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*a chi c'è da sempre
a chi c'è da tanto
a chi c'è da poco
e a chi è arrivato alla fine*

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1. Introduction

In over a century since its first filmic adaptation, the character of Count Dracula on screen has continuously changed form and characteristics. From the hideous beast it was in F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), *Dracula*'s first ever cinematic appropriation, to the dangerous but attractive and seductive monster who posed a threat to the patriarchal family, like in Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931) and Terence Fisher's *Dracula* (or *Horror of Dracula*, 1958), and then again, into a romantic character who longs for romance and his lost love, as in Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) and Gary Shore's *Dracula Untold* (2014). (Holte xv) Even more recently, the figure of the Count has been rewritten and reappropriated in the American franchise of *Hotel Transylvania* created by Todd Durham in which the Count is portrayed as a caring husband, father, and then grandfather. Thus, just like the character in Bram Stoker's novel, the immortal Count Dracula has repeatedly shapeshifted and adapted to different types of media, audiences, and historical periods. Differently, the representation of the female characters of *Dracula* has not seen such a dramatic shift despite the hundreds of adaptations and revisions. Indeed, even the most recent appropriations of Stoker's opus have continued to depict women simply as naïve tragic victims or as consensual hypersexual monstrous women who must be thus eliminated. One of the latest rewriting of the novel, which continues the tradition of depicting the Count as dangerous yet handsome, sensual, and seductive, and at times also romantic, is the three-part serial *Dracula* distributed by Netflix and the BBC in 2020. Initially seemingly feminist, due for instance to the gender flip and split of Dr Abraham Van Helsing into an intellectual faith-doubting nun and a twenty-first-century scientist, this last rendition might initially be perceived as feminist, progressive, and empowering, yet, as it will be demonstrated in this thesis, that is not the case.

The rewriting of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* produced by the BBC in collaboration with Netflix, is a three-part horror serial which stars Claes Bang and Dolly Wells as its titular characters. The serial was written and directed by Steven Moffat OBE¹ and Mark Gatiss, previously screenwriters of several *Doctor Who* episodes (especially during Moffat's time as showrunner, ca. 2010-2017), and co-creators of the famous BBC series *Sherlock* (2010-2017), one of the many adaptations of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* series. Just like Bram Stoker's novel, this three-part serial follows the typical "tripartite cycle of admission-

¹ Officer of the Order of the British Empire

entertainment-expulsion.” (Craft 108) Thus, the threat (Dracula) is presented in the first episode, developed and explored in the second, and finally exposed and defeated in the third.

The first act, “The Rules of the Beast,” (1x01) set in the year 1897, begins with Jonathan Harker already hospitalised in the Saint Mary’s Convent of Budapest, where Sister Agatha Van Helsing lives. Already from the very beginning of the episode, it is clear that this version of the Sister, differently from her equivalent in the novel, plays a fundamental role in the story and she will eventually be the one to cause Dracula’s defeat. She, in fact, as the surname also suggests, is none other than the gender-flipped version of Dr Abraham Van Helsing, the Count’s archenemy. Just like her male counterpart in the novel, who holds numerous academic titles, she is a woman of culture, one might even say a scholar, and is extremely interested in “everything dark and evil.” (1x01 58:38-58:40) Thus, as the first episode unfolds through a series of flashbacks, and thanks to Sister Agatha’s interrogation, the audience gets to know Jonathan and his story: he had travelled from England to Romania finalise a sale of a property, tragically became his prisoner, and quite by chance he had managed to escape. Eventually, he was found by some fishermen and was taken to the nunnery to recover and be studied by Sister Agatha. Finally, Count Dracula too reaches the Convent and, through a series of subterfuges, manages to enter it. The first episode thus ends with Harker, the Mother Superior, and all the sisters gruesomely murdered, Sister Agatha sacrificing herself to save Jonathan’s fiancée Mina, and her fleeing the nunnery.

The second part, “Blood Vessel,” (1x02) is an expansion of the journey of the *Demeter*, which in the original only covers a few pages. Aboard the ship, there are seven passengers, each one chosen carefully by Dracula for their skills, and, unbeknownst to her, Sister Agatha. The plot thus unfolds, like the first episode, through a number of flashbacks and a metaphorical game of chess between the Sister and the Count, until eventually she realises she is hallucinating their interaction and she, too, is aboard the *Demeter*. After numerous attempts to find and kill Dracula, the ship is finally sunk by Captain Sokolov and Sister Agatha, and the Count is temporarily stopped. The episode closes with Dracula awakening underwater over a century later and resurfacing on the shores of Whitby. This second episode serves not only as an account of how the Count reached England, as in the novel, but also as a portrayal of the development of the romantic connection between him and Sister Agatha, which eventually leads to his demise.

Lastly, in the third episode “The Dark Compass,” (1x03) set in London in the year 2020, Dracula, dormant underwater since the sinking of the *Demeter* in 1897, is accidentally revived by an underwater research team in charge of finding his body. Over a century prior, in fact, the

fugitive Mina, after inheriting her father's fortune and with the collaboration of the Van Helsing family, had founded the Jonathan Harker Foundation. Since its establishment, the institution has been mainly focusing on finding the body of Count Dracula so he could be studied and exploited for medical research. The leader of the organization is Sister Agatha's great-great niece, Doctor Zoe Van Helsing, who has dedicated her entire life to studying and retrieving Count, sacrificing thus for her career love, marriage, and motherhood. As soon as the Count re-emerges from the waters, he meets Zoe on the shore and his feelings for Agatha are immediately reignited. Both characters, in fact, are played by Dolly Wells and thus look identical, save for their accent, as the Sister is Dutch and the Doctor is English. After a few days where he manages to elude Zoe, the Count is eventually captured and incarcerated by the foundation and is thus forced to donate his blood to the Doctor for medical research. However, following Dracula's suggestion, in an attempt to gain further insight, she drinks it instead. As he has told her, in fact, only this way will she finally be able to understand him. In this rendition of *Dracula*, indeed, blood is not just sustenance for the vampire but also a means to absorb the victim's skills, memories, and knowledge. As Sister Agatha's blood is part of the Count's, in doing so, Zoe recovers her ancestress's mind and, in a sort of metempsychosis, the two women become one². In the end, thanks to their combined skills and knowledge, the two then manage to uncover all of Dracula's secrets and eventually they "defeat"³ him. Thus, in the last few seconds of the third episode, as he realises Sister Agatha has now reincarnated in Zoe's body and is suffering due to her cancer, in order to alleviate his beloved's pain, the Count essentially commits suicide by drinking her sick blood, which is poisonous to him. Finally, as they both lie dying, in a scene reminiscent of the one closing Coppola's adaption, the two lovers are depicted embracing naked in the sun.

Another fundamental character in the third episode is that of Lucy Westenra, a 22-year-old black girl who is framed as careless, sexually promiscuous, and lascivious. As in the novel, it is her death that eventually triggers the final "battle" against Dracula. In fact, it is when Lucy is murdered for the first time by the Count, that one of her many suitors, Jack Seward, contacts his mentor, Doctor Zoe, to demand aid to save Lucy and defeat Dracula. The four characters eventually all meet in the Count's abode and Lucy is at last gruesomely murdered a third time, this time staked by her former lover with a wooden spike and finally turns into ashes.

² The term refers to the combination of the character of Agatha and Zoe Van Helsing, resulting from the latter drinking Count Dracula's blood

³ I here put defeat in quotation marks due to the fact that I retain that it is not truly Zagatha that defeats Count Dracula but rather it is him that commits suicide to alleviate her of her suffering. We could thus argue that in relieving her of her pain he becomes the hero

From this simple synopsis, it becomes immediately clear the importance of the female characters in this rewriting of *Dracula* and thus the reason behind my interest. Like previous adaptations, in fact, this serial “highlights the strong female presence within the story by centering much of its action around the women of the narrative.” (Nystrom 63) The main female characters, I retain, all represent different types of femininity: the prototypical Victorian Angel in the House, namely Mina Harker and Lady Dorabella Ruthven, one of the passengers of the *Demeter*; the stereotypical hyper-sexualised Black Jezebel, who is Lucy Westenra; and the postfeminist gothic heroine, embodied by Sister Agatha and Doctor Zoe Van Helsing. Yet, I believe, in spite of their heterogeneity, they all eventually have one sole purpose, which is to serve patriarchy and strengthen its ideals about femininity.

Thus, my thesis is that, although seemingly progressive in its representation of women, by re-presenting, and thus reinforcing, stereotypes and archetypes, admonishing female sexual desires, and limiting female agency, Netflix/BBC’s *Dracula* (2020) reinstates archaic patriarchal ideals about femininity, domesticity, and female empowerment. This text, in addition to being pro-patriarchal, I would argue, is also anti-feminist. In fact, as I concur that feminism is “a political movement that stresses agency,” (Gorton in Munford and Waters 47) then a text in which the agency of its female characters revolves only around the male characters is decisively anti-feminist.

To prove my statement, in this thesis, I intend to perform what Harry M. Benshoff calls “image (or stereotype) analysis,” which is, a “content analysis designed to reveal persistent patterns and character motifs” in a text. (153) Specifically, I will concentrate on the dichotomisation of the characters according to the virgin/whore divide, more recently developed into the good/bad girl dichotomy, as illustrated in chapter 2.2. Thus, I will perform a study of five of the female characters of the serial, namely Mina Murray/Harker, Lady Dorabella Ruthven, Lucy Westenra, Sister Agatha Van Helsing and Doctor Zoe Van Helsing. More precisely, I will focus on the manner these women embody different types of femininity and how each type eventually reinforces the aforementioned patriarchal ideals. The two research questions I intend to answer for each of the five thus are: What are their characteristics and in what archetype or stereotype are the female characters categorised? Does this categorisation follow the dichotomy of the virgin/whore and the subsequent reward/punishment? Due to their extremely limited screen time and their insignificance in the development of the story of some of them, I will not analyse all the female characters in the serial. Thus, I will not focus on Agatha’s sisters and her Mother Superior, the Grand Duchess Valeria of Augsburg, Yamini Sharma, Lucy’s mother and friends, and Zoe’s colleagues.

Naturally, being a visual media, in my study I will also analyse the clothes worn by the five women for, as noted by Deborah Cartmell in her study of literary adaptations on screen, “costume is a vital part of the adaptive process of the text from page to screen since it is, and has been throughout film-making history, one of the primary methods of character revelation.” (*Companion* 295) Thus, the overall goal of this thesis is to highlight the serial’s connection to the phenomenon of the postfeminist mystique and continue the ongoing debate on “the ways in which contemporary neo-Victorian texts, objects, and media engages with feminism and postfeminism, and in what ways this engagement is productive, problematic, or both simultaneously.” (MacDonald and Goggin 5)

Being a small screen rewriting of a Victorian gothic novel, this serial and its characters are situated at the crossroads of a number of different fields of study. To conduct my research I will thus utilise theories, analytical categories, and definitions from several different subjects. Television studies and Adaptation studies represent the main theoretical background for my thesis as they provide the motivations for why it is important to study televisual adaptations and their content and present the features it is productive to focus on. The field of Neo-Victorian studies will be the basis for the analysis of the three female characters set in the nineteenth century, namely Mina Murray/Harker, Lady Dorabella Ruthven, and Sister Agatha Van Helsing. Due to the fact that I will combine her analysis with the one of her descendant, for the latter and for Doctor Zoe Van Helsing I will also employ the analytical category of the Postfeminist Gothic, specifically theories on postfeminist gothic heroines. Lastly, as in this adaptation the character is played by a black actress, the field of black feminist studies and the concept of intersectionality represents my main theoretical background for the analysis of Lucy Westenra.

Even though in conducting my analysis I did not take into consideration authorial intentions, I deem it nonetheless important to present some of Moffat and Gatiss’s thoughts regarding the foregrounding (or backgrounding) of the main female characters, and the reasons behind the gender reversal of Dracula’s archenemy. I find this quick digression also especially important seeing the strong emphasis in the serial’s advertisements on the two writers and their previous collaboration on *Sherlock*, rather than on its relation to Stoker’s *Dracula*. The most in-depth analysis of the characters given by the authors of the serial is presented in the three-episode interview with television critic Haley Campbell, in the BBC Sounds podcast “Obsessed with...” released contemporarily to the serial’s broadcasting on television. As noted by the interviewer, in the novel Mina Harker is one of the main characters and, one might even say, the true catalyst of Dracula’s debacle. So why did Moffat and Gatiss choose to sideline her? The reasons behind her backgrounding might initially seem almost feminist. As Moffat notes,

in the original “Mina is a good character and all that, but she is fundamentally being a victim” (episode 1, 34:02-34:06) and that is not the type of woman the authors wanted as their lead. Moreover, as if in the story of *Dracula* there was no space for more than one empowered woman at a time, one must also remember that “Sister Agatha got a huge promotion.” (episode 1, 33:49-33:51) Naturally, then, one starts to wonder why the authors decided to “promote” the character of Sister Agatha, an extremely small character in the original, who in this adaptation also gets the role of Doctor Abraham Van Helsing, *Dracula*’s archenemy. Apparently, her “promotion” was completely unplanned. In fact, in the podcast Gatiss and Moffat declare that when they first conceived the serial they had not yet decided who was going to be *Dracula*’s new adversary. But who better than “a woman wearing a crucifix,” one that is “already wearing the superhero outfit [...] appropriate for battling vampires”? (episode 1, 29:18-29:28) A woman that is “leading the charge” and “deliberately taking on the vampire because she is simply fascinated by him.” (episode 1, 34:08-34:14) It is more appealing and “more fun doing that.” (episode 1, 34:16-34:18) As it is clear then, there was no feminist agenda behind Moffat and Gatiss’s choices regarding the roles of their female characters, the goal was not to present empowered female characters, it was mostly fortuitous.

As for the structure of this study, in the following sections of this introduction, I will first give a brief overview of existing literature on *Dracula*, its adaptations, the author, and his sources; then I will clarify what is meant by “patriarchal ideals about femininity, domesticity, and female empowerment” and finally the difference between a stereotype and an archetype. Subsequently, in the first chapter, I will contextualise femininity in Britain in the two historical periods depicted in the series and compare the two to elucidate why the Victorian era is still so central to literary productions in the twenty-first century. Next, in the second chapter, I will describe the different fields and theories that I utilise in the analytical chapters to conduct my study of the five main female characters. The main body of this thesis is represented by the third, fourth, and fifth chapters. In the first one, I analyse the two “Angels in the House” of the serial, namely Mina Harker and Lady Dorabella Ruthven. Specifically, I highlight how their representation reinforces and reignites the nostalgia for a better and long-gone past and for a more subdued and submissive femininity. In chapter four, I will focus on perhaps the most blatant example as to why I retain this series to be pro-patriarchal, anti-feminist, and at times racist, that is, the character of Lucy Westenra. Lastly, in chapter five, the most extensive one seeing their importance in the story, I conduct my analysis of the two main female characters, Sister Agatha and Doctor Zoe Van Helsing, and establish why the gender reversal of the novel’s Van Helsing is restraining rather than being empowering. Finally, in my conclusion, I will first

reiterate why it is fundamental to study representations on screen, especially those of black women, then I will expound why I believe the serial analysed to be part of the ever-growing phenomenon of the “postfeminist mystique” conceived by Rebecca Munford and Melanie Waters.

1.1 Literature Review

Being one of the most adapted novels enormously has been written on Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and its subsequent reworkings, especially since the 1970s and 1980s when Film and Television Studies were truly established. (Browning and Skal in *Dracula* vii) Thus, as it would be nearly impossible to give a full account of everything ever written on the urtext and its hundreds of adaptations, in these sections I will provide only a small but significant overview of existing literature on the matter.

1.1.1 Sex, Sexuality, and Gender

It is hard to pinpoint exactly by whom and when the link between the act of feeding of the vampire and sexual intercourse was first ever established, yet it is one of the main foci of scholars who have written about vampire stories. Due to this connection, several are the scholars who have focused on the themes of sex and sexuality in *Dracula*, especially on the reversal of sexual roles, on the promiscuity of Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker, and on the homoerotic tones of the novel. Four of the most quoted academics on the matter are Christopher Craft, Stephanie Demetrakopoulos, Richard Dyer, and Talia Schaffer. Interestingly, all four authors have focused on slightly different aspects of sex and sexuality in Stoker.

Christopher Craft, in ““Kiss Me with Those Red Lips”: Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*” (1984), analyses gender roles, sexuality, and the exchange of positions in the “intercourse” between the aggressive and dominant wives of Dracula and the weak and defenceless Jonathan Harker. Similarly, Stephanie Demetrakopoulos, in “Feminism, Sex Role Exchanges, and Other Subliminal Fantasies in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*” (1977), studies the reversal of the sex roles in the novel. Unlike Craft, however, she concentrates on the connections between motherhood and vampirism and between sexuality and Victorian womanhood. Differently, Richard Dyer, in his “It’s in his kiss!: Vampirism as Homosexuality, Homosexuality as Vampirism” (2011), focuses only on the homosexual aspect of vampirism as intercourse.

Lastly, in her article ““A Wilde Desire Took Me”: The Homoerotic History of Dracula” (1994), Talia Schaffer focuses on the link between historical context and homosexuality in the text. In fact, the novel was written and published contemporarily to the trials of Oscar Wilde, a good friend of Stoker, for the crime of sodomy. Thus, she retains, “*Dracula* explores Stoker's fear and anxiety as a closeted homosexual man during Oscar Wilde's trial.” (381)

Alongside sexuality, many scholars have also focused on representations of gender and femininity in *Dracula*. For instance, scholars Jean Lorrain, Carol A. Senf, Charles E. Prescott, and Grace A. Giorgio, concentrated on the figure of the New Woman in the urtext. As it will be further elucidated in chapter 2.1, in fact, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, a new ideal of femininity emerged in society and that ideal, scholars have disputed, is represented in the novel by Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker. Carol A. Senf, in ““*Dracula*”: Stoker's Response to the New Woman” (1982), focused mainly on gender equality and argued that although it is true that the author constructed his female characters as intellectually equal to their male counterparts, they do not benefit from sexual equality. (38) Moreover, in analysing the two main female characters, she classified Mina as a more traditional heroine and Lucy as the representative of the ideal of the New Woman. Contrarily, Jean Lorrain, in “*Dracula* Meets the New Woman” (1999), challenged this position and stated that it is Lucy who is “the old-fashioned lady” and Mina is “the noble New Woman.” (32) Differently, Charles E. Prescott and Grace A. Giorgio, in “Vampiric Affinities: Mina Harker and The Paradox of Femininity in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*” (2005), argued that Mina represents neither the modern New Woman nor the traditional Angel in the House, but rather she finds herself positioned in between these two figures as she “struggles” to negotiate being an independent and emancipated woman and a submissive good wife (and mother). (487)

1.1.2 *Dracula's* Adaptations

Unsurprisingly, seeing the sheer number of adaptations, numerous are the monographs that focused on *Dracula* and its numerous adaptations. The most complete and thorough are perhaps John Edgar Browning and Caroline Joan (Kay) Picart's *Dracula in Visual Media: Film, Television, Comic Book and Electronic Game Appearances, 1921-2010* (2011) and David J. Skal's *Hollywood Gothic: The Tangled Web of Dracula from Novel to Stage to Screen* (1990). Other scholars, instead, have usually focused on specific adaptations of the novel, like Vincent Canby in his review of Coppola's movie and Judith Mayne in her study of F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu*.

Just like for the novel, several scholars have also focused specifically on the representation of the female characters in filmic appropriations. As previously illustrated, interestingly seeing the huge number of reworkings and the big shift in the characterisation of the character of the Count, not much has changed since the release of the first visual adaptation over a century ago in terms of the representation of the female characters. In fact, especially on screen, Dracula's women continue to be depicted as either the dangerous hypersexual woman who constitutes a threat to bigamous, heteronormative, and patriarchal marriage, usually represented by Lucy Westenra or the Count's three wives, or as the virginal, tragic, and innocent victim who succumbs involuntarily to Dracula's irresistible appeal, normally embodied by the character of Mina Harker. Generally, in their analyses, scholars have compared the female characters in the novel with the ones in a specific adaptation. For instance, Lisa Nystrom studied the portrayal of the New Woman in the original and in Coppola's adaptation and focused on the "strong female presence felt within the story" (63) and "the association the female characters share with the figure of the Count." (64) Analogously, Lauren Rocha, compared representations of gender and femininity in *Dracula* and in *Penny Dreadful* (2016).

1.1.3 Race, Ethnicity, and the Empire

Surprisingly, only a few scholars have focused on representations of race and ethnicity in the novel. For instance, Jack [Judith] Halberstam, in *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (1995), dedicates a chapter to the figure of the Jew and the presence of antisemitism in the novel. Halberstam retains that the physical descriptors attributed to the Count (aquiline nose, bushy eyebrows and hair, ...), "his relation to money/gold, his parasitism, his degeneracy, his impermanence or lack of allegiance to a fatherland, and his femininity" clearly characterise him as Jewish. (92) Differently, Stephen Arata in "The Occidental Tourist: "Dracula" and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization" (1990) and in *Fictions of Loss in The Victorian Fin De Siècle* (1996), focused on the reversal of the roles of coloniser and colonised as represented by the threat of the vampiric disease to Englishness. In Stoker's novel, he argues, it is the primitive Other coming from the East, embodied by Dracula, that subdues, "colonises," and conquers the civilised Westerners, specifically the Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker, who, being women, symbolise the future of the English race. He argues that even if the Count eventually "fails" to spread vampirism as Lucy is staked and purified and Mina never completes her transformation, nonetheless the Count succeeds in infecting the British race because Little

Quincey Harker's blood contains not just his mother's and his father's but also Dracula's, as Mina had previously fed on him.

1.1.4 Stoker and his Sources

Obviously, a lot of attention has also been given to the author himself, his literary production, and his sources. The first real attempts at factual accounts of the life of the author and his sources of inspiration are: Harry Ludlam's *A Biography of Dracula: The Life and Story of Bram Stoker* (1962), in collaboration with Noel Thornley Stoker, son of Bram, and Hamilton Deane, first adaptor of *Dracula* on stage; *The Man Who Wrote "Dracula": A Biography of Bram Stoker* (1975) written by Daniel Farson, distant relative of Stoker; and Barbara Belford's authorised biography *Bram Stoker: A Biography of the Author of Dracula* (1996, republished in 2002 as *Bram Stoker and the Man Who Was Dracula*). All of these biographies benefited of the access to family papers yet, according to Browning and Skal, all were marred by inaccuracies or lack of factual citations. (in *Dracula* 577-579) Other important and more recent biographies of the author worth mentioning are Lisa Hopkins's *Bram Stoker: A Literary Life* (2007), which focuses not just on the author's magnum opus but also on his other writings; Paul Murray's *From the Shadow of Dracula: A Life of Bram Stoker* (2004), who also had access to family documents and presents a more accurate and factual account of the author's life, and lastly, David J. Skal's *Something in the Blood: The Untold Stories of Bram Stoker, the Man Who Wrote Dracula* (2016), a "wide-ranging cultural biography of Stoker, [which explores] his creativity and sexuality in unprecedented depth." (Browning and Skal in *Dracula* 580).

Surprisingly, seen how this characteristic of Count Dracula has become part of popular culture, only a few studies have been published on the possible connection between the figure of the imaginary Count and the historical figure of Vlad "The Impaler" Țepeș, also known as "Dracula" or "Draculea." The first scholars to propose Țepeș as the possible source of inspiration for the fictional character were Raymond McNally and Radu Florescu in *In Search of Dracula* (1972). Almost three decades later, Elizabeth Miller refuted this connection in her essay "Filing for Divorce: Count Dracula vs. Vlad the Impaler" (1998). This rebuttal was then quickly followed in 1999 by another essay from McNally titled "Separation Granted; Divorce Denied; Annulment Unlikely," in which the author defends his position as historian, reinstates that Stoker had knowledge of the existence of Vlad Țepeș, and re-asserts that, because of a number of historically accurate mentions in the novel regarding the ancestry of the two characters, the two Draculas are definitely related. (5)

1.2 Patriarchy and Domestic Ideology

According to Bonnie J. Fox, patriarchy is a “system of practices, arrangements and social relations that ensure biological reproduction, child rearing and the reproduction of gendered subjectivity, as well as gender ideology, or the sense of gender identity, itself.” (in Bahlieda *Legacy* 16) However, her definition does not identify one of the most important attributes of patriarchy, that is, the power imbalance between genders in patriarchal societies. Indeed, as Zillah R. Eisenstein has noted, “[p]atriarchy is defined to mean a sexual system of power in which *the male role is superior in possession of power and economic privilege*. Patriarchy is the male hierarchical ordering of society.” (in Bahlieda *Legacy* 16, my emphasis) What is important to note is that this hierarchical system is all-encompassing, in fact, “patriarchal attitudes, values, and beliefs shape our cultural, social, political and economic decision making, interpersonal relationships, leadership models, religious beliefs, and educational practices.” (Bahlieda *Legacy* 16)

Heavily attacked, condemned, and denounced during the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century, in more recent times patriarchy and its effects have been decreasingly criticised as a result of the fact that “[p]atriarchy has increasingly become viewed narrowly as a familial anachronism that has been dispatched with the advent of the women’s rights in the 20th century rather than an invasive and growing meta-ideology.” (Bahlieda *Legacy* 17) In addition, the patriarchal ideology has been so little criticised when compared to others for “it is a male ideology and as such it is rarely open to challenge” and due to the fact that it is often not seen as an actual ideology but simply as “a set of normalized relationships between the sexes and in families.” (Bahlieda *Legacy* 19)

One might thus assume that in a patriarchal system there is no place for women in a position of power, however, as it is clear for instance by the increasing number of female CEOs, presidents, and so on, that is not the case. Yet, “to this day women who have led have also done so in a patriarchal manner.” (Bahlieda *Legacy* 17) This means that women, in order to be perceived as deserving of power and capable of ruling, must display characteristics that have historically been associated with masculinity, such as a bigger inclination to partake in risky behaviours, aggressiveness, assertiveness, and so on.

Being all-encompassing, patriarchy “has been reflected in the development of physical structures and artistic expression that reify its concepts and ideology [...] and other forms of

human expression that reflect and imbue society with its values.” (Bahlieda *Legacy* 41) In fact, as it is also the case for the serial under scrutiny, patriarchy is frequently “mythologized and symbolized in our institutions and relationships, organizational structures, art, language, architecture, sports, social interactions, economic philosophies, religious traditions, education system, and our modern electronic media.” (Bahlieda *Legacy* 44) Thus, to uphold the hierarchy, especially in the media, women have often been depicted as “subordinate, submissive, and deferential to males.” (Connell and Messerschmidt in Bahlieda *Legacy* 51)

1.3 Stereotypes vs Archetypes

Before proceeding with my analysis I deem it important to distinguish between a stereotype and an archetype. In this serial, in fact, the characters of Mina Harker, Lady Dorabella Ruthven and Lucy Westenra represent a stereotype, respectively the ones of the Angels in the House and the hypersexualised Jezebel, whereas Sister Agatha and Doctor Zoe Van Helsing, represent an archetype, specifically the one of the postfeminist gothic heroine.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a stereotype as a “preconceived and oversimplified idea of the characteristics which typify a person, situation, etc.” (“Stereotype”) This simple definition however does not highlight one of the most important characteristics of a stereotype, that is, its correlation to power. Such relationship and the term’s innate negative connotation are emphasized by Jeremy Butler as he defines stereotypes as “*demeaning* fictional character types that are based on *ideologically defined* social types.” (352, my emphasis) Differently, and more generally, in their study of television representations, Jonathan Bignell and Faye Woods give a more extensive definition and identify stereotypes as a “socially constructed shorthand used to decode or describe an identity group, erasing any diversity within it by applying a reductive, simplified set of traits to the group as a whole.” (235-236) Moreover, and most importantly, as sociologist Liesbet Van Zoonen has noted, generally “stereotypes fulfill the structural needs of a patriarchal and capitalist society by reinforcing gender differences and inequalities.” (in Campbell 289) Examples of socially constructed stereotypes are, for instance, the preconceptions that boys are innately better at economics and sciences and girls at arts and humanities, that black men are inherently physically (more) powerful (known as “the mandingo stereotype”), or, heir of the Victorian ideology of the separate spheres and biological determinism, the stereotype that women belong to the household and should focus on taking care of their home, their husband, and their children, and not on public matters.

On the other hand, an archetype, or a prototype, is “an easily recognisable character type on which a writer can build.” Thus, differently from a stereotype, an archetype is neither inherently ideologically imbued, nor it is characterised by a relationship to power. Instead, generally, an archetype is about a character’s psychology and motivations. (Bignell and Woods 236) Very frequently different archetypes are combined, as it is the case, for instance, for the archetypes of the hero and the orphan. Examples of such a combination are Harry Potter from the *Harry Potter* series, Frodo Baggins from *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and Luke Skywalker in the *Star Wars* franchise.

2. Contextualisation

In the first two sections of this chapter, I intend to delineate the characteristics of gender ideology and the ideals of femininity in the United Kingdom during the Victorian Era and nowadays. Specifically, I intend to focus on the 1890s and on the last three decades as they are the decades in which the serial is set. Then, in the third part, following the works of scholars such as Sally Ledger, Tara MacDonald, and Joyce Goggin, I will highlight the analogies and differences between the feminine ideals of the late nineteenth century and those of the late twentieth/early twenty-first century, which are the basis for the continued depiction of the Victorian era in contemporary literary productions.

2.1 Gender and Femininity in Victorian Britain

Like for the majority of historical periods, it is hard to define exactly when the Victorian era began and when it ended. Generally, the start has been pinpointed to the accession to the British throne of Queen Victoria in 1837 and the end with her death in 1901. In these six decades we have an extraordinary growth of the empire's extension, power, and economy, the height of colonialism, the peak of the Industrial Revolution, and, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, the beginning of "unprecedented anxiety and uncertainty about the social roles, sexual nature, and natural spheres of activity of men and women." (Eltis 450)

As a result of biological determinism, according to which our behaviours, predispositions, and skills are determined by our biological characteristics, during the dawn of the Victorian Era we see the development of the gender ideology of the two separate spheres. According to this doctrine, males are innately strong, independent, and rational, whereas females are conceived as weak, dependent, and more emotionally driven. Men, thus, were conceived as belonging to the public sphere (society) whereas women belonged to the private sphere (the household). As a result, in the nineteenth century in Britain "there was an intensification in the domestic ideology." (Walby 228). According to this belief, all of a woman's aspirations and activities were to be limited to her home, her husband, and her family. Thus, in the nineteenth century, women "rarely worked in public" and "were excluded from the public sphere of the state;" "non-marital sexuality" was severely sanctioned; suffrage was not yet universal; married women could not own any property; and "cultural institutions [...]" supported the notion that a woman's place was in the home." (Walby 228) Therefore,

diametrically opposite to her male counterpart, the proper Victorian woman should in no way be “overtly sexual” as that was a male prerogative. (Bloom 155) As Jennifer Swartz-Levine has also noted, in the early Victorian period, being “chaste, modest, non-sexual beings” was “the standard for Englishwomen.” (346) Due to this double standard, in the latter part of the century, we have the insurgence of “a national debate known as “The Woman Question,” which encompassed issues such as property ownership, marriage contracts, inheritance law, and female sexuality, among others” (Swartz-Levine 345) and the contemporary beginning of the woman suffrage movement.

In addition to a double standard for the two sexes, as a result of the doctrine of the two spheres, we also have the establishment of the dichotomy of the Angel in the House versus the Fallen Woman. (Primorac 150) The figure of the Angel in the House was first delineated by the English poet Coventry Patmore in his narrative poem of the same name, published between 1854 and 1862. This figure, as portrayed in the serial by Mina Harker and Lady Dorabella Ruthven, represented the ideal of womanliness in the Victorian Era. The Victorian Angel was conceived as inexperienced, innocent, sweet, submissive to her husband, not opinionated, and, most importantly, not in any way overtly sexual. (Hayek 33-54) The figure of the Fallen Woman, on the other hand, encompassed everything the Angel did not: she was idealised as aggressive, immoral, and a threat to the patriarchal family. (Auerbach *Rise*) Most importantly, opposite to the Angel, she was frequently depicted as enjoying extra-marital sex. (Demetrakopoulos 106) Thus, she “had to be cast out and publicly punished for the good of the community and to prevent others from acting as she had.” (Hayek 39) Even, as Nina Auerbach has noted, “Victorian conventions ordain[ed] that a woman’s fall ends in death.” (*Rise* 30)

Contemporarily and consequently to the establishment of this dichotomy, we see the rise of “The Woman Question,” which challenged the legal and political double standards between men and women in British society, and the emergence of a new ideal of femininity, personified in the figure of the New Woman. John Edgar Browning and David J. Skal, have defined “New Woman” as a term which identified “independent women who challenged the prevailing standards of marital subjugation, dress, education, and employment and who advanced progressive movements like women’s suffrage and birth control.” (in *Dracula* 93) Specifically, they concentrated on “the double gender standard, fought for women’s right to systemic higher education, worked to penetrate male middle-class professions, and became notorious for their unflinching outspokenness on various intellectual and sexual questions.” (Jusova 1) Subsequently, as it has been highlighted by Sally Ledger, the figure of the New Woman was “perceived as a direct threat to classic Victorian definitions of femininity.” (*New*

Woman 22) It is important to note, however, that like the ideal of the Angel in the House, the emergent ideal of the New Woman was nearly unachievable for the average woman and it “was largely a discursive phenomenon.” (Ledger *Fiction and Feminism* 3) Moreover, unsurprisingly seeing the blurring of most boundaries and concepts concerning gender and femininity at the *fin de siècle*, the figure of the New Woman was “from its inception, riddled with contradictions.” (Ledger *Fiction and Feminism* 16) However, New Women were usually constructed as more emancipated, independent, and sexually “more frank and open than [their] predecessors” as they “felt free to initiate sexual relationships, to explore alternatives to marriage and motherhood, and to discuss sexual matters such as contraception and venereal disease.” (Senf 35)

2.2 Gender and Femininity in Contemporary Britain

Undoubtedly, life has significantly improved for women in the United Kingdom in the last couple of centuries, yet British women are still very much affected by patriarchy, its ideology, and its ideals. For instance, today, differently from the nineteenth century, women are not denied access to the “public sphere,” yet they still usually maintain a subordinated position. Moreover, in spite of the fact that most women are now part of the paid workforce, there still is a considerable pay gap between the genders and an “extensive occupational segregation.” When it comes to sexuality, the aforementioned sanctions on non-marital relationships are not as harsh as they used to be, yet they are “still present to a greater degree for women than men.” Furthermore, at the beginning of the twentieth century, precisely in 1928, universal suffrage was finally obtained after years of protests, yet a century later women still are “only a tiny proportion of the elected representatives.” As for cultural institutions, nowadays they “increasingly allow women’s active participation, but usually in a subordinated way.” (Walby 228-229) Lastly, and perhaps most surprisingly, gender relationships nowadays are “still mired in the long-distance archaic, heroic, and patriarchal past.” (Bahlieda *Patriarchy* 75)

In terms of dichotomies regarding the ideals of femininity and womanliness, just like in the nineteenth century, nowadays women are still being “categorised” based on their sexuality (or lack thereof). On one end of the spectrum, we find the “good girls” who do not partake in any sexual activity (if not to procreate) and on the other end, we find the “bad girls” who are overtly sexual. Unsurprisingly, such dichotomisation has often been represented in the media: the “good girls” are usually praised and glorified, whereas the “bad girls” are punished, like the

Fallen Women in the Victorian era, either by being outcasted or by death. Thus, in visual media, the categorisation of female characters continues to follow the stereotypical divide of the virgin/whore dichotomy (also the Madonna/whore dichotomy) typical of early Hollywood cinema. In such a split, women are either “good girls,” who are neither sexually active nor overtly sexual, or the “bad girls” who do the opposite. (Benshoff 153) This trope has existed since the establishment of Hollywood filmmaking and remains nowadays. For instance, in the slasher movie genre where the sexually active bad girl is generally murdered for her behaviour while the “virgin” good girl becomes the heroine. As it will be demonstrated, in the third episode of the serial this divide is represented respectively by the characters of Lucy Westenra and Zagatha Van Helsing.

2.3 Comparing Ideals and Historical Periods

When comparing and analysing two historical periods one must always be wary to not over-simplify their characteristics and see correlation and causation where there is none. Elaine Showalter, for instance, has asserted that the “last decades of the twentieth century seem to be repeating the problems, themes and metaphors of the *fin de siècle*.” (in Ledger and McCracken 2) However, as Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken have noted, “[t]he idea of a cyclical end-of-the-century experience should [...] be regarded with some suspicion,” even if conceiving the turn of the nineteenth century as the origin of current debates around race, gender, and class is extremely tempting. (3) Even though I agree with Ledger and McCracken’s cautiousness, I contend that it is unarguable that the two epochs are extremely similar, especially in terms of ideals of femininity and womanhood. As it has been previously illustrated, in fact, the dichotomy of the Angel in the House vs the Fallen Woman has not disappeared, but it has simply developed into the virgin/good girl vs the whore/bad girl dichotomy. Moreover, as Ledger herself has observed, the “complex dialogue between feminist politics, socialist politics and the politics of empire which was so strongly manifested in the *fin de siècle* is ongoing at the close of the twentieth century.” (Ledger *New Woman* 41) Other scholars have also highlighted this similarity. For instance, in their article on Neo-Victorianism and Feminism, Tara MacDonald and Joyce Goggin have noted that

the contradictory qualities of the Victorian era [...] seem strikingly similar to those that shape and inform our own moment, fraught with conflicting versions of womanhood, feminism, and gender performance all of which add up to very complex and often perplexing (sexual) politics. (3)

Similarly, Jennifer Swartz-Levine, in her analysis of sex, gender, and sexuality in *Dracula*, has pointed out that in the twentieth and twenty-first century we still “find ourselves not far removed from the Victorian notions of womanhood” and that “the social and cultural positions of women is one that has been a constant ground for examination.” (345) As it will be expounded later, these similarities are one of the many reasons for the extreme popularity of neo-Victorianism nowadays.

3. Theoretical Background

3.1 Television Studies and Representation in the Media

The field of television studies first emerged from the field of media education, established in the 1930s, but only truly evolved at the end of the twentieth century, due to television's increased popularity. In more recent years, due to the rise of new forms of televisual media, there has been a huge debate concerning the subject matter of television studies vs new media studies. For instance, in *The New Television Handbook*, Patricia Holland wonders whether in the twenty-first century, as a result of the digital revolution, one can still talk of television "as a single, coherent medium." (xii) Nowadays, in fact, the boundaries between television proper and online streaming platforms are more than ever blurred. For instance, extremely frequently, series, serials, and so on, are first released on one platform, and then the other. Moffat and Gatiss's *Dracula* is an example of this new trend. The serial was, in fact, first published in the United Kingdom on BBC1 between January 1st and January 3rd, and then it was released worldwide on January 4th on Netflix. Even more often, broadcast channels are adventuring in the online streaming services industry and creating their own platforms. Examples of this trend are Max (previously HBO Max), BBC iPlayer, ABC iView, and so on. Thanks to the spawning of dozens of streaming services, viewers can access content anywhere and at any time, making studying television more challenging but all the more important.

In the last few decades, as they spread across several different platforms and subsequently created new streams of income, television programmes have increasingly become viewed as products rather than means to inform and educate audiences, who are now seen as "consumers" and "the market," or to simply entertain them. Indeed, while it once was just the domain of actors, directors, producers, and so on, in the 2010s and 2020s, "television has become a platform for entrepreneurs, advertisers, sponsors, celebrity agents, public relations organisations and marketing people." (Holland 5) Even more frequently, in fact, programme announcements and releases are accompanied by huge advertisement campaigns and supplementary products such as blogs and social media profiles, conventions, merchandise, "cross-platform narratives," and so on. Patricia Holland has termed this "cluster of media grouped around television production [...]' New' Television." (xii)

The field of television studies focuses on three different aspects of television. First, it studies the production of television programmes, that is, it focuses on "the everyday practices

of television production and the experiences of those who work within it” (Mayer et al. in Holland 55) in addition to inspecting “those factors that make production possible, tracing the cultural, social, political, technological and economic conditions within which creative writers, producers and technicians are placed.” (Holland 55) Second, it examines the television text itself, generally focusing on each genre and its content, the platforms in which the programmes are distributed, and the general contemporary media landscape. Lastly, it studies the viewers, numerically and statistically (gender, age, education level, ...), but also their reception, that is, the way “audiences respond to and make use of television.” (Holland 57) In my analysis, I will concentrate on the second focus of television studies, and will examine neither the production nor the reception of the serial as they are beyond this thesis’s scope.

Studying such a matter as television and its content might seem useless and trivial, yet that is not the case. First of all, from a numerical viewpoint, television studies is important for nowadays almost everyone owns some type of device capable of streaming televisual media, thus we are all subject to its content. Then, according to Christopher Campbell, because it is often through images depicted in the media, which frequently “reflect ideological positions and help reproduce dominant forms of social power” (292) that individuals “negotiate identities, ideas, and relationships with other people.” (289) For instance, when it comes to women, as Cynthia Carter and Linda Steiner have noted, “sexist images reproduced by the media make hierarchical and distorted sex-role stereotypes appear normal.” (in Campbell 289) Moreover, television remains, I would say only second to social media, one of the main mediums used to spread ideals and ideologies. In fact, for instance, as Rebecca Munford and Melanie Waters have noted “the medium in which feminism’s ghosts have enjoyed most sustained exposure in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is, most probably, television.” (13) Lastly, and more importantly, as Jonathan Bignell and Faye Woods have pointed out, television “is a major cultural site of representing, managing and debating difference” and its representations have the power to “influence how we as a culture understand our collective reality and the people in it.” (232) Clearly, television programs do not present just one single meaning but they “are relatively open texts, capable of being read in different ways by different people.” (Fiske in Campbell 12)

Stuart Hall, one of the founding fathers of cultural studies in Britain, used the term representation to “describe the complex ways in which the mass media not only *present* images, but how they are actually engaged in *re-presenting* images that have multiple meanings, especially when it comes to meanings about race and ethnicity.” (Campbell 11) Considering the “multiple meanings,” then, each text can be decoded in a number of ways. There are three levels

to decoding a text: preferred readings, negotiated readings, and oppositional readings. For Hall, the first level is the one containing the “preferred” (or dominant) readings, that is the meaning the producer of the media intended to convey. Thus the audience decodes the text in the way the author wanted to. The second level contains the “negotiated” meanings, which “[allow] for analysis beyond the meaning intended by their producers” yet are not totally opposite to it. To the second level, John Fiske and John Hartley added the “potential for cultural myth-making.” (in Campbell 12-13) The third level contains the “oppositional readings,” that is, all those readings that are opposed to the ones intended by the author (the preferred readings). The third and last level, is the one in which the viewer “detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference.” (Campbell 13) This “detotalization” might be caused, for instance, by the different socio-cultural backgrounds between the audience and the producers. Clearly, thus, there exists no “true” meaning to a text, but a myriad of different readings influenced by as many factors (gender, class, race, sexuality, ...) As Harry Benshoff has noted, it is important not to imagine these possible readings as separated from one another but as continuum whose two extremes are the preferred and the oppositional readings and all those in between are negotiated readings. (17) Obviously, the “television text does not present all meanings equally positively or strongly.” (Butler 10) Through dialogue, acting styles, music, and other attributes of the text, television emphasizes some meanings and de-emphasizes others.” (Butler 10-11)

Being one aspect of television studies so centred on representation, televisual textual analyses utilise a number of approaches from other fields and subjects. For instance, borrowing theories from gender studies, one form of feminist television criticism, called the image-of-women approach, “searches television texts for women’s stereotypes – that is, demeaning fictional character types that are based on ideologically defined social types.” (Butler 352) More recently, however, feminist scholars have advanced from the “image-of-women approach” and have adopted “more sophisticated methods” for analysing the systems of beliefs encouraged by our patriarchal society. In spite of their focusing on different aspects of the relationship between women and television, the majority of scholars “believe that patriarchal discourses in television are not uncontested or monolithic even though feminists may not be optimistic about women’s opportunities to overthrow them.” (Butler 353) Another theory that impacts television studies is queer theory, which is, “the study of discourse surrounding lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) identities and their representation in our culture.” In spite of its insurgence already in the early 1990s, due to the almost absence of LGBTQ+ characters on television, it was not until the early 2000s that there was a rise in “queer theory-founded

analyses of television.” Like feminist television criticism, queer theory focuses on the construction of the identity of characters, “society’s power structures,” and the discourses surrounding gender and sexuality. (Butler 357) Lastly, starting from the early 1970s, but truly developing in the 1980s and 1990s, we have the combination of television studies and race and ethnic studies. Like feminist studies and queer theory, scholars in the field initially focused simply on the depiction of stereotypes on television (e.g. the black mammy, the jezebel, ...). As the field developed, however, scholars began to broaden their methodology and scope and started to focus additionally on the different discourses, identities, and processes behind the racialization of certain physical and behavioural markers. (Butler 358-359) As it has been aforementioned, television studies does not just focus on the televisual text itself, be it a series, a serial, a documentary, and so on, but also on the relationship between the text and the viewer. Thus, contemporarily to these three fields of study, there was a rise in the inquiries on the characteristics of the viewers, their use of televisual products, and their response to the texts (reception theory). In spite of all of this, however, “[t]he bulk of television studies methods is still concerned (some would say obsessed) with the text.” (Butler 361)

As it has been previously stated, until recently the lack of diversity was a relevant problem for television studies. Unsurprisingly, producers and directors favoured white, straight, middle-class characters. Fortunately, especially in the 2010s and 2020s, there was a rise in the number of diverse characters, yet this does not necessarily signify progress. In fact, often television programmes still lack “meaningful diversity.” According to Mary Beltran,

meaningful, rather than surface level diversity requires [c]haracters of colour who are fully realised individuals with storytelling and interiority equal to white characters [...], [w]riters and producers with knowledge of and interest in the worlds and perspectives of the non-white characters [and] ‘[n]atural’ diversity that exploits a story’s setting or subject matter. Settings such as schools and hospitals and particular geographic regions can offer a range of story possibilities and demographic make-ups. (in Bignell and Woods 237)

Another issue of the television industry is the practice of “colourblind casting,” that is, the selection of non-white actors to play roles of “normatively white characters.” (Warner in Bignell and Woods 238) This practice has been frequently used by British and American television to compensate for the absence of diverse characters on screen.

Surprisingly, seeing the heterogeneity of its citizens, in British television minorities have historically been severely underrepresented and regional British accents were hardly ever portrayed. Luckily, this is not so much the case nowadays. In fact, thanks to the 2006 Charter

Review, one of the public purposes of the BBC became “representing the UK, its nations, regions and communities.” (2) This purpose was then extended in the revision of 2016:

The BBC should reflect the diversity of the United Kingdom both in its output and services. In doing so, the BBC should accurately and authentically represent and portray the lives of the people of the United Kingdom today, and raise awareness of the different cultures and alternative viewpoints that make up its society. (5)

That same year, to improve representation on British television, BBC journalist Ros Atkins founded “the 50:50 Project” whose main goals are to increase the number of women both in front and behind the camera and a higher focus on diverse and fair representations. This project now involves hundreds of organizations, has been adopted in over 30 countries, and has widened its scope from solely gender to ethnicity and disability as well. (“50:50”)

Throughout the years a number of different formats have developed in television, nowadays the most popular ones are certainly the series and the serial. According to Jonathan Bignell and Faye Woods, a series is a “television form where each programme in the series has a different story or topic, though settings, main characters, and performers remain the same” (75) whereas a serial, known as mini-series in the United States, is “a television form where a developing narrative unfolds across a sequence of separate episodes.” (70) Generally, a serial “will delay story resolution beyond an episode whereas in a series a story will come to a conclusion within an episode.” (Bignell and Woods 75) Differently from, for instance, the United States, “serials” are “more common in British television” than series, because British “broadcast culture has historically enabled short runs from three to ten episodes.” (Bignell and Woods 76) Examples of series are ABC’s *Grey’s Anatomy* and CBS’s *NCIS*, as they present different storylines with the same characters and settings, whereas BBC’s *Dracula* and Netflix’s *The Queen Gambit* classify as serials due to the fact that one single storyline is narrated in a (small) number of episodes.

3.2 Adaptation Studies

Like many other fields, it is difficult to establish when adaptation studies really began. Especially, due to the fact that until the latter part of the twentieth century the field was “dominated by case studies in classic adaptations” (Cartmell *Companion* 3) and no real investigations of the genre of adaptations as a whole and of the field itself had been published. In spite of the advent of adaptations on screen already at the beginning of the century, it was not until 1957 with the publication of George Bluestone’s “full-length study of film adaptation” *Novels Into Film* that the genre began to receive attention in film and literary studies.

Subsequently, in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, a number of monographs were published. Yet, it is not until the twenty-first century that the focus of the field broadens from solely canonical authors and “the one-way trajectory from literature to film.” (Cartmell *Companion* 7)

The attitude towards adaptations through the years has also changed in terms of “hierarchy” and “fidelity.” Initially, in fact, adaptations were perceived as “lesser” when compared to the original and fidelity to the original text was what denoted the quality of the product. When it comes to the “hierarchy” of the two texts, although it is true that by labelling a certain work as an adaptation “we openly announce its overt relationship to another work or works,” as Linda Hutcheon has noted, the adaptation should be conceived as a product “that is second without being secondary.” (9) As a result, fidelity to the original should not be the scholar’s main focus but rather the adaptation should mostly be analysed as its own text who is a “stereophony of echoes, citations, [and] references.” (Barthes in Hutcheon 6) This decreasing focus on fidelity also allows authors to feel freer when they interpret a certain work. In fact, as Deborah Cartmell has noted, “the adaptor need not be a servant of the adapted author but free to change the text to appeal to a mass contemporary rather than elite audience.” (*Companion* 8) Thus, the resulting work constitutes a “polyphonic text” which “generates a radically innovative and *arguably ‘original’ work* for consumption, while simultaneously generating a multiplicity of *new and illuminating perspectives* on its antecedents.” (Bowler and Cox 8, my emphasis)

In spite of the fact that nearly seven decades have passed since the establishment of the field of Adaptation Studies, there still really is no agreement among academics regarding the definitions and differences between adaptation, appropriation, re-writing, intertextuality, and so on. Clearly, my goal in this thesis is not to attempt to define what dozens of scholars and over sixty years of research have not succeeded in, in this chapter, I will thus simply expose the thoughts of some of the major scholars in the field: Julie Sanders, author of *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2016 2nd ed.); Linda Hutcheon, author of the monograph *A Theory of Adaptation* (first published in 2006); Deborah Cartmell, co-editor of *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (1999), editor of *A Companion to Literature, Film and Adaptation* (2012), founder and co-editor of the scholarly journal *Adaptation* (est. 2008), and founder of the Association of Adaptation Studies; and finally Thomas Leitch, author of essays such as “Adaptation, the Genre” (2008) and “Adaptation Studies at a Crossroads” (2008), and editor of *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies* (2017).

Julie Sanders opened her publication by stating that “it is safe to say that adaptations and appropriations (or mediations and remediations) can vary in how explicitly they state their intertextual or connective purpose.” (3) She then broadened this definition and proceeded by

proclaiming that frequently adaptations “constitute a more *sustained and deeper engagement* usually with a *single text or source*” (6, my emphasis) and “*openly declare themselves* as an interpretation or re-reading of a canonical precursor” as they “most often [signal] a relationship with an informing source text either through its title or through more embedded references.” (35, my emphasis) Differently, appropriations generally present “*a more decisive journey away* from the informing text into a wholly new cultural product and domain, often through the actions of interpolation and critique as much as through the movement from one genre to others.” (35, my emphasis) Thus, “[i]n appropriations the intertextual relationship may be less explicit, more embedded.” (3) She also believed that a certain text does not need to be defined as either an adaptation or an appropriation as multi-layered texts often are both contemporarily. (38) Yet, even if she dedicated two full chapters to their definition, Sanders eventually “declines to draw a categorical distinction between the two terms.” (Cartmell *Companion* 88) Thus, all she stated at the end of her monograph was that “[w]hat distinguishes appropriation from straightforward adaptation [...] is the specific intent behind the act of reinterpretation.” (191) As it should be clear to any scholar of literary and cultural studies however a certain intent of creation does not always coincide with the resulting product and its meanings. Therefore, such a definition remains, like others, rather ineffectual.

Sanders also focused heavily on the political aspect of the adaptive process. She retained that “these processes are frequently, if not inevitably, political acts.” (123) She then proceeded to add that as they “highlight often perplexing gaps, absences and silences within the original,” most adaptations and appropriations “as a result have a deep political and literary investment in giving voice to characters or events which appear to have been oppressed or repressed in the original.” (126)

As others have previously done, in *Adaptation and Appropriation*, Sanders also dedicated a whole chapter to neo-Victorian adaptational works. She believed the reason behind such a proliferous genre to be the fact that the Victorian era “offers a very specific example of the cultural contradictions that adaptational work can seek to highlight” (159) and that it

proves ripe for appropriation because it highlights many of the overriding concerns of the postmodern era: questions of identity; of environmental and genetic conditioning; of repressed and oppressed modes of sexuality; of criminality and violence; of an interest in urbanism and the potentials and possibilities of new technology; of law and authority; of science and religion; and of the postcolonial legacies of empire. (161)

As it has been aforementioned in the section on femininity and will be further demonstrated in the chapter on neo-Victorianism, in fact, the current historical period and the Victorian age present a number of analogies and similarities. Thus, the Victorian age has often

been “adapted and refunctioned to embrace the concerns of our own period” (Cartmell *Companion* 275). Moreover, as Deborah Cartmell has noted, “neo-Victorian literary texts are themselves adaptations; even when they do not refer back to a single Urtext, they remain compatible with contemporary definitions of adaptation and appropriation.” (*Companion* 273)

Linda Hutcheon began her monograph *A Theory of Adaptation* focusing on the relationship between the adapted text and its adaptation(s). Like the majority of theorists in the field of adaptation studies in the last couple of decades, she believes that fidelity and closeness to the “original” should not be “the criterion of judgment or the focus of analysis.” (6) It is important to note this for when the field was first established ““fidelity criticism” [...] was the critical orthodoxy in adaptation studies.” (6-7) Adaptations, however, are not just a reproduction or replica of an original, they are “repetition[s] without replication.” (7)

Hutcheon then proceeded to divide adaptations into three categories based on the meaning of the word itself and the different perspectives from which we can examine them. Firstly, she focused on the noun “adaptation,” and she defined it as “a *formal identity or product* [that] is an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works” and continued by stating that “[t]his “transcoding” can involve a shift of medium (a poem to a film) or genre (an epic to a novel), or a change of frame and therefore context.” (7-8) Secondly, she concentrated on the verb “to adapt” and described adaptation as “a *process of creation* [that] always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation.” (8) Lastly, she focused on the relationship of the adaptation with the original and other reworkings and stated that “seen from the perspective of its *process of reception*, adaptation is a form of intertextuality: we experience adaptations (*as adaptations*) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation.” (8) In spite of these three definitions, and Hutcheon’s final statement that “an adaptation [is] an extended, deliberate, announced revisitation of a particular work of art,” (170) Thomas Leitch retains that “[her] formulation leaves several important questions unresolved.” (in Cartmell *Companion* 88) Hutcheon herself was aware of this lack, in fact, she dedicated a whole chapter to “Final Questions” and stated that “in offering some answers to the basic questions of the *what, who, why, how, where, and when* of both adaptation and this ambivalent evaluation of it as product and as process, this book invariably has provoked many new questions in turn.” (169-170) Yet she did not proceed to attempt to further clarify these doubts. Instead, likely aware of the fact that one single definition of adaptation is impossible to achieve, she attempted to define what is *not* an adaptation. This move was especially useful for the field of adaptation studies in the 2010s and 2020s. In fact, as Siobhan O’Flynn writes in the epilogue to the 2012 edition of the monograph, “[i]n today’s hybrid media

landscape [...] Hutcheon's closing question [...] is even more relevant now" due to the fact that "adaptation considered on a continuum has been further complicated by the emergence of transmedia as a media conglomerate production strategy" and "untangling where the distinction [between adaptation and transmedia] lies is often difficult." (in Hutcheon 181) This is further complicated by the audience's consistent need for "innovation and change." (in Hutcheon 188) Just like with Sanders, then, the issue of clearly defining adaptations, appropriations, rewritings, reworkings, and so on, remained open.

Hutcheon also focused on authorial intent as an important feature of adaptational works. Interestingly, she retained that with the coming of New Criticism and Post-Structuralism in the latter half of the twentieth century, "intentions [...] were deemed irrelevant to interpretation." (107) However, as it has been aforementioned in the section on Sanders's definitions, even recently scholars of literary and cultural studies have utilized intent as the sole defining and distinguishing factor of adaptations, appropriations, and so on. Personally, I agree with Hutcheon and the other theorists who "have rightly insisted [that] intending to do something is not necessarily the same thing as actually achieving it." (Nattiez, and Wimsatt and Beardsley in Hutcheon 109) Although it is obvious that the act of rewriting and reinterpretation of a certain text is based on authorial intentions, its meaning and definition should not be solely based on what the author intended to create but also on other important factors such as historical context, authorial fame, previous reworkings, and so on. (Hutcheon 141-145)

Lastly, I want to focus on Thomas Leitch's chapter "Adaptation and Intertextuality, or, What isn't an Adaptation, and What Does it Matter?" in Deborah Cartmell's collection of essays *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation* as it engages with the aforementioned monographs. Leitch begins his essay by heavily criticising Hutcheon, Sanders, and other scholars for their reluctance to define the field of adaptation studies and to give a clear and fixed definition of adaptation, appropriation, and so on. He then proceeds to attempt to give a better, or rather clearer, definition of the field and the various terms. He "being[s] with the axiom that adaptation is a subset of intertextuality" and continues by "[reviewing] nine different accounts of the relation between adaptation and intertextuality." One might expect Leitch, especially considering the harsh critique to his colleagues, to give a decisive definition yet he himself states: "[t]hough these nine different accounts are intended to be suggestive, not exhaustive, each of them has something valuable to offer the discourse on adaptation, and considering them all together provides more illumination than any one of them alone can offer." (89)

3.3 Neo-Victorianism and Neo-Victorian Studies

According to Iris Kleinecke-Bates the term “neo-Victorianism” designates both “a thriving and influential field of art and literature” and “an academic study engaging with similar concerns.” (Kleinecke-Bates 1) Scholars Marie-Louise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben have identified neo-Victorianism as innately “quintessentially Gothic” in its “resurrecting the ghost(s) of the past, searching out its dark secrets and shameful mysteries, insisting obsessively on the lurid details of Victorian life, [and] reliving the period’s nightmares and traumas.” (4) Yet, they retain, it contemporarily attempts to “understand the nineteenth-century as the contemporary self’s uncanny *Doppelgänger*” due to the several similarities between the two historical periods. (4) From neo-Victorianism and its obsession and fascination with the past, we see the emergence of the genre of the neo-Victorian and the consequent establishment of the field of Victorian Studies in academia.

Just like for adaptation, appropriation, and so on, “[c]oncise definitions of the neo-Victorian are hard to come by, and surprisingly, there is no consensus about the boundaries of the genre.” (Whelehan in Cartmell *Companion* 274) One of the most quoted definitions is certainly the one given by Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn in their monograph *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009*. According to them, Neo-Victorian “texts (literary, filmic, audio/visual) must in some respect be *self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians.*” (4) More precisely, in another essay, Llewellyn has defined neo-Victorian fiction as “those works which are consciously set in the Victorian period [...] or which desire to re-write the historical narrative of that period by representing marginalised voices, new histories of sexuality, post-colonial viewpoints and other generally ‘different’ versions of the Victorian.” (165) Hence, a neo-Victorian text could be, for instance, an appropriation of a Victorian novel, like the serial under scrutiny, or a contemporary text set in the Victorian age, like Dacre Stoker’s *Dracul* (2019), prequel to Stoker’s *Dracula*, which, in recounting the life of Bram and the genesis of *Dracula*, offers a new interpretation of the novel and its source of inspiration.

When it comes to the depiction of history, according to Antonjia Primorac, neo-Victorian texts can contemporarily “promote a re-visioned, liberating rewriting of the Victorian past” and “be driven by rather unsavoury impulses of the nostalgic desire for the ‘certainties’ that this same past is popularly associated with: traditional, essentialist, heteronormative gender roles and a world order still reflecting an imperialist world-view.” (48) As a result, while some

“neo-Victorian adaptations have challenged Victorians constructions of empire, gender, and sexuality,” (Bowler and Cox 3) generally in neo-Victorian media, “[t]he Victorian era is nostalgically reconstructed as a time of sexual innocence, a time far removed from our own culture of permissive sexuality” (Hadley 12) and “a time of high morals and family values.” (Kleinecke-Bates 202) Yet, as aforementioned, the Victorian era is everything but “far removed” from ours. In fact, as MacDonald and Goggin note, “the contradictory qualities of the Victorian era [...] seem strikingly similar to those that shape and inform our own moment, fraught with conflicting versions of womanhood, feminism, and gender performance all of which add up to very complex and often perplexing (sexual) politics.” (3) Thus, we engage with the Victorian period in neo-Victorian fiction to try to “make sense of the contemporary moment.” (Bowler and Cox 3) In fact, as Iris Kleinecke-Bates has noted, “representations of the past are as much about the past as they are about the present” and it is thus impossible to portray the past without “simultaneously negotiating the present.” (15)

Clearly, neo-Victorian studies is the field of study in academia which focuses on the study of neo-Victorian texts. Several scholars, in fact, have contended that “Victorian ideas can give us a clearer understanding of the origins of our present problems, showing how our tangles over education and class, gender and religion took root in the first place.” (Birch in Llewellyn 164) As previously noted, indeed, the issues that concerned the Victorians are extremely similar to the ones that affect our own time.

3.4 Postfeminist Gothic

Before defining the characteristics of the Postfeminist Gothic, especially considering their elusive nature, a short introduction on Postfeminism and the field of Gothic studies is definitely necessary. Similarly to the field of adaptation studies, due to their inherently contradictory nature, one single exhaustive definition of Postfeminism, Gothic, and Postfeminist Gothic does not exist. I will thus, once again just explain the interpretations of the main academics. According to Benjamin Brabon and Stéphanie Genz, the two concepts “are linked by their transgressive and boundary-defying capabilities, their eschewal of a binary logic and their embrace of pluralism” (1) and by what “Robert Miles considers to be ‘the law of the Gothic genre’: gender.” (3) Moreover, the Gothic represents a perfect “venue” for Postfeminism, as it plays the “congenial host to debates about the family, reproductive rights and sexual violence that remain unresolved” after the advent of the first and second wave of

feminism. (Munford and Waters 136) In fact, according to Gina Wisker, in the Postfeminist Gothic the two terms fuse to “to disturb comfortable ignorance and blinkered constructions of gender, identity, sexuality, relationships and culture” (47) thus, she states, the genre “revitalises feminism’s broader issues, including gender equality, inclusivity and diversity.” (52)

Unsurprisingly, the term Postfeminism has been differently interpreted and utilised by critics and scholars. In popular culture, the concept has been employed to categorize “a number of (particularly) female characters that have emerged from the 1990s onwards.” Differently, in academia, it has been used to refer “to a shift in the understanding and construction of identity and gender categories.” Similarly, in political and social studies, it “has been read as indicative of a ‘post-traditional’ era characterised by dramatic changes in basic social relationships, role stereotyping and conceptions of agency.” Only in recent years, Postfeminism has been linked to neoliberalism, and consumerism, which see individualism, competitiveness, and enterprise as the basis for the subject’s empowerment and freedom of choice. Thus, “[r]ather than being tied to a specific epistemological framework, postfeminism emerges in the intersections and hybridisation of mainstream media, consumer brand culture, neoliberal politics, postmodern theory and, significantly, feminism.” (Genz and Brabon 23-28)

Like for other “post-” terms, the prefix in Postfeminism has created a paradoxical definition. Indeed, “an expression “*post-* + X can either be X or non-X, or both at the same time, which makes the derivative motivationally ambiguous.” (Kocourek 106) In this case, the prefix has assumed the meaning of chronologically after, as if feminism was over and we lived in an era post-feminism; anti, as in contrary to the tenets of past feminisms; or “a genealogy that entails revision or strong family resemblance,” as in continuing the work of first and second wave feminism. (Genz and Brabon 26-27) As a result of its paradoxical nature, thus, Postfeminism has been “perceived as a pro-patriarchal, anti-feminist stance” but also “it is seen to denote a postmodern and poststructuralist feminism that discredits discursive homogeneity and a unified subjectivity.” (Brabon and Genz 1-2) Consequently, it has acquired “both feminist/anti-feminist, empowering/disempowering, [and] subversive/conservative designations.” (Brabon and Genz 2) Moreover, as Amanda Rossie has noted, the prefix “post-” could also denote the ending of feminism and its work. (26) However, as she has also stated, recent times have seen a “revitalization of feminism in the public sphere” as a response to the “resurgence of misogynistic, violent, and anti-feminist politics.” (26) In fact, as Gina Wisker has also noted in her essay “Postfeminist Gothic” from 2019, “the demise of sexism, heterophobia and racism are overstated, and equality is far from our grasp.” (47) Regarding the meaning of “post,” and seeing the cyclical resurgence of postfeminism, in her essay “Past the

Post: Postmodernism and Postfeminism” Julie Ewington has suggested that “it is not feminism that we are “post” but one historical phase of feminist politics.” (in Genz and Brabon 36)

As Postfeminism is so connected (or *disconnected*) to past feminisms, a brief overview of Western feminism in the late nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries is required. The first wave of feminists (late XIX-early XX century) advocated for social and moral equality of the sexes (education, voting rights, ...) and saw the rise of the Suffragette movement. Second wave feminism (1960s-1980s) focused on reproductive rights, the family (emotional labour), the workplace, and the economic situation of women. In those same years, we have the rise of black feminism, which heavily criticised the whiteness of mainstream feminism. Moreover, black feminists affirm that “the liberation of black women entails freedom for all people, since it would require the end of racism, sexism, and class oppression.” (Campbell 296) At the very end of the second wave, we have the resurgence of postfeminism, “recovered” by the press after its “disappearance” due to the outbreaks of the two World Wars, and at the time conceptualised as a response to second wave feminism. (Genz and Brabon 35) Moreover, in these same years, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” to designate “the notion that subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class, and sexuality.” (Nash *Re-thinking* 2) Intersectionality thus focuses on the study of the convergence of different forms of discrimination, subjugation, and oppression and how these strengthen one another. The third wave of feminism (1990s-2010s) was heavily influenced by poststructuralism, postmodernism, and deconstruction, and thus centred, in addition to reproductive rights (a tenet of feminism still nowadays), on the dismantling of the categories of gender and sex as predetermining factors. Thus, with the publication of *Gender Trouble* by Judith Butler, gender is definitively differentiated from sex as a performative act and not as a biological factor. Lastly, fourth wave feminism (2010s-...), which operates mainly on the internet, has mostly revolved around body and sex positivity, gender equality in the workplace, and, once again, it has continued to focus on women’s reproductive rights. In fact, in spite of the fact that over half a century has passed since the beginning of the battle for, for instance, abortion rights, in many countries women still are not given the right to choose (i.e., in some American states since the overturning of *Roe v Wade* in 2022). In addition to this, fourth wave feminism has linked with several other movements and generated a number of new fields of study, such as ecofeminism, which combines ecocriticism and feminism.

In “*Being Mary Jane* and Postfeminism’s Problem with Race,” Amanda Rossie identified five tenets of Postfeminism in the West. Firstly, “postfeminism frames women’s empowerment through consumption and hypersexualization.” (27) Second, it displays a

“heightened attention to the feminine body.” (27) Third, resulting from the second tenet, we have what Rosalind Gill calls the “makeover paradigm,” (in Rossie 27) which entails not just aesthetic makeovers but also of relationships. Fourth, “postfeminism encourages women in their twenties to delay marriage and motherhood in lieu of higher education, careerism, and pursuing individual passions like travel” while contemporarily reminding them of their biological clock. (27-28) Fifth, “postfeminism produces an apolitical feminine subject” (28) whose “withholding of critique is the condition of her freedom.” (Tasker and Negra in Rossie 28) In postfeminism thus, “women’s problems are personal and never structural.” (28) Moreover, unsurprisingly seen feminism in its heyday, central to Postfeminism “is the idealization of a white, middle-class, heterosexual subject.” (28) Thus, to sum up, the ideal postfeminist subject, according to Rossie, is an apolitical, white, slender, middle-class woman, who in her 20s spent her time pursuing an education and a good career, spending money, and travelling, and who in her late 20s/early 30s finally got married, likely stopped working, and became a mother.

As aforementioned television has long had problems with representations of women and minorities. However, at least numerically, that is not so much the case today. Quantity, however, does not necessarily implicate quality. In fact, what is important to focus on when considering televisual representations is *how* women and minorities are represented on screen. According to Sarah Banet-Weiser, western television is now abundant with representations of black women, and, as a result, “representational visibility no longer has the same urgency” as it did before. (in Rossie 29) Yet, as aforementioned, we should not focus just on the number of black female characters on screen, but also on their characterization. When it comes to race and the depiction of women on film and television, according to Kimberly Springer, ““racialized postfeminism” [has] updated historical racist stereotypes of black women (i.e., the welfare queen, mammy, jezebel, and black superwoman) for a new time.” (in Rossie 29) Moreover, as Jess Butler has argued, although it is true that the ideal postfeminist subject is a white woman, nowadays black women⁴ on screen ““clearly embody and enact postfeminism” by embracing femininity and consuming feminine goods; using empowerment language; and fashioning themselves as heterosexual subjects.” (in Rossie 29) Amanda Rossie disagreed with this statement and retained that although it is true that black women can *enact* postfeminism, and

⁴ Rossie used the term “women of colour” multiple times throughout her book to designate black women, I avoid using this term for two reasons. First because person of colour, technically, could also be a white person as white is a skin colour. Second, due to the fact that generally “person of colour” identifies all ethnicities that are not white (so not just black people, but also Asians, Arabs, and so on).

“use it to their benefit in the same ways white women do,” they can never *embody* it, as the ideal postfeminist subject is a white woman, and black women, clearly, will never be white. (30)

As for many other genres, it is hard to determine when the genre of Gothic exactly began. The majority of scholars, however, have pinpointed its beginning in the latter half of the eighteenth century, specifically with the publication of Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). (Botting 42; Hogle and Smith 2) It was only in the 1790s, however, that “the largest number of gothic works were produced and consumed” and that “the terms of gothic production” were defined.” (Botting 57) Unsurprisingly for a genre so centred on women and gender issues, one of the most successful writers of the Gothic is Ann Radcliffe, who, differently from some of her colleagues, was already well-received by eighteenth century critics. (Botting 58, 61)

Surprisingly for such a prolific genre, it is not until the late twentieth century that, thanks to feminist literary criticism, we see the “rescue” and institutionalization of the field of Gothic studies. (Fitzgerald 9) According to David Richter, it is feminism that foregrounded this area of study, which until the 1970s was “neglected at best.” (2) Feminism, he stated, “seized on the Gothic novel partly, of course, because many of its important authors (like Radcliffe and Shelley) were women, but primarily because the Gothic had always been considered *female reading* even when it had not been *female writing*.” (2) In addition, it “has become a significant part of the feminist agenda, [...] because the plight of the passive heroines of romance could be read as a convenient metaphor for the plight of all females under the restrictions of patriarchy.” (3)

Naturally, the characteristics of the first Gothic novels were rather different from the ones of the Gothic genre nowadays. Yet, “settings and plots, in conjunction with the romance tradition from which they drew” have remained relatively stable. (Botting 42) According to Xavier Aldana Reyes, one of the defining features of contemporary Gothic is the “tension between the barbaric past and the modern present, with the former acting as force of oppressive evil and the latter as heroic stalwart of contemporary customs and sensibilities.” (4) This “temporal tug of war” (Reyes 4) typical of twentieth and twenty-first century Gothic finds the perfect setting in the Victorian era as it is a “site of struggle between incipient modernity and an unenlightened past.” (Spooner in Reyes 4) In the BBC serial, like in Stoker’s *Dracula*, the past is clearly represented by the Count himself, who is five centuries old, whereas the heroic

present⁵ is personified by Sister Agatha Van Helsing for the Victorian Era and by Doctor Zoe Van Helsing for the twenty-first century.

Twentieth and twenty-first century Gothic has been primarily concerned with “acting as a social commentary for its time” (Reyes 16) and with contemporary issues “often connected to the rise of identity politics in social activism and literary criticism.” (Reyes 11) The main identity marker it has explored is gender, which Robert Miles, as aforementioned, retains to be “the law of the Gothic genre.” (in Brabon and Genz 3) Analogously, Sarah E. Whitney has stated that the Gothic “investigates the limits of gendered identities and roles” (5) As James Craig Holte has also noted, the gothic has a “tradition of creating a sense of dread by calling into question traditional gender roles and the effectiveness of the patriarchal power structure to protect itself from an assault by the “other.”” (7) According to Karen Stein, “feminist criticism views the Gothic novel as a story of gender role inequalities and their concomitant anxieties.” (in Whitney 5) However, similarly to Postfeminism, which as previously explained can be interpreted as both feminist and anti-feminist, “the Gothic has always displayed an inherent paradox as it both challenges and upholds patriarchal forms of control and domination.” (Brabon and Genz 3) Clearly, both Postfeminism and Gothic are “paradoxical” terms that contemporarily imprison and empower women (Brabon and Genz 4) and as a result, generally, Postfeminist Gothic texts have been both read as feminist and anti-feminist.

Being the derivative of two such complex terms, the Postfeminist Gothic has also been a rather hard genre to define. Scholars Benjamin Brabon and Stéphanie Genz were the first to do so in 2007 in their book *Postfeminist Gothic* and they described it as an analytical category that “moves beyond the ‘female gothic’ with its historical associations with second wave feminism and female/feminine victimisation.” (1) Similarly, a few years later, Rebecca Munford and Melanie Waters used this label “to refer to texts that mobilize the tropes of supernaturalism (especially haunting, vampirism and telepathy) to respond [...] to the gains made by second wave feminism.” (137-138) Whereas the basis for women’s freedom in first a second wave feminism were work and education, (Munford and Waters 42) with the advent of postfeminism female empowerment is achieved through “consumption and hypersexuality.” (Rossie 27)

The genre of the Postfeminist Gothic in popular culture began, according to Munford and Waters, at the end of the 1990s. In fact, starting with such heroines as Xena⁶ and Buffy,⁷

⁵ “present” at the time of the action depicted not present as in twenty-first century

⁶ From *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995-2001)

⁷ From *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003)

“the twenty-first century has augured a steady stream of small-screen Gothic fictions that are haunted by anxieties about the legacy of second wave feminism and its impact on the rights and freedoms of individual women.” (Munford and Waters 138) More recently, however, Post-feminist Gothic works have “tend[ed] to fantasize about re-domesticating women.” (Munford and Waters 138) In popular culture, there has, thus, been a return to the myth of domesticity, with a focus on marriage and family. This can be seen also in the serial here analysed. In fact, for instance, before Count Dracula feeds on Lady Dorabella Ruthven in the second episode, he makes her hallucinate “a glimpse of what might have been,” that is, the family she will not be able to have, which is her deepest desire. (2:00:21-2:00:24) Another difference between the first and second generation of postfeminist heroines is the locus of their “powers.” Whereas the early heroines, like the aforementioned Xena and Buffy, “were physically formidable as well as mentally astute, subsequent convolutions of the Gothic have tended to re-inscribe women as possessors of psychic – rather than somatic – power.” (Munford and Waters 140) In fact, more recent postfeminist gothic shows like *Medium* (2005-2011) and *Ghost Whisperer* (2005-2011) have portrayed “the recuperative power of memory, with the figure of the psychic remembering and recovering the experiences of other people (and dead women in particular).” (Munford and Waters 143-144) The postfeminist gothic heroine can thus “safeguard” the future from threat “only when she uses her ‘memories’ of the past.” (Munford and Waters 146) Once again, these two features of contemporary postfeminist gothic texts are depicted in BBC’s *Dracula*. In the serial, Zoe’s and Agatha’s powers are not represented by their physical strength, especially given the fact that the body they “share” in the third episode is dying from cancer, but by their intelligence, their acumen, and their ability to combine their knowledge and memories, unlocked by Zoe when she drank the Count’s blood. Only then, she can “remember” and “recover” her ancestress Sister Agatha and thus she gains the power to finally defeat Dracula.

Considering the elusiveness of the terms that compose the Postfeminist Gothic and the importance of gender in the genre, naturally one wonders whether postfeminist gothic texts are generally feminist or anti-feminist, empowering or disempowering, subversive or conservative, and if such categorisations are even possible. Clearly, that depends on the work analysed, however, usually, postfeminist gothic texts have remained as elusive as the genre they represent. Sarah Whitney is one of the few scholars who has taken a firm stance regarding their interpretation. In fact, in *Splattered Ink: Postfeminist Gothic Fiction and Gendered Violence*, she argued that postfeminist gothic works “[emphasize] women’s *disempowerment*” and contradict “postfeminist culture, which proclaims loudly and consistently that the struggle for women’s freedom is finished.” (2) Postfeminist works, she continued, “violently intrude on the

well-constructed fantasy of a safe and equitable world” and “[w]hile not claiming victimhood as an organizing identity” demand the readers/viewers “arrive at the uncomfortable conclusion that to be female, even today, means to live with terrible risk.” (2) Clearly, this “risk” is personified in the series by the character of the Count, and, although it is true that he feeds indistinctively on men and women, I retain that he prefers feeding on the female characters definitely more than the male ones. In fact, whereas to the male characters he only gives sexual hallucinations (e.g. Jonathan and Abramoff), or simply murders them straight away (e.g. Lord Ruthven), for the female characters he constructs elaborated hallucinations that are undoubtedly centred on their being female and their desires, which are much different to their male counterparts. For instance, to the Grand Duchess Valeria of Augsburg, he shows them dancing together on the day of her eighteenth birthday; to Lady Dorabella he shows the family she could have had was she not about to be murdered; as for Zagatha at the end, he makes her hallucinate the two of them (the Count and her) embraced fully naked in what appears to be the sun, which like in previous adaptations “becomes a medium of romantic consecration.” (Auerbach *Vampires* 146)

3.5 Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality was first introduced in the 1980s in the field of law by civil rights advocate Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in her studies “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” (1989) and “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” (1991). (Nash *Black Feminism* 9) This idea was conceived as “a way to think about identity and its relationship to power” (Bignell and Woods 233) and “exposed how single-axis thinking undermines legal thinking, disciplinary knowledge production, and struggles for social justice.” (Cho et al. 787)

As aforementioned, the analysis of Lucy Westenra is based on the concept of intersectionality. Scholars identify intersectionality as an investigation of how the identity markers of race, class, gender, sexuality, and so on *intersect* and reinforce one another in relation to power. In fact, as Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge have noted in their monograph *Intersectionality*, “[w]hen it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each

other.” (in Drif and Guilbert ix) Thus, an intersectional analysis, to be defined as such, must adopt “an intersectional way of thinking” and focus on the combination of these different forms of domination. (Cho et al. 795) In my study of the character of Lucy Westenra, I will thus combine the analysis of gender, race, and sexuality, to prove that her awful portrayal, caused by the combination of all the negative traits associated with these three labels, leads to an intersection of different forms of oppression, which result in Lucy receiving a worse punishment for her actions when compared to other characters in the serial whose identity is a composite of less discriminated identity markers (e.g. being white vs being black, being male vs being female, and so on).

4. The Angels in the House: Mina Harker and Lady Dorabella Ruthven

Among critics, there has been no agreement when it comes to the role of the character of Mina Harker in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Victorian scholar and vampire expert Nina Auerbach simply defined Mina as "a pawn in [the Count's] battle against the men [in the novel]." (*Vampires* 82) Differently, the majority of scholars has compared the character of Mina to the emerging figure of the New Woman. Some academics have argued that she does not at all reflect the attributes of such a character and that she is simply "a stereotypically 'good' little Victorian Miss," (Ledger *New Woman* 30) especially when it comes to her sexual repression. (Demetrakopoulos 104) Others have stated that Stoker's Mina "combines the independence and intelligence often associated with the New Woman with traditional femininity." (Senf 45) Whereas others have fully identified her character with "the noble New Woman." (Lorrah 32) In fact, as it has been noted by Brooke Allen, Mina in the novel "could hardly be more of a New Woman if she tried: a self-supporting career woman, capable, accomplished, an equal (and to tell the truth more than equal) partner to her mate." (in Boyd 5) What most scholars have agreed on, however, is that in the novel "Stoker's characterization of Mina centers on her intelligence and strength." (Demetrakopoulos 110)

As previously mentioned in the introduction, in the BBC serial, the character of Mina Harker has been sidelined in favour of the foregrounding of the characters of Sister Agatha and Doctor Zoe Van Helsing. From essentially being one of the main catalysts of Dracula's demise thanks to her skills, wit, and initiative, in the BBC/Netflix serial Mina is revoked of most of her original power and agency. In fact, she simply serves first, as an almost ideal representative of the stereotypical figure of the Angel in the House, whose only role is to be a submissive caretaker to her husband, and second, as the founder of the Jonathan Harker Foundation, created to find and study Count Dracula. Essentially, Mina's little agency in this adaptation is either related to a male figure (Jonathan or Dracula) or a result of her wifely duties.

The audience's "first"⁸ encounter with Mina Harker is through the message she sends to her husband-to-be as he travels to Castle Dracula. In the letter, she might initially seem more framed as the novel figure of the New Woman rather than as the stereotypical ideal of the Angel in the House, yet, as it will be demonstrated, that is not the case. Mina opens her letter to Johnny

⁸ It is not actually the first time Mina appears on screen however the audience does not know yet that she is one of the two nuns in the room with Jonathan during his interrogation at the beginning of the episode

by stating that she would excuse him were he to “fall prey to temptation” to the “very exciting women” he will meet as he “[travels] across Europe to Transylvania.” (1x01 5:56-6:21) Thanks to this initial statement it might seem that she is preventively excusing a possible infidelity, as it is part of her duties as a fiancée (1x01 6:21-6:24). She then continues by declaring that, during their separation, she, as well, might find consolation in some of their acquaintances: “the very handsome Dr. Holmwood,” Jonathan’s “friends Reggie and Barnaby, who always seem so pleased to see [her]” or “lovely Edwin from [his] office,” or then again “the butcher’s boy, who has filled up quite deliciously in recent months,” and, perhaps the most shocking one, “the adorable barmaid at the Rose and Crown.” (1x01 6:30-6:49) However, in spite of these numerous almost comical remarks, who distance her from the figure of the Angel in the House, two statements, I retain, reinstate her role as the dutiful submissive Victorian wife. First, contradicting her previous declaration that she will find solace in their acquaintances, she states that “the certainty of [their] coming wedding is all the consolation [she, as] a young woman could require” (1x01 6:24-6:30). Then, in closing her letter, rebuking her pre-emptive pardon of a possible infidelity, she declares that she “feel[s] certain [her and Jonathan] shall be mindful of each other at all times during [their] separation” and she thus sends him “all [of her] love.” Moreover, she does not simply close her letter with her name, but she adds “your adoring” to it, further enhancing her position as a devoted wife-to-be. (1x01 6:49-7:02)

Mina’s role as the faithful caring fiancée is further intensified as it is revealed that she is the second nun who is questioning Jonathan at the beginning of the first episode. Once she discovered Jonathan’s identity, in fact, Sister Agatha has tracked her down thanks to an acquaintance in London and has requested her presence at the Convent. Talking to her fiancé, who had thus far not recognised her for he is so debilitated, in one of the most representative statements of her characterisation as the dedicated wife-to-be, Mina asks Jonathan: “Did you really think, even in your darkest moment... that I wouldn’t come for you? Did you think it was even possible that I could abandon the man I love?” (1x01 1:01:41-1:01:55) Clearly, being the “good Victorian miss” that she is, she would have never done so, as she would have disobeyed her wifely duties of caretaking and support to her husband. She has thus, analogously to the novel, travelled across Europe to be on her husband’s side in this moment of need.

In the urtext, more than her role as a good wife, it is Mina’s intelligence, skills, and initiative that are continuously highlighted and praised. Perhaps the most blatant example can be found in one of the entries from Dr John Seward’s diary where he reports Dr Abraham Van Helsing’s words: “Ah, that wonderful Madam Mina! She has a man’s brain – a brain that a man should have were he much gifted – and woman’s heart.” (*Dracula* 220) Such a praise is

especially significant as it comes from a man who possesses numerous academic titles, in fact, as Abraham himself points out, he is an “MD, DPh, D. Lit,⁹ etc., etc.” (*Dracula* 114) Moreover, Mina in the novel is a working woman (*Dracula* 60) and she is full of knowledge and skills, even superior to the ones of her male companions. For instance, for her job and to help Jonathan in his, she has learnt the art of stenography. Once again, it is Dr Abraham Van Helsing who praises her for her expertise, which, as he states, is more extensive than his:

Oh, you so clever woman! [...] I long knew that Mr. Jonathan was a man of much thankfulness; but see, his wife have all the good things. And will you so much not honour me and so help me as to read it for me? Alas! I know not the shorthand. (*Dracula* 175)

Contrarily, in the serial, she is depicted as anything but proactive, smart, and “gifted.” First, because none of the skills she possesses in the novel are ever mentioned. Second, due to the fact that she is repeatedly portrayed as naïve and foolish. Her ingenuity can be seen, for instance, as Jonathan turns into a vampire when she starts bleeding due to a wound caused by a bat. Instead of fleeing, or at least trying to defend herself, she throws the wooden stake she is holding on the floor, because she knows that “he would never harm [her]” and that she “is safe with [him].” (1x01 1:04:30-1:04:46) Then again, at the end of the episode when, in spite of the sister’s insistent warnings, she invites Dracula transmogrified as Jonathan to enter the room where she and Sister Agatha are hiding. (1x01 1:25:58-1:27:42)

Even though it might seem, even Mina’s philanthropy does not estrange her from the figure of the Angel in the House. In fact, during the 1893 International Exhibition in Chicago, the British Baroness Angela Burdett-Coutts defined women’s philanthropic work as the “truest and noblest, because the most natural.” (Williams Elliott 2) Philanthropy was thus just perceived as an extension of the woman’s role as a caretaker. With the rise of female philanthropists, numerous were the “apprehensions about the defeminization of women and the destruction of the happy home life they were expected to superintend,” (Williams Elliott 4) that is the preoccupation that the figure of the Angel in the House would vanish due to the emancipation and independence gained through philanthropic work. Yet, I retain, these preoccupations do not apply to the character of Mina in the serial for two reasons. First, because her philanthropy begins only after the death of her husband-to-be. Therefore, in becoming a widow,¹⁰ she has already lost most of her obligations as a dutiful wife (taking care of the family,

⁹ Doctor of Medicine, Doctor of Philosophy, and Doctor of Letters

¹⁰ I take the liberty of using the term “widow” to denote Mina’s situation for lack of a more appropriate term and due to the fact that even if they do not actually marry in the serial, she and Jonathan do become husband and wife in the novel

of her husband, ...) and, I would dare to say, she is as a result allowed to pursue a “career” at the time seen as detrimental to the “domestic ideology of the separate spheres [...] despite the common assumption that it was merely an extension of women’s domestic role.” (Williams Elliott 6-7) Second, due to the fact that the institution she creates is founded in memory of her late husband-to-be, thus reconnecting the little agency she gains with his death to her role as a dutiful loving wife.

As it has been previously highlighted, costumes are also extremely important when it comes to the definition of the attributes of a character in a televisual text. In the serial under analysis, Mina is either depicted wearing a light blue and white nun’s dress and veil (Fig. 1) or a long white lace dress. (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3) Both ensembles, I believe, serve to reinforce her status as the idealised Victorian angel. It is unarguable that the nun’s cassock is perhaps the epitomic symbol of purity, charity, and submissiveness. According to the Vatican, in fact, the prime virtues of all religious figures are “humility, obedience, fortitude and chastity.” (“Perfectae Caritatis”) Undoubtedly, these morals closely resemble the ones idealised by the figure of the Angel in the House. The second dress, on the other hand, is reminiscent of a typical Victorian wedding dress (Fig. 4) and of “the white garments of the angel,” which in the novel are worn by Lucy when she is buried. (*Dracula* 169) In addition to her outfits, as we can see from Figure 2 and Figure 3, lighting is also employed to strengthen Mina’s angelic aura. In all the scenes where she is wearing the lace dress, in fact, Mina is either sunlit from behind, which creates a sort of halo effect, or she is surrounded by bokeh lights, which make her look like an apparition.



Figure 1 Mina wearing the nun’s cassock, 1x01 1:49



Figure 2 Sunlit Mina wearing a white Victorian dress, 1x01 20:06



Figure 3 Sunlit Mina wearing a white Victorian dress, close up, 1x01 1:01:01



Figure 4 A typical mid-Victorian wedding dress – Unknown - Victoria and Albert Museum

Mina's physical characteristics also frame her as the naïve, innocent, and angelic Victorian miss. In fact, as Stephanie Genz and Benjamin Brabon note in their analysis of

Postfeminist texts, “long blonde hair and [a] thin, petite frame” are “the conventional signifiers of attractive, helpless and (to some extent) unintelligent femininity.” (234)

An even more blatant example of the glorification of the figure of the Angel in the House by the authors in the serial, in spite of her appearance only in two scenes of the second episode, is represented by the character of Lady Dorabella Ruthven. Differently from Mina Harker, she is not a character from the urtext. Thus, I believe, being a product of only Moffat and Gatiss’s imagination, she is perhaps even more representative of my thesis that the writers through the female characters in the serial reinstate archaic ideals about femininity, domesticity, and female empowerment.

Lady Dorabella Ruthven is first introduced at the beginning of the second episode, as she is boarding the ship with the other passengers of the *Demeter*, and from the very first few minutes on screen, she is already framed as a devoted wife. In fact, the very first words she utters, as she is holding her husband’s arm, are: “We just got married, isn’t it wonderful?” (1x02 6:41-6:43)

Especially defining of Lady Ruthven’s role as the stereotypical Angel in the House is the scene of her murder and the preceding conversation with Count Dracula. During her first, and only, night on the ship, Dorabella awakens because of the excessive heat in the cabins below deck and decides to take a walk on the ship’s upper deck. Here, after a brief exchange with Abramoff, she encounters the Count. Once again, from her first few words she is framed as the dutiful wife. In fact, in presenting herself to Dracula she does not say that her name is Dorabella, but rather she introduces herself as “Lady Ruthven.” (1x02 29:26) Interestingly, seeing her devotion to her husband, as the conversation continues, the two almost seem to flirt with one another. In fact, Dracula calls Dorabella “superb” (1x02 29:52) and tells her that “something about [her] positively demands... intimacy” while she calls him a “handsome stranger” (1x02 30:39) and excitingly asks him if he is “one of those exotic noblemen one reads about in the novels... filled with all the mystery and wickedness of the East.” (1x02 30:50-31:00) At this point, the two are extremely close and almost appear to be about to kiss. Yet her role as a devoted wife is not undermined by this scene. If anything, the opposite is true. In fact, as she is “flirting” with Dracula, Dorabella highlights once again that she is “newly married” (1x02 00:30:29) and repeatedly mentions her “handsome” husband. (1x02 00:30:04) Moreover, after distancing herself from the Count, she tells him that she and Lord Ruthven are about to move to America together to start a new life and they “will have lots of children.” (1x02 00:30:06-00:30:08) Thus, before murdering her Dracula allows her to have “a glimpse of what might have been.” (1x02 32:02-32:06) In this rewriting, in fact, the Count makes his victims

hallucinate their deepest desires as he feeds on their blood. Hence, as a reflection on some water inside a wooden barrel, he first shows Dorabella herself and her husband holding a newborn baby, (1x02 31:36) and then, as the reflection changes, the child has become a toddler and Dorabella appears to be pregnant again. (1x02 31:52) Thus her deepest wish, as it has also been previously recounted by Dorabella herself, is to be at her husband's side and have "lots of children." (1x02 00:30:08)



Figure 5 Lord Ruthven, Lady Ruthven, and baby, reflection in the barrel, 1x02 31:36



Figure 6 Lord Ruthven, Lady Ruthven, and toddler, reflection in the barrel, 1x02 31:52

Another fact that equals the character of Lady Dorabella Ruthven to the one of Mina Harker is her ingenuousness. Half-way through the second episode, in fact, it is revealed that Lord Ruthven is entertaining a secret relationship with Adisa, his manservant, and that the marriage with Dorabella is simply a "necessary evil" to hide their affair. (1x02 00:14:03) Obviously, being so naïve and so devoted to her husband, Lady Ruthven does not realise that

their union is just a cover for his homosexuality and that all he actually cares about are her money and her aristocratic title.

As aforementioned in the analysis of Mina Harker, costume is also extremely important when analysing the characteristics of a character and this is particularly true for Lady Dorabella Ruthven. In the initial scene, she is wearing a bright-blue Victorian dress, which really stands out against the desaturation of the background, and a dark blue hat adorned with a cream-coloured feather (Fig. 7). In her left hand, she is holding a small bunch of wildflowers and a tiny satchel, whereas, in her right hand, she is holding a cream-coloured parasol. Her choice of clothing and accessories are quite telling of her character and immediately frame her as the quintessential Victorian woman. In fact, the dress and headpiece she is wearing are characteristic of that historical period, as can be seen from Figure 8 and Figure 9. Moreover, the bunch of daisies and lavender she is holding contribute to her characterisation as pure and innocent, as it is usually young girls who pick wild flowers.



Figure 7 Lady Ruthven wearing a typical Victorian dress, 1x02 7:14



Figure 8 Typical Victorian dress – Henry Vincent - British Library



Figure 9 Typical Victorian headwear – Ashton John - British Library

Differently, in the scenes on the deck right before she is murdered by Dracula, Lady Ruthven is wearing a white nightgown embellished with silver pearls and white laces. This outfit closely resembles the one in the sunlit scenes of Mina (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3) and just like for her, the choice of such an ensemble further strengthens Dorabella's image as the Angel in the House. First,

because of its similarity to the previously mentioned mid-Victorian wedding dress (Fig. 4). Second, due to the fact white is a colour which typically symbolises purity and innocence.



Figure 10 Lady Ruthven wearing a white dress/nightgown, 1x02 31:44

Lastly, it is the two characters' final moments on screen that, I retain, commend their behaviour as devoted and submissive wives as ideal, especially if compared to Lucy's death, as it will be illustrated in the following chapter. In fact, Mina Harker's life is spared by Dracula because he does not find her interesting and prefers to feed on Sister Agatha. Thus, as it has been previously illustrated, she is allowed to live and continue her life in memory of her late husband-to-be. On the other hand, even if she is eventually murdered just like Lucy, Lady Ruthven receives a much better treatment from Count Dracula. Indeed, before killing her, even if only through a hallucination, the Count chooses to please Dorabella and grants her wish to become a mother.

5. The Black Jezebel: Lucy Westenra

Just like for the character of Mina Harker, there is no consensus among scholars regarding the role of Lucy Westenra in the novel prior to her transformation into a vampire. According to Eltis Sos, “Lucy is far more reminiscent of the traditional feminine, defenseless and frivolous Victorian lady.” (457) Analogously, Stephanie Demetrakopoulos describes her as an absolutely perfect “early Victorian woman/angel.” (104) Similarly, Jean Lorrain labels Lucy as an “old-fashioned lady.” (32) On the other hand, Bloom Abigail Burnham frames her, due to her independence, her challenging of marriage laws, (152) and her “sexual precociousness,” (178) as a typical example of the novel figure of the New Woman. In spite of this lack of agreement, majority of scholars contend that subsequently to her transformation into a vampire, Lucy represents the embodiment of the fallen woman and an admonishment of female sexuality. In the BBC serial, I retain, Lucy possesses only these last characteristics as she is portrayed, even before becoming undead, as a lascivious young woman who “feeds on” men for her pleasure. Thus, as it will be demonstrated, through her overall characterisation and her multiple murders, the writers admonish libertine female sexuality and intend to reinstate Victorian ideals about femininity, as the comparison with the other female characters will reveal.

In Stoker’s *Dracula* Lucy Westenra is described as “a blonde, fragile, porcelain creature.” (Demetrakopoulos 109) Diametrically opposite, in this rewriting of the novel, she is rewritten as a sexually promiscuous young black woman whose only passions are drinking, partying, and entertaining extramarital sexual relationships. Hence, in the BBC serial, the character of Lucy represents the stereotypical figure of the hypersexualised Jezebel. Such a framing should not come as a surprise, for “[s]tereotypical portrayals of Black women dominate current popular representations and perceptions of Black womanhood.” (Gammage 1) Very often, in fact, black women “have been represented in the media as hyper-sexual jezebels.” (Pellerin in Gammage 136)

Although it is true that nowadays the representation of black women on screen has improved, as they “now occupy roles of professors, presidents, and fixers,” often they “maintain the same stereotypical characteristics” as before as they are continuously framed as such as stereotypes as the mammy, the tragic mulatto, and, like in this serial, the hyper-sexual jezebel. (Gammage 150) Marquita Marie Gammage defines the jezebel as “an overly sexual Black woman with no moral compass.” (85) Moreover, according to the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Imagery, this stereotype “depicts African-American women not only as lascivious and lewd but

also as predatorily promiscuous.” (in Cheers 3) Thus, like a vampire, the jezebel is an “insatiable sexual being” that is incapable of controlling herself. (Collins in Littlefield 678-679)

As Jean Lorrah observes “[t]he attack of the vampire is an obvious symbol for rape.” (31) However, this connotation is basically totally eliminated when it comes to the character of Lucy Westenra in the serial. First, because of her skin colour. In fact, as a result of their stereotyped sexual promiscuousness and their continued representation as lustful, “[w]omen of color are often not considered “legitimate victims” in the context of sexual violence.” (Whitney 18) Hence, as Linda Meyer Williams has noted in her study of the correlation between race and rape, “[i]f black women are viewed as always desirous of sex, then sex in any form will be viewed as acceptable to black women and the charge of rape denied.” (10) Second, as a result of the absurd conversation on consent between her and the Count. When Lucy arrives at the cemetery to encounter Dracula after her hen night, she admonishes him because he has just fed on another person instead of just waiting for her. To this, he replies: “I need to feed on someone Lucy. You don’t always give your consent.” (1x03 00:49:38-00:49:43) She thus, seemingly amused, remarks that probably that victim did not assent either, and asks the Count why her consent matters to which he replies that “it doesn’t, but it’s delicious.” (1x03 00:49:51-00:49:53) In addition, when the two are deciding for how long Dracula is allowed to feed off of Lucy, it is her that “as a special treat” invites him to drink her blood for “five minutes” instead of three because she actually enjoys it. (1x03 00:55:37-00:55:45) Clearly, if she gives her consent to the feedings and even takes pleasure in them, Lucy cannot be perceived as a victim of the Count and the “attack of the vampire,” rather than symbolising rape, simply becomes a symbol for consensual sexual intercourse, reinforcing, as a result, her position as the hypersexual Jezebel. Moreover, the comical tone of the conversation on consent clearly serves to illustrate that Lucy’s empowerment is only illusory. In fact, if in postfeminist texts the right to choose symbolises the “individualist discourse of agency and empowerment,” (Munford and Waters 48) then the absence of choice signifies a deprivation of power.

In BBC’s *Dracula*, there are also several other factors that lead the audience to not view Lucy as a victim equal to the others and actually think that “she asked for it”: her flashy clothing, her seductive dancing, her excessive drinking, and, obviously, her promiscuousness. Nowadays, in fact, “[p]rovocative dress, intoxication, and male implied sexual signals are still used as justifications for rape in civilized societies.” (Bahlieda *Legacy* 54) Therefore, in the following sections, I will analyse Lucy’s outfits, the ways she moves and behaves, and her statements, so to prove that, not only does she function, like her counterpart in the novel, as an admonishment of female sexuality, but also as an “invite” to return to past ideals of proper femininity.

As they exit the club so she can pee behind the bins on the street, Lucy's friend Zev admonishes her for her promiscuous behaviour and it is exactly at this moment, I believe, that the opposition between proper femininity and female sexuality, corresponding to the Victorian ideal of the Angel in the House, and Lucy's behaviours is established. Zev remarks that she is "terrible" because her friend, and former lover, Jack has feelings for her, and she seems not to care about them. (1x03 00:22:52-00:23:07) In response to this observation, she states: "It's not like I have never shagged him."¹¹ What is he complaining about? [...] It was like... three times? Four, depending on what you count." Immediately Zev admonishes her and tells her that if she continues behaving like this she will "get a reputation." She thus criticises him for his "slutshaming" and replicates by calling him "Queen Victoria." (1x03 22:53-23:18) This epithet not only has somewhat homophobic tones, for "queen" is often used derogatorily to denote an effeminate gay man, but also, as it has been aforementioned, it locates Lucy in opposition to Victorian ideals of proper femininity and female sexuality, as represented by the figure of the Angel in the House, which is so much praised in the first two episodes.

It is especially through her murder(s), I believe, that Moffat and Gatiss, like Stoker in the novel, employ Lucy "as a cautionary tale, warning women of what will befall them should they choose to stray from the path." (Nystrom 70) The "path" in question, if we compare her death(s) to the ones of the other female characters in the serial, is none other than the one commended by the ideal of the Angel in the House: women should be innocent, sweet, submissive to men, not opinionated, and, most importantly, not be in any way overtly sexual. (Hayek 33-54) In the serial Lucy is "killed" three times: first, she is drained by Count Dracula, and as a result she becomes undead; then, she is burnt and disfigured when she is cremated after her funeral; lastly, she is staked with a wooden spike by her friend/former lover Jake Seward. In the following sections, I will analyse the symbolic meanings of these three murders and why I retain that they signify different levels of punishment for her promiscuity.

In the urtext, the act of penetration is extremely important for the development of the character of Lucy Westenra. In fact, first the penetration of Dracula's teeth into Lucy's neck turns the "good Victorian miss" into a fallen woman, then the penetration of the stake into her heart returns her to her original state and beauty and saves her soul. As Demetrakopoulos argues like the vampire's teeth, the stake "has obvious phallic connotations" (108). Hence, as one phallic object has disrupted the original order, another one has to re-establish it. Yet, as it will be demonstrated, that is not the case for the BBC adaptation. Due to the fact that Lucy in the

¹¹ "Shag" is a British colloquial term that means "having sexual intercourse"

serial, contrarily to the one in the novel, at the beginning of the story is not a sweet little virgin but actually enjoys sexual intercourse (and thus penetration), she cannot be redeemed through a penetrative act. Rather, she must be destroyed by the very thing she enjoyed so much in life and, as it will be discussed in the next section, her soul must remain unsaved.

In the novel, Lucy's soul is eventually saved by her fiancé, Arthur Holmwood, when he drives a stake through her heart. Once staked, Stoker's Lucy regains "her face of unequalled sweetness and purity," as the "earthly token and symbol of the calm that was to reign for ever." (*Dracula* 205) This return to her original beauty signifies that Lucy's "perverse sexuality is only an evil overlay" and not her authentic self. (Demetrakopoulos 111) Contrarily, because Lucy's true nature is not one of "sweetness and purity," in the Netflix/BBC adaptation her soul cannot be redeemed and thus she can never return to her initial beauty. As a consequence, she is terribly defaced and then gruesomely murdered as she is, quite literally, pulverised because of her sins. Indeed, in the serial, after being killed by Dracula (1x03 1:03:21), Lucy is first burned and thus disfigured in the crematorium (1x03 1:05:44), and then she is staked by one of her lovers, Doctor Seward (1x03 1:21:20). These scenes are significant for two reasons. First, because fire is usually used as a means of purification. The inability of fire to purify Lucy is thus a further indication of her inherent immorality. Moreover, to further indicate the impossibility of her redemption, contrary to the novel, once staked Lucy's body does not return to her original state, so to signify the saving of her soul, but rather she disintegrates into dust (1x03 1:21:37). At this point Count Dracula steps on her ashes as if to indicate that even in death, because of her sins, she does not deserve any respect. (1x03 01:21:39)

The scene of Lucy's funeral is also extremely symbolic of the admonishment of her being promiscuous and hypersexual. Differently from the novel, in fact, she is not just buried after her death, but she is instead cremated. As it has been previously mentioned, whereas fire usually symbolises purification, in this scene, it serves to disfigure Lucy and to deprive her of one of the most important things to her in life, that is, her beauty. It is then for this loss that she begs Jack to kill her. Still alive (or rather undead) while she is being burned, Lucy emerges from the incinerator and, after looking at her image in a mirror nearby, calls herself a "bloofer lady"¹² (1x03 1:11:18 and 1:16:42). In fact, she does not yet realise that she has been mutilated and, because she is now covered in burn scars, looks hideous. After this scene, Lucy leaves the funeral home and reaches Count Dracula. It is at this moment that she sees her actual appearance. In fact, when she arrives at the Count's abode, Zoe brilliantly asks her to take a

¹² beautiful lady

selfie and finally Lucy can see her current state: every inch of her body is charred, her hair is completely burnt, and her teeth are covered in soot. (Fig. 11) As soon as she realises the state she is in, Lucy starts screaming and bursts into tears. As she falls on her knees, she cries: “Look at me. [...] Will I always be like this? [...] But I was beautiful!” and to Dracula’s remark that she has “outgrown” her beauty she replies that she does not want to and wants to return as she was (1x03 1:17:00-1:18:28). Thus, she rejects the Count’s invitation to remain together forever because, clearly, to her, beauty is more important than being immortal. Jack, moved by her desperation, decides to relieve her of her pain, and, subsequently to her repeated begging, stakes her with a wooden spike, murdering her definitively. (1x03 01:20:56-01:21:20)



Figure 11 Lucy Westenra after the cremation, 1x03 1:16:05

The song choice during Lucy’s funeral also strengthens her dissimilarity to the ideal of femininity represented by the figure of the Angel in the House. In fact, during the function and as she is being cremated, “Angels” by Robbie Williams plays in the background, specifically, the verse describes the ideal woman’s behaviour: “Through it all she offers me protection – a lot of love and affection – whether I am right or wrong.” (1x03 1:15:27-1:15:39)

As for the other female characters, the clothes Lucy wears are also telling of her character. At the beginning of the episode, she is wearing a white ruched crop top and tight pants of the same colour (Fig. 12). Then, in the scenes at the club before her proposal, she is wearing a short sequined silver dress (Fig. 13). Lastly, on her hen night and on the day of her funeral, she wears a bronze glitter short dress with long sleeves and a thick crystal choker so to cover Dracula’s bite scars (Fig. 14). As can be seen from the pictures, all three outfits are quite revealing and provocative, and, as a result, serve only to enhance her hypersexuality and promiscuousness.

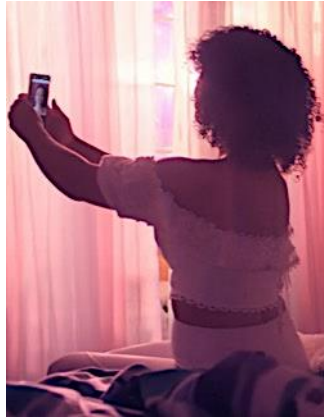


Figure 12 Lucy Westenra wearing a white co-ordinated set, 1x03 19:41



Figure 13 Lucy Westenra wearing a short silver sequined dress, 1x03 42:47

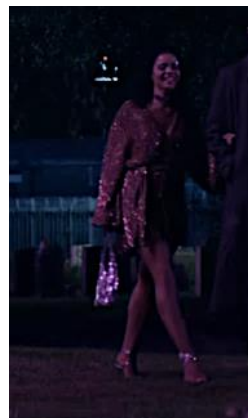


Figure 14 Lucy Westenra wearing a short long-sleeved bronze glitter dress, 1x03 50:11

In this serial, had she not been black, Lucy Westenra would have undoubtedly been the ideal postfeminist character. Firstly, due to her empowerment through hypersexualization. (Rossie 27) Lucy's only agency in the serial, in fact, is related to her sexuality. Second, as she depicts postfeminism's "heightened focus on having a slender, sexy body sculpted through constant self-surveillance," (Gill in Rossie 27) as portrayed in the very first scene where she is almost obsessively taking, and posting, dozens of selfies. Lastly, as "postfeminism encourages women in their twenties to *delay* marriage and motherhood" while temporarily maintaining

the pressure to do so as women age. (Rossie 27, my emphasis) During a conversation with her friend Zev, in fact, Lucy first says “Why shouldn’t I have fun? Jesus, I’m only 22. It’s not like I’m going to marry anyone.” (1x03 23:23-23:27) Then, approximately 40 seconds later, her boyfriend Quincey proposes to her in the middle of the dance floor, and she immediately accepts. She thus initially wished to stay unmarried yet finally, she surrenders to society’s pressure and consents to her boyfriend’s request. Indeed, when Zev questions her on her motives and tells her that she should love the person she is marrying, she simply states that she “likes” him. (1x03 00:48:19) Thus, he reminds her that “marriage is for life” to which promptly she answers that “life isn’t forever.” (1x03 00:48:49-00:48:57)

6. The Postfeminist Gothic Heroines: Sister Agatha and Doctor Zoe Van Helsing

In spite of the authors' claim that, differently from the novel, the main character of this serial is Count Dracula himself, I believe that they are instead the two Van Helsing, Sister Agatha and Doctor Zoe, that assume the central role. Yet, as it will be demonstrated, their agency still mainly revolves around the figure of the Count, restraining thus their empowerment and their position as postfeminist gothic heroines. In this chapter, I will thus first analyse the two Van Helsing separately, in order of appearance, then I will compare the two characters to their male counterpart, namely Dr Abraham Van Helsing, in the novel and in previous adaptations, and lastly, I will demonstrate why I believe Count Dracula to be Agatha and Zoe's double in this serial.

Sister Agatha Van Helsing is the second character to be introduced on screen, after Jonathan Harker, and from the very first few lines, we realise that she is not a stereotypical nun and that she will be a fundamental character in the development of the serial. At the beginning of the episode, Harker has already been a guest at the St Mary's convent for a few days and Sister Agatha is the only nun he has not yet met. Yet, while he was recovering, she was not "sequestered in prayer" as he assumes, but rather she was isolating to study him. (1x01 01:01:07-01:01:13) This behaviour is already peculiar because nuns, normally, would not study a patient but instead would spend their time taking care of them and, obviously, praying.

The content of the bag Sister Agatha is holding as she enters the room where Jonathan is resting is also telling of her peculiarity. In fact, as she positions it next to the table where she is about to sit to interrogate Harker on his stay at Castle Dracula, we can see it contains several wooden spikes, which are one of the few effective weapons against vampires. (1x01 00:01:29)

In the first half of the episode, the audience also learns the reasons behind Sister Agatha's choice to be ordained, and once again she is framed as anything but an average nun. Contrarily to what one might assume, she is not a nun by calling, or at least not anymore, in fact, her "calling was a very long time ago" (1x01 3:07-3:09) and now "like many women of [her] age, [she is] trapped in a loveless marriage, maintaining appearances for the sake of a roof over [her] head." (1x01 46:36-46:42) If she even had any, in the years she has spent as a nun Sister Agatha has clearly lost her faith, in fact, she now believes it to be "a sleeping draught for children and simpletons" (1x01 00:34:06-00:34:09) and she finds Jonathan's faith to be "touching." (1x01 46:28) In addition, as he tells her that the reason why he is at the convent is

because it is a “house of God,” she laughs, turns to Mina, and states “Well, that's good. We could do with a man about the place, eh, Sister?” and then, talking to Jonathan she says: “Look to your own protection, Mr. Harker. God doesn’t care.” (1x01 2:30-3:01) All of these statements, I believe, frame her as modern and secularised and contribute to her image as the ideal feminist heroine.

Another point which distinguishes Sister Agatha from a stereotypical nun is her intensive knowledge of vampirism, “witchcraft,” and the occult in general. One of the first questions she poses Jonathan is if he has had sexual intercourse with Count Dracula during his stay at the castle. The reason behind this question, she explains, is that Jonathan has obviously “been contaminated with something” and “any contact [he has] had with Count Dracula, sexual or otherwise, is therefore relevant.” (1x01 00:21:00-00:21:07) Her choice of words in this scene, such as “contaminated” and “sexual intercourse,” almost frames her as a doctor, which renders her even more unique if we consider that the first female doctor in Hungary started practising exactly in 1897. (Zoltán 62) Again, as she is explaining to Jonathan what the “contagion” consists of, Sister Agatha demonstrates an amount of knowledge unusual for her position. She is, in fact, like Van Helsing in the novel, an actual expert on the matter:

There is a contagion, a corruption passing through this world from one sufferer to the next. For those unfortunate to fall victim to it, life becomes incurable. They lose the divine ability to die. As their bodies rot, their consciousness persists. Even as dust, their pain goes on. It is a secret every gravedigger keeps. There are those among us destined to scratch at our coffin lids for all eternity. If you work among the dead, it is not death you fear. It’s the alternative. (1x01 33:13-33:57)

It is right after this scene that her secularity is first undermined. As Harker explains how he was able to escape the castle, in fact, she attributes the success to God rather than to pure fortuitousness, as it is the case:

You were facing the sun. [...] I have sought to find God all my life and never found a sign of him anywhere. Why now? Why you? Why him? [...] Count Dracula fears the cross. He fears the symbol of our Lord. [...] Dracula, prince among vampires, fears the cross. Do you understand what that means? [...] God is real. God is real and I have found him at last. (1x01 00:59:02-00:59:59)

To this, Jonathan replies that she has not found God but rather the devil. Thus, she promptly states that “if it takes the devil to bring [her] to her Lord then [she says] bring on the devil!” and that she believes it to be God who has saved Jonathan. (1x01 1:00:02-1:00:06)

Harker is not the only one to admonish Sister Agatha for her unusual interests or for her incautious initiative. In fact, as the Count is standing naked in front of the gates, her Mother Superior asks her: “Sister Agatha, have you been up to one of your secret projects again?” to

which she replies: “You’d better hope so.” (1x01 01:08:38-01:08:44) All of the sisters then proceed to draw their wooden stakes and the Mother Superior, extremely worried, asks her “what have you brought down upon us?” (1x01 01:08:58-01:09:00) Yet Sister Agatha does not seem to care about her worries, rather she seems excited about this encounter, in spite of the clear danger all of them are in.

The feelings Sister Agatha has for Count Dracula are certainly the most telling about her character. In fact, although she repeatedly demeans him, it is clear that she also finds him extremely interesting and, at points, she almost seems to admire him. As Dracula stands at the entrance of the convent she seems genuinely interested in comprehending the reasons behind his behaviour and so she asks him: “What’s stopping you? A feeling? A force? Is it physical or mental? Why do you need an invitation?” (1x01 01:10:45-01:10:54) However, a few seconds later, she tells the Count that she does not even expect him to know why he is behaving a certain way for “a beast can follow rules” and she does not “expect it to understand them.” (1x01 01:10:56-01:11:18) She then proceeds to compare him to an ox. All of these insults clearly anger the Count yet she continues to tease him mindless of danger. Perhaps the height of her challenging Dracula is the scene in which she cuts her palm and feeds him her blood. Not only is this scene rich in sexual connotations, as the Count almost licks her bloody finger, but it is also the beginning of Dracula’s retortion. As Sister Agatha compares him to a dog to which the nuns often give scarps, he asks her: “Do you think provoking me is clever?” and again she treats him as a test subject: “Yes, I do, I want to learn about you, I want to see the limit of your capability, it’s the point of this experiment.” (1x01 01:13:35-1:13:53) This propensity for risky behaviours is a typical marker of masculinity and, as it will be expounded later, it is a recurrent trait of powerful women in patriarchal societies. As it has been already said, in spite of all of these insults Sister Agatha at times actually seems to admire Dracula. In fact, she describes him as a “prince of exceptional learning and attainment” (1x01 1:16:48) and as “the best of vampires.” (1x01 1:16:56) This appreciation, I believe, once again repositions the Count as superior to Sister Agatha and their relationship more comparable to the one of admirer and admired rather than scholar and test subject or hero and villain.

The second episode begins with Dracula and Sister Agatha playing a game of chess. Presented by the Count with the choice between black and white, she decides to play white. This answer is again quite telling of her character. First, because it displays her overconfidence, the white side is in fact the losing one. Second, as it classifies her as the hero of the story as, especially in opposition to black, white is definitely a signifier of goodness. Lastly, because the two pawns that are confronting one another are a black knight and a white queen and, obviously

being a powerful woman, Sister Agatha chooses the latter. It is important to note that this relation is not just metaphorical, the white queen on the board *is* Sister Agatha. Each of the pawns on the board, in fact, represents a passenger on the Demeter and every time someone is murdered by the Count, Agatha loses a piece.

During the game, as she has yet to realise that the game they are playing is a representation of the voyage to England and that she, too, is a victim of Dracula, Sister Agatha continues to tease the Count in an attempt to better understand him. For instance, when she realises that the sponsor of all the passengers on board is Count Dracula disguised as “Mr. Balaur,” she states: “Ah, the beast revealed. Ravenous for blood and stinking of grave dirt. A sophisticated gentleman, nothing more than a veneer.” (1x02 00:42:59-00:43:08) Then, she almost boasts about her intellect and once again demeans the Count: “Dracula, a corruption of the Latin Dracul, meaning dragon. In Romanian, Balaur. The purpose of an alias seems to have eluded you. [...] You’ll have to be cleverer than that. To feed off the civilized you’ll have to learn to live with them first.” (1x02 00:43:17-00:43:33) She then proceeds to move one of her pawns, and overconfidently, states: “You see? Not the losing side.” (1x02 00:43:48-00:43:51) Eventually, as she finds herself with only a few pieces left on the board, Sister Agatha realises that the interaction with the Count is a hallucination resulting from his feeding on her and thus she too is one of his victims. Yet, she does not allow her disadvantage to discourage her and attempts to continue her game against the Count. In fact, she states: “The pawn is well-placed. If I can get it to the other side, it becomes another queen.” (1x02 00:47:06-00:47:11)

At last, in spite of their disadvantage, it is thanks to Sister Agatha’s knowledge, wit, and wisdom, and her and Captain Sokolov’s sacrifice, that Count Dracula is eventually overcome and made dormant for 123 years. Halfway through the second episode, after a brief interlude in which the Sister is believed by the passengers to be the murderer as she is found hiding in one of the cabins covered in blood, thanks to Sister Agatha and Yamini (the daughter of one of the passengers) it is finally revealed that Dracula is a vampire and thus the few survivors join forces to defeat him. First, Sister Agatha relieves Captain Sokolov of command and takes the lead. (1x02 00:54:58-00:55:00) Then, with the help of Piotr (the deckhand) and Olgaren (the cook), they dispose of 49 of the 50 boxes of soil in the hull. By leaving one last box, Sister Agatha believes they will finally be able to entrap Dracula and defeat him:

Sister Agatha: We leave him one box Only one resting place. Right now he’s hiding in the shadows, but daylight weakens him. He will need to rest eventually. If there’s only one box...

Captain Sokolov: We can trap him.
(1x02 00:56:55-00:57:05)

Yet that is not the case. The Count has indeed foreseen her tactic, has filled a mattress with soil, and has hidden it in one of the cabins, so as to be able to continue his voyage to England undisturbed. Eventually, Captain Sokolov and Sister Agatha discover his hide and she determines that the only remaining solution is to blow up the ship. Once again the Sister displays knowledge on matters a nun is unexpected to. In fact, not only does she know how to prepare gunpowder but also the exact place where they should put the explosives so as to sink the ship. Thus, being still in command, she asks Sokolov, Olgaren, and Piotr to abandon the *Demeter* as she will sacrifice herself so that “no trace of the vampire’s foul contagion [will] reach the New World.” (1x02 01:14:27-01:14:36) In addition, she urges the Captain to never tell anyone about the position of the *Demeter*, for they “must protect the curious from themselves.” (1x02 01:15:05-01:15:07) As the hero of the story, she has thus decided that it is her duty to safeguard the future from Dracula’s threat. Unfortunately, the plan fails, and instead of being killed by the explosion, the Count is simply made dormant for twelve decades.

Sister Agatha Van Helsing represents what Tara MacDonald and Joyce Goggin label as the “exceptional woman,” who is, a woman who “figures as a kind of time-travelling figure, an anachronistic modern woman thrown back into the nineteenth century, with hyper-awareness of gender codes and even feminist theory.” (5) She, in fact, makes repeated comments on sex, homosexuality, and women’s rights. For instance, at the beginning of the first episode as she is trying to reassure Jonathan about his dreams where he had sexual intercourse with his fiancée, she talks about her own dreams and hidden desires: “There is no shame in it. Dreams are a haven where we sin without consequence. Believe me, I know. Some mornings, I can hardly look sister Rosa in the face.” (1x01 20:28-20:42) From such a statement one might even presume Sister Agatha to be lesbian, or, at least, bisexual. Then again, when Dracula reaches the gates of the convent transmogrified into a wolf and then returns to his human form, fully naked. To his remark that “the army of the faithful can’t seem to look [him] in the eye,” Sister Agatha responds “You’re naked, and they’re nuns. It isn’t your eye they’re not looking at” and then proceeds to look down at his genitals. (1x01 01:09:11-01:09:14) At one point, she even makes a remark about women’s rights. This scene might initially seem to be almost empowering yet if we analyse it closely we realise that it re-instates a sort of reward/punishment system for “good girls” vs “bad girls.” In response to Count Dracula’s silencing of the Mother Superior, Sister Agatha states: “She’s earned the right to express her contempt, you know? We all have. Each of these women in front of you has turned her back on earthly pleasures.” (1x01 01:14:15-01:14:24) Thus, to earn the right to express their thoughts, women have to “[resist] all forms of

temptation.” (1x01 01:14:27) It comes as a consequence, I believe, that those women that do not resist temptation, such as the aforementioned fallen women, do not deserve such a right.

The first person Count Dracula encounters as he emerges from the waters he is been resting in since 1897 is Sister Agatha’s descendant Doctor Zoe Van Helsing. Like her ancestress, she is played by the English actress Dolly Wells, thus it becomes immediately clear that, following Agatha’s steps, she will be the one to take on the role of the heroine in this last part of the story. Moreover, as previously illustrated, their resemblance reignites Count Dracula’s feelings for Sister Agatha and these emotions will eventually be the cause of his demise.

As it has been previously stated, Doctor Zoe is the woman in charge of the Jonathan Harker Foundation, which, for the last 123 years has been trying to find the remains of Count Dracula and, in the meantime, has focused on medical research. Eventually, their efforts have been repaid and the Count’s body has been found. Unfortunately, one of the scuba divers responsible for retrieving Dracula has accidentally revived him and thus, following Zoe’s command, the team has decided to retreat and wait for the Count on the shores of Whitby. Alas, this first attempt to entrap the Count tragically fails and he manages to escape. A few days later he is located again and finally, he is fortuitously entrapped. In fact, it is only due to his fainting because of Zoe’s cancerous blood that the team succeeds in capturing him. Thus, Count Dracula is taken to the foundation to be studied and exploited for medical research.

Before she drinks Dracula’s blood and thus “revives” her ancestress, Doctor Zoe Van Helsing is depicted as deficient, and as lacking the tools and capabilities to overcome the Count. First, because of her career choices and second because of her gender. Interestingly, in spite of her importance, not much is disclosed in the serial about Sister Agatha’s descendant, yet the little that is revealed about her is enough to frame her as the stigmatised figure of the “maniacal career woman.” (Munford and Waters 13) In fact, as it is highlighted in one of her conversations with the Count, Zoe has sacrificed romance, friendship, and family to focus solely on her research. This characterisation is the first signal of her inadequacy to defeat the Count. Indeed, as Stéphanie Genz and Benjamin Brabon note, “career women are pathologised and defined as abject and *deficient*, selfish and emotionally stunted, and ultimately regretful about neglecting their essential roles as wives and mothers.” (92, my emphasis) Then again, she is portrayed as deficient when she fails to draw Count Dracula’s blood while he is held in the facility. Like the vampire’s teeth penetration of the victim’s neck, the needle’s piercing of the skin is a clear metaphor for penetration. Indeed, unable to perforate his skin, Zoe even says “I can’t seem to penetrate the skin.” (1x03 00:32:56-00:32:59) As it has been previously illustrated in the

analysis of the character of Lucy Westenra, penetration is deeply symbolic in this serial. Thus Zoe's inability to pierce Dracula's skin as she is attempting to draw his blood is not a just literal signifier of the hardness of his skin, but also of her lack of a penis, which renders her inferior to the Count. According to Freudian psychoanalysis, in fact, females are simply male subjects that lack a penis and they are thus innately inferior because "deficient." (Laplanche and Pontalis 302-303)

Due to their resemblance, Zoe is also repeatedly compared to her ancestress, and once again she is portrayed as insufficient and inferior. This comparison between the old and the new Van Helsing, I believe, contributes to the nostalgia for a long-gone better past which characterises this adaptation. For instance, as the Count is describing Zoe, he calls her "fast," "clever" and "driven" but also "compromised" and "corrupt." (1x02 00:35:18-00:35:50) In fact, the reasons behind their interest in Dracula are totally different: Sister Agatha was indeed fascinated by him but eventually her goal was to defeat him to safeguard the future from his threat, on the other hand, Zoe's goal is to entrap him and study him, likely so she can also heal her cancer, as we can assume from her repeatedly denounced dubious morality. Their different reaction to death also clearly distinguishes the two. In fact, even as she is slowly dying due to the vampire's contagion, Sister Agatha's priority remains to defeat the Count. For instance, when Captain Sokolov asks her if she is "all right," she replies: "No, no, I'm dying, but don't get distracted." (1x02 00:55:19-00:55:23) Differently, Zoe, a terminal cancer patient, has already surrendered to her illness and states that she does not care any longer for Dracula is "not [her] problem anymore." (1x03 01:08.48-01:08:51) It is only because of her ancestress's insistence that she then decides to make one last attempt at defeating him. Indeed, when she appears to her as a hallucination, Sister Agatha tells her: "I am inside your head, I feel your guilt. [...] [you] brought Dracula back to life, so he is still very much your problem and you know that" (1x03 01:09:17-01:09:23) and to Zoe's remark that she is dying she replies "I'm dead. But I'm Sister Agatha Van Helsing of the Saint Mary's Convent, Budapest, and neither of us are quite done yet." (1x03 01:09:49-01:08:58) Thus, Zoe decides to discharge herself from the clinic where she is hospitalised and asks Jack Seward, her pupil, to take her to Count Dracula's abode. At one point, even Sister Agatha belittles Zoe, in fact, she states: "As our Lod said that night in Gethsemane, 'The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.' [...] I am the spirit and you are the flesh," thus implying that Zoe is the weak one of the two. (1x03 01:09:30-01:09:43)

As it has been aforementioned, in a patriarchal society, women in a position of power need to display characteristics typical of hegemonic masculinity in order to be considered

deserving of their role. This can be clearly seen in the characters of Sister Agatha and Doctor Zoe Van Helsing. Agatha, in fact, in spite of her wearing a clear indicator of femininity, that is the nun's cassock, repeatedly shows traits that are normally associated with manliness. For instance, she finds dangerous situations thrilling and recurrently partakes in risky behaviours. When Dracula arrives at the Convent in the first episode, in fact, she exclaims: "How exciting!" (1x01 01:02:23) Then, as the Count is standing in front of the entrance, she asks one of her sisters to open the gate so she can test whether it is true or not that a vampire can enter an abode only if he receives an invitation. First, she declares that she is "completely confident" (1x01 1:09:27) about opening the gate, yet, a few seconds later, she sighs with relief and states: "So it's true then, that's interesting [...] a vampire may not enter any abode unless invited in, I wasn't sure about that one." (1x01 1:10:26-1:10:34)

Just like in the novel Abraham Van Helsing "functions as an alter ego or nemesis to Count Dracula," (Bloom 153) in this re-writing Sister Agatha and Doctor Zoe function as Dracula's doubles. This can be seen, for instance, in the repetition of the Count's words and actions by the two women. Repeatedly, in fact, Sister Agatha quotes Dracula verbatim. For example, as she is about to be hung by the passengers of the *Demeter* who believe her to be the murderer, Sister Agatha pretends to be a vampire and warns them that, were they to try to murder her, she would actually survive as vampires are immortal. She then proceeds to threaten them by stating that, in revenge of their attempted murder, she will drink their blood and, quoting the Count, "[she] will make [them] last" (1x02 52:38:52:40). Then, at the end of the episode, as she is trying to prolong her conversation with the Count while Captain Sokolov ignites the gunpowder she prepared to blow up the ship, she quotes Dracula again when he tries to interrupt her. She says, like Dracula in the first episode, that "one must never rush a nun" (1x01 1:12:16-1:12:19 and 1x02 1:23:00-1:23:03). Another example of doubling is found in the act of imbibing blood and the subsequent gain of information. As it has been previously illustrated, in fact, in this serial blood is not just sustenance of the vampire but also source of knowledge. Thus, both Dracula and Zoe expand their knowledge and gain power through blood drinking. Indeed, had she not followed the Count's directions that "everything is in the blood if you know how to read it," (1x03 00:35:15) Doctor Van Helsing would have never been able "to match [him]" (1x03 00:41:21) for she would have never retrieved her ancestress memories and, subsequently, she likely would have not had the knowledge and power sufficient to defeat Dracula.

Sister Agatha and Doctor Zoe are not just doubles of Dracula in the serial but also a condensation of past renditions of Abraham Van Helsing. For instance, at the end of the third

episode, mimicking Van Helsing in Fisher's *Dracula*, in an incredible outburst of energy, she runs on top of the table at the centre of the Count's living room and, jumping off of it, she tears the curtains, exposing thus Dracula to sunlight. (1x03 01:23:54-01:24:01) Moreover, as it will be illustrated in the analysis of Sister Agatha's and Doctor Zoe Van Helsing's outfits, one of the ensembles worn by the latter in the serial is quite reminiscent of the clothes worn by past portrayals of Van Helsing, such as the one worn by Peter Cushing in *The Brides of Dracula* (1960).

Whereas in the urtext the heroine is represented by the New Woman, (Lorrah 32) in this rendition it is the two Van Helsing's that assume that role. In fact, they represent the archetypal postfeminist gothic heroine. As it has been previously mentioned in the section on the genre of the Postfeminist Gothic, the "powers" of the second generation of postfeminist gothic heroines have shifted from physical to psychical ones. Thus, twenty-first century postfeminism gothic works have focused on "the recuperative power of memory." Only thanks to these recovered memories then can the heroine "safeguard" the future from the threat. (Munford and Water 143-146) Clearly, the figure of the postfeminist heroine is thus embodied in the serial by Sister Agatha and Doctor Zoe Van Helsing. In fact, as it has been previously illustrated, their powers are not represented by strength or any other physical powers but by their intelligence, knowledge, and wit, which combine when Zoe drinks Dracula's blood and thus recovers her ancestress's memories.

In the novel, Bram Stoker "employs not one hero but four handsome young men [...] defending the women's virtue, with the help of a powerful patriarchal figure, Dr. Abraham Van Helsing" (Holte 22) As it has been already said, in this serial, it is Sister Agatha and Doctor Zoe, and their subsequent "fusion" as Zagatha, that assume the role of the hero, yet they do not "defend women's virtue" nor do they really save anyone. As a matter of fact, if we want to be punctilious, it is rather Count Dracula who has chosen not to feed on, for instance, Mina Harker or Jack Seward. In the first case, it is because he is more interested in knowing Sister Agatha and he believes Mina to be an "insipid little thing" and imagines her to be "flavourless" (1x03 00:33:57 and 00:34:00). Whereas in Jack's case, it is only because Dracula is intrigued by Zagatha and her statement that she finally has understood what his one fear is. (1x03 1:22:38-1:23:07) Moreover, at the end of the serial, we could argue that it is Dracula who "eliminates the threat" as he is not killed by Zagatha but rather he commits suicide.

In spite of their heroism, finally, like all the other empowered women in the serial, Doctor Zoe and Sister Agatha must also be eliminated because, as Nina Auerbach has noted in *Our Vampires, Ourselves* "[a] ruling woman has no place in the patriarchal hierarchy *Dracula*

affirms.” (66) Thus, at the end of the third episode, Zagatha is finally killed by Count Dracula. It is exactly at this moment, I retain, that their role as feminist figures is most undermined. First, because of Dracula’s disregard of her statement that she is not scared of death, that she feels “equal” to it, and her seeming heedlessness to pain. Because he is terribly afraid of pain and death, these attributes render Zagatha definitely superior to the Count, yet, her superiority is tainted by his choice of feeding on her. In fact, as the Count decides to be the one to kill her and relieve her of her pain, he reassumes a dominant position over Zagatha and deprives her of her right to choose. Moreover, as it has been previously illustrated, Dracula in this rendition makes his victims hallucinate their deepest desires as he is drinking their blood. As he feeds on Zagatha he makes her “dream” them fully naked embraced in the sun. Thus, according to this scene, all she has ever wanted was to be with the Count. This, I believe, positions her nearly on the same level as the pre-feminist figures of Lady Dorabella Ruthven, Mina Harker, and the Grand Duchess Valeria of Augsburg, as they all three are depicted as only desiring love and romance.

As previously illustrated, costumes are also extremely important in the analysis of televisual representations, especially if the character wears such symbolic ensembles as the nun’s cassock, as Sister Agatha Van Helsing does in this rendition of *Dracula*. The cassock worn by Sister Agatha is composed of a long-sleeved light blue tunic and veil, and white guimpe, white coif, and white bandeau. Obviously being a nun, on her neck hangs a crucifix. (Fig. 15) The colour choice in this instance is also extremely important. In fact, light blue in the Catholic Church is the colour representative of the Virgin Mary. This ensemble, as illustrated in the analysis of Mina’s outfits, clearly serves as a physical signifier of purity, charity, and submissiveness. Doctor Zoe Van Helsing, on the other hand, is depicted as wearing either her white lab coat (Fig. 17) or a pretty masculine outfit, which reminds of previous renditions of Abraham Van Helsing (Fig. 18) or, even, of televisual renditions of famous detectives such as Lieutenant Columbo (Fig 19). In fact, when in plain clothes, she is depicted wearing a green leather trench coat, a white t-shirt, and black tight jeans. (Fig. 16) Thus, in being associated with such figures as scientists, doctors, and detectives, Zoe is immediately framed as an empowered working woman and we can already assume she will display characteristics typical of masculinity. For, as previously illustrated, in patriarchal societies, like ours, women in a position of power must exhibit masculine traits in order to be considered as worthy of their position.



Figure 15 Sister Agatha wearing the nun's cassock, 1x01 1:02:54



Figure 16 Zoe wearing plain clothes, 1x02 7:32



Figure 17 Zoe wearing her white lab coat, 1x02 31:50

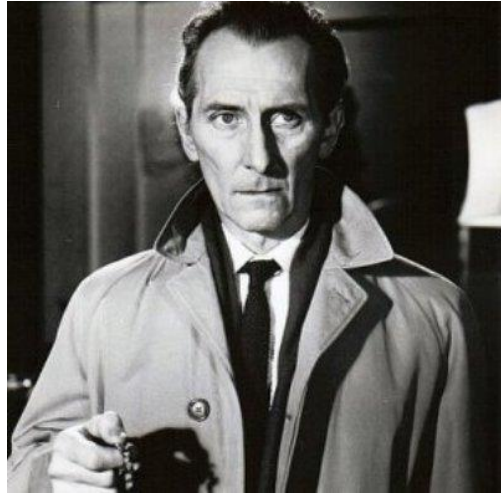


Figure 18 Peter Cushing as Dr Abraham Van Helsing in *The Brides of Dracula* (1960)



Figure 19 Peter Falk as Lieutenant Columbo (1971) - IMDb

As it has become clear thanks to the analysis of the murders of Lady Dorabella Ruthven and Lucy Westenra, death has a deep symbolic meaning in this serial. Obviously, this also applies to the characters of Sister Agatha and Doctor Zoe Van Helsing. As previously illustrated, before being killed Dorabella is “rewarded” by Dracula as he makes her hallucinate her deepest desire, on the contrary, Lucy Westenra receives a much worse treatment as she is first drained, then burned, and finally staked. Such a difference in modality, I believe, stems from their categorisation according to the virgin/good girl vs whore/bad girl dichotomy. Thus, Sister Agatha and Doctor Zoe are also “rewarded” as they personify the figure of the virgin/good girl. Due to the fact that she is a nun and she wears the colours representative of the Holy Virgin Mary, Sister Agatha clearly represents the virginal good girl. Indeed, nuns when they are ordained, they take a vow of chastity. Moreover, like a good wife, Sister Agatha has chosen to dedicate her life to only one man, that is, God. In fact, nuns are also often referred to as the Brides of Christ. Thus, at the end of the second episode, despite being infected by the vampire’s

contagion, following her sacrifice, Sister Agatha dies happily, as can be deducted by the smile on her face, for she is convinced that she has defeated Dracula. Doctor Zoe Van Helsing too, unmarried and seemingly asexual, is granted a painless death. Like her ancestress, she too has dedicated her whole life to one man, namely Count Dracula. Thus, as the Count realises that she is in terrible pain because of her cancer, he decides to feed on her and alleviate her suffering, even if that means he, too, will die.

7. Conclusion

The figure of the Count has in the 127 years since the publication of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* continuously changed and morphed to adapt to different media, audiences, and historical periods. From the terrifying beast of the first adaptation to the handsome vampire of the last rewritings, Dracula has repeatedly shapeshifted to adapt to its new contexts yet that is not the same for his women. Indeed, Mina, Lucy, and so on, are still characterised nowadays as either the tragic victims or the dangerous hypersexual monsters. Thus, enormous attention has been given in academia to this recurrent motif and the answer is always the same: women on screen continue to be categorised according to patriarchal ideals of femininity. Indeed, to uphold the hierarchy at the base of patriarchy, women have persistently been depicted as "subordinate, submissive, and deferential to males." (Connell and Messerschmidt in Bahlieda *Legacy* 51) Subsequently, all women who do not adhere to this ideal must be eliminated, as that is frequently the case for Lucy Westenra and Dracula's wives. The BBC serial *Dracula* analysed in this also adheres to this tradition as it "rewards" those characters that re-present patriarchal ideals of womanhood and "punishes" all those characters that do not respect the hierarchy. Thus, I argued that although seemingly progressive in its representation of women, by re-presenting stereotypes and archetypes, admonishing female sexual desires, and limiting female agency, BBC's *Dracula* (2020) reinstates patriarchal ideals about femininity, domesticity, and female empowerment.

As it has been mentioned in the introductory chapter, the general goal of this thesis was to continue the ongoing debate on "the ways in which contemporary neo-Victorian texts, objects, and media engage with feminism and postfeminism, and in what ways this engagement is productive, problematic, or both simultaneously." (MacDonald and Goggin 5) Thanks to the analysis of the five main female characters, I retain that it has been demonstrated how the serial under scrutiny is at times "feminist" and empowering yet, overall, the engagement with feminism it presents is more problematic than not. In fact, in limiting the female characters' agency, punishing overtly sexual characters, categorising women according to stereotypes and archetypes, praising domesticity and romance, and so on, Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat reinforce a nostalgia the nostalgia for a "better past" in which women were submissive, constrained to their house, and unemancipated. Indeed, as highlighted in the analytical chapters, the characters who show characteristics typical of patriarchal ideals of femininity such as the one of the Victorian Angel in the House, represented in the serial by Mina Harker and Lady

Dorabella Ruthven, are praised and glorified whereas those who present traits akin to the ones of figures such as the Fallen Woman, namely Lucy Westenra, are admonished and punished for their behaviours. As previously illustrated in chapter 2.2, this characterisation, and the subsequent punishment/glorification, follows the virgin/good girl vs whore/bad girl dichotomy typical of early Hollywood cinema. Thus, although seemingly innovative and progressive, the serial here analysed has simply followed a trend that has been ongoing for the last century.

Before closing this thesis I would like to once again illustrate why it is so important to study representations on television and in the media overall. First, as “media messages”, as it has been noted by Christopher Campbell, “help citizens make sense of the world around them, especially for depictions of traditionally marginalized groups.” (289) In addition, as it has been highlighted by Jonathan Bignell and Faye Woods, portrayals in the media “can influence how we as a culture understand our collective reality and the people in it.” (232) Representations in televisual productions are especially important because of television’s omnipresence and for “Television is a major cultural site of representing, managing and debating difference [as it] represents people we may never meet and places we may never visit, so it can shape cultural understandings and social norms surrounding gender, sexual orientation, class, nationality, disability or race and ethnicity.” (Bignell and Woods 232) Moreover, analyses such as the one conducted in this thesis are significant because it has been proven that media depictions heavily contribute to the hypersexualization and objectification of women which can then lead to an increase in mental illnesses, eating disorders, and sexual dysfunctions. For instance, in their psychological study “Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women’s Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks,” Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts have noted that exposure to objectification and sexualisation, leads women to internalise such attitudes and increasingly view themselves as (sexual) objects rather than human beings. This applies especially to black women and the Jezebel stereotype. As it has been aforementioned, in fact, black women have been disproportionately depicted in the media as sexual objects compared to white women. A recent study on the sexual objectification of black women, conducted by Joel R. Anderson and others, has demonstrated that the participants to the research visually objectified black women more than white women, especially “under conditions of sexualization” (i.e. provocative or revealing clothing, sensual poses, ...). (467) Then, for in recent years there has been an ever-growing number of texts which, more or less blatantly, advocate for a return to former prototypes of femininity, like the aforementioned ideal of the Angel in the House. Indeed, texts like the ones analysed in this thesis are part of the ever-growing phenomenon of the “postfeminist mystique” which was first conceived by Rebecca

Munford and Melanie Waters in their monograph *Feminism and Popular Culture: Investigating the Postfeminist Mystique*. Heir of the “feminist mystique,” the postfeminist mystique is the “re-enchantment and re-mystification” of “nostalgic and highly stylized images of traditional femininity.” (10) Normally, it has revitalized “particular models of white, middle-class femininity that belong to the image repertoire of ‘pre-feminist’ cultural productions,” such as the Victorian ideal of the Angel in the House in this serial. Generally, it has done so “through a combination of fashion, wit, irony and heterosexual romance.” The purpose of the postfeminist mystique, as seen in BBC’s *Dracula*, is usually to “[expose] what is missing from the present” and “[valorize] a past in which men and women were not equal.” (Munford and Waters 11-12)

Lastly, I want to close this work with a quote from Jennifer Swartz-Levine’s essay “Staking Salvation: The Reclamation of the Monstrous Female in *Dracula*” (2016) for it perfectly sums up the serial here analysed and thus, I believe, constitutes the perfect conclusion for this master’s thesis

We continuously rehash the same tropes that Stoker did in 1897 as female morality is linked with female sexuality, thereby creating a system of classification wherein a woman’s value is primarily based on her chastity and Angel in the House-like behavior. Michel Foucault’s famous assertion in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (1976) that “We are the other Victorians” seems to resonate now more than ever, particularly when applied to women and the vampires who bite them. (360)

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Abstracts

The figure of Count Dracula has since the publication of the novel continuously changed and morphed to adapt to different media, audiences, and historical periods. From the terrifying beast of the first adaptation to the handsome vampire of the last rewritings, Dracula has repeatedly shapeshifted to adapt to its new contexts yet that is not the same for his women. Indeed, Mina, Lucy, and so on, are still characterised nowadays as either the tragic victims or the dangerous hypersexual monsters. Thus, enormous attention has been given in academia to this recurrent motif and the answer is always the same: women on screen continue to be categorised according to patriarchal ideals of femininity. The BBC serial *Dracula* here analysed also adheres to this tradition, thus, in this thesis, I argued that although seemingly progressive in its representation of women, by re-presenting stereotypes and archetypes, admonishing female sexual desires, and limiting female agency, BBC's *Dracula* (2020) reinstates patriarchal ideals about femininity, domesticity, and female empowerment. To prove my statement, I conducted a character analysis of the main female characters and proved that they, too, continue the tradition of the dichotomy virgin/victim and whore/monster.

Die Figur des Grafen Dracula hat sich seit der Veröffentlichung des Romans ständig verändert und gemorphet, um sich an verschiedene Medien, Zielgruppen und historische Epochen anzupassen. Von der furchteinflößenden Bestie der ersten Verfilmung bis hin zum gutaussehenden Vampir der letzten Neufassungen hat sich Dracula immer wieder verändert, um sich den neuen Kontexten anzupassen, doch das gilt nicht für seine Frauen. Tatsächlich werden Mina, Lucy usw. auch heute noch entweder als tragische Opfer oder als gefährliche hypersexuelle Monster dargestellt. In der Wissenschaft wurde diesem wiederkehrenden Motiv große Aufmerksamkeit gewidmet, und die Antwort ist immer dieselbe: Die Frauen auf dem Bildschirm werden nach wie vor nach patriarchalen Weiblichkeitsidealen kategorisiert. Die hier analysierte BBC-Serie *Dracula* steht ebenfalls in dieser Tradition. In dieser Arbeit habe ich daher argumentiert, dass die BBC-Serie *Dracula* (2020), obwohl sie in ihrer Darstellung von Frauen scheinbar fortschrittlich ist, durch die erneute Darstellung von Stereotypen und Archetypen, die Ermahnung weiblicher sexueller Wünsche und die Einschränkung weiblicher Handlungsmöglichkeiten patriarchalische Ideale über Weiblichkeit, Häuslichkeit und weibliche Selbstbestimmung wiederherstellt. Um meine Behauptung zu belegen, habe ich eine Charakteranalyse der weiblichen Hauptfiguren durchgeführt und nachgewiesen, dass auch sie die Tradition der Dichotomie Jungfrau/Opfer und Hure/Monster fortführen.