Even if the *mestiza* remains a potential source of chaos as her powers clearly

38. Hamilton, L., *The Laughing Corpse*, p. 40

39. Ibidem, p. 24.

40. Ibidem, p. 36.

indicated, the pervasive goodness of an American/European/Christian upbringing can indeed transform and model ethnic minorities and integrate them into the 'melting pot'. What it also discloses is that in order to appreciate differences the liberal project of multiculturalism need to eliminate or transform them in slight variations of an otherwise homogeneous whole –a unified American identity– that has to privilege unity over excessive fragmentation. Languages became then an asset instead of a way of constructing a world and a sense of belonging and black hair a void consumerist appeal to exotic seduction.

On the other hand, I argue that the discourse of Christianity here might be significant in itself as a particular site to designate 'whiteness' in opposition to voodoo and blackness. Looking at American religious landscape, one cannot fail to notice the ever-increasing number of religious communities that flourish locally, nationally and in the web. Why a Christian heroine then? Does Christianity occupy a privilege position in defining America-ness?

In order to answer we need to look at how Anglo-America has established and intensively promoted through cultural artefacts the idea that a group of radical Christians founded the Nation. As Shohat so clearly points out:

Eurocentric historiography posits casi-magical beginnings with the "discovery" of America, the pilgrims, the puritans, and the pioneers eliding Native-American and African-American perspective and voices.⁴¹

Christianity then, in Hamilton's gothic novels, operates as a marker of whiteness for its connection to a Eurocentric/white foundational myth and, at the same time, it connects Anita to traditional vampire and zombie narratives in folklore, literature and cinematic adaptations. In both canons (in the first zombie screen artefact of the thirties, in the novel *Dracula* and in vampire visual narratives) Christianity is central. In traditional vampire folklore⁴² and in *Dracula*, Stoker, rescuing Irish folklore, poses Christian holy items at the core of Van Helsing's strategy to overcome evil. The holy host, the crucifix and consecrated water are amply used against vampires in fiction. In Anita's narratives one appreciates how in many occasions Christianity, with its 'set of tools' will resurface in the narrative as a mean to fight against evil creatures, mainly vampires because they seem more in danger of turning to ashes if exposed to the power of Faith.

41. Shohat, E., 'Ethnicities-in-relation: Toward a Multicultural Reading of American Cinema' in Friedman, L., *Unspeakable Images. Ethnicity and the American Cinema*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991, pp. 215-247.

42. Barber, P., *Vampires, Burial and Death. Folklore and Reality*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

There was a burn scar almost hidden in the lace. The burn was in the shape of a cross. How many decades ago had someone shoved a cross into his flesh? “Just as you having a cross would be an unfair advantage.” [...] It was a shame that it wasn’t merely the shape of a cross that hurt a vampire. Jean-Claude would have been in deep shit. Unfortunately, the cross had to be blessed, and backed up by faith. An atheist waving a cross at a vampire was a truly pitiful sight.⁴³

The dangerousness of what I have called ‘unmediated voodoo’ and of Christianity as a redeeming force is also present if we look at the other character I have mentioned before: Manuel Rodriguez⁴⁴ –Manny– a voodoo practitioner far less dangerous than Dominga.

Manny is described as Anita’s initiator. They have been working together when she was younger and he has been her ‘maestro’ in all things related to raising the dead. We are introduced to Manny in the second book and we cannot but admire him for his integrity and the way Anita feels about him. He is a honourable person in a world dominated by moral relativism and personal self-interests. She trusts him above everyone else:

Manny Rodriguez stood in the doorway. He’s about two inches taller than I am. His coal-black hair is streaked with grey and white. Thick waves of it frame his thin face and black moustache. He’s fifty-two, I would still rather have him backing me in a dangerous situation than anyone else I know.⁴⁵

This feeling of admiration is mutual and is the base of their friendship as much as the element that allows for their professional cooperation:

“You called me for backup.” He smiled that brilliant teeth flashing smile that lit up his entire face. “You didn’t call Charles or Jamison. You called me, and, Anita, that is the best compliment you could give an old man.”⁴⁶

43. Hamilton, L., *Guilty Pleasures*, p. 10.

44. It has to be noted here the Spanish surname.

45. Hamilton, L., *The Laughing Corpse*, p. 25.

46. Ibidem, p. 27.

Nevertheless, just before the first meeting with Dominga at her house –a meeting that Manny himself has set up without disclosing how he happened to know her– he reveals his ‘dark’ secret: before his marriage with the good Rosita, not only has he been practicing voodoo (we already knew that) but the Señora and him have been lovers:

I stared at him as he rinsed his mug out in the sink. “Do you know something you’re not telling me?” “No,” he said. I rinsed my own cup, still staring at him. I could feel a suspicious frown between my eyes. “Manny?” “Honest Mexican, I don’t know nuthin.” “Then what’s wrong?” [...] “Yeah, so?” “Dominga Salvador was not just my priestess. She was my lover.”⁴⁷

Even more shockingly, he has been practicing human sacrifices to serve in her barbaric rituals. We discover that during the dialogue in *la Señora’s* lounge:

“You were not so quick to judge a few years back, Manuel. You slew the white goat for me, more tan once.” I turned towards Manny. [...] There should be music and camera angles when you learn one of your best friends participated in human sacrifice. More than once she had said. More than once. “Manny, is she telling the truth? Did you perform human sacrifices?”⁴⁸

So he has been helping *la Señora*, performing human sacrifices and therefore showing no respect for human laws or God laws.

It was many years ago, when he did not know better. At that point he was a voodoo priest himself, Dominga was his lover but, since Rosita converted him to Christianity, he has not involved himself with her nor has he performed any voodoo ceremony.

“You know I was vaudun before Rosita converted me to pure Christianity.”⁴⁹

Here again Hamilton plays with this idea of unmediated voodoo as a source of evil and describes the providential conversion to the true faith as the only way to escape eternal damnation. Christianity is again associated to goodness, civilization and moral superiority.

47. Hamilton, L., *The Laughing Corpse*, p. 28.

48. Ibidem, p. 47.

49. Ibidem, p. 28.

PROVISIONAL CONCLUSIONS ON WHITENESS AND OTHERNESS

Defining *mestiza* consciousness, Anzaldua describes it as a 'a new value system with images and symbols' that may serve to reconfigure a sense of group and personal identity not articulated around the split between 'white... and colored... male and female' and the hegemonically differentiated 'us' and 'them'.⁵⁰ According to Anzaldua's understanding then, metaphors are not figures of speech⁵¹ but 'dominant paradigms... [that] are transmitted to us through the culture made by those in power'.⁵² In order to reshape imagination, authors then need to look closely at cultural heritages and weave them into another fabric, another desirable symbolic realm to become.

According to this interpretation of *mestizaje* as a generative force, Anita had the potential to disrupt the racist elements embodied in the colonial representations of threatening vampire others and vicious voodoo Afro-Caribbean *bokors* that used their powers to oppose the legitimate exploitation of their land by metropolitan whites.

Nevertheless, I have shown that what is at play in Hamilton's construction of the horror scenario are traditional notions of Afro-Caribbean viciousness and moral inferiority.

In Dominga's case her moral degeneration is heavily determined by her Caribbean origins and her practice of dark voodoo located in her cultural heritage.

In Anita's family history Christianity as her white cultural heritage constitutes the ground on which our heroine can hold on to morality and distance herself from a cultural tradition that leads people to evil doings and moral corruption.

Manny's revelations –his intimate involvement with a malevolent woman of colour and his participation in human sacrifices– is once more described as a consequence of his upbringing and his *Mexicanidad*. His salvation is made possible thanks to his conversion to another fate that is obviously constructed in opposition to voodoo/African heritage with its hideous ideas and practices.

Unmediated voodoo, that is to say what Hamilton imagines as 'pure' practices –in the context of first-generation migrants in the States– is still presented in the narrative as the root of evil. The negro-phobia I have analysed in the third chapter, reappears almost

50. Anzaldua, G., *Borderlands*, p. 80.

51. Current definition of metaphor, Webster Dictionary online: 'a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them', <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metaphor>, 16th of June, 2015. Nevertheless, the notion of *metaphors* is quite complex and have been extensively explored. For a classic contribution to the debate see: Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M., *Metaphores we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

52. Anzaldua, G., *Borderlands*, p. 16.

sixty years later in the form of an ethnic religion associated to (Afro-)Caribbean origins that leads people to human sacrifices and to an unnatural command over the dead.

Hamilton's narrative therefore, far from creating a third space for *difference*, manifests the great hold that notions of barbarism and primitivism associated to blackness still had on the American imagination, where identity politics seems to lead to exclusion, discrimination and diffuse fear. Instead of moving beyond the self/other, us/them dichotomy and embracing a transnational and transracial identity, she preserves the normative function of whiteness and reinforces cultural metaphors that see in interracial origins just a way to move away from blackness and its dark arts.

Moreover, Hamilton's treatment of *mestiza* condition as a step away from blackness and a move towards whiteness, discloses some of the theoretical problems that a vast number of scholars have identified in the use of *mestizaje* as an epistemological tool to question the modernist understanding of race and ethnicity. In this particular case Anita's will works to deconstruct stable American/white and Mexican/black identities, creating a hybrid through a body that is marked by these two oppositional belongings (skin colour and dark hair, Christianity and voodoo powers). The very possibility of this hybrid would question the initial essentialism of opposed identities. This idea of a creative identitarian process relies on a notion of *mestizaje* understood as the '...mixture of pure elements such as primary colours, that is to say homogenous bodies free from all *contamination* and valued for their purity, then, unless these two elements are seen as fully complementary, their mixture might be perceived as polluted and undesirable.'⁵³ In most racist societies, the identitarian elements that shape the *mestiza* embodied subjectivity and that in turn create the possibility of 'the beyond' are already hierarchically organised and that hierarchy will resurface once more in terms of 'external'/social devaluation if blackness is far too visible on the frontstage. Furthermore, if Anzaldúa theorised *mestizaje* as a metaphorical discourse that pertains to the symbolic and entails the political possibility of transformation then, it remains a ground for power struggles and negative re-signification over *time*.

In other words, if 'struggles between the sides to impose their idiosyncrasies, and the possibly unbalanced outcome, are hidden'⁵⁴ nevertheless they do operate quite clearly in the narrative under consideration and in real political struggles of minority groups for recognition.

53. Gruzinski, S. and Deke D., *The mestizo mind: the intellectual dynamics of colonization and globalization*. London: Routledge, 2002, p. 19.

54. Roitman, K., «Hybridity, Mestizaje, and Montubios in Ecuador», *QEH Working Paper Series*, Working Paper Number 165, 2008, pp.1-20, p. 14.

THE REMAKE OF THE BEASTY BOYS

In this chapter, I will consider the way in which male characters are portrayed in Hamilton's novels according to the theoretical presupposition that gender roles and ideals –in fiction as much as in reality– are mutually constructed and that they continue to dialogue over time.¹

I wish to define 'dialogue' between masculinity and femininity² then as a game of alterities that largely determines the way in which social, economic and political transformations in the condition of women are mirrored by changes in the way men are perceived or in the ways in which particular 'modes' of being a man are privileged in a given cultural context and are represented through cultural artefacts as desirable. According to this notion, exploring the ways in which Hamilton depicts her male characters will provide a better understanding of how the character of Anita Blake –the focus of my work– comes to life and how the heroine engages with a variety of supernatural creatures that emblematised different forms of masculinities that appear less or more desirable to the female protagonist.

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1. As far as Literature is concerned read: Horlacher, S. (Ed.), *Constructions of Masculinity in British Literature from the Middle Ages to the Present*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. For a sociological analysis see Connell, R. W., *Masculinities*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995, p. 44: 'Masculinity and femininity are inherently relational concepts, which have meaning in relation to each other, as a social demarcation and a cultural opposition. This holds regardless of the changing content of the demarcation in different societies and periods of history'.
 2. To navigate the ambiguities implicit in most literary criticism on the topic of women's, female, femininity, feminist writing I have been guided by Moi, T., «Feminist, Female, feminine» in Belsey, C., and Moore, J. (Eds.) *The Feminist Reader Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996, pp. 104-117.

In order to understand the symbolic discursive constructions of desirable masculinity(s) in the novels, I have referred to Badinter's figurations of the Hard Man/Soft Man/Androgyne and to Connell's and Kimmel's contributions to what have been known since the eighties as *Men's Studies* that have closely addressed issues of identity, performativity, inequality and gender violence. In particular these authors have tried to account for the challenges posed by feminism and socio-economic mutations to a traditional ideal Man that had colonised the middle class white imaginary and, as a discursive practice, has historically dominated both women and men in real life.

Despite of the presence of a vast number of lover-boys equally essential to the development of the narratives, I have decided to look at Richard –the 'macho' werewolf– and Jean Claude –the androgynous vampire– to investigate Anita's understanding of who represents a desirable partner because these are the two that remain as a constant in her love life. Her choices of lovers suggest that there are multiple desires at play in Hamilton's popular fiction in relation to masculinities in the context of a heterosexual erotica. I wish to illustrate this variety of elements starting from the assumption that conflicting desires can be read as literary effects of paradoxical yearnings at play in contemporary white, middle class American women's lives.

Richard and Jean Claude constitute two very different forms of being male and are both depicted as flawed people: Richard, the ideal boyfriend, turns out to be a domineering macho –the Hard type– that shows no respect for her independency, freedom and is caught in a spiral of violence that he exercises against himself and other were animals. As far as his relationship with Anita is concerned, he tends to be a control freak and to hate those that are close to her one way or another.

Vice versa, Jean Claude, despite all his flaws as a lover –the romantic ideal of the perfect match is not present in Anita's world– is portrayed as a better choice because he is sensitive and understanding without being 'Soft' and maintains a high degree of power associated with a form of traditional masculinity. This ability of showing strategic gender role playing and emotional adaptability indeed makes him a most desirable *angrogyne* in the sense proposed by Badinter: a reconciled man.

THE HARD AND THE SOFT MAN: A THEORETICAL APPROACH

*While it is difficult to be a woman...
it is impossible to be a man*

Fernando Camon

Badinter in her *X Y: la identidad masculina*,³ reconsiders and summarises some of the debates that emerged in the eighties on the condition of men in a world where feminism has had, alongside socioeconomic transformations, a huge impact in people's perceptions of how relationships should be established, which attitudes and attributes were desirable in a man and which roles and obligations had to be claimed in intimate spaces –named the family and the 'private'– in continuum with the public that had been progressively and irreversibly transformed. The insertion of women in the labour market and the feminist movement in its will to conquer ground inside and outside the claustrophobic house of the patriarch had forever changed gender relations, altering the expectations that women had in relation to men and questioning the possibility of enacting traditional gender roles in the secluded familiar environment.

According to Banditer, with the emergence of feminist sensitivity/consciousness, some of the traditional behaviours/practices attributed to men were heavily criticized and new forms of being a man in the world became to be recognised as desirable. Ideals and practices that have historically defined masculinity were effectively proven not to be trans historical or universal/natural constituents of manhood but that were instead generated in political and economic contexts that frames the 'social conditions of possibility' of gendered subjectivities.⁴

In Connell's words:

Masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals. Masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting.⁵

3. Badinter, E., XY, *La identidad masculina*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1993.

4. Whitehead, S., «Masculinity- Illusion or Reality» in Whitehead, S. (Ed.), *Men and Masculinities. Key Themes and New Directions*. Malden: Polity, 2002, pp. 8-44. For further reading: Adams, R., and Savran, D., *The Masculinity Studies Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.

5. Connell, R. W., and Messerschmidt, J. W., «Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept», *Gender Society*, 2005, N. 19, pp. 829-859, p. 836.

In order to describe how the notion of the more desirable forms of 'being a man' operates, Badinter amply uses literary examples selected from a vast collection of American cultural artefacts: referring to Hemingway's masterpieces and Bukowsky's underground and unholy prose, she wishes to prove that the struggle to 'acquire' traditional American white masculinity –that she calls Hard– and to keep performing it without pose has been harmful for men, both those that were depicted as real men and those that, by contrast, were suspected of being homosexual or effeminate, and therefore not quite so 'real', impostors.

Due to the emergence of feminism, the traditional Hard man feels at risk of being replaced by men embracing other forms of manliness much more humane and desirable for the New Woman. In fact, contemporary women seems to be increasingly concerned with the amount of violence that 'traditional' men expressed against them in their attempt to maintain their sense of manhood and their feeling of being in control that had been so deeply compromised.⁶ Thus, following the imperative *Give'em Hell* that insists on compulsory strength as a marker of manliness and the (potential) use of violence, the Hard Man struggled to establish a reassuring sense of superiority and of being in command.

If one looks at the specificity of hard manliness in the context of contemporary America, Michael Kimmel's most recent socio-analysis of white masculinity(s) helps to explore the specific forms in which such changes –magnified by globalization, economic/financial crisis and natural disasters– are threatening the white American imagination. In this text, he clearly supports Badinter's claim:

If masculinity is based on impermeable defenses and the feeling of being in control, then violence may be restorative, returning the situation to the moment before that sense of vulnerability and dependency was felt and one's sense of masculinity was so compromised. [...] use violence as a means of restoring what was experienced as threatened, that part of the self that is suddenly made vulnerable.⁷

So, far from being a natural mode of being a man, the Hard is nowadays the expression of the a desire to be in control that has been progressively eroded by feminism and simultaneously -as Kimmel points out- by contemporary socio-economic mutations that have dramatically altered the possibilities of well-being in contemporary America.

6. Faludi, S., *Stiffed. The Betrayal of the American Man*. New York: Arper Collins, 1999.

7. Kimmel, M., *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era*. New York: Nation Books, 2013, p. 177.

All those elements constitute a serious challenge to the reactionary idea that white men were enjoying a superior power position in relation to a variety of others because they were *naturally* entitled to it:

The surge in aggression from America's angry white men comes not only from the gradual dispossession of white men from virtually every single position of power and authority in the land, but also from the challenge to their sense that such positions are their birthright.⁸

Furthermore:

The new American anger [...] seeks to restore, to retrieve, to reclaim something that is perceived to have been lost. Angry White Men look to the past for their imagined and desired future. They believe that the system is stacked against them. Theirs is the anger of the entitled: we are entitled to those jobs, those positions of unchallenged dominance.⁹

Considering the impact of these presuppositions on the psychic make up of the Hard Man, Badinter coins another name for him: the Knot-Man in reference to both his traditional look and his emotional 'knots'. The Knot Man wears a suit and a tie like any other successful businessman of his generation and his emotions are in turn knotted up to guarantee that he is always tense and implicitly ready for a fight.¹⁰

He is the catalogue of the worst masculine stereotypes: obsessed by competition, by intellectual and sexual accomplishments, emotionally helpless [...] aggressive and incapable of getting involved with others...¹¹

8. Kimmel, M., *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era*, p. 177.

9. Ibidem, p. 21.

10. In his «The Construction of the Construction of Masculinities», Brod gives quite an interesting interpretation of the way in which the suit works to dehumanised/de-identify the male body and at the same time how the tie visually points at genitals as the centre of maleness: 'men's clothing is designed to hide the fact that men have bodies. The Western business suit creates a box-like covering, with straight lines, much more monolithic colors and textures, and very little variation in fashion from year to year so as not to call attention to itself, in contrast to the fluctuations in women's fashions and makeup. Thus, we reinforce the construction of women as sex objects and men as disembodied intellects, inscribing onto our bodies the mind-body split that maps onto the male-female divide as part of patriarchal ideology. The necktie worn by men in conjunction with this suit is a highly symbolic article of clothing. First, one ties a noose tightly around one's neck to declare emphatically the separation of mind from body, and then with the material remaining, one points an arrow straight to one's genitals, the only part of men's bodies that is supposed to really matter' in Horlacher, S. (Ed.), *Constructions of Masculinity in British Literature from the Middle Ages to the Present*. New York : Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 19-32, p. 23.

11. Badinter, E., *XY. La identidad masculina*, p. 176. Translation mine.

Indeed, he is *no sissy, a big wheel, a sturdy oak* and he shouts: *Give them Hell!*¹²

The figuration of the hard man she elaborates upon stands for a man that, despite the amount of privileges that he enjoys in patriarchy, has been emotionally amputated, that cannot express his fillings and has to resign to a life deprived of emotions and caring, both in the form of being cared about and caring for someone else.

Furthermore, Badinter emphasises how the obsession with homosexuality and effeminacy that have characterized the emergence of nineteenth middle class discourses on manliness are paired with the psychic imperative of not showing any sign of femininity, if a man wants to get approval and wishes to enjoy a higher degree of power in real life. The French philosopher seems to suggest that, for these very reasons, men are socially encouraged to cut off the ability to feel and are destined either to live a sterile life or to become a self-distractive neurotics. The Hard type, in short, represents the prototype of a man with a high connection to violence. He is a vital threat for those that work as reminders of his supposed weakness in this mad, desperate effort to maintain dominance both over other men and over women.

According to Badinter then, this 'exclusion of femininity' that allow the configuration of the Hard since the end of eighteenth century can be best understood as a construction that works on two different interdependent levels: the social and the psychological. If in Connell's theorising, Hard options operate socially through the policing of men and the exclusion of women:

To sustain a given pattern of hegemony requires the policing of men as well as the exclusion or discrediting of women. Evidence of such mechanisms ranges from the discrediting of 'soft' options in the hard world [...], to homophobic assaults and murders [...], all the way to the teasing of boys in school for 'sissiness'.¹³

in Bandinter's analysis, the theoretical focus lies on the 'internal' prescriptions of manliness that allow her to think about Hard options as damaging factors for men in their performances as gendered humans despite of the social and political recognition those same performances might entail.¹⁴

12. Badinter, E., *XY. La identidad masculina*, p. 178-179.

13. R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, «Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept», p. 844

14. In relation to the effectiveness of the Hard in the context of contemporary neo-liberal economy: Connell, and Wood, J., «Globalization and Business Masculinities», *Men and Masculinities*, Vol. 7 No. 4, April 2005, pp. 347-364.

On the opposite side of the symbolic spectrum one would encounter the Soft Man; the perfect match for a strong willed woman that would renounce his masculinity in order to embrace his psychic 'feminine' side: the Soft type represents an adaptive response to the challenges posed by feminism and by mutated socio-economic conditions of reproduction; he is the reversed image of the Hard man, his alter ego. While the Hard inhibits his femininity to the extreme, the Soft ignores his masculinity, turning into a female-actor embodied in a male-anatomy.¹⁵

He is the good partner; the one that does the dishes and that would surrender to provide love and care. He is the one at total disposal, 24 hour a day; the Soft is the opposite of the knot-man thanks to his will to dedicate himself to others. His form of being a man implies another mutilation, the mutilation of the 'masculine' side or, in less psychoanalytical terms,¹⁶ his manhood is characterised by his unwillingness to socially perform according to traditional gendered normative roles. This dichotomy, that enforces social practices, leaves men with no way out. In both scenarios men will find themselves psychically impaired, either victims of hate against all 'others' or of self-hate, unable to cope with the impairing discursive construction of a dualistic notion of gendered subjectivities in conflict.

But let us look at Richard, the werewolf as an example of a literary man dangerously shifting towards a violent traditional form of white masculinity.

RICHARD ZEEMAN: MOVING TOWARDS HARDNESS

Richard Zeeman is one of Anita's primary love interests. Hamilton introduces him pretty early in the series, precisely in *The Circus of the Damned*, the third novel published in 1995. He is given much attention at the beginning of the series because he is coded as the *natural* choice as a partner for a Christian, law-abiding young woman. He is in fact depicted as a reassuring human, an appealing alternative to the insinuating vampire that we have known since *Guilty Pleasures*:

Out loud I said, "Richard Zeeman, just an innocent bystander."¹⁷

15. Badinter in *XY la condición masculina* writes: 'El hombre blando sustituye al hombre duro como su contrario absoluto. [...] algunos hombres creyeron que les convenía abandonar todo tipo de virilidad y adoptar valores y comportamientos femeninos. El hombre duro, con su feminidad inhibida, dejaba el puesto al hombre blando con su masculinidad ignorada', p. 175.

16. For a short but extremely useful analysis of Badinter's psychoanalytic theoretical approach: Rodgers C., 'Elisabeth Badinter and "The Second Sex": An Interview', *Signs*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Autumn, 1995), pp. 147-162.

17. Hamilton, L., *The Circus of the Damned*, New York: Orbit, 1995. p. 41

“Do you lust after Richard because he’s handsome, or because he’s human?”¹⁸

He is a junior high school science teacher driven by his job that has decided to hide his lycanthropy from everyone to avoid putting it at risk.

“How do you know so much about lycanthropes?” “It’s my job,” he said, “I teach science at a local junior high.” I just stared at him. “You’re a junior high science teacher?” “Yes.” He was smiling. “You looked shocked.” I shook my head. “What’s a school teacher doing messed up with vampires and werewolves?”¹⁹

In Hamilton’s fantasy world, the violent nature of werewolves is considered a threat to humans making impossible to maintain a job for those that have been infected, especially when they are dealing with the youth or working in the health sector in which the exposure to blood can lead to further contagion.

Richard’s appearance is deceiving: he looks like any other ordinary human so Anita starts a relationship with him in the hope of not getting too involved with the preternatural community and to resist vampire seduction. He seems like a nice guy: healthy, attractive

Richard’s hands were clasped loosely around one knee. He was wearing white Nikes with a blue swoosh, and no socks. Even his ankles were tan. His thick hair brushed the tops of his naked shoulders. His eyes were closed. I could gaze at his muscular upper body as long as I wanted to (...). I approved.²⁰

and fond of outdoor activities; as a first date he suggests going caving.

“Movies and dinner?” I said. “No,” he said. “Something unique. Caving.” “You mean crawling around in a cave on a first date?”²¹

He is such a refreshing choice, beautiful in his imperfection-ness:

18. Hamilton, L., *The Circus of the Damned*, New York: Orbit, 1995, p. 49.

19. Ibidem, p. 48.

20. Ibidem, p. 46.

21. Ibidem, p. 63.

I've never been comfortable around men that are beautiful. Low self-esteem, maybe. Or maybe Jean-Claude's lovely face had made me appreciate the very human quality of imperfection.²²

He is so different from the ambiguous and plotting vampire that she calls 'monster':

"He's a monster, Richard. You've seen him. I can't love a monster."²³

At this point in the saga, she would never go out with the monsters so it comes as a big shock that the man she ended up dating from the third book on is not a regular human but indeed a werewolf; an *alpha* in fact that, by *The Killing Dance*, will turn into an *Ulfric*.²⁴ Being an *alpha* means that he has an extraordinary physical power at his disposal, that he might tend to enter struggle for dominance easily and that, as a result, he'll most certainly die young.²⁵

Almost from the beginning of their relationship, his 'were-animal' nature -predatory and territorial- manifests itself as a lack of respect for her autonomy that she cannot tolerate, especially when it interferes with her work:

"Anita, you've almost died twice today. How can you . . ." "Can it, Richard. I need to go to work tonight.' [...] "You're right, you're right." His voice was soft. "It just caught me off guard. You nearly died today and you're sitting there drinking coffee like it's ordinary."²⁶

Nevertheless, he remains a desirable lover till the climatic explosion of violence in book six. In fact, alongside a dominant nature he is unable to control at times, he performs a certain number of activities that make him charming to the eye of the heroine. He is responsible with his job, sustains a satisfactory sexual relationship and desires to be a father, all 'qualities' that have been defined as essential in Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity as a consensual -to a certain extent- form of 'being a man':

22. Hamilton, L., *The Circus of the Damned*, New York: Orbit, 1995, p. 47.

23. Ibidem, p. 212.

24. *Ulfric*: leader of a wolfclan.

25. This idea, a source of anxiety for the female character, matches most statistics on white male youth dying for violence-related injuries as shown in Kimmel and in some of the material on-line: <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss6106a1.htm> last viewed 22/07/2015.

26. Hamilton, L., *Circus of the Damned*, p. 209.

Most accounts of hegemonic masculinity do include such “positive” actions as bringing home a wage, sustaining a sexual relationship, and being a father. Indeed it is difficult to see how the concept of hegemony would be relevant if the only characteristics of the dominant group were violence, aggression, and self-centeredness. Such characteristics may mean domination but hardly would constitute hegemony—an idea that embeds certain notions of consent and participation by the subaltern groups.²⁷

Indeed Anita manifests a high degree of compliance/consent towards these practices/attitudes for two reasons that are easily identified in the narrative: first of all, she codes them as a side-effects of his affection that she is strongly persuaded she will be able to change. She is depicted as a strong believer in the reparatory nature of true love²⁸ as many women that have dealt with controlling and violent partners are in real life.²⁹ Secondly and to a certain extent contradictorily, she tolerates them because they are effectively interpreted as signs of his ‘nature’ revealing the implicit danger that traditional conception of an ‘inborn’ violent nature of men bears for heterosexual women that find themselves involved with abusive partners. Nevertheless, the discovery of his lycanthropy represents a turning point in their relationship. The notion that she is engaged with someone that turns furry once a month is troubling because the ‘animal nature’ we all share becomes dominant and, as a consequence, all the inhibitions and norms that keep that very nature at bay are wiped out turning humans into dangerous predators out of control.³⁰ She is so upset that she starts being cautious, wondering at times if he will attack people

He didn’t seem bored or impatient. He seemed to be having a good time watching the people. His eyes followed an elderly couple as they walked through the glass doors. The woman used a cane. Their progress was

27. Connell R. W. and Messerschmidt, J. W., «Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept», *Gender Society*, 2005, 19, p. 840. Emphasis mine.

28. In this respect, in his analysis of intimacy, Gibbons states: ‘Female admiration of men presumes that the male is able to escape [...]; women’s complicity derives from that specific ‘badness’ which can be tamed by love.’ Gibbons, A., *The Transformation of Intimacy. Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992, p. 154.

29. Norwood, R., *Donne che amano troppo*. Milano: Feltrinelli, 1989 and *Lettere di donne che amano troppo*. Milano: Feltrinelli, 1997.

30. On the hybrid nature of humans and the epistemological dangers of this recognition for the Humanist project: Agamben, *L’aperto. L’uomo e l’animale*. Milano: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002. I believe that according to this approach, werewolves can be read as morally monstrous creatures but are also wired as monsters because they evoke both fascination and horrors as humans that have fully embrace their animality affectively breaking down the ontological barriers between the human world and the animal one. In this case the limit transpassed and patrolled would be the one setting us discursively apart and in a superior position in relation to any other creature on the Planet.

painfully slow. His head turned slowly with them. I scanned the crowd. Everyone else was younger, moving with confident or hurried stride. Was Richard looking for victims? Prey? He was, after all, a werewolf.³¹

In *The Werewolf Complex*, Denis Duclos, provides a key contribution to support my reading of the way in which (potentially) hard masculinity is coded in Richard, the dominant were.³² In fact, according to the author, representations of the werewolf as a dangerous animal and a potential serial killer are central to understand American culture that expresses an irrational attraction towards violence, the emblem of a repressive psychosocial order individual men are caught up in. This repression has created, alongside a variety of factors, the space for the emergence of the serial killer as a dangerous deviant that has then jump to the big screen metamorphosed into a bloodthirsty werewolf. Then, Hamilton's decision to attribute traits of this domineering masculinity to a werewolf does not appear as the result of a random choice but corresponds to a general trend in mainstream American cultural production revolving around preternatural creatures.

Moreover, the ways in which those violent practices and attitudes eventually explode into the novels aren't casual either: the first time she discovers the full extent of Richard rage and uncontrollable nature, it is when she witnesses him eating a man after a power fight for domination, breaking the cultural taboo on cannibal consumption, turning over to the monstrous once and for all:

"Two alphas fight here tonight. One of us will leave this circle alive. One of us will feed you tonight. Drink of our blood, eat of our flesh. We are pack. We are lukoi. We are one."³³

Marcus drove his claws into Richard's back. Richard tucked his face and neck against the other man's body, protecting himself from the claws. Marcus shuddered. Richard broke away from him, bringing his bloody hand out of Marcus's chest. He tore the still-beating heart out of his chest and flung it to the wolves. They fell on the morsel with small yips and growling.³⁴

31. Hamilton, L., *The Lunatic Cafe*. London: Hachette, 1996, p. 7.

32. Duclos, D., *The Werewolf Complex: America's fascination with violence*. Oxford: Berg, 1998.

33. Hamilton, L., *The Killing Dance*. New York: Orbit, p. 295.

34. Ibidem, p. 297.

When I passed the last furred body, the sound of tearing flesh brought my head around. I couldn't stop myself in time. Richard's muzzle was raised skyward, slick with blood, throwing down a piece of meat that I tried not to recognize.³⁵

From this moment on the relationship between the two becomes a lot more unsettling; they go through patches of open hostility, reconciliation and friendship but Richard's inability to deal productively with his hardness, his desire to be in control and his will to dominate sexual partners does not leave much space for thrust, a key element of any desirable love bond in fiction as much as in real life.

BADINTER, FEMINIST FICTION AND ANDROGYN

The Hard and the Soft alternatives as two extremes of a spectrum of desirable forms of being a man leave men mutilated. They are either sociopath with a propensity to exercise violence against women and towards other men or doormats that, according to the statistics Badinter provides, are lovely fathers but totally unable to be assertive, to maintain sexual tension in their relationships with women and incapable, most times, of dealing with working environments.

Badinter offers a valuable alternative: the androgynous as a form of being in the world that allows people to embrace 'femininity' and 'masculinity' strategically and be adaptive instead of reproducing/performing a set of limited gendered roles/practices and behaviours.

Badinter reminds us that the term androgyny, as most people probably already know, comes from the fusion of two Greek words: *anér-andros* = man and *gyné-gynaikos*= woman. The etymology of the word has allowed the emergence, in the modern era, of a multiplicity of interpretations that have been adopted in many feminist literary creations from Orlando onwards. On one hand the reference to duality encapsulated in the word has led critics and writers to embrace the melting of differences in a unity that transcended the specificity of the two, a 'neutral being' not controlled by gender. On the other, it has generated a reading of the figure that would allow the co-existence

35. Hamilton, L., *The Killing Dance*, p. 299.

of the two, either as the 'feminisation of the male' or 'masculinisation of the female'.³⁶ Nonetheless, in her reading of the androgynous as a figure that subverts our condition of amputated men, she distances herself from these conventional interpretations of androgyny that appear to dominate both theoretical writing and feminist literary fictions³⁷ and she stresses the fact that the acquisition of androgyny represents a process of integration, somehow a form of styling the Self versus a form of conceiving it as a given expression of a double nature.³⁸ Badinter's 'androgynous' self-styled individual could consciously use a number of strategies that have been historically identified as feminine or masculine to cope with the challenges at hand, positioning her feminist project alongside queer readings of gender as performance even if Badinter's model seems to relay on a notion of embedded psychological dualism absent in more recent feminist works.³⁹ Far from being a confused gendered ideal, the contemporary *androgyn*e represents a very competent human that shows a great degree of adaptability, constantly zigzagging between compassion, soft-heartedness, affection, sensitivity, tolerance and ambition, toughness, practicality and courage⁴⁰ and s/he has the potential to become a fully integrated man and/or woman without transcendence and does not constitute himself or herself as a separate/third gender/sex. Removing the utopian element of a genderless society so dear to sci-fiction and Goth authors and to some revolutionary critics,⁴¹ I think Badinter offers a much more sensible way of going about limited notions of gendered subjectivities.

36. For a clear summary of this debate see: Goodlad, L. M. E., «Looking for Something Forever Gone: Gothic Masculinity, Androgyny, and Ethics at the Turn of the Millennium», *Cultural Critique*, No. 66 (Spring, 2007), pp. 104-126.

37. Heilbrun, C., *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*. New York: W. W. Northon and Company, 1982.

38. Badinter, E., *XY, La identidad masculina*, p. 224.

39. Butler, J., *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

40. Characteristics identified by Woodhill, B. M. and Samuels C. A. in «Desirable and Undesirable Androgyny: a Prescription for the Twenty-First Century», *Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1 March 2004, pp. 15-28.

41. Rubin, G., «The Traffic of Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex» in Reiter, R. R., *Toward an Anthropology of Women*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975, pp. 157-211.

JEAN CLAUDE: THE ANDROGYNOUS VAMPIRE

"This is a place of pleasure, Anita, not violence."

Jean Claude

Connell points out how maleness has been historically conceived as a quality inherent to the body of a man;⁴² in other words the 'essence of man' makes itself visible through his skin at a first glance. Through a casual glaze, a certain feel of the skin- smooth-, particular muscular shapes and tensions, a quality of postures and moves that imply the possibility of sexual encounters,⁴³ Jean Claude manhood is put into question:

The voice belonged to Jean-Claude, club owner and master vampire. He looked like a vampire was supposed to look. Softly curling hair tangled with the high white lace of an antique shirt. Lace spilled over pale, long-fingered hands. The shirt hung open, giving a glimpse of lean bare chest framed by more frothy lace. Most men couldn't have worn a shirt like that.⁴⁴

The Master vampire is represented from *Guilty Pleasures* onwards as a combination of 'masculine physical traits' and fragile beauty that present itself as a threat to traditional notions of male good looks through what can be best described as his androgynous appearance and he is immediately elicited as a figuration that can deconstruct traditional notions of looks and gender roles/attitudes attributed to men and women respectively.⁴⁵

In other words vampirism in Hamilton, exemplified by Jean Claude, unsettles any straightforward gender classification and manifests itself at skin level -looks and texture- as much as in a subtle performance of cross dressing/transvestism that reveals the *performative* and *fluid* nature of gender/sex identifications. His odd taste in clothes, constantly remarked upon, serves to accentuate this felling of estrangement that the novelist uses to pinpoint Jean Claude's ab-normal, dangerous and monstrous androgynous presence. In fact, transgressing against one set of boundaries is 'to call into

42. Connell, R. W., *Masculinities*, p. 45.

43. Ibidem, p. 53.

44. Hamilton, L., *Guilty Pleasures*. New York: Orbit, 1993, p. 10.

45. This visual element does not clash with the findings of Altman on the progressive shift in appearance of many heterosexual white men that adopted since the eighties an androgynous style with long hair and a certain display of effeminacy in their choice of clothes as opposed to the *macho* look that became popular in the American gay communities in those very years. In Badinter, E., *XY la identidad masculina*, p. 216.

question the inviolability of both, and of the social codes of sex- already demonstrably under attack- by which such boundaries were policed and maintained.⁴⁶

Following up the notion of 'dialogue' between the characters, I wish to remark that in the narrative, the monstrous body of the vampire defined by its fragile frame but equipped with overwhelming force mirrors the 'unwomanly' quality of Anita's, herself an expression of androgynous 'female masculinity'.⁴⁷ As much as Jean Claude appears simultaneously strong and fragile, the heroine is muscular and extremely delicate like a China doll.

If the looks of this creature far removed from traditional male beauty and (therefore) 'essence' makes him a potential object of desire for the heroine, even more so does his whole 'psychology'. Jean Claude is in fact coded as an old-fashioned gentleman

I had turned him down. There had been a message on my machine and an invitation to a black tie affair. I ignored it all. So far the Master was behaving like the courtly gentleman he had been a few centuries back. It couldn't last.⁴⁸

sensitive and understanding

"It is alright, ma petite. We are both safe now." I shook my head against the stained front of his shirt. "It's not that." He touched my face, raised it to look at him in the soft-lighted darkness of the car. "Then what is it?" "I had sex with Micah." I watched his face, waited for the anger, jealousy, something to flash through his eyes. What I saw was sympathy, and I didn't understand it. [...] "You're not angry?" I asked.⁴⁹

that makes her feel safe

"I've never seen you be that... soft with anyone before." It startled me. "You've seen me kiss Richard before." He nodded. "That was lust. This is..." He shook his head, glancing up at Jean-Claude, then back to me. "He

46. Garber, M., *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Identity*, New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 32.

47. Halberstam, J., *Female Masculinity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.

48. Hamilton, L., *The Laughing Corpse*. New York: Orbit, 1994, p. 76.

49. Hamilton, L., *Narcissus in Chains*. New York: Orbit, 2001, p. 101.

makes you feel safe.” I realized with a jolt that he was right. “You’re smarter than you look, Zerrowski.”⁵⁰

The vampire is imagined as a creature through which a set of contradictory *time* dimensions collapsed into a corpse. The androgynous vampire desirability is guaranteed by immortality that gives him plenty of time to develop/adapt, old age that grants Jean Claude a nice touch of gentleman-ness and his forever-young gorgeous looks that helps turning him into a ‘hot prize’. As Mukherjia have stated, supernatural intimacy with the vampire creates a space in which these *time* dimensions are simultaneously displayed allowing for combined traits of desirable masculinities (and femininity) to be displayed.⁵¹

If gentleman-ness appears as a desirable quality in an androgynous man nonetheless it is frowned upon when associated to a controlling attitude or a wish to limit the heroine’s ability to choose for herself as in Richard/Hard type case. The underline message being that traditional hard men would use gentleman-ness to require a certain degree of subordination from their partners; submission in fact, could be socially considered an appropriate response. Richard’s desire to be ‘the man’ in the relation would lead him to fury, to fight with other men over her attention and to actively sabotage her attempts to create a community of weres to which she is emotionally and romantically bonded to, while the androgynous vampire discloses an irresistible combination of gentleman-ness, understanding and respect for her autonomy.

Furthermore, Jean Claude’s strategic adaptability allows him to perform different roles in the novels and make the androgynous guy difficult to pigeonhole: the terrifying body guard, the affectionate and patient lover that will not feel threatened by her multiple lovers and ultimately a mature man that will use his superhuman passion to satisfy her sexually while simultaneously exercising control over his own devouring nature (he restrains from bloodsucking). He represents the perfect combination, a mixture between danger and pleasure incarnated in an undead body and he exemplifies the ‘almost’ ideal partner for a contemporary young woman that needs to be supported and understood but cannot do without a high degree of independency.

“I cannot bewitch you with my eyes, and it is harder to cloud your mind, but it can be done.” His fingers encircled my arm. Not hurting. I didn’t try

50. Hamilton, L., *Narcissus in Chains*, p. 100.

51. Mukherjia, A., «My Vampire Boyfriend: Postfeminism, “Perfect” Masculinity, and the Contemporary Appeal of Paranormal Romance», *Studies in Popular Culture*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Spring 2011), pp. 1-20.

to pull away. I knew better. He could crush my arm without breaking a sweat, or tear it from its socket, or bench press a Toyota.⁵²

He moved like a dancer, or a cat, a smooth, gliding walk. Energy and grace contained, waiting to explode into violence.⁵³

Vampires are different, *ma petite*. If you were not so stubborn, you might find out how different.” I had to look away from his eyes. The look was too intimate. Too full of possibilities.⁵⁴

The fiction of immortality and old age appears related to desirable masculinity in the form of wealth: Jean Claude is in fact obscenely rich. He has built up an erotic empire (strip clubs and exotic dancing theatres) that will reinforce his powerbase and will guarantee economic prosperity for all those that will ally with him. His riches are exemplified by the choice of lushful decorations for his residency, expensive clothing and the possibility of satisfying anyone’s desires (gifts to lovers). Wealth in the form of houses, clubs, bars and all kind of property that he owns stand for power and authority. Instead of reproducing the economic dependency of a female young character from a patron in the context of age inequality as much as class inequality, Hamilton provides a mode of identification of a desirable relationship in which the two are presented as two successful professionals, effectively eliminating the possible identification of Jean Claude’s sensitivity to Soft Manliness.

Jean Claude’s wealth appears as a sign of desirable entrepreneurship in a man and creates the ‘illusion’ of a future in which women will have overcome gender inequality and will have won the struggle for professional recognition and equal pay. In other terms, his fortune in contemporary-future America works both as a reminder of how convenient it is to be economically independent for women in establishing love relations and, at the same time -as in other contemporary romance narratives⁵⁵- function to signal how wealth is still a very much desired asset in a man.

52. Hamilton, L., *The Laughing Corpse*, p. 89.

53. Ibidem, p. 87.

54. Ibidem, p. 145.

55. The *Twilight* saga offers an undisputable example of this tendency of picturing wealth as a very desirable asset in a man. Another extremely successful cycle in which wealth is represented as key in the development of the plot is *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Nevertheless, both examples differ from Hamilton’s project because the heroines are pictured as young women far from being economically or emotionally independent. On the significance of wealth in the construction of romance and its appeal for female readers see: Radway, J., *Reading the Romance. Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1991.

This particular aspect locates the use of time in Hamilton's series in a very different scenario in relation to the canon. In *Dracula*, the past was rendered through the depiction of a native land, frozen in time, in which ancient forms of aristocratic domination –lets not forget that Dracula is a Count–, resisted the advent of modern times. The lack of capital circulation, exemplified by his habit of accumulating coins,⁵⁶ as much as the presence of a variety of ethnic groups prone to superstition suggested a country deeply unfit for change. Dracula himself was described as a being unable of performing change: through the printed press, phonographs, typewriting and hypnoses –all modern 'technologies'– he is ultimately destroyed.

In *Gilda* the time dimension is fractured into different moments in which the vampire has to prove her ability to survive and adapt. She does it wonderfully thanks to her affiliation to human partners and her own particular form of humanity: sharing desires and hopes with her human companions she floats in time while others of her kind are destined to remain trapped in their old ways and costumes. Nevertheless Gomez's use of time reflects her will to rewrite the African-American presence in the States more than being a useful dimension to question the mutable social construction of 'femininity'. In Hamilton's fiction for (heterosexual) women, the past dimension is embodied in the vampire in the form of an androgynous man extremely experienced in the matters of the heart, sexually skilful and with a deep knowledge of human 'economic' motivations.

PROVISIONAL CONCLUSIONS ON DESIRABLE MASCULINITY(S)

Thanks to a great effort on the part of feminist thinkers, *Women's* and *Men's Studies* have revealed the social and cultural dimensions that shape our notions of what it means to be a 'woman' and a 'man', what are considered to be typically feminine and typically masculine characteristics and which performances of gender guarantee social acceptance and recognition. These varieties of forms are constructed in dialectical opposition and vary from one social context to another. Different ideals/practices of being a man are in tension with one another and in opposition to the modes in which a desirable form of femininity emerges. In relation to masculinities, hegemonic masculinity is the idealised form of masculinity, the most desirable among many, at a given place and time. It represents the socially dominant gender construction

56. Franco Moretti for example has provided an ingenious reading of *Dracula* in which the vampire is represented as a figure for monopoly capital. Moretti, F., «The Dialectic of Fear», *New Left Review*, 136 (Nov.-Dec. 1982), pp. 67-85.

that subordinates femininities as well as other forms of masculinity, and shapes and affects men's social relationships with women as well as the relations between men; it represents a particular culturally coded form of exercising power and authority on a micro/macro level. According to most critics today in the United States, hegemonic masculinity is embodied in heterosexual, European American men that tend to feel displaced and threatened by economic, social and political changes that have invested their lives. In some cases this feeling of 'crisis' can lead to the use of violence perceived as a legitimate reaction to re-assert their power over women and other men.⁵⁷ Hamilton narratives offer a literary example of how the figure of the androgyny in a literary text serves as a symbolic valid alternative. In fact, the androgynous vampire that strives to adopt gestures, poses and a look that is difficult to place, a mixture of tenderness, sensitivity and authority represents a form of resistance to hegemonic white American masculinity with its historical debt to violence and phobia against otherness. Being a deconstructive/liminal figure that moves beyond Hard masculinity and the Soft ideal, the vampire allows forms of resistance and subversions to gender discursive practices to emerge. Indeed Hamilton contributes significantly to the re-inscription of the vampire canon. Her writing can be inscribed in the 'game of reverse' of traditional notions based on *Dracula* of what vampirism represents for women: instead of being a source of death, the final renunciation to autonomy and the prostration to the rule of the patriarch, the relationship with the vampire is a preferential highways to gain emotional security, power/autonomy and to be an equal partner in a wealthy empire.

To conclude, I would like to stress once more that symbolically the androgynous provides a model for a fluid notion of personal identity not so inherently controlled by gender. Considering that all desirable lovers are androgynous people, Hamilton seems to find traditional restrictive notions of femininity and masculinity undesirable for women and her success as a writer makes me wonder if the appeal that vampire popular fiction exercised on female readers resides indeed on its ability to provide an alternative model-companion for an heroine that navigates 'the shifting array of gendered prescriptions, proscriptions, and desires'.⁵⁸

57. Thibaud, C., «Violencia de género y la hipótesis de la violencia anómica» in Huguet, M. y González Marín, C. (Eds.), *Historia y Pensamiento en torno al género*. Madrid: Dykinson, 2010, pp. 135-158.

58. Mukherjea, A., «My Vampire Boyfriend: Postfeminism, "Perfect" Masculinity, and the Contemporary Appeal of Paranormal Romance», p. 6.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX, BABY

*The relationship between feminism and sex is complex.
Because sexuality is a nexus of relationships between
genders, much of the oppression of women is borne by,
mediated through, and constituted within, sexuality.
Feminism has always been vitally interested in sex.*

Gayle Rubin

... and disease...

Rosi Braidotti

In this final chapter I wish to situate the reader in the context of the 'sex wars' looking at the anti-sex and the pro-sex radical movements in the effort to highlight how this hegemonic debate in American Feminism articulates the complex role that sex and pleasure play in the narrative of Laureen Hamilton. I will then explore in details some of the most significant disagreements in the context of the movement's attempt to discuss female sexuality, desire and their cultural representations. I will analyse how the pro-sex and anti-sex positions¹ have reflected on vampirism both analytically and creatively. In order to do so, I will consider Dworkin's *Intercourse* in which the author

1. I have decided to talk about 'pro-sex' and 'anti-sex' positions in the sex wars according to the analysis proposed by Willis, E., « Lust Horizons. Is the Women's movement pro-sex? » in Willis, E., *No More Nice Girls. Countercultural essays*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2012, pp. 3-15.

uses her theoretical framework to provide a reading of vampirism as a reactionary, anti-women literary genre and fails to recognise its potential as a site of symbolic resistance to patriarchy. Next, I will turn to Califia's piece of literary writing as an example of pro-sex mind-blowing appropriation of vampirism. Among the most influential voices of the pro-sex radicals, I have focused my attention on Rubin's analysis and Califia's *The Vampire* because they showed a great concern with the intermingling of pain and pleasure in understanding female sexuality and because Rubin's *Thinking Sex* offers a meaningful insight on no-normative sexual practices, especially sadomasochism. I think that the pro-sex contributions are essential to highlight the originality of Hamilton's remodelling of the canon in so far as pain and pleasure are key ingredients that mark Anita's quest for sexual ecstasy.

The pro-sex position can be (reductively) described as promoting the revaluation of female sexuality, in *its multiple expressions*, as a way to nourish women through pleasure. Anita's experience of a promiscuous and joyful sexual life combined with the representation of sadomasochism as a strategy to subvert traditional gender roles makes Hamilton's narrative a twenty first century version of Califia's pain/pleasures as radical feminist vindication.

SEX IN THE EIGHTIES: MAPPING THE RADICALS' FIELD OF BATTLE

One aspect that I have left out in my previous analysis of the context in which *Gilda* was written and that influenced the way in which the author conceives her lesbian character is that of a debate that became central to American Feminism in the eighties. The argument can be best synthetically described as an ideological conflict around the issue of sexuality and violence against women that involved a vast number of organizations affiliated one way or another to the Women's Movement. I wish to look briefly at the major points under discussion and then focus on the influence that the debate had on Gomez's appreciation of vampirism.

The literature of the 1970s and 1980s, [...], covers an impressive breadth of issues. Violence against women, advocacy for the ERA, and an emphasis on abortion rights figure prominently, but so do issues surrounding racism,

lesbianism, and even such bugaboos as sadomasochism among women and feminists' defending pornography.²

Despite the huge diversity that characterised feminist discourses and practices in those years, the American eighties tend to be remembered as the decade of the 'sex wars' emphasising, among the different approaches and epistemologies, the controversy around the relation between sexuality and violence and the special concern a vast part of the Movement felt for the ever-growing market of 'adult material'. The discussion has qualified as 'wars' due to the virulence of the attacks that the leading figures of the two 'blocks' launched against each other.

The radical/libertarian debate over sexuality has reached an impasse that obscures the common ground that feminists share-the belief that patriarchal values and institutions need to be replaced by a new vision of personal and sexual relations.³

Gayle Rubin, in her analyses, rhetorically wonders:

A good deal of current feminist literature attributes the oppression of women to graphic representations of sex, prostitution, sex education, sadomasochism, male homosexuality, and transsexualism. Whatever happened to the family, religion, education, child-rearing practices, the media, the state, psychiatry, job discrimination, and unequal pay?⁴

The most echoed position in terms of media coverage was the one supported by a radical group of militants ferociously opposing pornography interpreted as a manifestation of patriarchal ab/use of women's bodies and the very cause of violence against women.⁵

The economy of the States had changed dramatically in the past two decades; the 'Fordist jump' had created an ever-expanding new market of cultural goods and, among those,

2. Bailey, C., «Making Waves and Drawing Lines: The Politics of Defining the Vicissitudes of Feminism», *Hypatia*, Vol. 12, No. 3, Third Wave Feminisms (Summer, 1997), p. 23.

3. Berger, R. J., Searles, P. and Cottle, C. E., «Ideological Contours of the Contemporary Pornography Debate: Divisions and Alliances», *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2/3, Spirituality, Values, and Ethics (1990), p. 35.

4. Rubin, G., «Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality» in Vance, C., *Pleasure and Danger. Exploring Female Sexuality*. Routledge: London, 1984, pp. 143-178, p. 166.

5. Califia, P., *Public Sex. The Culture of Radical Sex*. San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1994 highlights how the visibility of the anti-sex/anti-porn position in the media was primarily the result of the strategic alliances that it established with reactionary sectors of middle-class white America namely the Church and the ultra-conservative Republicans.

the production and consumption of pornographic materials had turned from a relatively 'endogamic' business into a mass-market affair with such a potential for growth that, a decade later, the annual income derived from it exceeded football's, basketball's and baseball's compounded.⁶ Therefore, the question of sexual representations in popular culture to which a vast number of people have gained access became central to feminist theorising.⁷

According to anti-sex radical thinkers, porn exemplified most of the problems women had to confront in their everyday lives. Heterosexuality associated to sexual danger in pornography was particularly problematized alongside 'virtually every variant of sexual expression [that was considered] as anti-feminist.'⁸ Militants scrutinised the veiled assumptions of 'dominant' porn, according to which female desire/drive was totally dependent on men's as clearly manifested by heterosexuality being at the core of mainstream production. On the other hand, violence against women in porn became the focus of critical enquiry for the anti-sex radicals due to the its (apparently) overwhelming portrayal of female bodies mutilated, battered, gang raped or acted upon, in whichever way it was seen fit, as a source of male sexual arousal.⁹ Thanks to the *illusion of pleasure* for male and female actors generated by the cumshot,¹⁰ pornography was interpreted as the manifestation of a 'male erotica' that denied the specificity of female pleasure at least visually and, simultaneously, turned violence associated to male pleasure acceptable and legitimate for the audience.

The central core of this political stand relayed on the notion that rape was the only possible expression of male sexual drives and the source of gendered relations. Therefore the flee from heterosexuality was the only way to both escape domination and to guarantee women's survival.

In Dworkin's words:

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6. Rich, F., Naked Capitalists, 20th of May, 2001. Available online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/20/magazine/naked-capitalists.html> last view June, 26, 2015. For a detail statistical account of pornographic selling market and on the difficulties related to collecting statistic data on pornography: Simon, W. Bowmaker, *Economics Uncut. A Complete Guide to Life, Death and Misadventure* Edward Elgar Publisher, 2005, Cheltenham, UK. Available online: <http://www.wosco.org/books/Economy/Economics%20Uncut.pdf#page=204>. Last view June, 2013.
 7. Hobsbawn, E., «The Social Revolution 1945-1990» in *The Age of Extremes, 1914-1991*. London: Abacus, 1994, pp. 287-319.
 8. Rubin, G., «Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality», p. 165.
 9. On the selective use of pornographic material to enforce their position read: Rubin, G., «Misguided, Dangerous and Wrong: an Analysis of Anti-pornography Politics» in Alison, A., and Avedon, C. (Eds.), *Bad Girls and Dirty Pictures. The Challenge to Reclaim Feminism*. Pluto Press: London, 1993, pp. 18-41.
 10. Slang expression totally accepted, by now, in academic visual media critique on pornography as Linda Williams' works show.

Sex and murder are fused in the male consciousness, so that the one without the imminent possibility of the other is unthinkable and impossible... the annihilation of women is the source of meaning and identity for men.¹¹

Representations of intercourse, collapsed into the 'reality' of it, were interpreted as pivots of women servitude and disqualification as subjects. The metaphor Dworkin (a cultural critic and the most virulent spokeswoman of the moment alongside MacKinnon¹²) uses to describe women's subordination and rendition is the one of a battlefield: a war act with the enemy penetration, occupation and final destruction of the female body and psyche. In this analytical frame, pornography and cultural representations of heterosexual intercourse represent repeatedly the encounter between two humans on unequal terms and codifies the only mode of social interaction with men in patriarchy.¹³

Sex is important to me because I see it as fundamental to the lower status of women [...] and because I think that most sex that women experience is in fact sexual abuse.¹⁴

Appropriating Robin Morgan motto "Pornography is the theory, rape is the practice", MacKinnon states:

Pornography is a practice. It is not just fantasies or ideas. The link between attitudes and behavior is not all that complicated here. As we showed in our hearings, pornography makes inequality sexy, it makes it sex.¹⁵

Moreover:

Pornography is the propaganda of sexual fascism. Pornography is the propaganda of sexual terrorism. Images of women bound, bruised, and

11. From a speech given by Dworkin in San Francisco. Quoted in Califia, P., *Public Sex. The Culture of Radical Sex*, p. 117.

12. Catharine MacKinnon is a lawyer and a very well known political figure. She was another influential leader of the Radical Feminist Movement in the United States. MacKinnon is currently known for her work on justice from a gender perspective and her contribution appears far more relevant/solid than Dworkin's on the matter. Nevertheless, I have used Dworkin's work because of her engagement with cultural critique and her position as a creative writer.

13. For a more detailed compendium of her work: Dworkin, A., *Woman Hating: A Radical Look at Sexuality* (1974), *Our Blood: Prophecies and Discourses on Sexual Politics* (1976) and her key text: *Pornography—Men Possessing Women* (1981).

14. Armstrong, L. and Dworkin, A., «Dissident for the Duration... Louise Armstrong Talks to Andrea Dworkin», *The Women's Review of Books*, Vol. 3, No. 8 (May, 1986), pp. 5-7, p. 6.

15. Quoted in Lindgren, J., «Defining Pornography», *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, vol. 141, n. 4 (Apr., 1993), pp. 1153-1275, p. 1204.

maimed on virtually every street corner, on every magazine rack, in every drug store, in movie house after movie house, on billboards, on posters pasted on walls, are death threats to a female population in rebellion.¹⁶

Wheleham defines this theoretical stand naïve, while the contemporary film scholar Linda Williams, in a much more severe tone, states:

Satisfied simply to deride the organ of presumed male power itself rather than the system of oppositions by which the symbolic meaning of the penis is constructed, the critique does not even approach the discursive root of the problem of pornography and sexual representations for feminism.¹⁷

In other words, the collapse of symbolic elements into the materiality of sexual organs –the *phallo* of ‘*phallogocentrism*’ turned into the penis– reveals the inability to comprehend the complexity of discursive practices on sex and sexuality and a near-sighted vision that in short turns the penis into the mayor problem while the *phallo* disappears, not being substantially embodied anywhere.

This theoretical stand worked both against heterosexual feminists that were relegated at the margins as ‘sympathizers’ of the enemy and against any possible alliance with those that enjoyed forms of sexual interactions described as ‘suspicious’ due to the fact that ‘all penetrative sex is (currently) symbolic of patriarchal colonization.’¹⁸

The Cultural Radicals understood patriarchal cultural systems and practices in such absolute and all-pervasive terms that they were imagined as ‘spaces’ with no discontinuities or contradictions; on the cultural front consequently Radicals could not foresee successful struggles if not in a problematic defence of a (imagined) virtually free-from-naughty-sex lesbian experience that in turn translated in the almost exclusion of heterosexual feminists from militancy.¹⁹

16. Quoted in Wheleham, I., *Modern Feminist Thought*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995, p. 78.

17. Linda Williams, *Hard Core. Power, pleasure and the “frenzy of the visible”*, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1989, p. 266.

18. Wheleham, I., *Modern Feminist Thought*, p. 79.

19. E., ‘Radical Feminism and Feminist Radicalism’, *Social Text*, No. 9/10, The 60’s without Apology (Spring - Summer, 1984), pp. 91-118, p. 105: ‘Andrea Dworkin, who has reified the sex-class paradigm, defining it as a closed system in which the power imbalance between men and women is absolute and all-pervasive. Since the system has no discontinuities or contradictions, there is no possibility of successful struggle against it-at best there can be moral resistance.’ For a brief and clear summary on ‘speech/discourse’ versus ‘practice’ theoretical readings of pornography, read: Klymbyte, G., *Wired fingers, sticky keyboards. Techno-embodiment in online pornography*. Available online, https://www.academia.edu/11306158/MA_Thesis_Wired_Fingers_Sticky_Keyboards_Techno-Embodiment_in_Online_Pornography, pp. 12-16.

‘Intercourse’ and Vampiric Rape

The anti-sex position, so clearly expressed by Dworkin, permeated radical understanding of other cultural manifestations providing *de facto* an extremely monolithic mode of interpreting culture that left no chance for re-signification of artefacts.

In her reading of *Dracula* of 1987, Dworkin states:

Dracula is a new narrative of intercourse and the phenomena associated with it: lust, seduction, penetration, possession, decadence and decay, death.²⁰

In *Dracula*, vampirism is —to be pedestrian in the extreme— a metaphor for intercourse: the great appetite for using and being used; the annihilation of orgasm; the submission of the female to the great hunter; the driving obsessiveness of lust, which destroys both internal peace and any moral constraint; the commonplace victimization of the one taken; the great craving, never sated and cruelly impersonal. [...] As humans, they begin to learn sex in dying.²¹

These fragments represent quite a ‘bizarre’ contribution to the interpretation of the canon. In the rest of the book Dworkin analyses a series of foundational European novels, such as *Madame Bovary* and *Wuthering Heights* in order to disclose how symbolic violence against women operates. In this context, she interprets vampirism as one of the many representations of rape as the only possible interaction between men and women symbolically and in the flesh. In particular, she compares Stoker’s novel to the eighties’ *Deep Throat* pornographic film, for the emblematic reference to oral sex and the common voyeuristic ‘male gaze’ that controls both artefacts:

And the men, the human suitors and husbands, cannot give the good fuck; instead, they are given a new kind of sex too, not the fuck but *watching*— watching the women die. And with the great wound, the vagina, moved to the throat, there is the harbinger of what has become a common practice of sexual assault now: throat rape, deep thrusting into the throat as if it were a female genital, a vagina, in the manner of the pornographic film *Deep Throat*.

20. Dworkin, A., *Intercourse*, p. 174.

21. *Ibidem*, p. 177.

If one contrasts Dworkin's analysis –that effectively leaves no space to cultivate Gothic (feminist) passions– with Gomez's creative usage of the vampire figuration, the difference is sticking primarily because it is a piece of creative writing quite far removed from Dworkin's theoretical material.

Nevertheless I wish to highlight a not so obvious debt that Gilda entertains with this radical position. Gomez obviously situated her literary piece in the context of the Radical discourse on homosexuality and lesbianism. She resists the Gothic Tradition that disqualifies female homosexuality as a perverse abomination that turns respectable women into monsters and she suggests that lesbianism can be politically enacted both to free women from Patriarchy and as a form to deconstruct gender oppression. Echoing radical emphasis on the notion of female communities and lesbian love, in order to conceptualise a new ethical vision of human relations, she pictures a bucolic landscape where love and blood/dream **sharing** have replaced the tyrannical dichotomy of domination and submission²² and there is virtually no sexual tension in her fantasy world that could be named problematic.²³ Furthermore, Dworkin's theorizing on the predatory nature of heterosexual men appears in Gomez's fiction in the form of a secure, almost-entirely-feminised world in which heterosexual encounters fall exactly in the category above enlightened: rape.

While the reader is exposed to the new *topos* of the black lesbian vampire at war with race and Africanism, Gilda cannot be considered as a starting point to problematize the way in which representations of sex have operated in the canon, because sex and even sexual tension are practically absent in the narrative.

In other words, Gomez fails to provide a reading that maintains sexuality at the core, idealising 'platonic' lesbianism as a practice that involved subjective political positioning but was effectively deprived of the notion of desire as the reason behind that very positioning.²⁴ The author fails to create a symbolic space for utopian transgressions (from feminism) for women in love with men as much as Radical Feminism, with its emphasis on the 'contaminating' effects of intimacy with men, could not provide a space for alliances with heterosexual feminists.

22. Willis, E., «Radical Feminism and Feminist Radicalism», *Social Text*, No. 9/10, The 60's without Apology (Spring - Summer, 1984), pp. 91-118, p. 111.

23. Gomez, in a interview released in 1993, acknowledged the influence of the feminist debate stating that striking a balance between the diffused patriarchal view of the female body as sexual property and the total abandon of sexuality as a legitimate field to create and enforce identity has been somewhat tricky while writing her work.

24. For a close sociological reading that take class into consideration in producing a certain ideal type of feminist sexuality and considers 'lesbian platonism' as a middle-class response to the super-eroticized working and upper-class lesbian subject of the sixties see: Newton, E., and Walton, S., «The Misunderstanding: Toward a More Precise Sexual Vocabulary» in Vance, C., *Pleasure and Danger*, pp. 242-250.

If we look at the pro-sex contributions –undoubtedly at odds with Dworkin’s and its appropriation by Gomez– they appear much more coherent with Hamilton’s interpretation of vampirism due to Anita’s great emphasis on sex as power and as the primary vehicle to achieve self-awareness and liberation.

Pro-Sex Perspective

Feminism must put forward a politics that resists deprivation and supports pleasure. It must understand pleasure as life-affirming, empowering, desirous of human connection and the future, and not fear it as destructive, enfeebling, or corrupt. Feminism must speak to sexual pleasure as a fundamental right, which cannot be put off to a better or easier time.

Carol Vance

If the anti-sex Radicals were fighting against multiple forms of violence against women (legally and symbolically) wired in twenty-century cultural artefacts, pro-sex feminists vice versa elaborated on the idea that sexual pleasure could be used to conquer emancipation and to redefine personal/ collective identities as women. If in the previous decade the countercultural movement had sacralised irrationality and intuition as transformative elements²⁵ pro-sex feminists introduced sex (with a particular focus on transgressive sexualities) in the equation as a form to give voice to the impulses that had been historically repressed, controlled and directed by puritanism and social norms. According to the pro-sex then, anti-sex feminists’ reactions towards sexual imagery was primarily a matter related to the ways in which sex was culturally coded as filthy and therefore their attitudes towards pornography had to be understood as horror against sex itself. According to the pro-sex militants, embracing the idea that a ‘good’ woman was ideally uninterested in sex but primarily concerned with affects and intimacy Cultural radicals were horrified at representations of sex in general and regarded them as always heavily controlled by a misogynistic gaze.²⁶ In this perspective, a re-validation of reactionary and dangerous discourses on women as asexual beings was operating in

25. Puleo, A., *Dialéctica de la sexualidad. Género y sexo en la filosofía contemporánea*. Catedra, 1992, Madrid, p. 67.

26. Hollibaugh, A., ‘Desire for the Future. Radical Hope in Passion and Pleasure’ in Vance, C., *Pleasure and Danger*, p. 401-410.

the anti-sex propaganda and that the same strategy for exclusion that was operating in society at large (the Self/Other, the hierarchic articulation of different sexual preferences and bodily practices) controlled the anti-pornography positioning on the matter.

Therefore, pro-sex feminists emphasised sex as the '*experience*' of bodily pleasures and the body, in its fleshy dimension, as a site that allowed for the exploration of female powers. They promoted a closer scrutiny of representations in order to provide a multidimensional understanding on how pornography worked on its audiences as much as the feminist engagement with the production and the distribution of different forms of porn targeting women and centred on a new 'female gaze'.²⁷ In short, to a notion of sexuality centred on neo-Victorianism as the ideological landmark on which female nature as nurturer, carer and affectionate being ultimately dispossessed women of their entitlement to sexual pleasure,²⁸ the pro-sex activists directed their political effort to suggest that explicit representations of sex could operate as an emancipatory cultural artefact and that gender-role-playing in sexual encounters could be used as a strategic move to conquer liberation from the constrain of normativity. In pro-sex discourses, sex as desire seems to turn into a liberatory value *per se*,²⁹ exposing that major issues in the debate revolved around notions of fantasy, agency, freedom and power. In Ferguson's words:

As feminists we should reclaim control over female sexuality by demanding the right to practice whatever gives us pleasure and satisfaction.³⁰

The understanding of sexual danger or 'the tension between sexual danger and sexual pleasure'³¹ was nevertheless central to pro-sex feminist project. Sexuality was defined as the crossroad between 'restriction, repression, and danger as well as a domain of exploration, pleasure and agency'³² that allow 'the exploration of the body, curiosity, intimacy, sensuality, adventure, excitement, human connection, basking in the infantile

27. 'La pornografía es una ceremonia. Y Una ceremonia privada. Toda la seducción de la ceremonia (de cualquier ceremonia) está basada en esa violencia que ejerce sobre la lógica del sentido. La ceremonia (...) se fundamenta en la suspensión de la lógica que permite la *dialéctica mágica* de la ceremonia'. In Barba, A., y Montes, J., *La ceremonia del porno*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2007, p. 51-52.

28. Willis, E., «Radical Feminism and Feminist Radicalism» and Echols, A., «Cultural Feminism: Feminist Capitalism and the Anti-Pornography Movement», *Social Text*, No. 7 (Spring - Summer, 1983), pp. 34-53. Another element that emerged in anti-sex Radicalism as the expression of a certain style of Victorianism is the concept of 'purity' exemplified by their notion of heterosexual contact as contaminating and the promotion of 'contagious free' (lesbian) segregated zones.

29. Glick, E., «Sex Positive: Feminism, Queer Theory, and the Politics of Transgression», *Feminist Review*, No. 64, Feminism 2000: One Step beyond? (Spring, 2000), pp. 19-45.

30. Ferguson, A., «Sex War: The Debate between Radical and Libertarian Feminists», *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1984, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 107-125, p. 109.

31. Vance, C., *Pleasure and Danger. Exploring Female Sexuality*, p. 1

32. Ibidem, p. 18.

and no-rational³³ and ultimately provides energy for individuals in their struggle to survive. Instead of focusing exclusively on sexual danger, they hoped to deepen feminist reflections on pleasure and expand the very *real* territories in which safe but also powerful female sexual expression in the form of abandonment and impulsiveness could take place. To a monolithic understanding of pornography, the pro-sex bunch promote a 'kaleidoscopic' approximation that stressed the impact of erotic representations both on the individual as much as on collective imaginary allowing for a much less prescriptive mode of interpretation. Through their emphasis on individual agency and bodily practices they managed to deteriorate the anti-sex radical construct of the 'victimised woman' and to replace it with the images of women much more at ease with their sexual beings and engaged in exploring their fantasies and desires. Their refusal to adhere to a hierarchical vision of legitimate versus illegitimate forms of sexual pleasure lead the pro-sex radicals to identify their *ideal* in a 'sexual relationship (is) between fully consenting, equal partners who negotiate to maximize one another's sexual pleasure and satisfaction by any means they choose'. Decentring the focus from lesbianism as a source of reassuring 'purity', they promoted an understanding of sexuality that could operate as an inclusive political project of alliances for women, independently from their sexual orientation, a project in which the notion of *difference* remained central. Appropriating difference in this context meant a non-hierarchical interpretation of personal and collective sexual orientations as much as an attempt to disrupt identity politics located in the 'lesbian subject':

This 'pro-sex' feminism has been spearheaded by lesbians whose sexuality does not conform to movement standards of purity (primarily lesbian sadomasochists and butch/femme dykes), by unapologetic heterosexuals, and by women who adhere to classic radical feminism rather than to the revisionist celebrations of femininity which have become so common.³⁴

The format of a single sexual standard is continually reconstituted within other rhetorical frameworks, including feminism and socialism. It is just as objectionable to insist that everyone should be lesbian, non-monogamous, or kinky, as to believe that everyone should be heterosexual, married, or vanilla.³⁵

33. Vance, C., *Pleasure and Danger. Exploring Female Sexuality*.

34. Rubin, G., «Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality», p. 166.

35. Ibidem, p. 166.

When contemporary critics look at the way in which pro-sex feminism promoted alternative representations of women, they tend to focus primarily on the porn industry analysing what is by now known as the post-porn contemporary scene. Nevertheless, the process of feminist appropriation of cultural artefacts revolving around a subversive erotica started before the queer vanguard of the nineties.

In 1988 Califia provided one of the best literary examples of how the pro-sex radicals dealt with cultural representations and how the tension between pleasure and danger in female sexual experiences did not have necessarily to be resolved through the annihilation and the suppression of sexual drives both in fiction and in reality. In most of her political writings, Califia suggests that the attempt to collapse all representations of sexual practices in a 'bundle' had to be regarded as a great mistake. Despite the recognition that Dworkin's theorising created a 'sense of emergency' and the conditions for further mobilisation of feminist activists, pro-sex feminists sought to address the basic assumption implied in Radicals' critique, namely that getting rid of pornography was the only simple step needed to restructure patriarchal society.³⁶ As many other pro-sex radicals, Califia understood the use of symbols in popular culture in a complex and dialogical way emphasising their plasticity and the possibility for their appropriation as a way to create a new *ars erotica* in North America. In Vance's words:

To assume that symbols have a unitary meaning [...] is to fail to investigate the individuals' experience and cognition of symbols, as well as individual ability to transform and manipulate symbols in a complex way which draws on play, creativity, humor, and intelligence... To ignore the potential for variation is to inadvertently place women outside of culture except as passive recipients of official symbol systems. It continues to deny what mainstream culture has always tried to make invisible the complex struggles of disenfranchised groups to grapple with oppression using symbolic, as well as economic and political, resistance. Mainstream symbols may be used to both reveal and mock dominant culture.³⁷

I will briefly explore how this alternative conception of representations of sex as much as the inclusion of S/M practices operated in Califia's story.

To start with, the creation of an unusual setting far removed from the house -central to the canon- is the first sign of the story's originality. The writer is indeed speaking about

36. Califia, P., *Public Sex. The Culture of Radical Sex*. San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1994.

37. Vance, C., *Pleasure and Danger. Exploring Female Sexuality*, p. 15.

a 'community' as much as Gomez was; nevertheless this is a community of men and women that are bound together by their sexual preferences (clearly reflected in their use of fashion codes) and not a women-only type of fantasy.

Purgatory was fairly crowded that night. About sixty men and a score of women had assembled in the tiny club by one o'clock in the morning. Most of the women (other than one who was naked and being led around on a leash) were clad in the high fashion of the bizarre - leather skirts, spike heels, PVC corsets, thigh-high boots, studded wristbands or belts, black latex evening gowns.³⁸

The idea that the intermingling of pain and pleasure is crucial to the understanding of women's sexuality appears here transfigured in the form of a S/M scene. Instead of portraying a fantasy world in which women can feel safe thanks to the removal of men and the creation of female bonds that relied on Victorian notions of female intimacy as friendship, Califia displays the complex interaction between fantasy, pain and desire at work in lesbian sexual encounters. Ketty and Iduna are primarily coded as attractive, perverted sadomasochistic characters that enjoy greatly inflicting and receiving 'pain' in a ritualised manner. There is a move away from lesbianism as the core of female monstrosity and a source of dread. Moreover, Califia focus on S/M for the pathological position that those very practices occupied in the American and European imaginary.³⁹

The mistresses stood by the bar, under track lights, impassive and unapproachable, each one giving out some ominous signal perhaps toying with a whip around her waist or keeping time to the music with a riding crop in her gloved hand.⁴⁰

Occasionally a dominatrix would focus her gaze on a particular man and beckon him forward to kneel, get her a drink, light her cigarette, answer some insulting question, and kneel again.⁴¹

38. Califia, P., «The Vampire» in *Macho Sluts*. pp. 243-262, p. 243

39. S/M is still pathologized in the American Psychological Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV-TR, 2000) and generally it is assumed that engaging in SM is a sign that the person is psychologically unwell. Taylor, G. W. and Ussher, J. M., «Making sense of S&M: A Discourse Analytic Account», *Sexualities*, 4(3), 2011, pp. 293-314. On a literary level, *Fifty Shades of Grey* saga represents a clear example of how S/M is overall presented in popular culture. The novels show how the narrative exploitation of the S/M imaginary is motivated by the male character's traumatic experiences as a child with a violent father figure.

40. Califia, P., «The Vampire», p. 243.

41. Ibidem, p. 243.

She shook her head, but held it down for the submissive man to take a token' He smiled and said, 'Thank you, Mistress,' and wondered why the act he was performing gave him so much pleasure. Would she, he wondered, let him remove her stockings and actually kiss her feet, lick them? She took the joint away from him and passed it up the stairs, then rested the foot that was still shod upon his crotch. "Do you like my shoes?" she asked.⁴²

As one can appreciate in the fragments above, the creation of a setting erotically charged and the notion of power are central to Califia's project and indeed when the vampire enters the scene she does it in the fashion of a dominatrix flogging a man that has dared insulting her:

The fool kept on talking. "Why Ah don't reckon yew could even make a dent in my hide," he chuckled. "Probably be a waste of time. Ah kin take quite a lot, yew know. Wouldn't want ta embarrass a lil gal like yew - yew are a gal, ain'tcha?" Then the fatuous ass pronounced his own sentence: "Ah kin take anythin' yew kin dish out, sister".⁴³

Nine narrow tails whistled through the air, and the skin divided, rent, bled. She shifted her weight to the other hip and reversed the motion, criss-crossing the previously inflicted lashes.⁴⁴

In the development of the narrative, the interaction between the vampire and a possible victim is inscribed in the same codes of sexual 'perversion' that characterised Stoker's narrative, namely homoeroticism and no-reproductive sexuality outside the family. Califia effectively depicts a scenario in which the limits of normativity do not invest just the morphology of the partner you choose (male or female) but the *forms* in which homoeroticism and no-reproductive sexuality are experienced by those very bodies. I reckon that a closer look at these vampiric sexual encounters Califia's articulates in *The Vampire* allows one to comprehend a major shift that was taking place in feminist theorising. For *lesbianism* and the 'lesbian subject' a new idea of gender role performativity and 'aesthetic of existence' was emerging and colonising the feminist imagination.

42. Califia, P., «The Vampire», p. 244.

43. Ibidem, p. 248.

44. Ibidem, p. 249.

“All it would take is a little more pressure, and we’d have a fountain here. A scarlet fountain, pouring onto the dirty ground, completely wasted, unless... unless someone had a use for it. Unless someone caught it in their mouth before it hit the ground. Caught it and drank it, took life from it, rolled it around their tongue and palate and described the vintage to me, swallowed and swallowed as if they would never get enough. Look, my pulse is beating right here.”⁴⁵

She realized by the mushy feel of her panties against Kerry’s leather sleeve that she was wet down there, as wet as the mouth that fed on her. Her assailant realized it, too, because she ripped at her panties, literally clawed them to pieces, and then she was being crammed full, opened terribly, spread far too wide, almost lifted off her feet by the force of the fucking, and it hurt so much for so long that she came, came even as the canines sank another notch into her cuts and drank fresh blood from the deepened wound. Which penetration made her come? She did not know.⁴⁶

The story ends with the ‘victim’ realisation that sex is indeed not out of the question in this vampire relation and that

‘After the long hunt, the desperate search, the years of doing without, being alone and bereft, with no wings to shelter me, no sharp teeth in any of the mouths that kissed me, I have you. You are no dream, no fantasy. Finally, my treasure, my pet, my lord, I will make you my beloved. Your strength, your magic, my death and your immortality, I have it all within my reach.’⁴⁷

This great emphasis on sex and on transgressive practices such as those described in Califa’s *The Vampire* returns in Hamilton’s series as key elements in structuring the novels. Therefore, in the final part of the chapter I will focus my attention on sex and desire metamorphoses into the *Ardeur*, a metaphysical form of sexual ‘excess’ and, on the other hand, on S/M in order to prove that Hamilton’s narrative represents a literary effect of radical pro-sex position on twenty first century American Gothic. Both

45. Califa, P., «The Vampire», p. 256.

46. Ibidem, p. 259.

47. Ibidem, p. 261.

elements –sex and S/M practices– allow Hamilton to play with gender roles and to question the balance of power that articulates intimate relations.

‘EXCESSIVE’ SEXUALITY: THE *ARDEUR*

Cohen, in his exploration of the status of Giants in the popular imagination, highlights how Giants are represented as monsters because of their corporeal ‘excess’:

His body an affront to natural proportion, the giant encodes an excess that places him outside the realm of the human, outside the possibility of desire.⁴⁸

I reckon that this idea of excess is central to understand monsters in general and does not just apply to physical excess. In the case of vampire literature and female vampirism in particular the notion of ‘excess’ is central. I have already argued in chapter two that one of the reasons why Lucy turns into a monster is because of her uncontrollable sexual drive that challenges the Victorian notion of ‘woman’ as a creature with no sexual impulses. Any deviation from this established discourse on *normal* erotic appetites translated into a representation of horror and dread. While physical excess positions the Giant into a territory outside the possibility of human desire, female sexual excess places women in a territory marked by the presence of the vampire and therefore, once again, outside the possibility of evoking human desire as such. In both cases then, the matter of excess is articulated as the opposite of order/control as normativity that defines the human.

In Gilda’s, passion and intense sexual drives are replaced by a ‘will to share’ that effectively de-activates excessive sexuality originally represented as a manifestation of the predatory nature of (female) vampires.

In Anita’s narrative, this idea of vampiric ‘excessive’ sexuality has not been paired with homoeroticism but with the full appreciation of coupling with both men and women in the form of an irresistible metaphysical desire that allows bloodsuckers to feed from lust and that drives average humans crazy.

48. Cohen, J. J., *Of Giants. Sex, Monsters and the Middle Ages*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p. X.

Ardeur is the name that Hamilton coined to define it, giving this energy/power a 'foreign twang' and French origins that indeed constitute the source of its monstrous appeal. In *Narcissus in Chains*,⁴⁹ the tenth novel of the series, we read about it for the first time.

The idea that vampires enjoy special powers has been a constant theme in the development of the genre. An example would be Stoker's *Dracula* that possess the uncanny ability to control people psychically and that, simultaneously, command the elements, being a creature closer to nature than to civilization. As Auerbach has highlighted one of the numerous ways through which *Dracula* can be conceptualised would be through the figure of the *mesmerist*:

a derivation from Svengali, with his powers still further extended over time and space. The spell he casts on women- we never see him mesmerising a man, though he captures several- includes the animal kingdom, whose power he draws to himself at will, and at times the elements as well.⁵⁰

On the contrary, the appeal of supernatural powers that turn the vampire into an even more dangerous creature is totally absent in *Gilda*. The novel that I have marked as a transitional experiment to re-signify the genre shows a lesbian vampire that does not have any affinity with the elements. The best she can do is cloud the minds of those she is planning to visit at night and with whom she will exchange energy, dreams and blood; she strives to remove herself from the world of traditional literary bloodsuckers that are heavily in debt with folklore and superstition. Moreover, Gomez, *Gilda*'s author, has voided the narrative of sexual tensions –as a source of dread as much as a site for emancipation in the symbolic– inscribing her political narrative proposition into an anti-sex radical vision of the ideal 'lesbian pairing'.

Almost hundred years after Stoker's *Dracula* and few years after *Gilda*, superpowers reemerged in full force; this time they are connected to overwhelming sexual energy in multi-sexual encounters. It is a double-hedged energy. It gives power to the vampire that poses it and at the same time it provides a 'rush' to those it feeds from. There is indeed a form of reciprocity that have resurfaced from *Gilda*'s stories but the *Ardeur* seems to possess its own mind; it operates as a force through the bodies of the vampire and its victim and, as a metaphysical entity, it transcends them both.

49. Hamilton, L., *Narcissus in Chains*. New York: Orbit, 2001.

50. Auerbach, N., *Woman and the Demon. The Life of a Victorian Myth*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982, p. 16.

Anita describes the *Ardeur* in these terms: it is pure lust and it manifests itself as the irresistible fusion of auras.

Well, there was one thing about Jean-Claude. He could gain power by feeding off sexual energy. In another century he'd have been called an incubus.⁵¹ It's rare even for a Master Vamp to have a secondary way to gain power outside of blood. So it was impressive, sort of. The only other masters I'd met who could feed off of something other than blood had fed on terror. And of the two, I preferred lust. At least no one had to bleed for it. Usually.⁵²

I'd learned how to French kiss a vampire, but it was a hazardous pleasure, one to be done with care, and I was out of practice. In slipping my tongue between his fangs, I nicked myself. It was a quick, sharp pain, and Jean-Claude made a soft guttural sound, a heartbeat before I tasted blood. [...] There was no going back, no saying no, nothing but sensation. I felt that cool, shimmering wind that was his aura touch mine. For one trembling moment we were pressed together, our energy breathing against each other like the sides of two great beasts. Then the boundaries that held our auras in place gave way [...] spilling you against your partner, into your partner, giving you an intimacy that was never imagined, never planned, never wanted.⁵³

Anita develops the *Ardeur* through Jean Claude's marks. When she becomes a vampire servant, she turns into a creature that belongs to a French line of bloodsuckers that can survive on erotic energy as much as blood but she is forced to have sex multiple times a day to keep in control:

I was human, but just as I was the first human Nimir-Ra the leopards had ever had, I was also the first human servant of a master vampire to acquire certain... abilities. With those abilities came some downsides. One of those downsides was needing to feed the *ardeur* every twelve hours or so. *Ardeur* is French for flame, roughly translates to being consumed.⁵⁴

51. According to Medieval demonology, the Devil could transform itself into a beautiful lady (succubus) to seduce men and then have intercourse to retain their sperm. Later, it could transform into an attractive young man (incubus) and procreate with a woman. For a full description of their powers see: Izzi, M., *Diccionario Ilustrado de los Monstruos. Ángeles, diablos, ogros, dragones, sirenas y otras criaturas del imaginario*. Palma de Mallorca: José J. de Olañeta Editor, 1996.

52. Hamilton, L., *Narcissus in Chains*, p. 24.

53. Ibidem, p. 28.

54. Hamilton, L., *Incubus Dreams*. New York: Orbit, 2004, p. 8.

This new element that Hamilton introduces quite late in the saga, allows for a number of interesting variations in the original outline of the series, namely her turning into a *promiscuous* creature, an almost-*animal* and into the leader of a *poly-amorous community* in which S/M seems to be the domineering form of sexual foreplay. In fact, Anita started off as a single girl that was not particularly interested in dating. In relation to her perspective partners, she initially seems to behave according to a strict moral code: restrain, fidelity and commitment to the ideal of a life-long relationship. She falls for who she believes to be a human guy, Richard, and rejects vampiric seduction on the bases of the unmoral and monstrous behaviour of the Master of the City. She is an executioner after all:

Jean Claude sent me a dozen pure white, long-stemmed roses. The card read, "If you have answered the question truthfully, come dancing with me." I wrote "No" on the back of the card and slipped it under the door at Guilty Pleasures, during daylight hours. I had been attracted to Jean-Claude. Maybe I still was. So what? He thought it changed things. It didn't. All I had to do was visit Phillip's grave to know that. Oh, hell, I didn't even have to go that far. I know who and what I am. I am The Executioner, and I don't date vampires. I kill them.⁵⁵

In novel ten then, thanks to the progressive contamination of her mortal Christian soul through the proximity of a pard of wereleopards, facilitated by her *mestizaje*, everything shifts. She finds herself in bed with men she does not even know

"Great, nice to meet you both." I still couldn't figure out what to do with my hands. "What are you doing here?" "Sleeping with you," Caleb said. The blush that had been almost gone flamed back to life. He laughed. Micah didn't. Point for him.⁵⁶

and she appears constantly and ferociously in need of flesh and blood:

The blood was like icing spread just under the tenderness of his flesh; and the part of me that thought of Micah as meat wasn't Jean-Claude, it was Richard. I didn't know how to put the need into words. Micah turned his face, looked into my eyes, and I felt something inside me open; some door that I hadn't even known existed swung wide. A wind blew through the

55. Hamilton, L., *Narcissus in Chains*, p. 203-204.

56. Ibidem, p. 62.

door, a wind made of darkness and the stillness of the grave. A wind that held an edge of electric warmth like the rub of fur across bare skin. A wind that tasted of both my men. But I was the center, the thing that could hold both of them inside and not break. Life and death, lust and love.⁵⁷

I licked my tongue across that throbbing skin. I meant to be gentle, I meant many things, but his skin was slick and flawless against my mouth; the smell of him intoxicated me like the sweetest perfume. His pulse throbbed against my mouth, and I sank my teeth around that frantic movement. I ate at his skin, dug my teeth into the flesh underneath, and into his power, his beast. I felt my beast rise through my body, like some great shape rising from the ocean depths, a leviathan that grew and grew, swelling up inside me until my skin couldn't hold it, then it touched his beast, and it stopped, hovering in black water, hovering in my body like some huge thing. The two powers floated in that dark water, brushing huge, sleek sides down the length of their bodies, our bodies. It was a sensation like velvet rubbing inside me, except this velvet had muscles, flesh, and was hard even where it was soft. The imagery that kept flowing through my mind was of some great cat rubbing itself inside me, rolling through me...

"I had sex with Micah." I watched his face, waited for the anger, jealousy, something to flash through his eyes. What I saw was sympathy, and I didn't understand it. "You are like a vampire newly risen. Even those of us who will be masters cannot fight our hunger the first night, or the first few nights. It is overwhelming. It is why many vampires feed on their nearest kin when they first rise. It is who they are thinking of in their hearts, and they are drawn to them. It is only with the aid of a master vampire that the hunger can be directed elsewhere." "You're not angry?" I asked. He laughed and hugged me. "I thought you would be angry with me for giving you the ardeur, the fire, the burning hunger." I pushed back enough to see his face. "Why didn't you warn me that I couldn't control it?" "I never underestimate you, ma petite. If anyone I have ever known in all these centuries could have withstood such a test, it was you. So I did not tell you you would fail, because I no longer try to predict what power will do to you, or through

57. Hamilton, L., *Narcissus in Chains*, p. 70.

you. You are a law unto yourself so much of the time.” “I was ... helpless. I ... I didn’t want to control it.”⁵⁸

I wish to offer a last scene to complete this puzzle of Anita’s intimate world in relation to the power of the Ardeur in shaping her life.

The bed moved, and just the sensation of the men moving around on the bed was enough to tighten my body, speed my pulse. Dear God, help me. This couldn’t be happening. I’d feared ending up as a vampire. I’d come close many times, but I’d never thought it would happen like this. I was still alive, still human, but the hunger rose inside me like some great beast trying to dig its way out of me, and all that kept it from surfacing was my fingers digging into the wood, my forehead pressed against the carvings. I wasn’t sure which hunger I was fighting. But the ardeur colored all of it, whether I was craving flesh, or blood, the sex was there in all of it. I couldn’t separate them, and that was scary all on its own.⁵⁹

Once more, the radical understanding of female *normal* sexuality offers a pivot to my analysis of Anita’s sexual excess as the source of her monstrosity. According to Rubin’s theorising

sexuality that is ‘good’, ‘normal’, and ‘natural’ should ideally be heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive, and non-commercial. It should be coupled, relational, within the same generation, and occur at home (...) Any sex that violates these rules is ‘bad’, ‘abnormal’, or ‘unnatural’. Bad sex may be homosexual, *unmarried*, *promiscuous*, *non-procreative*, or commercial.⁶⁰

Following this line of reasoning, Anita sex falls clearly into the monster’s realm because it is unmarried, non procreative and, most of all, promiscuous.

While analysing Hamilton construction of vampirism as closely related to canonical monstrosity if we attend the notion of Lucy’s excesses as the source of her fall, what appears particularly relevant here vice versa is the emphasis on sexuality as a source

58. Hamilton, L., *Narcissus in Chains*, p. 101.

59. Ibidem, p. 130.

60. Rubin, G., *Deviations. A Gayle Rubin Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. p. 151.

of personal and collective power. Following a reverse strategy and moving beyond the stigma attached to sexual excess, Hamilton suggests -as much as the pro-sex radical feminists- that sexuality is a contested field of action and can be used to express and explore other forms of being in the world as women. Stated differently if 'bad', monstrous sex

may be masturbatory or take place at orgies, may be casual, may cross generational lines, and may take place in 'public', or at least in the bushes or the baths. It may involve the use of pornography, fetish objects, sex toys, or unusual roles.⁶¹

Hamilton appropriates it as a source of personal and collective power as much as radical pro-sex feminists. Sex in fact is not conceptualised as a battlefield in which women are meant to succumb to male violence or to forms of violence inevitably wired to sexual desire in Patriarchy. It may also be appropriated to experience freedom from moral restraints that still govern our cultural signification of sexuality as such. The Erotic and Sexuality, in whichever form they manifest themselves in women's lives, have to be understood as a source of emancipation. In line with Califia's reading in *Public Sex*, Hamilton suggests that Anita's personal affirmation and access to freedom become possible when she fully embrace her erotic potential and disrupts conservative notions of appropriate sexual practices articulated on gender normativity.

To conclude, I wish to share some ideas on S/M⁶² that appear recurrently in Califia's writings and in Hamilton's series.

In her theoretical work Califia argues, following Foucault's argument on perverted sexualities, that dominant discourses on sexuality established the 'condition of domination' that produced and reproduced, through psychiatric and psychological bodies of knowledge, the figure of the pervert among which the 'somasochist' was and still is classified. According to her readings then, those very practices were a form to destabilised accepted norms; if women in the context of traditional gender ideals were seen as passive and man as the active counterpart, in S/M practices the actors of different sexual scenes could interact and play at will with these easy identifications in order to experience through the flesh other forms of power during sexual encounters.

61. Rubin, G., *Deviations*, p. 151.

62. Barker, M., Iantaffi, A. and Gupta, C., «Kinky clients, kinky counselling? The challenges and potentials of BDSM» in Moon, L. (Ed.) *Feeling Queer or Queer Feelings: Radical Approaches to Counselling Sex, Sexualities and Genders*. London: Routledge, 2007, pp. 106–124 provides an overview of the clinical approaches to somasochism in therapy and explores S/M political potential according to the personal narratives of the participants.

Taking on board the radicals' notion that sexuality is inevitably a power field, Califia suggests that through 'playing' one can act out other roles and be no so deeply controlled by gender norms.

Using a definition given by a critic,

play generally adheres to a particular structure, utilizes particular symbols, navigates and negotiates aspects of gender and power ideologies, and illuminates various social scripts. In an SM context, "play" is a complex word. It references recreation and leisure and evokes a romantic sense of innocence and freedom from encumbrances. (...) a lifestyle rife with political, social, and sexual implications.⁶³

On the matter of power relations and playing, Foucault says:

the S&M game is very interesting because it is a strategic relation, but it is always fluid. Of course, there are roles, but everybody knows very well that those roles can be reversed.⁶⁴

My guess is that, according to Califia, through playing the participants can actually incarnate another social order. This hypothesis will confirm what Newmahr and other ethnographers have found while researching S/M communities:

the fantasy element connects SM to other fantasy interests, such as science fiction novels, films, and role-playing adventure games. From this perspective, SM is more easily understood as an all-encompassing lifestyle that represents liberation from the oppressive plight of the everyman and nurtures identities of marginality. This community is built around play, and it is through play that community identities are constructed, sustained, and nurtured.⁶⁵

Hamilton's use of S/M mimes these presuppositions:

He was supposed to be the submissive, and I was his dominant. Didn't that mean that I was in charge? Didn't that mean he did what I said? No. I had to

63. Newmahr, S., *Playing on the Edge. Sadoomasochism, Risk, and Intimacy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011, p. 8.

64. Foucault, M., «Sex, Power and Politics of Identity» in Rabinow, P. (Ed.), *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth. Volume 1*. New York: the New Press, 1997.

65. Newmahr, S., *Playing on the Edge*, p. 9.

learn enough to understand Nathaniel and some of the other were leopards, because he wasn't the only one with interesting hobbies. The submissive had a safe word, and once they said that word, all the play stopped. So in the end, the dominant had an illusion of power, but really the submissive got to say how far things went, and when they stopped. I've thought I could control Nathaniel because he was so submissive, but it was tonight that I realized the truth. I wasn't in control anymore.⁶⁶

Finally, in the ever-changing roles that 'the scene' of Jean Claude's sex clubs guarantees, we read:

I was alone with the feel of Nathaniel's pulse in my mouth. His flesh was so warm, so warm, and his pulse beat like something alive inside his skin. I wanted to free that struggling, quivering thing. I wanted to break it free of its cage. To free Nathaniel of this cage of flesh. To set him free. I fought not to bite down, because some part of me knew that if I once tasted blood that I would feed. I would feed, and Nathaniel might not survive it.⁶⁷

PROVISIONAL CONCLUSIONS ON 'PLAY-FUL' SEXUALITY

In the context of the progressive 'pornification of culture',⁶⁸ Hamilton models her fantasy around pleasure, freedom and power. In order to illuminate Anita's narrative use of sexuality as a site for women's emancipation, I have situated the reader in the context of the American 'sex wars' of the eighties, few years prior to the appearance of the first novel, *Guilty Pleasures*. Those years were dominated by a ferocious conflict between the anti-sex and the pro-sex radicals on the complex role that sex, violence and pleasure played in the lives of women. Ronald Berger has effectively summarised the debate in these terms:

66. Hamilton, L., *Incubus Dream*, p. 50.

67. Ibidem, p. 73.

68. From an updated review of the statistics on porn consumption in the States see: Illouz, E., *Erotismo de autoayuda. Cincuenta sombras de Grey y el nuevo orden romantico*. Madrid: Kats Editores, 2014.

Radical feminists focus on sexuality as an arena of victimization and inequality for women, while libertarian feminists focus on sexuality as an arena of constructive struggle toward women's sexual liberation.⁶⁹

Using the 'sex wars' as a point of departure, I have concentrated my attention on two leading figures of the period, namely Andrea Dworkin –an anti-sex radical– and Pat Califia –a pro-sex militant– because they have both reflected on vampirism critically and creatively. In *Intercourse*, Dworkin proposes a reading of vampirism as a reactionary, anti-women literary genre and a theoretical example of how literary artefacts emblematised and support women's exploitation. Vice versa, Califia's literary piece provides the reader with a S/M fantasy in which the parties involved finally find suitable partners to express and act out their most intimate desires. Anita's novels offer a number of elements that have allowed me to argue that Hamilton's plays with two notions proposed by Califia and other militants of the pro-sex radical front. Sexuality is, above all, an emancipatory force in the life of women and non-normative sexual practices –that question normative forms of intimacy– can be used to disrupt current power dynamics and, therefore, can be considered as *sites* to free themselves from some of the restraints of Patriarchy. In my analysis, I claim that Anita's polyamorous community, her joyful sexual life combined with the representation of sadomasochism as a strategy to subvert traditional gender roles, make Hamilton's popular narrative a form of radical, utopian feminist vindication.

69. Berger, R. J., Searles P. and Cottle C., «Ideological Contours of the Contemporary Pornography Debate: Divisions and Alliances», *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2/3, Spirituality, Values, and Ethics, pp. 30-38, p. 34. Please notice that the authors use the definition Radical and Libertarian instead of the one I have employed in my text. I have consistently referred to the definition pro-sex for Libertarian and anti-sex for Radical.

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this dissertation I have strived to provide the reader with some answers to the concerns expressed by monster's scholarship in the past three decades when, from the field of literary studies, a new understanding of the relevance of monster figurations emerged. Cultural studies' explorations of monster artefacts, anthropological reflections on monstrosity as a game of alterities and philosophical debates on monster ontology have lead me to embark on the analysis of a very successful neo-gothic narrative, *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter*; the series represents a multi-layered fantasy in which vampires, zombies and were-animals coexist in the world of a female heroine, a young *mestiza* that works alongside the police as a preternatural expert. She enjoys supernatural powers such as the one that allows her to resurrect the dead and that work as magnets for all sorts of freakish creatures the American imagination has ever produced.

In *Genealogy* I have argued that the monster represents a signifier of chaos and simultaneously patrols the limits of the legitimate. Starting from an etymological approximation, I have highlighted how the monster operates as a double edged device that disrupts epistemological categories showing the limits of *normativity* that, in the context of nineteenth and twentieth century western imagination, coincided with a definition of the human as male, heterosexual and white. In particular, in order to prove this point, I have focused on the specific forms in which power/knowledge intertwined to create discursive practices that reflect on the symbolic exclusion of (strange) Others from the category of people and leads to their progressive assimilation into the category of monsters. Vampires' and zombies' narratives have helped me to reflect on this symbolic exclusion; in particular *Dracula* has offered an example of how discourses on monstrous femininity were articulated in gothic literature at the time.

Through the analysis of Mina and Lucy, the two female protagonists, I have claimed that Dracula shows how 'eccentric' women were symbolically represented as monsters, that is to say creatures that threatened *normativity* through inappropriate behaviours. Excessive sexual appetite –promiscuity-, homoeroticism and 'professionalism' were all described as threats to Victorian (middle-class) social organisation and values. Intense sexual drives in women disrupted the boundaries that separated proper from dangerous behaviours and constituted a source of possible contagion. On the other hand, professionalism questioned the distinction between the 'public' and the 'private' that appears so central in maintaining the ideal Patriarchal family. In other words, these figurations operate as icons of 'diverse subjectivities' in the guise of a crazy woman and a rampant professional that had to be symbolically annihilated. Through these narratives I have shown how race and sexuality represented key concerns for the white, middle class, Anglo imagination in the *fin de siècle*.

In *Cartography* I have employed the notion of power/knowledge as sources of normativity and the monster as a *site* of resistance to the analysis of Gomez's novel *The Gilda Stories* and Haitian *indigenist* narratives. If power operates through knowledge in the creation of modern subjectivities but subjects could never be fully controlled by power technologies then the monsters may symbolically represent the forms through which resistance emerges. In other words, if 'it is not that life has been totally integrated into techniques that govern and administer it; it constantly escapes them', monsters in my analysis function as symbolic *escape gates*, sites to articulate collective forms of resistance to the normalised white, male, middle class 'human' subject. I have strived to prove my point looking at the ways in which -during the sixties, seventies and eighties- authors have attempted to resist hegemonic discourses on Otherness through the re-signification of zombies and vampires because of their emblematic presence as figurations of monstrous Others in the nineteenth and twentieth century. I have interpreted *Gilda* and *indigenist* contributions as a way of questioning hegemonic negative representations of differences, facilitated by the plasticity and the polysemic nature of these creatures.

In dialogue with a number of anthropological and sociological texts, in *Cartography* I have claimed that, with the appearance of new political subjectivities, monsters' potential to express forms of symbolic resistance has been fully exploited. *The Gilda Stories* and Haitian narratives have offered an example of monsters' usefulness to question hegemonic discourses on the western Self and to vindicate racial, ethnic and gender *differences*.

Which notions of difference does Anita Blake display? Which limits does Anita-monster cross?

Once again, following the central elements that characterised prototypical vampires' and zombies' narratives, I have focused my attention on race and sexuality. On the matter of race, pivoting my analysis on Anzaldúa's definition of *mestizaje*, Hamilton seems unable to overcome the legacy of the 'anti-negro thought' that has so deeply marked Anglo-American imagination. In chapter five in fact, I have illuminated how Anzaldúa's *mestizaje* serves to reconfigure group and personal identity not articulated around the split between 'white... and coloured,... male and female' and the hegemonically differentiated 'us' and 'them'. Therefore Anita, as a *mestiza*, had the potential to disrupt the racist elements embodied in the colonial representations of threatening vampire others and vicious voodoo Afro-Caribbean *bokors*. Nevertheless, I have shown how traditional notions of Afro-Caribbean viciousness and moral inferiority are still at play in Hamilton's fantasy world. Voodoo is still represented throughout the series as the root of evil and, to a certain extent certain negro-phobia I have analysed in the third chapter, reappears in the form of an ethnic religion associated with (Afro)Caribbean origins. Anita's monstrous location, instead of allowing the author to move beyond the self/other, us/them dichotomy and to create a space for ethnic and racial differences, preserves the normative function of whiteness and reinforces the cultural metaphors that have historically operated in western discourses revolving around monstrous others. In this respect, Anita-monster reveals through her very presence the great hold that notions of barbarism and primitivism associated with blackness still had on the white American imagination, where identity politics seems to lead to exclusion, discrimination and spread fear.

Vice versa, on the matter of sexuality, Hamilton's narrative discloses the limits of normativity and simultaneously helps *communitas* to emerge. Stated differently, Anita's monstrous location allows the author to resist hegemonic discourses on femininity and to foresee an alternative scenario in which the female character can enjoy a high degree of pleasure, freedom and power. Anita's narrative uses 'sexual excess', promiscuity and sadomasochistic play as *sites* for women's emancipation, alongside pro-sex radical appreciation of sexuality as an arena towards women's liberation from Patriarchy.

Hamilton depicts a fantasy world in which promiscuity, in the form of polyamory, is an emancipatory force in the life of women and a tool to question the heterosexual monogamous couple that, in the narrative, appears deeply intertwined with hard masculinity and historically nourished by patriarchal violence. The monstrous location of the female lead questions normative forms of intimacy, disrupts current power dynamics and, ultimately, provides the readers with the representation of valid alternatives to the current regime of power of 'heterosexual monogamy'.

To conclude, my original hypothesis was that, removing myself from paranoia as a domineering form of cultural criticism, I would be able to recover B-narratives such as

Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter as (monstrous) sites of resistance to hegemonic discourses on femininity and intimacy. According to the argument I have developed throughout chapter six and seven, Anita's polyamorous community, her joyful sexual life combined with the representation of sadomasochism as a strategy to subvert traditional gender roles, make Hamilton's popular narrative a form of utopian feminist vindication of a future world full of possibilities for women.

FUTURE RESEARCH

In my exploration of *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* series I notice that the traditional dichotomy of Self versus Others, that so clearly structure traditional Gothic narratives, has either vanished or has re-emerged as an internal frontier separating a multi-dimensional Self. In fact, these multi-layered narratives destabilise the monster canon not just situating the narrative voice elsewhere, in another body, but more clearly including differences that interact and interplay with each other and offer a non-linear, non-unitary vision of the subject.

In fact, the most relevant difference I have been able to identify through my journey into vampiric Gothic has been that from the eighties onwards, these monsters have been given a voice; they speak and they have desires of their own. This shift has appeared in zombie fiction recently and applies, to the best of my knowledge, almost exclusively to television fiction. The huge abyss that separated monsters from humans has become a *border zone*, a space that allows a certain kind of continuity. The vampire monster then, in contemporary fiction, is clearly not the Absolute Other of Dracula nor one of the putrefying corpses that threatened white settlers in Haiti. Monsters seem to have a lot more in common with us than their terrifying ancestors. Vampires and zombies in contemporary fiction are organized socially in forms that are quite recognisable, quite human in fact. They share language and they can communicate. This element would contribute to the understanding that, one way or another, we are all monsters. They are us. This notion of a generalised monstrosity could explain why the traditional division between inside and outside that was so central to gothic stories is dissolving in contemporary fiction. If we are all monsters then, it is almost impossible to conquer a safe paradise to escape their presence. In Anita's novels, Hamilton displaces the monster and locates it inside the home and in her own body. There are not haunted grounds-where danger is enclosed/located and isolated- and safe heavens- unpolluted, off limits land as the house once was. Furthermore, the inside/outside limit understood in a more collective sense, outside/inside the human community as an unbridgeable limit -made

visible through an easy recognition of the monstrous body- has also vanished. The complexity of Anita's monstrosity attests for this shift.

On the other hand, Anita is not a vampire, not a purifying corpse nor a wereanimal that changes its shape, yet she shares some of the characteristics of them all. My view is that she works as a bridge between the three in the form of a totally imploded, not coherent body. The elements of Otherness that I have pinpointed previously have been collapsed into a 'hybrid' human/monster continuum. In my future investigation I would like to throw some light on the hypothesis that emerges from these preliminary considerations. First of all, it seems that the current degree of *mediation* through new technologies has turned obsolete the distinction between the Self and the Other as co-dependent separate entities. Globalisation, advanced capitalism and the Internet have played a major role in redefining the material scenario in which these encounters of alterity take place. Moreover, the evolution of *bio-technologies* has heavily conditioned the forms in which western society now looks at the distinction between the human, the monster and the animal. They have help destabilised the notion of the human as totally separate from nature and the animal world and help the emergence of a eco-critical discourse revolving around the notion of continuum. I wish to explore these dimensions considering other contemporary monster narratives to contrast the current implication of animality in the definition of 'human' subjectivity. The body is now described as the container of differences and the animal *monster-within* reigns.

In order to explore what I understand to be the significance of animality in contemporary fiction and the possible reasons for its emergence as a central site that defines contemporary monster fiction, I will have to refer to a different set of tools. My current work has been shaped by my interest for the historical forms in which the Human has been theorised. I intuitively feel that most monster narratives express deep anxiety about the status of the Human in the world but in my future research, I will strive to move beyond the inhuman and reflect upon the *posthuman* and the potential of animal monstrous hybrids.

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