



**REPRESENTATIONS OF THE VAMPIRE IN
CONTEMPORARY BRITISH DRAMA**

Mehmet ÜNAL

PhD Dissertation

English Language and Literature

Prof. Dr. Yeliz BİBER VANGÖLÜ

2025

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**T.C.
ATATURK UNIVERSITY
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**SUPERVISOR
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TEZ BEYAN FORMU

SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ MÜDÜRLÜĞÜNE

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ABSTRACT

PhD DISSERTATION

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE VAMPIRE IN CONTEMPORARY
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Mehmet ÜNAL

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Yeliz BİBER VANGÖLÜ

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This dissertation examines representations of the vampire in five contemporary plays staged in Britain: Liz Lochhead's *Dracula* (1985), Conor McPherson's *St. Nicholas* (1997), Stephen Briggs's *The Truth* (2000) and *Monstrous Regiment* (2001), and Moira Buffini's *A Vampire Story* (2008). Arguing that the vampire serves as a potent symbol for exploring complex socio-cultural anxieties, the study analyses how these plays utilise the figure to interrogate themes of neoliberalism, queer identity and the posthuman condition. The vampire's predatory nature and insatiable thirst are examined in relation to the exploitative logic of late capitalism, consumerism and the commodification of life. The vampire's liminal existence and transgressive potential are explored through the lens of queer theory, revealing how the plays challenge heteronormative assumptions and explore alternative models of intimacy and belonging. Finally, the study investigates how the vampire figure embodies anxieties and possibilities of the posthuman, engaging with themes of technological advancement, the blurring of boundaries between human and non-human, and the precarious nature of identity in a technologically mediated world. By analysing these plays through an interdisciplinary framework, the dissertation demonstrates how contemporary British theatre utilises the vampire myth to reflect and critique the anxieties of a rapidly changing world, offering insights into the evolving nature of identity, power and social change in the 21st century.

Keywords: Vampire, Dracula, Neoliberalism, Queer Theory, Posthumanism.

ÖZET

DOKTORA TEZİ

ÇAĞDAŞ BRİTANYA TİYATROSUNDA VAMPIR TEMSİLLERİ

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Bu doktora tezi Britanya’da sahnelenen beş çağdaş tiyatro oyununda vampir temsillerini incelemektedir: Liz Lochhead’in *Dracula* (1985), Conor McPherson’ın *St. Nicholas* (1997), Stephen Briggs’in *The Truth* (2000) ve *Monstrous Regiment* (2001) adlı oyunları ve Moira Buffini’nin *A Vampire Story* (2008) adlı oyunu. Vampirin karmaşık sosyo-kültürel kaygıları keşfetmek için güçlü bir sembol olduğunu savunan çalışma, bu oyunların neoliberalizm, kuir (*queer*) kimlik ve posthümanizm temalarını sorgulamak için bu figürü nasıl kullandığını analiz etmektedir. Vampirin yırtıcı doğası ve doymak bilmez kana susamışlığı, geç kapitalizmin sömürücü mantığı, tüketicilik ve yaşamın metalaştırılmasıyla ilişkili olarak incelenmektedir. Vampirin eşiksel varlığı ve sınırları ihlal etme potansiyeli, kuir teorinin merceğinden incelenip bu oyunların heteronormatif varsayımlara nasıl meydan okuduğu ve alternatif yakınlık ve aidiyet modellerini nasıl keşfettiği açıklanmaktadır. Son olarak bu çalışma, vampir figürünün posthümanist kaygıları ve olasılıkları nasıl somutlaştırdığını, teknolojik ilerleme temalarıyla, insan ile insan olmayan arasındaki sınırların bulanıklaşmasıyla ve teknolojinin aracılık ettiği bir dünyada kimliğin istikrarsız doğasıyla nasıl bağlantılı olduğunu incelemektedir. Bu tez, oyunları disiplinler arası bir çerçevede analiz ederek, çağdaş İngiliz tiyatrosunun vampir mitini hızla değişen bir dünyanın kaygılarını yansıtmak ve eleştirmek için nasıl kullandığını ortaya koyar ve 21. yüzyılda kimliğin, gücün ve toplumsal değişimin evrimleşen doğasına dair fikirler sunar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Vampir, Drakula, Neoliberalizm, Kuir Teori Posthümanizm.

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that “study” became one of the first words she learned. Her simple understanding made the long hours worthwhile.

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Mehmet ÜNAL



INTRODUCTION

It falls upon each generation [...] to create its own monsters, or at least its own unique iterations of monstrosity. There is a good reason why vampires cast no reflections in the mirror. It is because what looks back at us is ourselves.

— Darryl Jones, *Sleeping with the Lights On: The Unsettling Story of Horror*

From legendary mythological creatures like centaurs, sphinxes, minotaurs and sirens to fantastic supernatural creatures of popular culture such as witches, vampires, werewolves and zombies, monsters have always haunted the human imagination by reflecting and thereby shaping the anxieties, fears and desires of societies that spawn them. They are often associated with the fear of the unknown, inevitable death and the desire for immortality, which are inherent human concerns. A particular type of supernatural monster, vampires, existing in both oral and written narratives, appear in various cultures as characters with such joint characteristics: blood-sucking, undead existence, immortality and sharp teeth. It is a remarkable fact that vampires consistently exhibit these traits across diverse cultures and narratives. This consistency suggests that the anxieties and desires they embody are deeply rooted in the human psyche, mirroring shared cultural anxieties. As Darryl Jones aptly states in the epigraph above, vampires, as well as other types of monsters, are human creations and the reflection of humanity itself. Through monsters, humanity confronts itself within the space of imagination, if not in the mirror.

The enduring fascination with the vampire is evident in its pervasive presence across a multitude of media, from classical literature like Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) to contemporary television series like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *True Blood* (2008-2014), *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-2017) and *Interview with the Vampire* (2022-Present). Film adaptations ranging from the classical horror of *Nosferatu* (1922) to the romantic fantasy of the *Twilight* saga (2008-2012) further demonstrate the vampire's adaptability and its capacity to embody diverse cultural approaches and anxieties. Even animated series like *Castlevania* (2017-2021) and children's cartoons like *Hotel Transylvania* (2012-2022) engage with the vampire myth, albeit in often playful and subversive ways. This

widespread presence across diverse genres and media underscores the vampire's centrality to contemporary culture, serving as a potent symbol onto which societies project their ever-evolving fears and desires regarding mortality, sexuality, identity and the ever-shifting boundaries of the human.

Although vampire studies have recently emerged as a distinct field, vampires, more generally, fall within the scope of monster studies. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, a professor of English, coined the term 'monster theory' in his influential 1996 article "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" in his 1996 collection of articles *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. This article provides a foundational analysis of what monsters are and how they are culturally produced throughout history. Despite the fact that Cohen's work is pivotal in establishing the field as it gave the monster theory its name, it can hardly be claimed that monster studies started as late as 1996. Earlier scholarship laid the groundwork for understanding the cultural power of monsters; J. R. R. Tolkien's "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics" (1936) and Rudolf Wittkower's "Marvels of the East: A Study in the History of Monsters" (1942) as well as John Block Friedman's *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (1981) endeavoured to examine the history of monsters, their symbolic meanings in ancient times and their influences on European societies, particularly during the Middle Ages.

While existing scholarship examines supernatural creatures in human imagination and their reflections in cinematic art as well as literature, there is a notable gap in research on representations of the vampire and reflections of the vampire's cultural impact in theatre. Besides being a visual art, theatre is also a part of the field of literature with its written texts. As both a visual and literary art form, theatre is deeply intertwined with culture by both shaping and being shaped by it. The study therefore examines how representations of the vampire are produced in theatre, how they function within and contribute to cultural discourse and how they are shaped by cultural values. Ultimately, by examining these portrayals through the lenses of art, literature and culture within the framework of existing theories, this research contributes an original analysis of how diverse perspectives on vampires intersect within contemporary British theatre.

Since theatre, like any other literary or artistic field, is formed and shaped under the influence of culture, thereby reflecting cultural characteristics, it offers a rich number of

vampire narratives. The abundance of vampire narratives in theatre offers an exploration of how vampire images emerge in the human imagination and how they function within societies. This exploration is crucial, as it contributes to the “understand[ing of] how mental functioning is related to cultural [...] and historical contexts” (Wertsch, 1998, p. 3). The reciprocal relationship between societal thought patterns and cultural expression underscores the significance of examining vampire images in theatre and reveals insights into the collective anxieties, desires and cultural values that shape these portrayals. Therefore, the study adopts a socio-cultural perspective by recognising that the selected plays are both products of and contributors to cultural discourse. By examining how supernatural creatures—products of collective fears and desires—are represented in theatre, the research contributes to the literature in a sociological context. Existing works such as Michael Chemers’ *The Monsters in Theatre History* (2018)¹, Santiago Lucendo’s 2020 article in Spanish “Vampiros en Madrid. Juan Carretero y las adaptaciones de *The Vampyre*”² (Vampires in Madrid. Juan Carretero and *The Vampyre*’s Adaptations) and Roxana Stuart’s 1993 dissertation *The Vampires of Nineteenth-century Melodrama*³ demonstrate scholarly interest in this area, yet my research indicates a lack of recent studies specifically examining vampire images in contemporary British theatre. The study addresses this gap by offering a detailed analysis of how vampire images function within contemporary British dramatic narratives, contributing to the larger field of cultural studies.

Drawing upon monster theory and vampire studies, the dissertation offers a detailed analysis of five key plays: Liz Lochhead’s *Dracula* (1985), Conor McPherson’s *St. Nicholas* (1997), Stephen Briggs’ *The Truth* (2000) and *Monstrous Regiment* (2001), and Moira Buffini’s *A Vampire Story* (2008). Through close readings of these texts, the study argues that these plays utilise the vampire figure to explore the complex interplay between the construction of identity, the negotiation of power dynamics and the subversion of social norms within a world increasingly shaped by economic forces, technological

¹ This book discusses the effects of monsters like vampires, ghosts and werewolves in performance arts, particularly in melodrama, and the role of theatre in the evolution of these figures in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

² This article attempts to emphasise the crucial role of theatre in the development of the 19th-century vampire image.

³ This dissertation examines how the vampire figure is used thematically in French, English, and American melodramas from 1820 to 1897.

advancements and evolving cultural values. By drawing upon these themes, this dissertation investigates how the plays engage with the enduring appeal of the vampire myth as a means of interrogating the conditions of the 20th and 21st centuries. In so doing, the analysis situates the plays within their specific cultural and historical contexts and traces the development of the vampire from the literary past through a contemporary lens.

By deviating from the conventional dissertation structure, the dissertation, however, proposes an unorthodox approach to investigating the multifaceted phenomenon of the vampire and vampirism. While the conventional format (which employs separate chapters first for extensive theoretical expositions in the context of methodology and then for examination of the included works in theses) offers a valuable framework, it may not be the most optimal approach for this specific topic. This deviation is justified by two main reasons. Firstly, the sheer volume and diversity of theories surrounding vampires and vampirism render a traditional, lengthy presentation of each theory potentially cumbersome as well as tedious. Secondly, the rigidity of the conventional dissertation format may struggle to fully capture and reflect the inherent allure, emotional resonance and dynamism associated with the vampire figure. A more fluid and engaging analytical approach seems to be necessary for this rapidly evolving and ever-changing concept. The dissertation therefore utilises an integrated approach to analysis, weaving theoretical frameworks directly into the close readings of the selected plays rather than presenting them in separate, dedicated chapters. This approach allows for a more nuanced and dynamic engagement with the complexities of vampirism and demonstrates how theoretical concepts illuminate the specific anxieties and concerns addressed by the relevant plays.

Each chapter of the dissertation engages with a specific facet of the vampire myth and illuminates its capacity to embody and reflect a range of contemporary anxieties. Chapter One lays the foundation for the dissertation by first defining the concept of 'vampire' and examining various definitions and interpretations of the term. The chapter then provides a comprehensive exploration of the vampire myth's historical evolution and its enduring cultural significance. Tracing the vampire's trajectory from ancient Mesopotamian demons and the figure of Lilith in Jewish folklore through its varied literary incarnations in Romantic and Victorian literature and into its diverse cinematic representations, the chapter establishes the key characteristics and symbolic resonance of

this enduring figure. By examining how the vampire has been used to embody anxieties related to mortality, sexuality, gender and social change across cultures and time periods, Chapter One provides the necessary historical and cultural context for understanding the specific ways in which the vampire is reimagined and utilised in the selected contemporary British plays. The chapter argues that the vampire's enduring appeal lies in its remarkable adaptability and its capacity to reflect the evolving anxieties of each generation.

Chapter Two introduces the five selected contemporary British plays—Lochhead's *Dracula*, McPherson's *St. Nicholas*, Briggs' *The Truth and Monstrous Regiment*, and Buffini's *A Vampire Story*—and their respective playwrights by situating them within the dynamic landscape of late 20th and early 21st-century British theatre. This chapter considers the plays' social, cultural and theatrical influences, exploring the unique challenges and opportunities presented by staging the vampire, a figure traditionally associated with the visual excesses of film. By analysing how the limitations and possibilities of the theatrical medium shape the representation of the supernatural and monstrous on stage, Chapter Two questions how these playwrights utilise innovative theatrical strategies (such as minimalist staging, meta-theatricality and the manipulation of language and sound) to convey the vampire's transgressive nature and unsettling power.

Chapter Three examines the vampire as a potent symbol of the anxieties and contradictions inherent in late capitalism and neoliberal ideologies, particularly as they intersect with consumerism and its potential alternatives. By focusing on the vampire's consumption of blood as a symbolic act of economic and existential exploitation, the chapter aims to demonstrate how these plays critique the dehumanising effects of a system that prioritises profit over human well-being and social justice. The chapter also considers the possibilities for resistance and the seeds of alternatives embedded within these critiques, such as those presented within certain interpretations of communism.

Chapter Four explores the vampire's transgressive potential to disrupt normative categories of gender and sexuality, focusing on how these plays interrogate the fluidity of desire, the formation of queer communities and the performance of identity. The exploration intersects with the Gothic and its queer iterations. As William Hughes and

Andrew Smith (2009b) note, the “Gothic has, in a sense, always been ‘queer’” (p. 1). The chapter builds upon this idea and the theoretical frameworks of the uncanny, which Freud (1955) defines as that “class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (p. 220) and its queer counterpart, the queer uncanny. Analysing *Dracula*, *St. Nicholas*, *Monstrous Regiment* and *A Vampire Story*, the chapter focuses on how the vampire’s liminal nature—its existence between life and death, human and monster, masculine and feminine—becomes a site for challenging heteronormative assumptions and exploring alternative models of intimacy, belonging and self-discovery. The vampire’s inherent ‘otherness’ positions it as both “different [...] and] unavoidably associated with the non-queer, the normative” (Hughes & Smith, 2009b, p. 3) and thereby highlights the tension between conformity and subversion. Through the lens of queer Gothic, which explores liminal spaces and non-normative characters (Haefele-Thomas, 2023a, p. 4), and the queer uncanny, the chapter examines the homoerotic subtext of the bite and other vampiric tropes.

Chapter Five examines how *Dracula* and *A Vampire Story* utilise the vampire to engage with the anxieties and possibilities of the posthuman condition. Focusing on how the vampire transcends traditional notions of embodiment, mortality and identity, this chapter explores how the plays interrogate the blurring of boundaries between the organic and the technological, the human and the non-human as well as the self and the other. As N. Katherine Hayles (1999b) argues, the posthuman is “an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components” (p. 4) whose boundaries are in constant flux. Analysing themes of transformation, transcendence and the loss of self, the chapter demonstrates how the vampire reflects anxieties surrounding technology’s impact on the body by “privileging informational pattern over material instantiation” (Hayles, 1999b, p. 2) and challenging the very definition of what it means to be human. Furthermore, by exploring the metaphorical resonance between vampirism and viral contagion, particularly in the context of the AIDS epidemic, the chapter argues that the plays utilise the vampire to explore the fear of infection and the othering of the infected. Echoing Sander Gilman’s (1988) observation that diseases like AIDS become focal points for societal anxieties and canvases onto which “cultural fears and prejudices are projected” (pp. 179–180), the chapter examines how these anxieties surrounding bodily vulnerability and the precariousness of identity manifest in a technologically mediated world.

Ultimately, the dissertation demonstrates that the enduring power of the vampire myth resides in its remarkable adaptability, its capacity to embody and reflect the evolving anxieties of each generation. By examining these five contemporary British plays through the interconnected lenses of neoliberalism, queer theory and posthumanism, this study reveals how the vampire continues to function as a potent symbol for exploring the complexities of identity, power and social change in a world increasingly shaped by economic forces, technological advancements and evolving cultural values. In their diverse and often unsettling portrayals of the vampire, these plays challenge the audience to confront their own fears and desires, thereby prompting critical reflections on the forces that shape their individual and collective experiences in the 21st century and beyond.



CHAPTER ONE

HISTORY AND CONCEPT

1.1. WHAT IS A VAMPIRE?

Vampires are arguably one of the most popular among all mythological and supernatural monsters as they exist in almost all cultures and folklore around the world. Owing to their emergence and existence in such a wide range of geographies and cultural narratives, there are inevitably myriad definitions of what a vampire is. It is pertinent to examine dictionary definitions of this phenomenon to establish a foundational understanding before exploring its cultural and literary variations. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) defines the word ‘vampire’ as

A preternatural being of a malignant nature (in the original and usual form of the belief, a reanimated corpse), supposed to seek nourishment, or do harm, by sucking the blood of sleeping persons; a man or woman abnormally endowed with similar habits.

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* likewise specifically mentions victims of a vampire as “the reanimated body of a dead person believed to come from the grave at night and suck the blood of persons asleep” (n.d.). In Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, for instance, Count Dracula sucks the blood of his victims while they are asleep as mentioned in both definitions. However, unlike the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, the *Collins English Dictionary* defines the word ‘vampire’ as “(in European folklore) a corpse that rises nightly from its grave to drink the blood of the living” (n.d.) without mentioning that a vampire sucks the blood of sleeping people. This comparison reveals a noticeable discrepancy, highlighting the variability of definitions across sources.

While other widely used dictionaries such as the *Cambridge Dictionary*⁴, *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*⁵ and *Macmillan Dictionary*⁶ give more or less similar definitions to that of the *Collins English Dictionary*, the core characteristic of a

⁴ “An imaginary creature, said to be a dead person returned to life, who sucks blood from people at night” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.-b).

⁵ “In stories, a dead person that sucks people’s blood by biting their necks” (Longman Dictionary, n.d.).

⁶ “A character in stories who appears at night to bite people’s necks and suck their blood” (Macmillan Dictionary, n.d.).

vampire as a blood-sucking creature is common in all definitions mentioned above and the characteristic of it as a dead or reanimated creature is also common in all except the *Macmillian Dictionary*. The existence of a diverse array of definitions for the term ‘vampire’ across reputable dictionaries highlights the interpretive fluidity and evolving nature of folklore and contributes to a nuanced understanding of this mythical and cultural phenomenon.

Although information about the nature of vampires (‘malignant’) and the purpose of their feeding on people by sucking their blood (‘to seek nourishment or do harm’) is given only in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, no information about their appearance is given in any of the dictionaries. In spite of the fact that vampires are distinguished from other supernatural monsters by their pointed teeth, most probably due to the influence of popular vampire movies like *Dracula* (1931), *Blade* (1998) and *Underworld* (2003), none of the definitions in these dictionaries gives any information about their pointed teeth or any features of their appearance. In line with the description of a vampire in fictional works, *The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (2005), published online in 2006 on *Oxford Reference*, defines a vampire as “in European folklore, a corpse supposed to leave its grave at night to drink the blood of the living by biting their necks with long pointed canine teeth” (Knowles, 2006). Even though this definition is an insufficient one in terms of explaining its appearance, it includes a very detailed description of teeth and it even specifies which set of teeth is long and pointed. In most of the popular movies and TV series, they are depicted as creatures ‘with long pointed canine teeth’ yet in a few TV series like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003), *The Strain* (2014–2017) and *Blood* (2015), they are depicted with long pointed incisor teeth or with all teeth pointed like a shark. Furthermore, “in folklore, the teeth are not especially prominent. [...] Some vampires do not even use their teeth to draw blood” (Barber, 1988, p. 44) since they are believed to use their pointed tongue to suck the blood of their victims (Zelenin, 1927, p. 394). Most probably, the reason why the dictionary definitions do not include information about the teeth of vampires is that their long, pointed teeth have become prominent with the emergence of popular fictional works like novels as well as movies. Dictionary definitions, on the other hand, are rather based on older narratives like folklore.

Overall, it appears that the definitions in the dictionaries do not provide enough information about their characteristics and how they look. Only very brief and rather

general inclusive information can be obtained from dictionaries. Given the limitations of dictionary definitions, a more comprehensive understanding of the vampire requires examining its depiction across a wider range of sources, including folklore, literature and popular culture. According to many such narratives, a vampire is an imaginary supernatural monster. In fictional and literary works, a vampire is depicted as a supernatural creature, resurrecting in human form after its death, transforming into an unageing immortal being. It is obliged to drink fresh human blood in order to survive and it does not eat or drink any other nutrient except for blood (the TV series, *True Blood* (2008-2014) and *Twilight* (2008)). It cannot come out into the sunlight as exposure to direct sunlight will burn it to death. In some narratives, it is mentioned that it has to sleep in a coffin with the soil of the grave in which it was buried when it died until sunset (Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and the TV Series, *The Strain*). Since it is dead, it is often depicted as having pale skin, no pulse and thereby a very low body temperature (the movie, *Twilight*). Its canine teeth are long and pointed in order to suck the blood of its victims. In some narratives, its ears and fingernails are also long and pointed (Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and the TV Series, *The Strain*). It has an extremely strong and durable body as well as heightened senses of sight, hearing and smell and it is capable of moving extremely fast (the movies, *Blade* and *Underworld*, the TV series *The Vampire Diaries* (2009–2017)).

These characteristics mentioned above cover the concept of 'vampire' along with the dictionary definitions in general terms, however, they do not necessarily conform to all vampire narratives in vampire folklore. For instance, unlike the depictions in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the popular movies and TV series, a vampire's skin "colour is never pale, as one would expect of a corpse: his face commonly is described as florid, or of a healthy colour, or dark, and this may be attributed to his habit of drinking blood" (Barber, 1988, p. 41) in vampire folklore. Likewise, in different cultures, different characteristics are attributed to vampires:

[A]ll vampires are not resuscitated corpses. Numerous vampires are disembodied demonic spirits. In this vein are the numerous vampires and vampire-like demons of Indian mythology and the *lamiai* of Greece. Vampires can also appear as the disembodied spirit of a dead person who retains a substantial existence; like many reported ghosts, these vampires can be mistaken for a fully embodied living corpse. (Melton, 2011, p. xxx)

The very reason for this variety in the definition of a vampire is “because each culture of people, from their various time periods and from their various locations, has feared different things” (Bane, 2010, p. 3) and therefore each culture had to produce creatures with characteristics conforming to its fears in its imaginations and narratives.

1.2. THE ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF VAMPIRES

Since there are various definitions of vampires in different cultures and time periods, it seems highly difficult to give a complete and all-inclusive definition for them. Nevertheless, the examination of their origin and history will facilitate an understanding of what a vampire is. Regardless of its various characteristics, a vampire is, above all, a monster in its essence and it falls into the category of monsters as one of their species. Consequently, an examination of vampires should commence with an exploration of the concept of ‘monster’ as an umbrella term.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word ‘monster’ as

a mythical creature which is part animal and part human, or combines elements of two or more animal forms, and is frequently of great size and ferocious appearance. Later, more generally: any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening. (n.d.)

While they are not imagined, nor narrated as half-animal, half-human creatures like centaurs and harpies or as a combination of more than one animal like chimaeras and griffins, in most vampire folklore, vampires have long pointed nails and pointed teeth that resemble the claws and fangs of wild animals. In addition to their ability to transform into animals, they are portrayed as ugly and frightening creatures. In Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897/1983), Count Dracula is likewise depicted as

[...] a tall, thin man, with a beaky nose and black moustache and pointed beard [...]. His face was not a good face; it was hard, and cruel, and sensual, and his big white teeth, that looked all the whiter because his lips were so red, were pointed like an animal’s. (1983, pp. 147–148)

In line with the dictionary definition, Count Dracula (as a monster and vampire) has a ‘ferocious, ugly and frightening appearance’, not to mention that his teeth are sharp like a wild animal’s. He is also narrated as being capable of transforming into a bat, a wolf

and a large dog. As the most famous vampire character in literature, Count Dracula is presented in line with the definition of a monster with his characteristics in the novel.

The word monster was first used in English between 1387–1400 with the publication of *The Canterbury Tales*. The history of monsters is, however, as old as humanity itself and the word has a religious origin. Timothy Beal gives the etymological analysis of the word monster in his *Religion and Its Monsters* (2023):

“[M]onster” derives from the Latin *monstrum*, which is related to the verbs *monstrare* (“show” or “reveal”) and *monere* (“warn” or “portend”), and which sometimes refers to a divine portent that reveals the will or judgment of God or the gods. (p. 18)

Although monsters are often associated with demonic and evil entities, the etymological examination of the word indicates that they are originally related to theology. In this sense, monsters are religiously considered as the embodiment of a ‘divine portent,’ warning people of the upcoming ominousness as harbingers of doom. They are simply believed to show that something is happening in society that is against the will of God.

Comprehending the historical and cultural impact of monsters within societies requires a meticulous etymological exploration of the term, which unfolds profound insights. This raises the question: are creatures imbued with considerable religious significance truly products of imagination? Put differently, does the existence of monsters extend beyond the realms of mere fantasy? Examining historical perspectives reveals that the term ‘monster’ initially encompassed phenomena beyond supernatural beings. The assertions of the esteemed French surgeon and scholar, Ambroise Paré (circa 1510–90), who is “considered one of the fathers of modern forensic pathology” (Weinstock, 2020, p. 4), provide insight into this broader historical usage. Within his seminal work, *On Monsters and Marvels*, Paré (1982) furnishes a comprehensive list enumerating the causative factors behind these ‘monsters’ and demonstrates the application of the concept to human physical anomalies:

The first is the glory of God. The second, His wrath. The third, too great a quantity of semen. The fourth, too small a quantity. The fifth, imagination. The sixth, the narrowness or smallness of the womb. The seventh, the unbecoming sitting position of the mother, who, while pregnant, remains seated too long with her thighs crossed or pressed against her stomach. The eighth, by a fall or blows struck against the stomach of the mother during pregnancy. The ninth, by hereditary or accidental illnesses. The tenth, by the rotting or corruption of the semen. The eleventh, by the

mingling or mixture of seed. The twelfth, by the artifice of wandering beggars. The thirteenth, by Demons or Devils. (p. 3)

Paré is, of course, not talking about supernatural monsters here but rather lists the accepted causes of “monstrous birth[s]”⁷ (1982, p. 57), which later became a branch of biological science and is known as teratology, the study of birth defects. He defines monsters as “things that appear outside the course of Nature (and are usually signs of some forthcoming misfortune), such as a child who is born with one arm, [...], and additional members over and above the ordinary” (Paré, 1982, p. 3). He does not imply but explicitly defines people with birth defects as ‘monsters’ and ‘things.’ Although at first glance it may seem extremely startling and inhumane, this was how society accepted and defined them at the time. Another very interesting point is that superstitions are listed along with scientific causes of deformed births by a scholar in causes 1, 2, 12 and 13. People with birth defects were not only considered as omens of ominousness but were also demonstrated in public for a fee in the ancient Roman and Greek periods. It is quite ironic that people’s treatment of ‘monstrous births’ seems to be far more monstrous. The etymology and religious origin of the term monster, which has later begun to be used to define purely imaginary supernatural creatures, actually enable us to have an idea about the social functions of creatures appearing under the category of monsters.

Unlike the word monster, there is no consensus on where the word vampire’s origin is based and myriad linguists as well as scholars (such as Franz Miklosich, Montague Summers, Stephan Hock and Johann Christoph Harenberg) accept one of the four distinct viewpoints on the derivation of the term, suggesting that the term may have Turkish, Greek, Slavic or Hungarian roots (Ragagnin, 2013, p. 63). The first viewpoint is that “the word vampire and its Slavic synonyms *upior*, *uper*, and *upyr* are all derivatives of the Turkish *uber* (witch)” (K. M. Wilson, 1985, p. 577) or “*obur* «glutton» ([...] «the swallower, somebody who gulps down»)” (Ragagnin, 2013, p. 64). In such Turkic languages as Kazakh and Kirghiz, the verbal stem *op-*, from which *obur* is derived, means “to eat up, gorge, swallow” (Ragagnin, 2013, p. 64). The Turkish origins of the word vampire, especially *obur*, make perfect sense when the characteristics of a vampire are

⁷ The term ‘Monstrous birth’, denoting children born with physical deformities such as unusual body parts or excess limbs, often seen as divine signs, particularly in the medieval period, was also linked, according to a tradition persisting until the 18th century, to the moral decay of mothers (Martins, Duarte, & Coelho, 2015, p. 120).

taken into consideration as a ‘glutton’ is a person who eats too much and whose need for food seems to be unquenchable. A vampire is likewise famous for its unquenchable thirst for blood. *Uber*, with its meaning ‘witch’, on the other hand, may, at first, seem to be irrelevant to the word vampire; however, it is known that vampiric monsters narrated as blood-drinking evil female creatures exist in some Siberian folklore, for instance.

Despite the fact that the term *vampir* is used to refer to a vampire in the modern Turkish languages, a creature named *obur* is described in Turkic folklore as

a malevolent being, very large in posture and with a very big head, tailed; able to fly and breathe fire, and shapeshift into different creatures, especially wolves, dogs, cats and other animals, or a ball of fire. It is said to devour everything that it encounters, as well as to boil people in a cauldron, eat them and then bring them back to life with a breath, and carry them back to any location from where they were kidnapped [...]. (Stachowski & Stachowski, 2017, pp. 653–654)

While the physical characteristics of *obur* do not resemble those of vampires as we are familiar with them in popular culture, its abilities to shapeshift, devour people and bring humans back from the dead are reminiscent of a vampire. Furthermore, apart from its physical form, in line with the term *uber*, which means witch, *obur*’s depiction above as a shapeshifting being utilising a cauldron and resurrecting people from the dead with a breath brings to mind a witch practising witchcraft.

The second viewpoint on the derivation of the term vampire is that it comes from the Greek verb *πι* (*Pi*), which means ‘to drink’ (Summers, 2003, p. 19). Since a vampire’s hallmark is drinking the blood of his victims in most narratives, it would be quite plausible to suggest that the term derives from this Greek verb. The third viewpoint on the term cited as the most probable derivation suggests that it is of Slavic origin, namely Serbian origin referring to the word *вамнуп/vampir* which is also claimed to have derived from the Lithuanian verb *wempti* (K. M. Wilson, 1985, p. 578). Just like the Greek verb *Pi*, the Lithuanian verb *wempti* also means ‘to drink’. Finally, the fourth claim, which suggests that the term is of Hungarian origin and the Hungarian word *vampir* is the source of the word vampire, is widely accepted by American and English writers (K. M. Wilson, 1985, p. 578). One or more of these four above-mentioned views, particularly the first and third ones, are often cited in vampire narratives regarding the etymology of the term vampire.

The etymology of the term is, however, not the only concept subject to controversy; the date regarding the first examples of the term in Western languages and literature is also controversial:

[T]he earliest recorded uses of the term “vampire” appear in French, English, and Latin, and they refer to vampirism in Poland, Russia, and Macedonia (Southern Yugoslavia). The second and more sweeping introduction of the word occurs in German, French, and English, and records the Serbian vampire epidemic of 1725-32. (K. M. Wilson, 1985, p. 9)

Although there are various records and dates associated with the first introduction of the term into European languages, almost all refer to Slavic sources, superstitions or incidences. The first use of the term in English is specified as 1732 by *Webster Dictionary* (n.d.) and as 1734 by *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989). However, the term is also claimed to have been introduced by Paul Ricaut (Rycaut) in his *State of the Greek and Armenian Churches* in 1679 according to Henry John Todd’s augmented edition of *Dr. Johnson’s English Dictionary* (1827) and Walter William Skeat’s *Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (1884).

Even though the first appearance of the word “‘upir’ (an early form of the word later to become ‘vampire’) in a document referring to a Russian prince as ‘Upir Lichy’ [which means ‘wicked vampire’]” (Melton, 2011, p. xxi) dates back to 1047, vampiric beings under various names can be traced back to ancient times through mythological, theological and folkloric narratives. According to Montague Summers (1968), the vampire figure can be traced back to ancient times, with Greek legends depicting deceased heroes revitalised by consuming fresh blood (p. 17). While these early accounts share the essential act of blood consumption with modern vampire lore, they differed in their physical manifestation: the ancient vampire was often a spectral entity capable of inflicting physical harm rather than a reanimated corpse (Summers, 1968, p. 1).

One of the most infamous and ancient of these vampiric beings is Lilith from Hebrew folklore, who is mentioned in the Babylonian *Gilgamesh Epic* (c. 2000 B.C.E.). She is depicted as “a vampire harlot who was unable to bear children and whose breasts were dry. She is pictured as a beautiful young girl with owl’s feet (indicative of her nocturnal life)” (Melton, 2011, p. 424). In the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, written during the Middle Ages, a different version of Lilith’s story exists, wherein she is referred to as the

first wife of the biblical Adam as a part of the story of creation by contrasting the standard story of Adam and his helpmate Eve (Velkes, 1993, p. 19). This story presents an alternative to the standard Biblical account, where Eve is Adam's first partner. In the story, Lilith and Adam are created from the same material, the earth, representing their equality (Vogelsang, 1985, p. 152). Adam and Lilith disagree over who should take the dominant stance during sexual intercourse and stemming from her desire for equality, Lilith's refusal to submit leads her to leave the Garden of Eden (Vogelsang, 1985, pp. 152–153). She then encounters three angels who tell her she must either return to Adam or face the consequence of her children dying. In her response, she agrees to claim vampiric abilities over babies on the condition that she pledges to avoid any babies that wear an amulet with the names of the three angels (Vogelsang, 1985, p. 152). God subsequently creates Eve from Adam's rib as a partner created to be his helpmate, rather than an equal (Velkes, 1993, p. 20). The text does not mention the sin of Adam and Eve or Lilith's jealousy leading to a vow to kill babies, though this is stated in other versions of the Lilith mythos and Lilith's image becomes one of a demon after she leaves Adam (Vogelsang, 1985, p. 153; Velkes, 1993, p. 21).

It is also stated that Lilith especially hates the sexual mating of the individuals she has attacked and takes out her anger on human children by sucking their blood and suffocating them. It is likewise believed that she causes all possible complications such as infertility and miscarriages to women attempting to be pregnant and have children. In addition to her hostility towards mothers and children, Lilith is often narrated as a *succubus*, “[a] female demon, the feminine to the male *incubus*⁸, a night fiend that visits men in their sleep to torment their dreams and to engage in sexual relations” (Bunson, 2000, p. 248) and men sleeping in a house alone are believed to be in danger of being overtaken by Lilith in Hebrew folklore. She has vampiric characteristics as a *succubus* since she is considered to consume the vitality of her victims (rather than their blood) with nocturnal activities that make them utterly exhausted and debilitated by incessant sexual performances.

Believed to be the progenitor of all vampires and evil, Lilith seems to have been created in human imagination specifically as an entity utilised to explain any problems

⁸ “A type of male demon, the masculine to the feminine *succubus* (see also), that visits women during the night to torment them and to have sexual intercourse” (Bunson, 1993, p. 132).

that occur during childbirth or unexpected deaths. Dating back to 2000 B.C.E. with its story alternative to the story of creation in the scriptures as a female vampire figure who rebels against God and patriarchal norms, Lilith is frequently cited in vampire narratives. As Adam's first wife, Lilith appears to be used as a figure pointing out that women disobeying their husbands and not submitting to their wishes will lose their fertility and eventually become demonised like Lilith.

An understanding of the historical and cultural context of such ancient figures necessitates an exploration of the regions from which they emerged. The region of Mesopotamia encompassing the fertile lands amidst the Euphrates and Tigris rivers holds significant historical importance as it marks the inception of humanity's recorded history and serves as the birthplace of several ancient civilisations. It is therefore noteworthy that the genesis of the emergence of ominous blood-sucking creatures can be traced back to this very region. Archaeological remnants unearthed from the ancient ruins of the once preeminent civilisations that ruled over Mesopotamia are indicative of the earliest vestiges of the conviction in vampirism. The iconographic representations of entities consuming human blood on excavated pottery artefacts and cuneiform tablets originating from the First Babylonian Dynasty (eighteenth century BC) indicate the existence of a profound apprehension towards blood-consuming spirits and demons in antiquity (Righi, 2012, pp. 6–7). The initial inhabitants of Babylon, the Sumerians, for instance, held a belief system encompassing three distinct classifications of spirits: “ghosts, semi- or half-demons, and devils of the most fearsome nature” (Bunson, 2000, p. 15). As the uttermost terrifying demon from the mythology of the ancient Assyrians and Babylonians, *Ekimmu*⁹ or the “Departed Spirit” (Summers, 2003, p. 219) is an ancient vampiric being often mentioned along with *Lilith* as the first of vampires in vampire folklore. *Ekimmu* is the spirit of an individual who succumbs to an unnatural and untimely demise, characterised by such phenomena as drowning, warfare or murder or whose body is left unburied in an isolated place like a desert. This encompasses those who are devoid of relatives to conduct proper burial rituals, not properly tended to by their family members through the offerings of food and beverages at their tombs or who prematurely pass away without having

⁹ The variations of *Ekimmu* are *Êkimmu*, *Edimmu* and *Êdimmu* (Bane, 2010, p. 126) and its meaning is “the thing which is snatched away” (Thompson, 1903, p. xxii). *Ekimmu* is occasionally cited as *Utukku* in certain sources. Despite being regarded as distinct entities, they are often used interchangeably due to their highly similar characteristics (Summers, 1928, p. 219).

fulfilled significant obligations and encountering love. These convictions concerning *Ekimmu* are grounded in cultural traditions that ascribe spiritual significance to the manner in which an individual passes on from the earthly plane.

As for the characteristics of this entity, deemed to be a malevolent spirit unable to attain repose in its grave and compelled to traverse the earth on account of the aforementioned factors rendering it ineligible for admission to the underworld, it is believed that *Ekimmu* exacts retribution upon the living by invading residences and engendering havoc and mischance as well as sucking both their blood and energy. Evidently, ancient people correlated any form of adversity, inconvenience and deaths potentially befalling every household with preternatural untimely deaths which seemed inexplicable to them and particularly with the neglect of rituals regarding the burial of the dead. It can therefore be inferred that *Ekimmu* is the embodiment of fear in the face of these unpredictable or unmanageable circumstances in the collective human psyche.

Whilst *Ekimmu* and *Lilith* are frequently cited regarding the origins of vampires, vampiric entities deemed to kill people by sucking their vitality, particularly their blood, appear in diverse cultures and regions, with varying names and characterisations. In the interest of brevity, this study will not concern itself with explaining all of them; it will only name a few preeminent ones, including Indian *Rakhshasa*, Chinese *Jiangshi*, Mayan *Camazotz*, West African *Obayifo*, Egyptian *Sekhmet*, Greek *Empusa*, Roman *Strix*, Romanian *Strigoi*, Hungarian *Nosferatu* and Arabian *Ghoul* (Summers, 2003). Furthermore, the characteristics and physical appearances of these entities are as abundant and diverse as their names. Due to this very fact, the literary historian Brian Forest aptly defines the vampire as ‘the monster with a thousand faces’ in his 1989 book *The Monster with a Thousand Faces* and it is not erroneous to henceforth define them as ‘the monster with a thousand names.’

In addition to vampire myths and folklore, two prominent historical personages, originating from Eastern Europe are often associated with the concept of vampire and vampirism: Vlad III Tepes (Vlad the Impaler), a fifteenth-century *voivode*¹⁰ or prince of Wallachia, Romania and Elizabeth Bathory (the Blood Countess), a seventeenth-century

¹⁰ Also, *vaivode*; “(in Eastern European history) a local ruler or governor, especially the semi-independent rulers of Transylvania, Wallachia, or Moldova before c1700” (“voivode”, n.d.).

Hungarian noblewoman. Arguably, one of the paramount rationales for the association of vampirism with these two figures and their widespread notoriety is that they are purported to be the source of inspiration for Bram Stoker during the composition of his seminal novel, *Dracula* (Miller, 1999, pp. 187–189). Vlad III Tepes is also known as Vladimir Dracula Țepeș¹¹ or Vlad Dracula and he inherited the title ‘Dracula’ from his father Vlad II Dracul, the title indicating that he was a member of “the Order of the Dragon, a Christian brotherhood dedicated to fighting the [Muslim Ottoman] Turks, in 1431” (Melton, 2011, p. 791). The term ‘Dracula’ originates from the Romanian word ‘dracul’, which can denote either ‘devil’ or ‘dragon’ and the suffix ‘-a’ serves to suggest a filial association with the progenitor, thus ‘Dracula’ can be translated as the ‘son of Dracul, dragon or devil’ (Beresford, 2011, p. 77). Accordingly, it can be suggested that Stoker borrowed the name of his renowned character, Dracula, from Vlad Dracula, wherein the name’s etymology encapsulates a sinister connotation as ‘the son of the devil’. Stoker evidently infers that the characterisation of Count Dracula within the novel is grounded in the actual historical Dracula, Vlad Tepes as suggested by the narrative dialogue of Dr. Abraham Van Helsing in *Dracula*:

I have asked my friend Arminius, of Buda-Pesth University, to make his record; and, from all the means that are, he tells me of what he [Dracula] has been. He must, indeed, have been that Voivode Dracula who won his name against the Turk, over the great river on the very frontier of Turkey-land. If it be so, then was he no common man; for in that time, and for centuries after, he was spoken of as the cleverest and the most cunning, as well as the bravest of the sons of the “land beyond the forest.” That mighty brain and that iron resolution went with him to his grave, and are even now arrayed against us. The Draculas were, says Arminius, a great and noble race, though now and again were scions who were held by their coevals to have had dealings with the Evil One. They learned his secrets in the Scholomance, amongst the mountains over Lake Hermanstadt, where the devil claims the tenth scholar as his due. In the records are such words as “stregoica” - witch; “ordog” and “pokol” - Satan and hell; and in one manuscript this very Dracula is spoken of as “wampyr” which we all understand too well. (Stoker, 1897/1983, pp. 240–241)

Given the fact that Vlad Tepes engaged in battle with the Ottoman Turks and was bestowed the title of *voivode*, while also being recognised by the notable appellation of Dracula, it is evident that the personage mentioned here pertains to none other than Vlad Dracula. Furthermore, the allusion to the name of the prominent scholar Arminius

¹¹ It is pronounced as ‘tse-pesh’ and means ‘impaler’ in Romanian (Porter, 2001, p. 17).

Vamber, a veritable person with whom Stoker had multiple encounters, suggests that Stoker was acquainted with the account of Vlad Dracula through Vamber (Miller, 1999, p. 191). The references to the terms 'Evil One' and 'Satan' ultimately appear to bear considerable correlation with 'the son of the Devil' which is the literal meaning of Dracula.

Born in Schassburg (a.k.a. Sighisoara), a town in Transylvania, Vlad III Tepes (1431-1476) is known to have acquired his epithet 'the Impaler' owing to the gruesome and barbaric methods he employed to torture and execute his adversaries. He definitely lived up to his names as 'Dracula, the son of the devil' and 'Tepes, the Impaler' as his victims were subjected to a multitude of gruesome acts including decapitation, mutilation, dismemberment, burning, flaying, boiling, live burial and cannibalism (McNally & Florescu, 1994, p. 91). Vlad's cruel tactics were not limited to instances involving Turkish prisoners of war. Instead, he employed such tactics within his own homeland as a means of resolving issues of political rivalry and consolidating his power and exerting his authority.

Another notable vampiric persona in historical records is Elizabeth Bathory, a member of the Hungarian nobility who lived during the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Bathory was alleged to have engaged in the torture and murder of adolescent females with the purported intent of bathing in their blood, based on her belief that the act would preserve her youthfulness and physical attractiveness. Her alleged actions, considered excessive even for her time, reflected a disturbing proclivity for inflicting pain and suffering.

Vampires have held a captivating presence in literature for centuries, their enduring appeal rooted in ancient myths, folklore and the dark legends surrounding historical figures like Vlad the Impaler and Báthory the Blood Countess. This potent combination of historical and mythological elements has fuelled the creation of a vast and varied body of fiction, encompassing novels, novellas, short stories, and poetry, all of which explore the human fascination with immortality through the figure of the undead. While John William Polidori's novella *The Vampyre* (1819) is often cited as the first vampire narrative in the English language, it is important to acknowledge that the literary origins

of the vampire extend back to earlier examples, notably within German poetry and translations, solidifying the early manifestation of vampiric entities in verse.

The German poem *Der Vampir*, written by Heinrich August Ossenfelder and first published in 1748, is commonly regarded as the earliest notable literary work that employs the theme of vampirism. The persona in the poem expresses frustration which results from courting a woman who seems dismissive of his efforts. In response, his thoughts are consumed by the notion of transforming into a vampire, clandestinely entering her chamber at night in order to kiss her while simultaneously draining her vital essence by means of bloodsucking. Another of the earliest poems on the subject in German is Gottfried August Bürger's *Lenore* which acquired widespread recognition following its publication in 1773. The poem portrays a spectral horseman assuming the identity of the deceased lover of the eponymous female protagonist, thereby abducting her on a haunting nocturnal journey across a sinister landscape. The climax of the narrative reveals the rider's true identity as Death, personified as a skeletal figure with a scythe and an hourglass. Although there is no overt narration of a bloodsucking vampire in the poem other than the return of the dead lover, its influence on vampire literature is noteworthy as it includes enough association with vampirism (Twitchell, 1981, p. 33). The poem's reach and influence were further amplified by William Taylor of Norwich's highly regarded English translation, published in the *Monthly Review* in 1796, making its themes accessible to a broader audience and solidifying its place in the development of vampire lore.

Finally, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe elevated vampirism to a subject of literary significance through his poem, *Die Braut von Korinth*¹², first published in 1797. The narrative relates the account of a Christian woman compelled to enter a life of monasticism as a means of obstructing her union with her Greek pagan lover. The profound sorrow that she has felt ultimately culminates in her death and transformation into a vampire, driven by her intense desire to accompany her lover each night. These three German poems have played a pivotal role in the incorporation of vampires as a literary motif in English literature and have been the most influential and most cited works in vampire literature as a source of inspiration for English works with the vampire theme.

¹² *The Bride of Corinth*

Being inspired by the German works on vampirism, the British poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Southey, Lord Byron and John Keats wrote the earliest examples of poems with a vampire theme. In 1798, Coleridge authored the first vampire poem, *Christabel*¹³ portraying the ominous presence of a vampire preying upon young girls and thereby establishing the first vampire character Geraldine in English literature. In parallel with Coleridge, Southey wrote *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801), a poem centred around his protagonist, Thalaba and his slaying of a vampire dwelling within the body of his late bride, Oneiza.

Introducing the concept of the Byronic Hero both through his own character and literary works, Lord Byron established the first male vampire in English literature with the publication of his poem *The Giaour* (1813). The protagonist depicted in the narrative does not embody the characteristics of a demon or any form of supernatural entity; he is rather a nobleman suffering the affliction of vampirism following a curse cast upon him by a Muslim Turk after discovering his affair with his wife, Leila. Finally, with his poem *The Lamia* in 1819, Keats subsequently revived the ancient mythological figures of Lamia and Lilith as literary characters and utilised their portrayal to elucidate themes of vampirism and malevolence which result from the non-human characteristics of his heroines. The abovementioned poems have served as a source of inspiration for subsequent vampire narratives, namely short stories and novels, as they introduced a plethora of themes and characters that have been incorporated into contemporary literature.

Inspired by both the German and English poems, the themes of which were vampirism, writers began producing the earliest samples of prose writing, namely short stories, novellas and novels from 1819 onwards. Polidori published a story entitled *The Vampyre; a Tale* in the *New Monthly Magazine* in April 1819 under Lord Byron's name in order to draw quick attention from the literary circle (Gardner, 1991, p. 48). Byron immediately denied the authorship of the story after its publication. Having achieved his goal, Polidori subsequently revealed that he was the author of the story in the next issue of the magazine. In fact, drawing attention was not the only motive behind using Byron's name; Polidori was inspired by a story¹⁴ told by Byron in a friendly contest between

¹³ It was first published in 1816.

¹⁴ The story was planned to be included in a chapter of a novel that Byron just began writing.

Byron, Polidori, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Shelley¹⁵ for writing the most original and scary ghost story in 1816. Furthermore, the vampire in *The Vampyre*, Lord Ruthven is apparently modelled after Byron whose public image was characterised by immoral tendencies, a slightly sinister demeanour, aristocratic lineage, an eloquent charm and a proclivity towards travelling the Orient (Bunson, 2000, p. 37).

As the first vampire story written in English, *The Vampyre* accordingly tells the story of a travelling aristocratic vampire seducing and sucking the blood of young women. With his character Lord Ruthven, Polidori transformed the image of vampires, which had been previously depicted as rural peasants lacking education, sanitation and attractiveness. Unlike Byron's Giaour, the romantic hero in his poem hiding passively in darkness and isolation to spend his cursed life, Polidori's aristocratic vampire Lord Ruthven is an active evil character ready to take action to satisfy his desires. Along with his traditional vampiric characteristics, he is also considered as a Byronic vampire who is "a man proud, moody, cynical, with defiance on his brow, and misery in his heart, a scorner of his kind, implacable in revenge, yet capable of deep and strong affection" (Macaulay, 1848, p. 362). The incorporation of such human characteristics in vampire narratives heightened the fear factor of the narrative by making it more credible and appealing to readers of the time, a technique that Stoker also employed in *Dracula*.

Another notable Gothic work on the vampire theme is James Malcolm Rymer's *Varney the Vampire: Or the Feast of Blood* (1845-1847). It is a highly rich penny dreadful¹⁶ with a total of 220 chapters, which were published in a serialised form on a weekly basis for almost two years. *Varney the Vampire* centres on the eponymous character, Sir Francis Varney, an aristocratic vampire regularly visiting the bedroom of a woman in order to suck her blood. Unlike the previous vampire narratives, Sir Francis Varney commits suicide because of the guilt he feels for not being able to stop his urge to suck blood.

After being dominated by male characters for over 50 years, vampire narratives returned to the traditional seductive female characters in 1872, when the Irish author

¹⁵ As a result of that contest, Mary Shelley likewise started writing her classic gothic horror novel, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818).

¹⁶ The term 'penny dreadful' commonly refers to cheap, serialised booklets printed on low-quality pulp paper sold for a penny. These pamphlets typically feature sensational or macabre narratives written primarily for working class and teenagers.

Sheridan Le Fanu created Carmilla, the most famous female vampire up to date, in his novella “Carmilla”¹⁷. It was originally published in his collection of short stories, *In a Glass Darkly* (1872). In contrast to conventional female vampire archetypes seducing and preying upon young men, Carmilla, a 200-year-old noblewoman, tends to target young women who are about the same age as her when she turned into a vampire. This shift in target suggests a complex exploration of female desire, vulnerability and the power dynamics inherent in the vampire mythos.

Before “Carmilla” was published and also afterwards, a number of relatively less prominent short stories about vampirism were written including William Gilbert’s “The Last Lords of Gardonal” (1867), Anne Crawford’s “A Mystery of the Campagna” (1887), Philip Robinson’s two stories, “The Man-Eating Tree” (1881) and “The Last of the Vampires” (1892), H. G. Wells’ “The Flowering of the Strange Orchid” (1894) and Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s “Good Lady Ducayne” (1896). Ultimately, each of these literary works influenced and paved the way for Stoker’s *Dracula*, which still remains one of the most famous and influential works of vampire literature in history. *Dracula* centres on the story of Count Dracula, an aristocratic vampire from Transylvania, who embarks on a journey to England with the intention of finding new victims. Stoker’s novel was greatly influenced by the traditional beliefs and superstitions pertaining to vampires prevalent in Eastern European cultures and it played a significant role in promoting the image of the vampire as a mysterious, aristocratic figure with a unique and catchy depiction.

Following the publication of *Dracula*, the vampire figure underwent significant evolution and diversification, particularly within the burgeoning realm of cinema and other literary forms. The period between Stoker’s novel and Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) saw various interpretations and adaptations that shaped the vampire’s popular image and expanded its presence across different media. Early cinematic efforts played a crucial role in this evolution. Tod Browning’s 1931 film adaptation, *Dracula*, starring Bela Lugosi, became a cultural touchstone and established a suave, aristocratic vampire archetype distinct from Stoker’s description and earlier folkloric figures (Rhodes, 2024, p. 421). Drawing on Stoker’s character but notably deviating from the novel’s physical descriptions (Rhodes, 2024, pp. 421–422), Lugosi’s portrayal greatly

¹⁷ The title is not italicised because it was not initially published as a standalone book containing only the single work.

influenced how the vampire was perceived by cementing certain cinematic tropes distinct from folklore, such as specific attire and mannerisms (Rhodes, 2024, p. 421). Initiated by this film, the Universal Pictures series continued to develop and popularise this cinematic vampire figure throughout the 1930s and 1940s (Rhodes, 2024, p. 428).

The cinematic evolution of the vampire archetype following *Dracula* saw contrasting interpretations, shaping the genre's visual and narrative conventions. By diverging from Stoker's original depiction and cementing enduring tropes such as formal attire and hypnotic charm (Rhodes, 2024, pp. 421–422, 428), Tod Browning's 1931 adaptation, *Dracula*, established a suave, aristocratic figure through Bela Lugosi's performance. In stark contrast, F.W. Murnau's unauthorised¹⁸ *Nosferatu* (1922) presented a grotesque, animalistic vampire through German Expressionist techniques¹⁹ to evoke psychological unease, epitomised by Count Orlok's bald head and protruding fangs. This divergence continued with Carl Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1932), which employed dreamlike atmospherics and symbolic realism to explore psychological horror over overt supernaturalism (McIver, 2024, pp. 368–378). Collectively, these films have expanded the vampire's cinematic lexicon and balanced Romanticised allure with visceral terror, influencing subsequent horror aesthetics.

Beyond cinema, literary explorations continued to refine and redefine the vampire. While film became increasingly dominant in popular culture, authors in the early to mid-20th century experimented with the vampire figure in various genres. Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's short story "Luella Miller" (1902), for instance, presents a psychic vampire who drains the vitality of those around her. Similarly, Arthur Conan Doyle incorporates vampire-like figures into his "The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire" (1924) and explores naturalistic explanations for seemingly supernatural occurrences (Wisker, 2024, p. 511). These and other literary works from the period demonstrate an ongoing engagement with the vampire archetype and adapt its core elements to reflect contemporary anxieties and narrative styles, often bridging the gap between traditional folklore/Gothic horror and emerging genres.

¹⁸ It faced legal challenges initiated by Bram Stoker's widow, Florence Stoker, concerning copyright infringement (Banks, 2024, pp. 403–406).

¹⁹ Such as stark lighting, distorted sets and shadow play (Heiss, 2024, pp. 382–391).

This evolution continued in subsequent decades, with several significant literary contributions fundamentally altering popular perceptions of the vampire. One such work is Anne Rice's notable series of novels *The Vampire Chronicles*²⁰ (1976-2018) portrays vampires who face the predicament of their never-ending existence and their craving for human blood as sympathetic beings. Building on this trend of humanising the vampire figure, Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* (1991) presents a lesbian vampire protagonist whose narrative explores themes of identity, community and historical experience, further departing from the traditional monstrous archetype (Wisker, 2024, p. 518). In addition, some works that sought to radically change the traditional belief in vampirism have emerged, such as Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series, which was first published in 2005. In *Twilight*, vampires are depicted as a mostly benevolent species that coexist with humans and refrain, as much as possible, from feeding on them.

From the diverse folkloric origins and early literary and cinematic forms to these later, more humanised reinterpretations, this extensive chronological progression reveals the vampire myth as a figure of remarkable adaptability. Its diverse forms and characteristics across various periods and media consistently serve as a potent reflection of evolving cultural anxieties and the enduring human fascination with the liminal and the monstrous. Despite its numerous variations, the phenomenon retains core elements such as the need for vital consumption and supernatural capabilities, which contribute to its sustained relevance within the collective imagination and its capacity to adapt to new cultural landscapes. Understanding this rich and dynamic history is fundamental to a comprehensive study of the vampire figure and its continued impact across various cultural and media landscapes.

²⁰ The *Vampire Chronicles* started with the publication of *Interview with the Vampire* in 1976 and reached its thirteenth instalment with *Blood Communion: A Tale of Prince Lestat*, released in 2018.

CHAPTER TWO

DRAMATIC CONTEXTS: THE PLAYS AND THEIR PLAYWRIGHTS

Having introduced the vampire's origins and history to understand the vampire's significance as an enduring symbol in Western culture, this chapter transitions to the specific dramatic texts central to this study. By examining how the medium of theatre itself shapes the representation of the supernatural and the monstrous, the chapter will first focus on the practical and interpretive challenges involved in bringing vampires to life on the contemporary British stage. Following this discussion of theatrical contexts, the chapter will individually introduce each of the five selected plays—namely, Liz Lochhead's *Dracula* (1985), Conor McPherson's *St. Nicholas* (1997), Stephen Briggs's *The Truth* (2000) and *Monstrous Regiment* (2001) and Moira Buffini's *A Vampire Story* (2008)—along with relevant information about their playwrights. This chapter will therefore provide the necessary information on the plays and their creators before proceeding to the more focused thematic and theoretical analyses in the subsequent chapters thereby facilitating a clearer and more uninterrupted engagement with the complex ideas and arguments that will be developed later in the dissertation.

2.1. A STAGE FOR THE UNDEAD: CONTEXTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Representing the vampire on stage presents unique challenges and opportunities for dramatic interpretation. Unlike the cinematic medium, which can rely on special effects and visual trickery to create the illusion of the supernatural, theatre relies on the power of language, the evocative potential of set design and lighting as well as the embodied presence of actors to perform the supernatural. The inherent limitations of the stage however can also become a source of creative innovation by forcing playwrights to find imaginative ways to convey the vampire's transgressive nature and its unsettling power to destabilise established boundaries between the human and the monster. In the context of contemporary British drama, this interplay of limitations and possibilities has led to a diverse range of vampire portrayals, each reflecting the specific anxieties and artistic sensibilities of its time.

Spanning three decades from the mid-1980s to the late 2000s, the plays selected for this study emerged within a dynamic and rapidly changing British theatrical landscape. This period of change in British theatre witnessed a resurgence of interest in new writing, accompanied by an increasing focus on social and political themes, with playwrights experimenting with form, language and genre. Within this context of innovation and social engagement, a potent symbol for exploring the darker aspects of humanity, the vampire proved a particularly compelling figure for playwrights seeking to engage with the cultural anxieties of the time.

Furthermore, it is crucial to acknowledge the prevalence of adaptation within contemporary vampire drama and its significance for this study. The fact that three of the five plays examined in the study—Lochhead’s *Dracula*, Briggs’s *The Truth* and *Monstrous Regiment*—originated in novels, as did many influential vampire plays of the 20th century (such as Hamilton Deane’s (1924) and John L. Balderston’s (1927) *Dracula*), raises questions about the relationship between these two mediums. As a creative process, adaptation often manifests in the playwrights’ choices regarding what to emphasise, what to omit and how to translate the narrative to the stage. These choices reflect the challenges of compressing a novel’s narrative scope and complexity into the time constraints and spatial limitations of a theatrical production. For instance, in adapting *The Truth*, Briggs streamlines Terry Pratchett’s plot by focusing on the central narrative of William de Worde²¹ and the founding of the *Ankh-Morpork Times* while excising many of the novel’s subplots and secondary characters.

With its capacity for detailed character development, expansive world-building and complex narrative structures, the novel may seem ideally well-suited to exploring the intricate world of the vampire. The prevalence of adaptations in theatre however should not be interpreted as evidence of the novel’s superiority. This intertextual dialogue with existing traditions is a defining characteristic of the vampire myth across all mediums, not just drama. Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), for instance, draws heavily on earlier gothic novels, folklore traditions and contemporary anxieties surrounding sexuality and disease.

²¹ William de Worde is a recurring character in Terry Pratchett’s Discworld novels, often portrayed as a somewhat naive but idealistic journalist. In *The Truth*, he becomes the accidental editor of the *Ankh-Morpork Times*, the city’s first newspaper. The newspaper’s emergence plays a central role in the novel’s plot, satirising the development of modern media and the challenges of reporting the truth in a complex and corrupt society.

Similarly, Pratchett's Discworld novels engage in playful and satirical intertextuality with established fantasy tropes and literary conventions while creating their own unique universe. It is rather likely a result of multiple intersecting factors. Firstly, novels can provide a rich pre-existing narrative framework, allowing playwrights to utilise familiar stories and characters thereby reducing the burden of invention from scratch. Secondly, adapting a successful novel can be a commercially sound decision, as it often comes with built-in audience recognition and the potential for attracting fans of the original work. The limitations of the stage—such as the lack of resources for elaborate sets, costumes and special effects, particularly in smaller or amateur productions—often necessitate streamlining narratives and reducing the number of characters by adapting a novel a more manageable undertaking than the creation of a wholly original work with a large cast and complex plot. The reliance on adaptation also highlights the enduring power of the vampire myth to resonate with contemporary audiences and playwrights, while also acknowledging the inherent theatricality of the vampire figure. Even seemingly original plays like McPherson's *St. Nicholas* and Buffini's *A Vampire Story* participate in this ongoing intertextual dialogue by drawing upon established vampire lore from folklore, literature and film.

It is essential to recognise that the analysis presented in this dissertation is based on close readings of the play texts themselves, supplemented by a comprehensive review of critical and audience responses to a range of productions. This analysis incorporates insights from a total of 41 reviews, encompassing 33 distinct productions. This includes 8 reviews of 7 productions of *Dracula*, 9 reviews of 9 productions of *St. Nicholas*, 9 reviews of 9 productions of *The Truth*, 3 reviews of 3 productions of *Monstrous Regiment*, and 12 reviews of 5 productions of *A Vampire Story*. Alongside scholarly articles and other secondary sources, these reviews provide valuable perspectives on the plays' theatrical interpretations and reception²². As these productions' live performances have not been personally viewed by the author of this study, the focus here remains on the dramatic text as the primary source of meaning. The reviews and secondary materials serve to illuminate the plays' performance histories and to contextualise the analysis within the broader field of contemporary British drama. This methodology acknowledges

²² How they were received by audiences and critics.

the inherent limitations—as well as the interpretive possibilities—of engaging with drama through text and documentation by recognising that theatrical meaning is co-created through a dynamic interplay of text, performance and audience responses.

Lochhead's *Dracula* has been lauded for its faithfulness to Stoker while also addressing contemporary concerns (Langridge, 2019). The tension between fidelity and innovation is evident in reviews of various productions. While the play's length and episodic nature can pose challenges for pacing and dramatic tension (Bedford, 1996; Atkinson, 2003; Reed, 2014), effective productions successfully navigate these challenges through judicious editing and a focus on core themes (Wynne, 2017, p. 171). For instance, some productions, like Red Rope's production, have streamlined the narrative by focusing on the psychosexual dynamics between the characters and excising extraneous subplots to highlight the tensions between Victorian repression and the seductive allure of the vampire (Lanchester, 2015). Other productions, like the 2017 Shaw Festival production, have emphasised the play's metatheatrical elements by foregrounding the act of storytelling itself and blurring the boundaries between the play's fictional world and the reality of the theatrical performance (Hoile, 2017). Lochhead's stage directions often emphasise the artificiality of theatrical representation, such as in the scene where the vampire brides are revealed to be distorted versions of other characters from Whitby by creating a sense of the uncanny and highlighting the performative nature of identity. This blurring of identities is further reinforced by the stage direction indicating that the brides' laughter should sound "silvery, unreal, glassy, electronic" (Lochhead, 2009, p. 32) by emphasising their otherworldly and artificial nature. The character of Dracula himself has been interpreted in a variety of ways, ranging from a more humanised Count (Quinn, 2021; WhatsOnStage, 2010) to an overtly monstrous predator (Vallely, 2014). By making Mina and Lucy sisters unlike the original, Lochhead's restructuring of the narrative likewise strengthens the play's focus on female relationships and their navigation of patriarchal constraints. Moreover, the use of theatrical elements—from a decaying attic set to a minimalist aesthetic with projections—further this adaptability by underscoring the play's potential for realising diverse directorial visions (Backstage Bristol Theatre, 2019; Hoile, 2017).

As a one-man show dependent on monologue, McPherson's *St. Nicholas* places significant demands on the actor, requiring a "tour-de-force" portrayal (Berko, 2011).

Brian Cox's original portrayal remains a benchmark, capturing the critic's complex blend of cynicism, humour and pathos (Phillips, 1999; Weeks, 2020). McPherson's stage directions use minimal detail by leaving space for the actor and director to interpret the character's physicality and emotional state. While some productions have been praised for similar qualities (Levett, 2010), others have fallen short by failing to fully capture the play's emotional depth (Holman, 2008). This disparity in the quality of productions highlights the importance of not only a compelling performance but also a careful consideration of the play's theatrical elements. Successful productions, for instance, often utilise sound and lighting to enhance the play's unsettling atmosphere and the protagonist's shifting psychological states (Woodward, 2020). They also tend to make strategic use of the performance space by creating a sense of intimacy and claustrophobia that reflects the character's internal struggles (Jones, 2016; Garside, 2016). Minimalist staging with a single chair can effectively focus the audience's attention on the actor's performance and the nuances of McPherson's language (Menon, 2016). The play's ending, where the critic directly addresses the audience and questions the nature of reality and dreams, offers a powerful moment of meta-theatricality that can be amplified through staging choices.

Briggs's adaptation of *The Truth* necessitates balancing faithfulness to Pratchett's unique voice with the demands of theatrical storytelling. Briggs incorporates Pratchett's narrative style, blending humour and social commentary, into his stage adaptation. The play frequently breaks the fourth wall by acknowledging its own theatricality. The line, "Yes, I know dogs aren't meant to be able to talk" (Briggs & Pratchett, 2002, p. 3) uttered by Gaspode, the talking dog, for instance, creates a self-aware and humorous tone. This blending of humour and awareness is crucial for navigating the play's complex themes, which range from meditations on the nature of truth and the power of language to pointed critiques of social and political structures. The staging of the printing press, a symbolic representation of the power of information and the birth of modern media, presents a further challenge, requiring not only technical ingenuity but also an understanding of how this object functions dramatically within the play's narrative (Booksta, 2024; Wild, 2023). Moreover, as a play deeply embedded within the Discworld universe, *The Truth* must appeal to long-time fans while also remaining accessible to newcomers unfamiliar with Pratchett's work as a challenge that requires careful consideration of both intertextual

references and broader thematic concerns. The play's satirical portrayal of the newspaper industry, for instance, can be emphasised through costuming, set design and the actors' physical mannerisms by creating a caricature that resonates with contemporary anxieties about the media. Noted by several reviewers as a key element of the play's success (e.g., Blackwell Dickinson, 2017), the rapid pace of the dialogue contributes to its frenetic energy and satirical tone. This fast-paced style as a characteristic of Pratchett's writing is essential for capturing the play's satirical edge and maintaining its momentum.

Briggs's adaptation of *Monstrous Regiment*, like *The Truth* also adapted from a Pratchett novel, also negotiates the challenges of staging both humour and social commentary. However, *Monstrous Regiment* further complicates matters by foregrounding gender performance and societal satire. This emphasis on gender and identity offers opportunities for exploring non-traditional casting and staging choices. Productions using gender-blind casting, for instance, have effectively highlighted the play's exploration of fluid identities and the performance of masculinity and femininity (McDonald, 2013). Briggs' adaptation retains the satirical style of Pratchett's original text and the stage directions often contain suggestions for physical comedy and visual gags that underscore the play's critique of gender roles and the absurdity of war. For instance, the stage direction describing Polly cutting her hair in the dark (Briggs & Pratchett, 2004, p. 3) immediately establishes the play's focus on transformation and the fluidity of identity. Briggs also provides ample opportunity for physical comedy, as in the scene where Polly nuts Corporal Strappi (Briggs & Pratchett, 2004, p. 8). These moments of humour underscore the play's satirical tone while also highlighting resourcefulness and quick wit. A key element in successful productions seems to be the ability to capture both the absurdity of war and the poignant struggles of individuals caught within its destructive machinery, often through a balance of physical comedy and heartfelt moments of connection between the characters. A review of a Brisbane production (QNews, 2023) notes the success of this approach in achieving a nuanced tone.

In contrast to Briggs's focus on adaptation, Buffini's *A Vampire Story* offers an original take on the vampire myth, juxtaposing its fantastical elements with the mundane realities of a small-town setting. From the opening stage direction – "A town, somewhere in Britain. Present day" (Buffini, 2015, p. 224)– Buffini establishes a sense of ordinariness that underscores the play's unique blend of realism and fantasy. Productions have

explored a spectrum of approaches, ranging from a focus on mental illness and isolation to a more comedic interpretation (Kim, 2023). This range underscores the play's ambiguity and its potential for exploring a variety of themes and perspectives on the vampire myth. The stage directions emphasise the contrast between Ella's vampire nature and the mundane settings in which she finds herself. The food tech classroom, where Ella discusses her vampirism with Frank, for instance, becomes a site of the uncanny as this ordinary setting is infused with the extraordinary. Some productions highlight the tension between Ella's desire for connection and the isolating nature of her vampirism, while others emphasise the play's self-aware engagement with genre conventions, using humour and meta-theatricality to subvert audience expectations. Productions that fail to fully capture Ella's fractured emotional landscape and the play's non-linear narrative structure, however, can lose the play's unique power. The challenge lies in striking a delicate balance capturing the fragmented nature of Ella's memories (Kim, 2023), the cyclical nature of her storytelling and the play's shifts between past and present, while also maintaining a balance between its gothic and comedic undertones (Kim, 2023). With Eleanor writing her story, the play's use of a framing device highlights the theme of storytelling itself as a means of survival and self-discovery. This framing device is reflected in stage directions such as, "Ella is sitting at a small desk" (Buffini, 2015, p. 250) and "Eleanor is sixteen. She is dressed in a costume of 1822" (Buffini, 2015, p. 225) by visually separating Eleanor's act of writing from the events of the play itself thereby emphasising the constructed nature of memory and narrative.

In conclusion, the challenges of staging the vampire force playwrights and theatre-makers to engage in a continuous process of adaptation and reinterpretation. The prevalence of adaptations from novels highlights the novel's capacity for detailed world-building and complex character development, offering a rich source of inspiration for dramatic reimagining. However, the limitations of the stage, especially regarding spectacle and special effects, demand creative solutions. Playwrights like Lochhead and Briggs often use stage directions to emphasise the artificiality of theatrical representation and to create a self-reflexive engagement with the act of storytelling itself, which shapes how the plays' themes are presented and understood. The varied interpretations evident in the reviews—ranging from minimalist stagings to more visually elaborate productions—further demonstrate the vampire's adaptability as a theatrical figure and its

capacity to embody diverse anxieties. Based on close readings of the dramatic texts and a comprehensive review of their production histories, the analysis establishes a critical framework for the thematic and theoretical discussions that will follow by recognising the dynamic interplay between text, performance and audience reception in shaping how the vampire is understood and experienced in the modern world.

2.2. LIZ LOCHHEAD'S *DRACULA* (1985)

Born in Motherwell, Scotland, Elizabeth Anne Lochhead (known widely as Liz Lochhead) is a prominent voice in contemporary Scottish literature with her sharp wit, feminist perspective and ability to weave together the personal and the political in her work. Lochhead's working-class background and experiences as a woman in a patriarchal society deeply inform her writing. Her work often challenges conventional narratives and gives voice to marginalised perspectives by reflecting her commitment to social justice and equality.

As a poet, performer and playwright, Lochhead's artistic endeavours are characterised by a remarkable stylistic versatility, evincing a deep "fascination with the multifaceted nature and expressive potential of language" (Horvat, 2011, p. 179). This very virtuosity is manifested in her masterful command of diverse dialects and literary forms by enabling her to navigate between the lyrical and the colloquial. Lochhead's profound influence on the literary landscape is undeniable, as accordingly evidenced by her prestigious appointment as Scotland's Makar²³ from 2011 to 2016. This recognition serves as a lasting testament to her significant contributions to Scottish arts and culture.

Lochhead's dedication to challenging dominant cultural narratives is strikingly evident in her masterful use of language. She skilfully employs language towards "framing untidy old experience" and exposing the inherent "irony" of the human condition (R. E. Wilson, 1990, p. 10), an act that testifies to her commitment to reshaping narratives that may have traditionally excluded marginalised voices or perspectives. By framing these experiences, Lochhead brings them to the forefront thereby encouraging audiences to reconsider their assumptions about history, gender and Scottish identity.

²³ A Makar is a poet or bard holding a ceremonial position in Scotland and responsible for promoting and celebrating Scottish poetry and language.

First performed at the Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh, Lochhead's 1985 adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) is not simply a retelling of a classic horror story, but also a deliberate and insightful reimagining that reflects her feminist sensibilities and her engagement with the social and cultural currents of her time. Her adaptation consciously draws upon the anxieties and preoccupations of both the Victorian era and the 1980s by creating a complex and layered narrative that speaks to the enduring power of the vampire myth.

Furthermore, Bram Stoker's seminal Gothic novel *Dracula* single-handedly occupies a pivotal position within both the vampire lore and the broader cultural consciousness. As a direct adaptation of Stoker's *Dracula*, the play exemplifies a multitude of themes, archetypes and motifs synonymous with the vampire genre. Encompassing numerous interpretations and adaptations within popular culture, the very name 'Dracula' has indeed become an enduring emblem of the vampire archetype, to such an extent that William Hughes (2012) argues "It appears seemingly impossible ... to talk about the vampire without making at least tacit reference to *Dracula* as a pivotal text" (p. 198). Thus, by including Lochhead's *Dracula*, this study acknowledges the foundational influence of Stoker's classic narrative and its enduring impact on the collective understanding of the vampire myth within British culture, mirroring the nation's own shifting social and cultural landscape.

2.2.1. Synopsis: A Glimpse into Lochhead's *Dracula*

Lochhead's *Dracula* revitalises the classic vampire narrative by imbuing it with a potent feminist perspective while retaining the core elements of gothic horror. Set against the backdrop of the late-Victorian era, the play unfolds across three starkly contrasting settings: the sunlit garden of the Westerman sisters' home in Whitby, the grim confines of Doctor Seward's asylum in London and the eerie and imposing castle of Dracula in Transylvania. The play introduces Mina Westerman and her fiancé, Jonathan Harker, whose lives are on the cusp of a dramatic upheaval. Jonathan's business trip to Transylvania to finalise Count Dracula's purchase of Carfax, a London mansion, quickly transforms into a terrifying ordeal as he becomes a prisoner in the Count's decaying castle. Simultaneously, in Whitby, Mina's younger sister, Lucy, a restless young woman yearning for excitement and escape from the constraints of Victorian propriety,

unknowingly attracts the attention of the predatory Count. Lucy then succumbs to Dracula's seductive power and is transformed into a vampire.

Meanwhile, confined within the asylum, Renfield, a patient with a disturbing fascination for consuming flies, spiders and birds provides a chilling counterpoint to the unfolding drama. His cryptic pronouncements and erratic behaviour hint at the arrival of a powerful, unseen force, foreshadowing Dracula's arrival in England. The head of the asylum and a friend of Jonathan, Dr. Seward initially dismisses Renfield's ravings as mere madness, yet he is confronted with the terrifying reality of the vampire's existence.

Initially preoccupied with societal expectations and the imminence of her marriage, Mina is also drawn into Dracula's web. Alone and vulnerable, Mina likewise becomes a victim of the Count's predatory desires and is forced to drink his blood thereby establishing a disturbing psychic connection that binds her to him. With the aid of a friend of Dr. Seward, that is, Van Helsing who possesses great knowledge of vampire lore, Mina, Jonathan and Dr. Seward embark on a journey to Transylvania. Their quest culminates in a dramatic confrontation in Dracula's castle as dawn breaks and the Count, weakened by the encroaching sunlight, is finally vanquished. However, victory comes at a cost, as Seward is killed during the struggle, his demise adding another layer of tragedy and loss to the play's bittersweet resolution.

Lochhead's adaptation purposefully departs from Stoker's original by emphasising female agency, subverting traditional gender roles and exploring the socio-cultural anxieties of the 1980s thereby creating a complex and layered narrative that resonates with contemporary concerns. This sets the stage for a deeper exploration of how Lochhead utilises the vampire myth to engage with themes of neoliberalism, queerness and posthumanism. By exploring the interplay of these themes within a reimagined vampire narrative, Lochhead's adaptation not only offers a compelling lens through which to examine the broader cultural significance of the vampire myth in contemporary British drama but also prompts critical reflection on the evolving nature of identity, power and the human condition in a rapidly changing world. The play's exploration of these complex themes provides a rich foundation for understanding how contemporary British dramatists utilise the vampire figure to engage with anxieties specific to their time by

paving the way for a deeper and more nuanced appreciation of the genre's enduring power.

2.3. CONOR MCPHERSON'S *ST. NICHOLAS* (1997)

A contemporary Irish playwright and screenwriter acclaimed for his command of dialogue and psychological insight, Conor McPherson constructs narratives that explore the darker facets of human experience. Frequently integrating elements of Irish folklore and mythology, McPherson offers a uniquely Irish perspective on ubiquitous human struggles with ethics and identity. Eamonn Jordan (2021) observes that despite his apparent utilisation of conventional forms, McPherson's "inventiveness and transformation of such genres alongside his uncanny ability to theatricalise a profound distillation of the fundamental essences of lived experience" contribute to the international resonance of his work (p. 550). Indeed, his artistry has garnered substantial recognition, with *The Telegraph* and *The New York Times* declaring him "the finest dramatist of his generation" (Spencer, 2004; Brantley, 2007). His work is often praised for its ability to capture the rhythm and nuances of everyday conversation, even in the midst of intense drama (Ruprecht, 2010).

A chilling monodrama, *St. Nicholas* (1997) epitomises his distinctive dramatic method by employing monologue, astute character development and sombre thematic undercurrents to examine addiction, obsession and transgression. By earning him the Meyer Whitworth Award and the George Devine Award, *St. Nicholas* proved to be a pivotal work in McPherson's career. Recognising the play's powerful exploration of complex themes and innovative use of the monologue form, these accolades helped solidify his reputation as a rising talent in Irish theatre and paved the way for his subsequent successes, including the Olivier Award and Evening Standard Award for *The Weir* (1999) and Tony nominations for *Shining City* (2004) and *The Seafarer* (2006).

As a title that immediately evokes a sense of festive generosity and childlike wonder, *St. Nicholas* becomes strikingly ironic given the play's content. The fact that the saint himself is notably absent from the narrative prompts critic Nancy S. Bishop (2019) to question the title's significance: "Is *St. Nicholas* meant to suggest the magic of the holiday or the magic of a night with the vampires?" This disjunction between the title and

text invites several interpretations. The most prominent reading centres on the ironic juxtaposition of the saint as traditionally a symbol of kindness and innocence with the protagonist as a cynical and self-destructive critic. This contrast highlights the critic's moral decay by associating his actions with a perversion of the values typically embodied by the saint.

2.3.1. Synopsis: A Glimpse into McPherson's *St. Nicholas*

First performed at the Bush Theatre in 1997, *St. Nicholas* reveals the psychological deterioration of an unnamed, middle-aged Dublin theatre critic, a man immersed in cynicism, self-contempt and alcohol. He regards his profession with disdain, acknowledging his influence over artists' careers while experiencing a profound sense of creative deficiency. He consumes alcohol excessively, disregards his family and contends with feelings of inadequacy and envy. His life is altered when he becomes captivated by Helen, a young actress whose performance in *Salome* mesmerises him. This preoccupation compels him to relinquish his responsibilities and pursue her to London.

When his pursuit of Helen proves fruitless, he encounters William, an enigmatic stranger who projects a disquieting charisma. William discloses his identity as a vampire and extends an invitation to his residence, an apparently unremarkable suburban dwelling that conceals a group of similarly captivating vampires. Desperate for companionship and liberation, the critic accedes to a sinister agreement: he will secure victims for the vampires in return for access to their power and a life devoid of the limitations imposed by his previous circumstances.

By enticing unsuspecting individuals into their grasp, he becomes their operative. Ironically, this descent into moral turpitude coincides with a creative resurgence. Unburdened by the demands of his occupation, he resumes writing by deriving a perverse sense of meaning from his function as a provider of victims. By participating in philosophical dialogues concerning the essence of art and the significance of existence, he develops a peculiar relationship with William. He nevertheless becomes increasingly repulsed by the vampires' absence of ethical principles and their parasitic lifestyle over time.

The critic's growing disgust for the vampires clashes with his dependence on them by creating internal conflict. This reaches a climax when they order him to bring Helen, the object of his obsession, as a victim. This act of betrayal marks a turning point by pushing him further into darkness and ultimately leading to his own ambiguous transformation. The play's open ending forces the audience to question the reality of his experiences and the finality of his moral decline.

The play's exploration of vampirism serves as a metaphor for the detrimental nature of addiction, obsession and the exploitation of power. The critic's alcoholism, his consuming infatuation with Helen and his manipulation of innocent individuals allude to these destructive inclinations. *St. Nicholas* ultimately prompts inquiries regarding the nature of art and the function of the critic by reflecting McPherson's own transition from a critic to an acclaimed playwright (Jordan, 2021, p. 550). The play's minimalist staging and focus on language emphasise McPherson's conviction regarding the potency of narrative, a tradition firmly established within Irish culture. While firmly grounded in an Irish context, McPherson's exploration of these themes resonates with audiences globally by demonstrating the universality of human experiences with addiction, obsession and moral compromise. As evidenced by the play's prosperity in numerous productions, it transcends cultural boundaries to address fundamental questions about human nature.

2.4. STEPHEN BRIGGS' *THE TRUTH* (2000)

A British playwright, narrator and actor, Stephen Briggs is celebrated for his extensive work adapting the novels of Sir Terry Pratchett, the renowned English fantasy author. By demonstrating a keen understanding of Pratchett's unique comedic style and elaborate world-building, Briggs has brought numerous Discworld stories to life through theatrical productions, radio dramas and audiobooks. Beyond adaptation, he has enriched the Discworld universe through companion books, maps and other supplementary materials by showcasing his intimate familiarity with Pratchett's characters, settings and thematic concerns (Thaung, 2019). By noting the need for minimalist sets and a reliance on actors to convey rapid shifts in time and location through their performances, Briggs has acknowledged the difficulties of translating Pratchett's episodic, 'cinematic' style to the stage (Thaung, 2019). As seen in various productions like Peculiar Productions in

2018, this streamlined approach to staging creates a dynamic and fast-paced theatrical experience that captures the wit and narrative momentum of the novels.

Pratchett's Discworld provides a unique lens through which to explore the concept of vampiric power, even in a play seemingly as focused on the press as *The Truth* (2000). Discworld is a flat world resting on the backs of four elephants, who, in turn, stand on the shell of the giant star turtle whose name is A'Tuin as it journeys through space. This fantastical setting forms the backdrop for a satirical world where magic is real and humans coexist with a diverse population of supernatural beings, including dwarves, trolls, werewolves, vampires, gnomes and even personified concepts like Death. The metropolis at the heart of *The Truth*, Ankh-Morpork acts as a microcosm of human society, a melting pot of cultures and a stage for both social progress and political corruption, often reflecting and satirising aspects of the actual world's history and social structures.

Within this context, Briggs' adaptation of *The Truth* becomes more than just a play about the power of the press and it offers a nuanced perspective on how vampiric power can manifest and operate within a society engaging with rapid technological change and the influx of new information. While vampires are not the central focus, the character, Otto Chriek, a photosensitive vampire iconographer, embodies several key themes related to the broader representation of vampires in contemporary British drama.

2.4.1. Synopsis: A Glimpse into Briggs' *The Truth*

Briggs' stage adaptation of Pratchett's *The Truth* was first performed by the Studio Theatre Club at the Unicorn Theatre, Abingdon, in 2000. The play's narrative centres on William de Worde, an aspiring journalist who becomes editor of Ankh-Morpork's first newspaper, *The Ankh-Morpork Times* after the dwarves invent the printing press. While William's dedication to truthful reporting clashes with the corruption and political scheming within the city by putting him at odds with those who fear the power of the free press, he finds allies in the dwarven printers and reporters.

As William investigates an attack on the city's Patrician, Lord Vetinari, he uncovers a conspiracy that extends to the highest levels of society. The play satirises the manipulation of information and the rise of fake news through the portrayal of a rival newspaper, *The Inquirer*, whose sensationalist and often fabricated stories capture the

public's attention and outsell William's more factual reporting. This competition between *The Times* and *The Inquirer* can be seen as a microcosm of the broader struggle for narrative control, a theme frequently associated with vampiric influence and the seductive power of misinformation. The investigation itself leads William and his companions on a dangerous quest involving encounters with inept assassins, corrupt officials and the cynical, talking dog, Gaspode. The play culminates with the revelation that William's own father, Lord de Worde, is implicated in the conspiracy thereby underscoring the pervasive nature of corruption within Ankh-Morpork and the difficulty of challenging established power structures.

The Truth therefore becomes a Discworld lens through which to examine not only the societal impact of the free press but also the insidious nature of vampiric power. Otto's profession as an iconographer, his manipulation of images through dark light and his status as a social outsider contribute to the play's broader exploration of how information can be controlled, manipulated and used as a tool of both seduction and oppression. This aligns with the dissertation's overarching theme by providing a specific example of how a vampire figure, even a secondary one, can embody and enact the anxieties associated with vampirism in contemporary British drama. Briggs' adaptation utilises the comedic and fantastical elements of Discworld to explore these themes by employing minimalist staging techniques and the narrative framing of Gaspode to create a dynamic theatrical experience (Warren, 2018). Through its exploration of corruption, misinformation and the struggle for individual agency against powerful institutions, the play's engagement with contemporary social and political concerns makes *The Truth* a relevant and thought-provoking work of theatre.

2.5. STEPHEN BRIGGS' *MONSTROUS REGIMENT* (2001)

Briggs' stage adaptation of Pratchett's *Monstrous Regiment* was first performed at the Unicorn Theatre, Abingdon, in 2001. Like *The Truth*, this play also uses the comedic and fantastical world of Discworld to explore complex themes. However, *Monstrous Regiment* shifts the focus from urban Ankh-Morpork to war-torn Borogravia and from the press to the military.

2.5.1. Synopsis: A Glimpse into Briggs' *Monstrous Regiment*

Monstrous Regiment is set in Borogravia, a small and impoverished nation at war. Polly Perks, adopting male attire and the alias Oliver Perks, enlists in the Borogravian army to locate her missing brother, Paul. Polly encounters the gruff Sergeant Jackrum at the recruiting station and enlists with several other young men. As they march toward the front lines, Polly discovers that her fellow recruits are also women disguised as men.

The harsh realities of war mark their journey: scarcity of food and supplies, encounters with wounded soldiers and the constant threat of the enemy. While Sergeant Jackrum attempts to instil some semblance of military discipline in his unorganised group, the regiment's unusual nature attracts the attention of William de Worde, a reporter for the *Ankh-Morpork Times*, and Otto Chriek, a vampire iconographer, who arrive to document their story. They reveal the bleak outlook of the war and cast doubt on the existence of the Duchess, Borogravia's reclusive ruler.

The regiment eventually reaches Kneck Keep, a seemingly impenetrable fortress. Using their disguises, Polly devises a plan to infiltrate the fortress by posing as washerwomen. While inside, they are captured and brought before a tribunal of officers, where their true identities are revealed. Just as they are about to be punished for their deception, Sergeant Jackrum rescues them and exposes the secret that many of the officers are also women in disguise in the Borogravian high command. Possessed by the spirit of the Duchess, Wazzer declares an end to the war and reveals a plan to reshape Borogravian society. In the ensuing chaos, Polly is reunited with her brother. She and the other women are allowed to continue serving in the army, now openly as women thereby marking a small but significant victory in their fight for equality and recognition.

Briggs' adaptation uses the comedic and fantastical elements of Discworld to amplify Pratchett's social commentary. The play's often farcical tone underscores the absurdity of the situation by emphasising that both war and gender roles are social constructs. As described in his introduction to the play and evidenced in various productions, the minimalist staging techniques employed by Briggs further contribute to the play's satirical impact by allowing the focus to remain on the actors' performances and the absurdity of the situations they inhabit (Briggs & Pratchett, 2004, p. 75). The play

engages with contemporary social and political concerns such as gender equality, the ethics of war and the struggle for individual agency against oppressive systems.

2.6. MOIRA BUFFINI'S *A VAMPIRE STORY* (2008)

Moira Buffini is a celebrated British playwright and screenwriter known for her witty and insightful explorations of complex relationships, particularly focusing on the female experience. Her background as an actress informs her nuanced understanding of character development, which is readily apparent in the compelling portrayals of Claire and Ella in *A Vampire Story*. Originally premiering as part of the National Theatre's Connections season in 2008, the play was later adapted into the 2013 film *Byzantium* by further demonstrating its resonance and adaptability. Memory and trauma are recurring themes in Buffini's work, often depicted through theatrical techniques that effectively convey the fragmented and unreliable nature of recollection. This focus on the power and distortion of memory is integral to her unique approach to the vampire narrative.

2.6.1. Synopsis: A Glimpse into Buffini's *A Vampire Story*

Within *A Vampire Story*, Buffini utilises the established conventions of the vampire myth as a framework through which to examine these complex psychological and emotional themes. The play opens on a train by introducing Claire and Ella, two young women embarking on a journey to a new town, assumed in false identities of the Wythenshawe sisters. Upon arriving in an anonymous town, Claire quickly finds employment at a local pub while Ella enrolls in school with potential for social interaction and conflict. It is within the seemingly ordinary context of a drama class that Ella makes the confession of her vampiric nature, claiming to be sustained by human blood. This revelation naturally evokes disbelief and fear from her classmates by further isolating her within this new environment. However, combined with Ella's emotional detachment and conspicuous refusal of food, her declaration paradoxically draws her closer to another outsider, the home-schooled Frank. This present-day narrative is interwoven with flashbacks to 1822 by gradually revealing the historical roots of Ella and Claire's present circumstances through the story of a prostitute, Clara and her daughter, Eleanor. Clara

narrates her encounter with Lord Ruthven, a figure from classic vampire literature and how this encounter serves as the catalyst for her transformation into a vampire.

These historical echoes become increasingly apparent as Ella's contemporary drama assignment, a play-within-a-play, begins to mirror Clara's story and Ella's own complex relationship with Claire. The lines between reality and fantasy blur, creating an unsettling sense of dramatic irony as the audience recognises Claire as the older vampire, Clara. The tension is further heightened by a series of unexplained disappearances of students and teachers without a trace thereby creating a sense of danger and suspicion. The tension builds towards a dramatic climax as Ella consumes animal blood during class by confirming her classmates' fears while also showcasing the performative aspect of her self-proclaimed identity. In response, the controlling yet ostensibly protective figure, Claire urges Ella to flee by perpetuating their established pattern of escaping the consequences of their actions. The play's ending is deliberately unresolved, mirroring the ambiguity at its core. Now confined to an institution under the observation of a psychiatrist named Darvell, Eleanor resonates with Clara's earlier encounter with a mysterious stranger who shared the same name. This cyclical motif is further emphasised by Frank's transformation into a vampire after being bitten by Ella thereby suggesting that the patterns of manipulation, exploitation and escape will continue unabated (George, 2016).

Through this intricate exploration of the vampire myth, Buffini offers a nuanced perspective on adolescent anxieties, the complexities of identity formation and the often-turbulent journey through adolescence. Ella's adoption of the vampire persona functions as both a coping mechanism for past trauma and an act of defiance against societal expectations. By highlighting the universal search for self-discovery and a sense of belonging, her fantastical claims resonate with the feelings of otherness and alienation common to the teenage experience. Through its interweaving of timelines, blurring of reality and fantasy as well as its focus on the power of performance, *A Vampire Story* ultimately becomes a powerful meditation on the enduring influence of memory and its capacity to shape, wound and ultimately define who we are. Buffini's use of the vampire myth transcends the limitations of the genre by transforming it into a potent symbol for the ongoing human struggle with identity, acceptance and the weight of the past.

CHAPTER THREE

NEOLIBERAL VAMPIRISM

Despite its pervasive influence on global politics and economics for the past four decades, neoliberalism remains an elusive and contested concept, precisely because it is not an easily defined static system. As David Harvey (2005) notes, it is difficult to offer a precise definition of the neoliberal state because “systematic divergences from the template of neoliberal theory quickly become apparent” and the practical application of neoliberal policies has “varied greatly from place to place as well as over time” (p. 70). This inherent fluidity reflects its complex and multifaceted historical development, emerging from the intellectual and political ferment of the mid-twentieth century. Following the post-World War II era, the dominant model of economic governance was what Harvey (2005) calls “embedded liberalism”: “a variety of social democratic, Christian democratic and dirigiste states [that] emerged in Europe after the Second World War [... with] state-led planning and even state ownership of key sectors” in several countries (pp. 10–11). Characterised by Keynesian economic policies²⁴, a strong social safety net and a commitment to regulating markets to promote “full employment, economic growth and the welfare of its citizens” (Harvey, 2005, p. 10), this post-war consensus came under strain in the 1970s due to “a serious crisis of capital accumulation” marked by the oil crisis, stagflation and declining corporate profitability (Harvey, 2005, p. 12). Along with the political and social upheavals they unleashed, these crises created an opening for proponents of free-market capitalism, like Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, whose ideas had been largely marginalised in the preceding decades. This shift was further consolidated by the rise to prominence of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, whose policies consolidated the shift towards a neoliberal world order (Harvey, 2005, p. 1).

²⁴ Named after British economist John Maynard Keynes, Keynesian economics argues that economic output is primarily driven by aggregate demand and insufficient demand can lead to prolonged periods of unemployment (Keynes, 2018, pp. 21–30). Furthermore, it emphasises the importance of government intervention, through monetary and fiscal policy, to stabilise the economy and maintain full employment (Keynes, 2018, pp. 335–337). Keynes (2018) also challenges classical economic theories, particularly Say’s Law, arguing that saving and investment are determined independently and increased saving does not automatically lead to increased investment, thus requiring active management of these variables (pp. 17–20, 185–191).

Having established this historical context, it would be appropriate to proceed to a discussion of the core tenets of neoliberalism. At its core, neoliberalism champions “individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills” within an institutional framework defined by “strong private property rights, free markets and free trade” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). The “competitive capitalism” (Friedman, 2002) is argued to be the most effective way to “co-ordinate human efforts” and promote individual liberty, viewing economic freedom as a prerequisite for political freedom (Hayek, 2006, p. 37). To this end, advocating for “the elimination of such concentration of power to the fullest possible extent,” Friedman promotes a severely limited role for the state (Friedman, 2002, p. 15). Hayek (2006) shares Friedman’s wariness about the concentration of power, warning that “planning leads to dictatorship because dictatorship is the most effective instrument of coercion and the enforcement of ideals and as such essential if central planning on a large scale is to be possible” (p. 74). In his view, central economic planning, even if implemented with good intentions, necessarily leads to the suppression of individual freedom and choice by creating a system where “the individual would more than ever become a mere means, to be used by the authority in the service of such abstractions as ‘social welfare’ or the ‘good of the community’” (Hayek, 2006, p. 100). He emphasises the importance of “ultimate values,” which he defines as “moral rules,” as the foundation for “the whole argument” for freedom, though he acknowledges the difficulty of defending those values against “an enemy who uses propaganda as one of his main weapons” (Hayek, 2006, pp. vii, 160, 5). Building on this individualistic framework, James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock (2001) contribute a crucial theoretical framework to this perspective, arguing that “men’s interests will differ” and that individuals, acting rationally, will seek “to maximise [their] own utility” (pp. 4, 29). The ‘economic theory’ they propose thus focuses on how those “conflicting interests are reconciled [...] through the mechanism of trade or exchange” within a system defined by a set of rules (a ‘constitution’) freely agreed upon by its members (Buchanan & Tullock, 2001, p. 4).

Despite these theoretical justifications, the practical application of neoliberal principles has faced significant criticism. This emphasis on individual freedom and market efficiency often masks a darker, more predatory reality. Critiques of neoliberalism specifically highlight how its policies and practices exacerbate social and economic

inequality, erode democratic values and exploit crises to advance the interests of corporations and a small, wealthy elite. These critiques span various disciplines and perspectives. Naomi Klein (2008), for instance, details how ‘shock therapy,’ far from being a set of purely economic policies, frequently involves state terror and violence by creating a climate of fear and disorientation that makes populations more susceptible to accepting radical social and economic change (pp. 95–110). Harvey (2005) likewise argues that the neoliberal project, despite its rhetoric of individual freedom and widespread prosperity, fundamentally serves “to restore the power of economic elites,” creating a system where the “benefits of revived capital accumulation were highly skewed,” benefiting a small minority at the expense of the majority (pp. 19, 16). Continuing this critique, Wendy Brown (2019) criticises neoliberalism’s attack on the very idea of the social, arguing that by reducing individuals to “economic actors” motivated solely by self-interest, neoliberalism destroys “the lexicon by which freedom is made democratic” and creates conditions where the pursuit of “social justice [...] and the common good” can be framed as an attack on individual liberty (pp. 58, 44, 104). By exploring the psychological and technological dimensions of power under neoliberalism, Byung-Chul Han (2017), expanding on this theme, argues that the constant pressure for “self-optimisation [...] and] achievement” within a system of ubiquitous surveillance turns the individual into a “slave, [...] willingly exploit[ing] itself without a master” (p. 2). This ‘crisis of freedom,’ he suggests, is not simply a byproduct of economic pressures but an integral feature of a system designed to exploit human potential for the benefit of ‘Capital’ (Han, 2017, pp. 2–3). While advocating for a market economy within a larger moral framework, Wilhelm Röpke likewise warns against the dangers of reducing all human values to mere economic considerations. He states explicitly that the market “must find its place within a higher order of things which is not ruled by supply and demand, free prices and competition” (Röpke, 1961, p. 6) but by ethical considerations, “true civic sense”, and the preservation of human dignity and community values (Röpke, 1961, p. 7). It is argued that “man [is] more than ever before governed by economic doctrines, by the carefully fostered belief in the irrationality of our economic system” (Hayek, 2006, p. 208) and this reduction of all social relations to market transactions has created a spiritual and moral crisis, leaving the masses searching for meaning and purpose in increasingly destructive ideologies and “surrogate religions” such as nationalism, fascism or

consumerism (Röpke, 1961, p. 9). In response to this crisis, Röpke (1961) insists that a humane economy must recognise the limits of the market and provide social and moral counterweights such as strong communities, secure families and a natural aristocracy of ethical leaders who are capable of standing up to the dehumanising logic of social rationalism (pp. 129–134).

This chapter will explore how contemporary British plays discussed in this study engage with these anxieties and contradictions of neoliberalism through the framework of neoliberal vampirism. Neoliberal vampirism is not simply a metaphor for greed or the pursuit of self-interest; it is a way of understanding how the logic of the market can become parasitic and predatory, feeding on the lifeblood of society—its social programs, its shared resources, its democratic values—to enrich a small elite. Often depicted as a seductive but dangerous outsider, the vampire serves as an apt figure for the deceptive allure of neoliberal rhetoric, promising freedom and opportunity while preying on the vulnerable and exacerbating inequality. By exploring how these plays depict vampires and their victims, it will enable us to gain a deeper understanding of the complex ways in which neoliberal rationality operates in the world and the diverse forms of resistance that have emerged to challenge its destructive power.

3.1. VAMPIRIC CAPITALISM: CONSUMPTION AND THE LOGIC OF EXCESS

The setting of Lochhead's *Dracula* in the late 19th century situates it within a specific historical context marked by the rise of industrial capitalism and its accompanying social and economic transformations. This historical context is crucial for understanding the anxieties and challenges faced by the characters, particularly those belonging to the working class who bear the brunt of these societal shifts. The play further explores this theme of class disparity through the characters of the Westerman sisters and Florrie. Evident in the setting of the play in Whitby, a seaside resort town, the Westerman sisters' lives are marked by leisure, luxury and a sense of entitlement, epitomising the bourgeoisie, a class that reaps the benefits of accumulated wealth and privilege within the capitalist system. Seward likewise defines Mina as the "sugar millionairess" (Lochhead, 2009, p. 9) by referring to the source of her family's wealth, implying that they made their fortune in the sugar industry. This industry, particularly during the Victorian era, was often associated with colonialism and the exploitation of labour in sugar plantations

(Huzzey, 2010, p. 373). This inherited wealth directly challenges the notion of meritocracy often associated with capitalism and more specifically, with the neoliberal ideal of the self-made individual. As Thorstein Veblen (2010) observes about the leisure class, their wealth and status are not earned through hard work or talent but simply inherited, highlighting the systemic inequalities perpetuated by the capitalist system: “The basis on which good repute in any highly organised industrial community ultimately rests is pecuniary strength; and the means of showing pecuniary strength, and so of gaining or retaining a good name, are leisure and a conspicuous consumption of goods” (p. 52). This conspicuous consumption stands in stark contrast to the struggles of the working class, represented by Florrie, exposing the hypocrisy of a system that claims to reward individual effort.

This critique of capitalist excess likewise resonates across other plays. In *St. Nicholas*, the narrator’s cynical observation reveals the hollowness of wealth and the emptiness of material possessions, echoing the Westerman sisters’ superficial affluence, when she states: “Big house in the right place. The cars and the cash. We were a pair of fat fuckers rolling around in the mud” (McPherson, 2011, p. 139). In *A Vampire Story*, Clara Webb’s cynical description of her brothel as one of “London’s finest” (Buffini, 2015, p. 251) reveals a similar commodification of human experience. Just as Dracula accumulates wealth and power, Clara prioritises profit by reducing human connection to a mere transaction. Regardless of its human cost, this shared focus on material gain connects these plays in their critique of capitalist excess. This pursuit of individual gratification, regardless of its social consequences, resonates with the neoliberal emphasis on individual responsibility and the rejection of collective action. The Westerman sisters, Clara and the narrator of *St. Nicholas* operate within a system that prioritises self-interest and encourages the pursuit of personal gain, even at the expense of others.

Lochhead’s *Dracula* further explores the anxieties surrounding social hierarchies within a rapidly changing world. As the Industrial Revolution reshaped the world, the anxieties surrounding the rise of industrial capitalism and its impact on social structures with the approach of a new century reverberate throughout the play by intensifying its exploration of class disparities and the accompanying social tensions. The pervasive feeling of imminent change imbues the lives of the characters, with a particular focus on Mina demonstrating an awareness of the evolving social milieu and a desire to dismantle

the entrenched hierarchies that have long defined and shaped her world. However, the deeply ingrained power dynamics, traditions and societal expectations prove resistant to change, as evidenced by Mina's following interactions with Florrie:

Mina Call me Mina! Florrie, we want but one year to a brand new century, times are changing, we'll have no more mistress and servants, I don't believe in them.

Florrie No, miss. (*Pause.*) You will still pay my wages?

Mina Course we will, silly goose... Florrie, Florrie, I know my sister is... a little odd sometimes. Will you help me?

Florrie With Miss Lucy?

Mina With Lucy.

Florrie Yes, mi – (*Uncomfortably.*) Yes, Mina.
[...]

Mina [...] Florrie! Florrie, look at the mess in there. Things everywhere! Go tidy it up!

Florrie (*beginning to go, slightly sarcastically*) Yes, Mina.

Mina (*exiting, calling as she does*) Change the flowers in the drawing room! Straighten those antimacassars in the parlour!

Florrie Yes, miss!
[...]

Florrie (*picking up behind them*) Don't believe in servants? Oh, don't believe in servants, don't you, that's very interesting. Better pinch yourself, Florrie my girl, look in the mirror, pinch yourself to see if you're real. (Lochhead, 2009, pp. 28–30)

Mina articulates her desire to dismantle the entrenched hierarchies when she tells Florrie that she does not believe in mistresses and servants anymore. However, despite her seemingly progressive words, Mina's actions betray a deep-seated adherence to the very hierarchies she claims to reject. Only moments after her declaration, she reverts to giving orders, instructing Florrie to 'tidy up,' 'change the flowers' and 'straighten the antimacassars.' This dissonance between Mina's stated beliefs and her ingrained behaviours exposes the deeply rooted nature of power dynamics and the challenges of dismantling them through mere good intentions. Florrie's sarcastic aside at the end underscores the hollowness of Mina's words, highlighting the gap between rhetoric and reality. This very conflict between Mina's desire for equality and her unconscious perpetuation of the servant-mistress dynamic demonstrates the limitations of individual good intentions within existing power structures. As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels likewise argue in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), individual consciousness is deeply intertwined with "the conditions of [one's] material existence, in [one's] social relations

and in [one's] social life" (1992, p. 56). Mina's inability to truly transcend the mistress-servant dynamic, despite her awareness of its injustice, exemplifies this interconnectedness. Thus, *Dracula* dramatises the unequal distribution of wealth and power in neoliberal societies, highlighting the tension between the privileged and the working class. Mina's performative progressivism mirrors the narrator's behaviour in *St. Nicholas*, who espouses a disdain for social hierarchies yet readily exploits his position of power. Both characters exemplify the limitations of individual action within a neoliberal framework, suggesting that true societal change requires a systemic dismantling of power structures, rather than mere performative allyship.

The play's critique of neoliberalism, specifically its emphasis on deregulation and the free flow of capital, is further amplified through the figure of Dracula as the central antagonist, who embodies the dark side of both capitalism and consumerism. More precisely, Dracula embodies the core tenets of neoliberal vampirism: the accumulation of wealth and power through exploitation, the disregard for human life, and the manipulation of systems for individual gain. His insatiable hunger for blood and his immense accumulation of wealth²⁵ serve as a potent metaphor for the insatiable appetite of capital and the exploitative nature of consumer culture. He preys upon the vulnerable by leaving them drained and lifeless, thereby mirroring how capitalism can extract vitality and autonomy from individuals while concentrating wealth in the hands of the privileged few. This very image of Count Dracula is congruent with Marx and Engels' (2010) evocative image of capital as "dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks" (p. 241), highlighting the parasitic nature of a system that thrives on the exploitation of the working class. Thus, extracting life and vitality from individuals to fuel his own power and dominance, Dracula becomes a symbol of the predatory nature of capitalism through his characterisation in the play. The parallel between Dracula's insatiable thirst and the capitalist drive for profit is reinforced by Jonathan Harker's own ambition in *Dracula*. Jonathan's initial focus on financial gain, even in the face of unsettling circumstances, echoes the play's depiction of capitalist ambition. Dracula, like a multinational corporation operating under neoliberal

²⁵ Despite the fact that the details regarding Dracula's wealth are not explicitly given, his wealth is evident from the implications to his aristocratic lineage and inherited possessions in the play (Lochhead, 2009, pp. 24–25).

deregulation, is free to exploit resources and cross borders without accountability. Coming at the expense of those he preys upon, his accumulation of wealth and power reflects the unequal distribution of wealth that characterises neoliberal globalisation.

3.2. THE COMMODIFICATION OF LIFE AND BLOOD

Building upon the critique of neoliberalism, the majority of the selected plays focus on blood as a symbol of both life and commodity by reinforcing the connection with consumerism and its exploitative nature. In *Dracula*, *A Vampire Story* and *Monstrous Regiment*, the treatment of blood and the vampire figure offers compelling variations on traditional narratives, reflecting anxieties surrounding consumerism and the boundaries of self within the neoliberal culture. These anxieties manifest through symbolic representations of blood and the vampire's relationship to it. Specifically, the commodification of blood highlights the neoliberal tendency to reduce all aspects of life to mere economic units, thereby diminishing the inherent value of human beings. This dehumanising tendency is vividly illustrated in *Dracula* through Dracula's consumption of blood and the blood transfusions given to Lucy by Seward. These seemingly disparate instances converge to expose how capitalism exploits even the most basic elements of human existence for profit. Dracula's parasitic consumption of blood, the very essence of life, mirrors the way in which capitalism reduces individuals to mere instruments of production, as poignantly articulated by Marx and Engels (2010) in their description of the worker as "an appendage of the machine" (p. 487). Though intended to restore her health, Lucy's blood transfusions become another facet of this commodification by foreshadowing her eventual transformation into a creature defined by her consumption of blood. This reduction of individuals to their economic value aligns with Zygmunt Bauman's (2007) analysis of consumerist society:

In the society of consumers no one can become a subject without first turning into a commodity, and no one can keep his or her subjectness secure without perpetually resuscitating, resurrecting and replenishing the capacities expected and required of a sellable commodity. (p. 12)

Bauman's observation underscores the dehumanising aspects of capitalism and consumerism, where the pursuit of profit and material gain overshadows considerations of inherent human worth.

This devaluation of human connection is further mirrored in *St. Nicholas*, where the narrator's cynical observation about transactional relationships is given:

There were one or two young things in the bloom of youth, but then the responsibility, you see, the responsibility got them. They were expected to have an opinion. On everything. They were expected to be on top of situations and the current... goings-on. Otherwise, what justified their existence? The man in the street needed to know what to think, hence these objective observers. And that may have partly been their fucking... thing. But the other was the pressure to fill space. Just fill column inches. It's not a pleasant feeling. You've got to fill it with words. And these kids could never admit they couldn't find the news. They all used to rob each other. They'd be dizzy for a year or two. All aflutter with responsibility. And then all asunder with it. And then the weight would pile on. Because there was a need for stimulation, wasn't there? It became more and more that it was easier to stay in town than go home. A few scoops at teatime. And then, time to eat. Money to lose. And, you fell in with another journalist, as a lover, you were a goner. Because you'd help each other to keep going. And you'd look at each other with a joyous tear of camaraderie. And then a bawling hatred because... well, because you knew this was hell. (McPherson, 2011, pp. 140–141)

The 'young things in the bloom of youth' are aspiring journalists, full of initial idealism and ambition. However, the 'responsibility'—the pressure to produce, to generate news, 'to fill column inches' regardless of substance—crushes their spirit and transforms them into cynical, self-serving individuals. They become trapped in a cycle of competition and exploitation, 'robbing each other' for stories and engaging in transactional relationships with colleagues to 'keep going.' The 'joyous tear of camaraderie' quickly turns into 'bawling hatred' as they recognise the futility and dehumanising nature of their work within a system that prioritises sensationalism and profit over truth and genuine connection. *St. Nicholas* highlights how professional environments can become breeding grounds for transactional relationships within a neoliberal framework. The pressure to succeed, 'fill space' and constantly produce regardless of ethical considerations fosters an environment where individuals are incentivised to exploit others for personal gain. The emphasis on individual achievement and competition undermines genuine collaboration and mutual support by transforming colleagues into rivals and relationships into transactions. By highlighting how the pursuit of professional success within a neoliberal

context can erode not only individual integrity but also the very possibility of authentic human connection, the narrator's cynicism reflects his disillusionment with this system. Therefore, this narration about responsibility does not simply extend the commodification of life to human interaction in general but specifically to the professional sphere by revealing how neoliberal logic can transform even seemingly collaborative environments into spaces of exploitation and alienation. The narrator's experience within the journalism industry serves as a microcosm of how neoliberal values can permeate all aspects of life by eroding trust, undermining genuine connection and reducing individuals to their economic and social utility.

Moving from the commodification of life itself to the objectification of women within this system, Lochhead's portrayal of the vampire brides in *Dracula* further accentuates the play's critique of societal structures and the objectification of women under both patriarchy and capitalism. This objectification can be linked to the way neoliberalism reduces individuals to their market value, often disregarding their inherent worth and dignity. Deviating from the traditional image of seductive and alluring figures of vampires, the brides are presented in the play as grotesque and distorted versions of Lucy, Florrie and Mrs Manners²⁶ (Lochhead, 2009, p. 32) to highlight how women are commodified and reduced to mere objects of desire within a consumerist culture. Their exaggerated features and insatiable desires reflect the distorted values and the relentless pursuit of 'more' that characterise capitalist societies, where individuals, particularly women, are encouraged to indulge in self-gratification and narcissistic concern for their appearance. As Jean Baudrillard (1999) likewise observes, "The individual is everywhere invited, primarily, to enjoy himself, to indulge himself. The understanding is that it is by pleasing oneself that one is likely to please others" (p. 95). This emphasis on self-gratification and the pursuit of pleasure resonates with Baudrillard's (1999) analysis of the "feminine model" in consumer society, where women are often presented as commodities to be consumed, further perpetuating gender stereotypes and power imbalances (p. 96). By the subversion of the traditional image of vampires as alluring and seductive figures, the vampire brides' grotesque appearance, with exaggerated features and decaying bridal gowns, plays a crucial role in conveying and enriching the play's

²⁶ A minor character as the head housekeeper at Heartwood, the Westerman sisters' residence.

social commentary. The vampire brides, with their insatiable desires and distorted bodies, become grotesque parodies of neoliberal consumerism, embodying the relentless pursuit of ‘more’ that characterises a society driven by manufactured needs and the constant pressure for self-optimisation. This aligns with Han’s critique of the neoliberal self as a ‘willing slave’ to consumer culture. Through the figures of the vampire brides, Lochhead likely exposes the harmful consequences of societal expectations and dehumanising effects of objectification as well as excessive consumption and patriarchal oppression, while also enhancing the dramatic impact of the narrative throughout the play. Very much like the figures in *St. Nicholas*, who are defined by their social status and material possessions, the vampire brides represent the emptiness and alienation that can result from prioritising material acquisition over genuine human connection.

Shifting the focus from the monstrous feminine to the complexities of individual agency within this system, the experiences of Lucy in *Dracula* offer further insight into the allure and dangers of neoliberal consumerism. Lucy’s aspiration for excitement and willingness to embrace the unknown is made evident in her dialogue with Seward:

- Lucy** [...] Oh, Arthur, do take me back to London with you. I do want to come and see all your lunatics you told me all the stories about.
- Seward** Lucy, you know I can’t. Not yet. Besides, it would upset you, you know it would. It’d terrify you.
- Lucy** Maybe I want to be terrified. (Lochhead, 2009, p. 45)

Lucy’s fascination with Seward’s patients and her desire to be ‘terrified’ reflect a longing for something beyond the mundane and predictable, a desire that aligns with the consumerist promise of excitement and fulfilment through consumption. This resonates with Bauman’s (2007) observation that “Consumer society thrives as long as it manages to render the non-satisfaction of its members (and so, in its own terms, their unhappiness) perpetual” (p. 46). Consumerist culture depends on creating and maintaining a sense of dissatisfaction by pushing individuals like Lucy to constantly seek new experiences and possessions in the hopes of attaining fulfilment. Her dissatisfaction with the constraints of her current life and her latent desire for excitement as well as the unknown later results in ‘inviting’ Dracula into her life and being ultimately exploited by becoming a victim of Dracula’s power and control thereby losing her autonomy and eventually her life. This tragic turn of events exposes the illusory nature of freedom within a consumerist culture, where individuals are encouraged to pursue their desires but are ultimately manipulated

and controlled by the systems of production and consumption. As Baudrillard (1999) aptly states, “The consumer experiences his distinctive behaviours as freedom, as aspiration, as choice”, while remaining trapped within a system that perpetuates desire and dissatisfaction (p. 61). Lucy’s downfall therefore serves as a cautionary instance by highlighting the dangers of unchecked consumerism and how individuals can be seduced by the promise of fulfilment only to find themselves ensnared in a cycle of emptiness and despair.

This pursuit of the transgressive in *Dracula* further connects with Ella’s carefully calculated consumption of animal blood in *A Vampire Story*. While seemingly a humane alternative, Ella’s choice subtly reinforces anthropocentrism within a neoliberal framework by upholding the human/animal binary and reflecting the neoliberal emphasis on individual choice as a solution to moral dilemmas. This ethical consumption mirrors broader consumerist trends where individual choices mask systemic exploitation. In stark contrast to Lucy’s impulsive embrace of desire and Ella’s controlled consumption, Maladict, in *Monstrous Regiment*, engages with the anxieties of conformity and control within neoliberal systems. The highly regimented military environment demands the suppression of individual desires and urges in favour of order and obedience, thereby mirroring the neoliberal emphasis on self-regulation and conformity to market principles. As an alternative to Maladict’s bloodlust, coffee becomes a symbol of both his suppression and his participation in consumer culture by highlighting the paradoxical nature of neoliberal freedoms, which often demand self-control and adherence to market logic as the price of participation. Moreover, this dynamic explores how individuals attempt to manage their perceived otherness through consumer products and seek integration into a system that might otherwise reject them. The constraints placed upon women in both *Dracula* and *A Vampire Story*, particularly upon Lucy and Ella, highlight the limited agency afforded to individuals within patriarchal societies, a system often reinforced and exacerbated by neoliberal policies that emphasise individual responsibility while simultaneously restricting opportunities for marginalised groups.

In contrast to Lucy’s impulsive and unbridled pursuit of desire in *Dracula*, Mina initially embodies a more cautious and reserved approach to life by adhering to societal expectations and seeking solace as well as security within the established order. Her life is carefully built upon the foundations of decorum, respectability and a longing for

stability as evidenced by her marriage to Jonathan, a symbol of respectability as a solicitor as well as her meticulous planning for her wedding, according to societal expectations. However, the delicate balance of her carefully constructed world shatters when she is exposed to Dracula's influence after being bitten by him. Her desire for Dracula is vaguely indicated when she grasps Dracula's cloak as described in the stage direction as "very ambiguous" and "almost like an embrace" when he is about to leave Mina's chamber (Lochhead, 2009, p. 74). This ambiguous indication is later confirmed by Jonathan, who witnesses this scene and accuses her of desiring Dracula and betraying him. This instance seems to be indicative of Mina's desires hidden beneath the surface of societal norms, revealing her previously unknown desires beyond the limitations of the societal structures governing her life. Mina's being cursed as a consequence of Dracula's intoxicating bite serves as a poignant symbol of the vulnerability of individuals within a system that prioritises profit and material gain over individual well-being.

This internal conflict between societal expectations and hidden desires is likewise central to *St. Nicholas*. The narrator's obsession with the actress disrupts his carefully constructed life, echoing the way Dracula's influence disrupts Mina's. This shared experience of inner turmoil highlights the destructive potential of repressed desires within the context of rigid social structures. Mina's experience, however, offers a different perspective on the tension between individual desires and societal expectations. Unlike Maladict's suppression of his inherent nature in *Monstrous Regiment*, his eventual transgression highlights the potential for subversion even within seemingly rigid social structures. Through these contrasting experiences, these plays explore the multifaceted nature of capitalism and consumerism and their insidious impacts on individual desires within a capitalist society. More specifically, with their emphasis on individual freedom and market-driven desires, the plays reveal how neoliberal ideologies can create a climate of vulnerability and exploitation, particularly for women.

Furthermore, Jonathan, in *Dracula*, as a solicitor embodies the ambition and drive for success often associated with the capitalist mindset. His primary focus on his career and securing his financial future is evident in his willingness to travel to Transylvania and to engage in a business deal with Dracula, despite the inherent risks and uncertainties (Lochhead, 2009, p. 18). Jonathan's actions mirror the pursuit of profit that is a driving force behind capitalism, where individuals are often motivated by personal gain and

economic advancement. This pursuit of advancement resonates with Baudrillard's (1999) analysis of consumer society, where individuals are driven not merely by basic needs but also by a desire for 'distinction' and the accumulation of status symbols, thereby further highlighting the materialistic values that underpin capitalist systems (p. 80). Despite the potential risks in a foreign land, Jonathan's pursuit of the deal with Dracula reflects this desire for progress and recognition within the capitalist structure, where wealth and status often serve as markers of success. Regarding the leisure class, Veblen (2010) likewise observes that "The possession of wealth confers honour; it is an invidious distinction" (p. 15). Jonathan's ambition and drive for success align with the neoliberal celebration of entrepreneurialism and the pursuit of individual achievement.

Ultimately, these vampire plays offer a powerful lens through which to examine the insidious influence of neoliberalism on contemporary society. By exploring the commodification of life itself, which is symbolised by blood, the plays expose the dehumanising logic of late capitalism, where individuals are reduced to their economic value and human relationships become transactional. Vividly depicted through the grotesque vampire brides in *Dracula*, the objectification of women and the pervasive pressures of consumerism, evident in Lucy's tragic pursuit of desire and the narrator's cynical observations in *St. Nicholas*, further underscore the plays' critique of neoliberal values. In *Dracula*, *A Vampire Story* and *Monstrous Regiment*, the symbolic representation of blood—whether consumed, suppressed or commodified—reveals anxieties surrounding the operation of power within neoliberal structures. These anxieties extend beyond the literal act of consumption to encompass broader concerns about individualism, consumerism, conformity and the exploitation inherent within these systems. Lochhead's *Dracula* utilises blood to symbolise Victorian anxieties related to female sexuality and transgression by reflecting societal fears and the seductive yet dangerous nature of desire. Similarly, Ella's choice to drink animal blood in *A Vampire Story* reinforces anthropocentrism and reflects neoliberal prioritisation of individual choice as a solution to moral dilemmas. In contrast, Maladict's coffee addiction in *Monstrous Regiment* represents an attempt to suppress his vampiric nature within a highly regimented environment by reflecting anxieties surrounding conformity and self-control within neoliberal systems. Coffee becomes a symbol of self-regulation, highlighting how neoliberal freedoms often demand conformity. These plays offer

nuanced perspectives on the vampire myth in relation to neoliberalism by demonstrating how individual choices can reinforce neoliberal values and perpetuate power structures. Through the multifaceted symbol of blood and the diverse experiences of their characters, these plays challenge traditional vampire narratives and invite audiences to confront the ‘vampiric’ forces operating within contemporary culture by prompting critical reflection on the ethical implications of a system that prioritises profit and power over human well-being and social justice.

3.3. RESISTANCE AND ALTERNATIVES: SEEDS OF COMMUNISM(?)

Despite its predominantly critical stance towards the exploitative nature of capitalism and the dehumanising effects of consumerism, *Dracula* also simultaneously offers glimpses of hope by envisioning the potential for a more just and equitable society, as suggested within the ideals of communism. While not explicitly communist, these moments of resistance can be seen as a rejection of the core tenets of neoliberalism. This resistance manifests in various forms, from individual acts of defiance to collective struggles against oppressive structures. Specifically, Mina’s inherent discomfort with the rigid class system, which is a cornerstone of the capitalist structure, and her stated desire to dismantle the barriers separating mistresses from servants suggests an awareness of the injustices inherent within capitalism. Her desire for a more egalitarian society, where individuals are not confined by the constraints of social status or economic standing, corresponds to the concept of a classless society as envisioned in the *Communist Manifesto*. This utopian vision, where “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (Marx & Engels, 1992, p. 80), offers a beacon of hope in the face of the harsh realities of a society confronting inequalities and divisions perpetuated by capitalist structures. Mina’s aspiration to a more equitable world, therefore, seems to serve as an appropriate exemplification of an individual hoping to overcome the limitations imposed by oppressive systems and envisioning a future in which the value of a person is not measured by material wealth or their status in the social hierarchy.

This desire for a classless society can be contrasted with the rigid social hierarchies depicted in *Monstrous Regiment*, where Polly’s disguise highlights the absurdity of gender-based limitations. Despite societal expectations, Polly’s ability to function effectively as a soldier underscores the arbitrary nature of such divisions by echoing

Mina's desire for a more equitable world. While the collective action in *Monstrous Regiment* offers a powerful image of resistance against oppressive structures, Mina's individual struggle within the confines of her social class reflects the difficulty of enacting systemic change under neoliberalism. Similarly, *A Vampire Story* presents Ella's ambiguous relationship with both freedom and constraint within her vampire existence, which resonates with Mina's struggle. While Ella desires freedom from Claire's control, she is also bound by her vampiric nature and the societal limitations it imposes.

Furthering the exploration of resistance within *Dracula*, Florrie, as a representative of the working class, exemplifies the values of hard work, community and solidarity that are often associated with the proletariat and the communist ideal. Her voluntariness for helping the Westerman sisters—despite their privileged position within the rigid class system—beyond her duty as a servant and her obvious pity for Renfield demonstrate the potential for compassion and collective action existing outside the individualistic and competitive framework characteristic of capitalism. While the sisters are not working-class characters, the shared threat of Dracula, as an oppressive force threatening to commodify them by consuming their blood and taking them under his influence, creates a temporary alliance between Florrie and the sisters and highlights the potential for cross-class solidarity in the face of a common enemy. Florrie's actions, in this context, resonate with the principles of the *Communist Manifesto*, which emphasises the “ever-expanding union of workers” and the transformative power of solidarity within the working class to challenge oppressive systems (Marx & Engels, 1992, p. 37). Florrie's compassion and belief in the collective good serve as a powerful reminder of an individual seeking connection, mutual support and a vision of a more equitable future.

Similar themes of solidarity and shared struggle also emerge in *Monstrous Regiment*. Despite their diverse backgrounds, the women of the regiment are united by their common goal and their shared experience of oppression. Polly aptly states “I'm not the first woman from Borogravia who's disguised herself as a man to join the army, and I won't be the last” (Briggs & Pratchett, 2004, p. 3). This shared experience fosters a sense of camaraderie and mutual support by reflecting Florrie's compassion and belief in the collective good. Similar to the shared threat posed by Dracula in *Dracula*, the existential threat of war faced by the characters in *Monstrous Regiment* creates an imperative for collective action that transcends individual self-interest. This sense of

shared purpose stands in direct opposition to the competitive and individualistic ethos of neoliberalism. The family dynamic of the newspaper team in *The Truth* likewise reinforces this notion by emphasising the strength of collective action and community over individual gain. This focus on community underscores the power of collective action in resisting neoliberal pressures.

This hope for a more just and collaborative world is further amplified by the characterisation of Van Helsing in *Dracula*, a figure of immense knowledge and strong determination who plays a crucial role in combating the forces of oppression and exploitation embodied by their ultimate enemy, Count Dracula. Van Helsing's profound understanding of Dracula's weaknesses serves as a powerful symbol of the transformative power of knowledge and awareness, reflecting the Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács' (1999) assertion that "the rise and evolution of [the proletariat's] knowledge and its actual rise and evolution in the course of history are just the two different sides of the same real process" (p. 21). For instance, when confronted with Jonathan's despair over Dracula's "almighty power," Van Helsing confidently disagrees by asserting, "Not almighty. No!" (Lochhead, 2009, p. 66) and meticulously explains Dracula's vulnerabilities thereby encouraging him to the combat against Dracula's oppression and raising his awareness and knowledge:

Van Helsing (*confidently affirmative*) For these [garlic and the crucifix] are the things which so afflict him that his every power shrivels. A stake in the heart, a cut-off head, and that's how we make him true dead. And then and only then can this – as salt does to a snail – dissolve him: the consecrated wafer, the Communion Host. These are the rules. Come dawn he must lie low all day every day in his coffin, shamming death. And remember – wolf, black dog, bat, a fog that chokes us – he can only shape change in the darkness. (Lochhead, 2009, p. 66)

Van Helsing's knowledge is not merely theoretical but actively applied to confront and dismantle oppressive structures. Accordingly, Van Helsing becomes a symbol of leadership and guidance on the path towards liberation from injustice and oppressive systems. His actions also resonate with Antonio Gramsci's (1992) concept of the "new intellectual" who participates actively in practical life, acting as a "constructor, organiser, 'permanent persuader'" (p. 10). Van Helsing embodies this ideal by educating others, equipping them with the necessary tools to confront the darkness threatening their society thus transcending the limitations of a mere orator and solidifying his position as a

proactive leader against oppression. In this sense, Van Helsing's role in the narrative aligns with the ideals of communism, encouraging awareness and collective action by inspiring individuals and communities to challenge and dismantle oppressive systems, thereby paving the way for a more just and equitable future. He also emphasises the strength of unity and solidarity by proclaiming to Jonathan and Seward; "we have each other. And our enemy has nothing to match this" (Lochhead, 2009, p. 66). His character therefore seems to embody the transformative potential of knowledge, leadership, solidarity and active participation in the struggle for social change.

The emphasis on knowledge as a tool for liberation similarly resonates with William de Worde's role in *The Truth*. De Worde's commitment to disseminating information as evident in his statement "I just want to hear the truth" (Briggs & Pratchett, 2002, p. 111), even in the face of opposition, reflects Van Helsing's belief in the power of knowledge to combat oppressive forces. De Worde's journalistic pursuit of truth involves meticulous research, interviewing and fact-checking—all forms of knowledge acquisition and application—to expose deception and hold those in power accountable. This pursuit of truth and its potential to challenge established power structures aligns with Van Helsing's actions. Van Helsing's knowledge and leadership are essential to combating Dracula's oppressive power, just as de Worde's commitment to truth and journalistic integrity in *The Truth* becomes a crucial weapon against the forces seeking to control the narrative and manipulate public opinion. Both characters utilise knowledge and communication to fight against deception and manipulation, tactics commonly employed within neoliberal systems to maintain power and control.

While marked by sorrow and loss, the ending of *Dracula* nevertheless offers a glimmer of hope, albeit a fragile one. The final scene unfolds with a blend of intimacy and violence by highlighting the complex interplay of love, loss and the enduring struggle for a better future. In a symbolic gesture, the final scene encapsulates both the darkness Mina and Jonathan have overcome and the possibility of a new beginning:

Jonathan grasps **Dracula**'s cloak of darkness and spreads it out at their feet. They sink down on it, kissing. A third and final set of shriek and hammer blows. As it dies away with the lovers entwined on **Dracula**'s cloak, white snow begins to fall, then blush-pink petals like apple blossom and confetti, then darker purple-pink and finally red, red petals as the curtain falls. (Lochhead, 2009, p. 85)

This tableau, with Mina and Jonathan embracing amidst a cascade of falling snow and petals, leaves a lasting impression on the audience by prompting reflection on the multifaceted nature of the play's themes. The descending snow and petals with their shifting colours and symbolic associations embody the promise of renewal while they also serve as reminders of loss and sacrifice. The initial descent of delicate white snow suggests a cleansing of the past like a blank canvas upon which a new chapter might be written. This sense of a fresh start is further amplified by the shower of blush-pink petals, reminiscent of apple blossoms, which symbolise rebirth, hope, and new beginnings as apple blossoms herald the arrival of spring, a season traditionally associated with rejuvenation and growth thereby reinforcing this optimistic interpretation. The association with confetti adds another layer of meaning, evoking a sense of celebration and joy after the hard-won victory over the forces of darkness.

The transient nature of snow and petals, destined to melt or wither away, however, subtly undermines this optimistic interpretation. Their ephemeral beauty serves as a poignant reminder of the fragility of hope and the fleeting nature of happiness. This visual metaphor underscores the play's underlying message that progress towards a more just and equitable society is not a linear path but rather a continuous struggle fraught with challenges and setbacks as is also evident in the characters' individual conflicts and struggles throughout the play. This sense of fragility and the persistent presence of loss is further emphasised by the gradual shift in the colours of the falling petals. From the delicate pinks of apple blossoms, the hues deepen into darker purple pinks by culminating in a cascade of red petals. This visual progression not only evokes the blood spilt throughout the play, a sombre reminder of the sacrifices made and the lives lost in the fight against oppressive forces but also alludes to the communist ideals indicated through the end of the narrative. It indicates that the beauty of the falling petals, while suggestive of hope and renewal, cannot fully erase the weight of these sacrifices, thereby leaving a lingering sense of melancholy amidst the celebration.

The play's ending, therefore, does not offer a simplistic resolution or a definitive vision of a utopian future. The image of Mina and Jonathan embracing on Dracula's cloak, a symbol of the darkness they have overcome, encapsulates this ambiguity. Their attempt to find love and hope amidst the remnants of a flawed system raises profound questions about the feasibility of achieving a communist utopia, the limitations of individual actions

and the ongoing struggle to create a better world while grappling with the legacies of capitalism and consumerism. The falling snow and petals, both beautiful and transient, embody this delicate balance of hope and uncertainty, prompting the audience to contemplate the complex and enduring nature of the play's themes.

Offering a glimmer of hope for a new beginning, this ambiguous ending resonates with the similarly ambiguous conclusion of *St. Nicholas*. The narrator's anticipated return to normalcy reveals a performative aspect to his recovery by mirroring the fragility of hope amidst a persistent sense of disillusionment as evident in his narration:

The summer was fading. There was a chill in the morning. I walked down the street and I thought about the fuss people were going to make of me. The potential it gave me to bully sympathy out of everybody. Back from my breakdown. On the right track again, yeah? I'd 'Embrace My Second Chance.' I'd do a piece about 'Getting Back.' Getting back in touch with things. Talking To My Wife. Giving My Children My Advice. I had my health. I had resolve. But most important. Over everything else. I had a story. So, were they real? Or were they a dream? Well, I've got to ask you, what the hell isn't a dream? (McPherson, 2011, p. 178)

This passage encapsulates the narrator's struggle to reconcile his past experiences with his anticipated future. The fading summer and the chill in the morning symbolise the decline of his previous life as well as the uncertain transition into a new phase. His cynical awareness of the 'fuss' surrounding his return from his 'breakdown' suggests a performative aspect to his recovery, as he anticipates manipulating others' sympathy for personal gain. The narrator's plans to 'Embrace My Second Chance' and write about 'Getting Back' further reinforce the sense of hope as well as performativity by hinting at a calculated attempt to capitalise on his experiences rather than genuine self-reflection. The narrator's unanswered questions about the nature of reality and dreams likewise further contribute to the sense of both hope and uncertainty.

However, this nuanced ambiguity in *St. Nicholas*, where the possibility of change is tempered by cynicism and doubt, contrasts sharply with the more pessimistic resolutions of *A Vampire Story*, *Monstrous Regiment* and *The Truth*. In *A Vampire Story*, Eleanor's return to her vampire costume suggests a resignation to her fate and the cyclical nature of violence and exploitation by implying a continuation of the same oppressive patterns. The cyclical structure of *Monstrous Regiment*, where the ongoing war and the women's disguises highlight the enduring power of societal norms and expectations, likewise reinforces this sense of inescapable repetition. Despite their individual acts of

defiance, the women remain constrained by the very structures they challenge. Similarly, mirroring the relentless and often manipulative churn of the news cycle, the unresolved narrative of *The Truth* suggests that the struggle for truth and transparency is a continuous and potentially futile battle against powerful forces seeking to control information. While *St. Nicholas* and *Dracula* allow for the possibility of renewal, albeit tinged with uncertainty, these other plays emphasise the enduring power of systemic forces and the formidable challenges of achieving lasting personal or societal transformation within a neoliberal context.

Across these diverse dramatic landscapes, the vampire myth serves as a potent vehicle for exploring the complexities of resistance and the search for alternatives within a neoliberal world. While *Dracula* offers glimpses of hope for collective action and individual resistance against oppressive structures, exemplified by Mina's attempt to challenge class hierarchies and Florrie's embodiment of working-class solidarity, *A Vampire Story* explores the psychological toll of isolation and alienation within a neoliberal framework. It highlights the cyclical nature of exploitation and the challenges of escaping deeply ingrained patterns of abuse, as seen in Eleanor's resignation to her fate at the end of the play. In contrast to Ella's isolated struggle, *Monstrous Regiment*, through its depiction of women challenging gender norms within the military context, examines the potential and limitations of collective resistance against patriarchal and societal constraints. The play suggests that while collective action can empower individuals and disrupt established hierarchies, the enduring power of these structures necessitates ongoing struggle. Similarly, with its focus on journalistic integrity and the manipulation of information, *The Truth* emphasises the importance of knowledge and transparency as tools for combating the deceptive tactics often employed within neoliberal systems. William de Worde's pursuit of truth becomes a form of resistance against the forces seeking to control and distort narratives. Finally, through the narrator's cynical journey and its ambiguous final scene, *St. Nicholas* offers a reflection on the struggle for authenticity and the elusive nature of hope and redemption within a society increasingly defined by performativity and self-interest. These plays ultimately offer a multifaceted exploration of the challenges and possibilities of resistance within a world shaped by neoliberal forces. They demonstrate the diverse ways in which individuals and communities engage with the pressures of conformity, consumerism and exploitation,

while also suggesting the potential for individual agency, collective action and the creation of alternative ways of being.



CHAPTER FOUR

QUEER VAMPIRISM

Emerging from the intersection of post-structuralism, feminist scholarship and gay and lesbian activism, queer theory provides a powerful framework for critiquing normative categories and their influence on our understanding of identity, sexuality and society. Rather than accepting fixed and essentialist notions of selfhood, queer theory posits that identities are fluid, performative and constructed through a dynamic interplay of social, discursive and material forces. A key figure in articulating the concept of performativity, Judith Butler (1999) argues in her *Gender Trouble* that “gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes... gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be” (p. 33). This challenges the notion of pre-discursive sex, suggesting that ‘sex’ is itself a normative construct, “one of the norms by which the ‘one’ becomes viable at all” within the domain of cultural intelligibility (Butler, 1993, p. 2). By highlighting the role of social norms and regulatory practices in shaping gender identity, this performative understanding of gender disrupts the idea of a stable, coherent gender identity that precedes and determines its outward expression. Butler (1993) further develops this concept in her *Bodies That Matter* by asserting that sex is “a process whereby regulatory norms materialise ‘sex’ and achieve this materialisation through a forcible reiteration of those norms” (p. 2) and emphasising the violence inherent in the production of intelligible bodies and the concomitant exclusion of abject bodies that defy normative categorisation (Butler, 1993, p. xi).

A cornerstone of queer theory is its deconstruction of such binary oppositions as heterosexual/homosexual, masculine/feminine, normal/deviant and inside/outside. Often presented as natural, self-evident and mutually exclusive, these binaries are revealed by queer theory to be interdependent, unstable and mutually constitutive. As Butler (1993) explains binary oppositions structure intelligibility through an “exclusionary matrix,” establishing a “constitutive outside” that defines the limits of the subject (p. 3). She argues that this ‘outside’ is “not the opposite of the former [the culturally intelligible], for oppositions are, after all, part of intelligibility; the latter [the abject] is the excluded and illegible domain that haunts the former domain as the spectre of its own impossibility” (Butler, 1993, p. xi). This spectral presence of the abject underscores the inherent

instability of binary systems by revealing how what is deemed unintelligible nevertheless constitutes the very limit of intelligibility itself.

Analysing the heterosexual/homosexual binary opposition and its pervasive cultural implications, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) argues in *Epistemology of the Closet* that the rigid distinction between these two categories is a relatively recent historical construct, emerging in the late nineteenth century as Western culture shifted its understanding and representation of same-sex desire. As Sedgwick (1990) explains, this destabilisation of previously understood categories of sexuality had a ripple effect across seemingly disparate areas of cultural thought and practice:

[This] crisis of homo/heterosexual definition has affected our culture through its ineffaceable marking particularly of the categories secrecy/disclosure, knowledge/ignorance, private/public, masculine/feminine, majority/minority, innocence/initiation, natural/artificial, new/old, discipline/terrorism, canonic/noncanonic, wholeness/decadence, urbane/provincial, domestic/foreign, health/illness, same/different, active/passive, in/out, cognition/paranoia, art/kitsch, utopia/apocalypse, sincerity/sentimentality, and voluntariness/addiction. (p. 11)

Sedgwick's list demonstrates how the construction of the homo/heterosexual binary impacted far more than just sexual identity. It infiltrated epistemological frameworks, spatial understandings, power dynamics, cultural valuations, concepts of selfhood and even eschatological visions. By linking these diverse categories to the crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, Sedgwick reveals how deeply embedded this binary is within Western culture and how its instability destabilises seemingly unrelated conceptual oppositions. The very act of defining homosexuality as a distinct category had profound and far-reaching consequences for how individuals understand and organise the world around them. It created a pervasive anxiety around the boundaries of normalcy and deviance, which then shaped a wide range of cultural expressions and social practices.

This destabilisation of binary categories is a core element of queer theory. Michel Foucault (1978), in his *The History of Sexuality*, also illustrates this destabilisation as follows: "The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (p. 43). By highlighting the emergence of homosexuality as a distinct category in the modern era, this statement encapsulates a shift from understanding same-sex desire as a series of acts to understanding it as a fixed identity. By expanding on this notion, David Halperin (1986) distinguishes between "sexual inversion," a broader category

encompassing various forms of gender nonconformity and “homosexuality” as a specific form of sexual identity (p. 34). This distinction is crucial for understanding the historical development of homosexual identity and its relationship to earlier, less defined categories of sexual and gender deviance. By revealing the historical and cultural contingency of these categories and their role in producing and regulating sexual identities, the very act of categorising sexualities becomes a subject of inquiry for queer theory. The instability of these binary oppositions, therefore, creates space for a proliferation of identities and desires that resist easy categorisation, exceeding and challenging the regulatory power of normative frameworks.

The performative dimension of identity is another key focus of queer theory. By drawing on Butler’s work on gender performativity and the insights of theorists like David Halperin, queer theory emphasises that identity is not a fixed essence but rather something that is continually produced and reproduced through repeated acts, gestures and behaviours. Butler (1999) argues that gender is “performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (p. 33). Rather than expressing a pre-existing inner truth, gender is created through the performance itself. This performance is not a singular act but a “stylised repetition of acts” (Butler, 1999, p. 179) that produces the illusion of a stable identity. Butler (1993) further explains performativity as follows:

[It is] not a singular “act”, for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition. (p. 12)

According to her, this concealment of the process of reiteration, through which norms are produced and enforced, is what gives them the appearance of naturalness and inevitability.

Gender performance is not a free, individual choice but is always situated within a broader social and discursive context. As Butler (1993) explains, this context acts as a ‘matrix’ that both enables and constrains the performance:

The “act” of this gendering cannot, strictly speaking, be a human act or expression, a wilful appropriation, and it is certainly not a question of taking on a mask; it is the matrix through which all willing first becomes possible, its enabling cultural condition. (p. 7)

This ‘matrix’ within which gender is produced is not freely chosen or controlled by the individual but is rather the product of pre-existing social and linguistic structures.

Nietzsche (1989) likewise highlights the way in which “the cause of the origin of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual employment and place in a system of purposes, lie worlds apart” (p. 77). This suggests that the social meanings and purposes attributed to gendered performances can be—and often are—quite distinct from the forces and conditions that produce them.

Applying queer theory to the figure of the vampire allows for a critical examination of how this figure embodies and challenges prevailing norms of gender and sexuality. Often depicted as a transgressive figure who defies the boundaries of life and death, male and female as well as human and monstrous, the vampire serves as a potent metaphor for exploring the anxieties and possibilities that arise at the limits of normative categories. By examining how narratives mobilise the vampire figure and to what ends, the complex interplay between identity, desire, power and knowledge can be further explored, revealing the ways in which these narratives both reflect and shape individuals’ understanding of the social world. The enduring fascination with the vampire and its persistent presence in contemporary culture suggest that these questions remain as vital and pressing issues, urging people to continue interrogating the boundaries of the human and the monstrous, the living and the dead, as well as the self and the other.

4.1. MONSTROUS REGIMENT: CROSS-DRESSING, HOMOSOCIALITY AND THE QUEER COLLECTIVE

Terry Pratchett’s *Monstrous Regiment*, adapted for the stage by Stephen Briggs, provides a compelling example of how cross-dressing, homosocial bonds and queer identity intersect within a specific social and historical context. Set in the fictional, patriarchal nation of Borogravia, the play follows the story of Polly Perks, a young woman who disguises herself as a man to join the army in order to find her missing brother. In doing so, Polly enters into a world of homosocial bonds, a world of men, where her performance of masculinity becomes a means of both survival and self-discovery. As Polly explains to the audience, “Men’s clothes, short hair and a bit of a swagger is all it takes to be a man” (Briggs & Pratchett, 2004, p. 17). By echoing Butler’s (1999) argument that gender is constituted through repeated acts and expressions (p. 25), this statement highlights the performative nature of gender. Polly’s act of cross-dressing then becomes

a form of performance through which she not only gains access to the male world of the army but also begins to question and reconfigure the very meaning of masculinity itself.

The theme of homosociality is central to the play, as Polly's entry into the all-male world of the army throws into relief the bonds and relations between men. The regiment itself becomes a kind of 'queer collective,' a space where normative categories of gender and sexuality are challenged and reconfigured. The close bonds that develop between Polly and her fellow soldiers, particularly Shufti Manickle, another woman disguised as a man, suggest the potential for homosocial desire to emerge within this all-male environment.

The play further complicates the dynamics of homosociality through the character of Lieutenant Blouse. Evident in his reluctance to perform femininity himself, despite recognising its strategic value, Blouse's initial adherence to traditional notions of masculinity is abruptly overturned when he devises a plan to infiltrate the enemy ranks by disguising himself as a washerwoman. Inspired by Polly's suggestion, this plan depends on the inherent absurdity of a man attempting such a deception and highlights the play's critique of rigid military masculinity. Complete with a flirtatious banter, Blouse's subsequent embrace of the role of 'Daphne' reveals a playful subversion of gender roles rather than a deep personal transformation. His earlier flippant remark about achieving the 'highest accolade' of having a foodstuff or item of clothing named after him gains a new layer of meaning in light of his cross-dressing escapade (Briggs & Pratchett, 2004, p. 90). While still a jest about military glory, it also subtly underscores the play's broader point about the arbitrariness of gendered categories and the potential for challenging them through performance. Though initially driven by strategic necessity, Blouse's performance of femininity becomes a comedic and ultimately insightful exploration of the performative nature of gender itself, thereby questioning the very norms that dictate which actions and accomplishments are deemed worthy of recognition.

The play's exploration of queer identity is further amplified through its engagement with the figure of the vampire. The reformed vampire in the regiment, Maladict embodies both the monstrous and the sympathetic aspects of this figure. While his vampiric nature initially marks him as an outsider, his commitment to abstaining from human blood and his loyalty to his fellow soldiers challenge the conventional association of the vampire

with evil and predation. The presence of Maladict within the regiment's homosocial world also raises questions about the relationship between monstrosity, queerness and the human.

Within the monstrous regiment, Maladict, whose true identity is revealed to be Maladicta, a biological woman performing as a man and as a vampire, stands out as a figure whose ambiguous gender further complicates the play's interrogation of normative categories. As a vampire, Maladict already occupies a liminal space between human and monster, living and dead; the revelation of Maladicta's identity adds another layer of liminality by blurring the boundaries of male and female, challenging the binary logic that underpins normative gender identities.

Maladict's performance of masculinity, then, becomes a double masquerade, a performance within a performance, as both vampire and man are constructed through a 'stylised repetition of acts' (Butler, 1999, p. 179) that produces the illusion of a stable and coherent identity. By highlighting the ways in which both masculinity and monstrosity are constructed through cultural norms and expectations, this not only allows Maladicta to navigate the homosocial world of the army but also creates opportunities for her to reveal the performative nature of gender itself. Moreover, Maladicta's vampirism disrupts not only the categories of the human but those of normative sexuality, as a figure whose desire does not conform to reproductive purposes but rather requires blood as its sustenance. In a world that demands conformity and shuns otherness, Maladicta's embodiment of multiple liminalities—as a vampire, woman and masquerading man—makes her a figure of both abjection and empowerment, a figure who is simultaneously cast out and yet also holds the potential for disrupting the very categories that seek to define her.

Through its exploration of cross-dressing, homosociality, and queer identity, *Monstrous Regiment* offers a nuanced and complex portrait of how gender, sexuality and identity are constructed and performed within the hyper-masculine environment of the military, a world governed by rigid normative categories. The play's setting in the Borogravian army, amidst the backdrop of war, underscores the rigidity of these norms and heightens the impact of their transgression. By mobilising the figure of the vampire and incorporating elements of fantasy and humour, the play creates space for

challenging these categories and reimagining the possibilities of being in such a strictly regulated space, a world where fixed definitions become fluid and unstable, where the lines between male and female, human and monster, as well as self and other are constantly blurred and renegotiated. The play's playful engagement with these categories, however, is not simply a matter of deconstruction or subversion but rather an act of creative reimagining, a process of exploring the generative potential that lies within the very structures it critiques.

By creating a space where audiences can engage with these complex issues in a less fraught and more playful way, the play's use of humour, in particular, serves to defuse the anxieties that often surround discussions of gender and sexuality. The comedic elements of the play however do not diminish the seriousness of its political critique. They rather amplify it by revealing the absurdity of the rigid normative categories that govern gender and sexuality, highlighting the ways in which these categories often fail to capture the complexity of lived experience. With Polly's decision to remain in the army and continue to challenge the patriarchal structures of Borogravian society, the play's ending suggests that the possibilities for social transformation do not lie in simply escaping or transcending these structures but in actively engaging with them, in finding ways to reshape and reimagine them from within.

The vampire figure itself also becomes a site of this reimagining. Maladicta's transformation into a reformed vampire (into Maladict) demonstrates the power of performance to create new possibilities for identity. Along with her refusal to succumb to the traditional bloodlust of the vampire, her adoption of a masculine role suggests that even the most monstrous figures can be reclaimed and redefined through acts of will and self-fashioning. This act of self-creation however is not simply a matter of individual agency; it is also enabled by the social and discursive context within which it takes place. Maladicta's transformation is made possible by the support and acceptance of her fellow soldiers, embracing her as one of their own despite her vampiric nature and gender ambiguity. The regiment itself, as a queer collective, becomes a space of possibility, a place where individuals can explore and express their identities in ways that defy normative expectations.

This utopian vision of social transformation however is not without its challenges. The play's setting in war-torn Borogravia and the ever-present threat of violence and death remind the audience that the struggle for social justice is often fraught with peril. With its open-endedness and refusal to offer any easy resolutions, the play's ending suggests that the work of queering the world, challenging normative categories and reimagining the possibilities for identity is an ongoing and necessarily unfinished project. Yet, the play's playful spirit and its insistence on the power of individual and collective agency also offer a message of hope, suggesting that even in a world governed by rigid and oppressive structures, there is always the possibility for resistance, transformation and the creation of new and more liveable futures.

4.2. QUEER GOTHIC: EXPLORING THE VAMPIRE IN *DRACULA*, *ST. NICHOLAS* AND *A VAMPIRE STORY*

With its focus on how Polly Perks and her fellow soldiers challenge and disrupt normative categories of gender and sexuality within the hyper-masculine environment of the Borogravian army, the preceding analysis of *Monstrous Regiment* demonstrates the subversive potential of queer narratives. This disruption of established systems and norms is also a defining feature of the Gothic tradition itself. As Robin Sowerby (2012) explains, 'Gothic' has been a 'protean' term, signifying a variety of things across different periods and disciplines (p. 35). Initially associated with the historical Goths, a Germanic tribe who played a significant role in the decline of the Roman Empire, the term Gothic was initially synonymous with barbarism, chaos and the destruction of the classical order. This association with a negative force that disrupts and dismantles the established systems would persist in the various transformations of the term Gothic over the centuries.

With the emergence of the Gothic Revival²⁷ in the 18th century, the Gothic became intertwined with a fascination with the medieval period, its architecture and literature, as well as a reappraisal of earlier artistic forms, such as the romance and the ballad (Punter, 2012, p. 3). Characterised by a paradoxical embrace of strength and liberty alongside an

²⁷ The Gothic Revival was a multifaceted cultural movement that emerged in mid-18th century Europe and spread to other parts of the world, notably to the United States and the British colonies. It was characterised by a renewed interest in and fascination with the art, architecture, literature, and culture of the medieval period, particularly the Gothic style that flourished in Europe from the 12th to the 16th centuries.

acknowledgement of ‘barbaric culture’ (Botting, 2012, p. 16), this renewed interest resonates with queer experiences of simultaneous marginalisation and empowerment. The Gothic’s exploration of liminality and transgression as well as its questioning of societal norms and boundaries provide fertile ground for examining non-normative identities and desires. Specifically, the Gothic’s focus on decay, ruin and the uncanny speaks to anxieties about the instability of identity and the perceived decay of social structures, anxieties which resonate with those felt by individuals and groups marginalised for defying or exceeding social and sexual norms. It is “the strength of Gothic [that] rests upon its being a liminal genre,” whose subject matter focuses on “liminal spaces, marginalised situations, non-normative characters and taboo practices” (Haefele-Thomas, 2023b, p. 4).

Pillared upon this rich and complex tradition as well as the intersection of queer theory and Gothic studies, the concept of queer Gothic offers a productive framework for examining how the anxieties and possibilities of queer experience are articulated and negotiated within Gothic narratives. Like queer theory itself, queer Gothic focuses on deconstructing binaries, challenging normative categories and exploring the performative nature of identity, as discussed in the previous section. This intersection of queer theory and the Gothic is further emphasised by William Hughes and Andrew Smith (2009a), who observe in *Queering the Gothic* that “Gothic has, in a sense, always been ‘queer’” (p. 1). Moreover, as Hughes and Smith (2009a) argue, “to be queer is to be different, yet it is also to be unavoidably associated with the non-queer, the normative” (p. 3). This suggests that queerness exists not in isolation but in a dynamic interplay with established norms, creating a tension, as described by Hughes and Smith (2009a, p. 3), between conformity and subversion.

Building on the anxieties and transgressions inherent in the Gothic, queer Gothic emerges from feminist and queer theory to analyse the intersection of queer identities and experiences with Gothic literary and cultural tropes and conventions, attending particularly to those marginalised or ‘othered’ for defying or transgressing heteronormative and cisnormative²⁸ expectations. This dynamic is particularly evident in the figure of the vampire, a recurring motif in both Gothic and queer literature. As a figure

²⁸ “Believing or suggesting that cisgender people (= people whose gender matches the body they were born with) are normal or right and all other people are not” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.-a).

of both fascination and revulsion, the vampire has long served as a potent symbol in Gothic narratives by embodying anxieties about sexuality, death and the transgression of boundaries. The vampire's inherent otherness, its existence outside conventional social structures and its fluid and often transgressive relationship to gender and sexuality make it a particularly resonant figure in queer Gothic.

Queer Gothic then not only utilises the vampire as a figure of abjection and transgression but it rather “serves as a shadow or mirror reflection of our deepest desires, as well as our fears” (Cameron, 2023, p. 117). This makes the vampire a particularly potent figure to give voice to marginalised experiences and to subvert societal norms. Moreover, the vampire's queerness is often explored through the lens of the Gothic in that it draws attention to precisely those aspects of the vampire mythos that challenge traditional notions of selfhood, sexuality and social order. The Gothic's ambivalent relationship with the past, its use of history as “a screen for the consumption and projection of the present,” as Fred Botting (2012, p. 22) has argued, allows contemporary playwrights to reimagine the vampire myth through a queer lens, interrogating how historical anxieties about otherness and transgression continue to inform present-day understandings of sexuality and identity. As queer artists offer critiques of traditional forms of social, cultural and political marginalisation and oppression, these re-imaginings provide opportunities to reclaim and rewrite cultural narratives.

In addition to *Monstrous Regiment*, Lochhead's *Dracula*, McPherson's *St. Nicholas* and Buffini's *A Vampire Story* also offer distinct yet interconnected explorations of queerness through the figure of the vampire by utilising the dramatic form to challenge societal norms, exploring the fluidity of identity and exposing the anxieties that lie beneath the surface of seemingly ordinary lives. Focusing initially on Lochhead's *Dracula*, this analysis will demonstrate how the play utilises queer Gothic tropes to interrogate anxieties surrounding gender and sexuality that were prevalent in the Victorian era. These historical anxieties, however, continue to resonate within contemporary society. The vampire figure in the play, as a site of both fascination and revulsion, functions as a symbol for both embodying and challenging these enduring concerns.

Set against the backdrop of the late Victorian era, Lochhead's *Dracula* explicitly engages with the Gothic's characteristic exploration of boundaries and anxieties of the known world collapsing into chaos. The play utilises traditional Gothic tropes such as grotesque consumption, liminal landscapes, ambiguous religious symbolism and the exploration of mental fragility to create an atmosphere of unease and foreboding. This atmosphere powerfully mirrors a society confronting rapid change and a creeping awareness of the shadows beneath the surface of progress.

The precariousness of boundaries is a key theme in the play. These include the grotesque consumption of life, exemplified by Renfield's zoophagous habits and vampires' bloodsucking. Described through an imagery of 'storms,' 'lightning,' 'wind,' 'wolves' and 'dark forests' (Lochhead, 2009, pp. 21–24), Transylvania's liminal and menacing landscape further emphasises this vulnerability. The use of ambiguous religious symbols, such as crucifixes and Communion wafers (Lochhead, 2009, p. 70), adds another layer to this exploration, as does the play's focus on mental fragility.

This destabilisation of seemingly secure boundaries between the self and other, the natural and the supernatural, reason and madness resonates with queer Gothic's interest in exploring the liminal spaces that exist outside of (or in between) normative categories. This is a concern similarly explored in McPherson's *St. Nicholas*, where the unnamed protagonist's descent into a world of vampires mirrors his own psychological fragmentation and blurring of reality. As José Esteban Muñoz (2009) states, "queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. The here and now is a prison house" (p. 1) and all of the social, moral and physical limitations for those who fall outside the social, sexual and gendered norms create tension in *St. Nicholas* in terms of identity and confinement.

While rooted in Stoker's Victorian context, Lochhead's play, written over a century later in 1985, also addresses the enduring power of these Gothic symbols. As Punter (2013) suggests, "forged as a response to a period of social trauma," these symbols persist because "trauma is one which British culture is still trying, in increasingly sophisticated ways, to understand" (p. 112). As explored by S. Brooke Cameron (2023) in "Queer Vampires," this resonates with the recurring motif of trauma in contemporary vampire narratives and suggests that these concerns remain unresolved, continuing to haunt later

generations in new and unsettling ways (pp. 117–133). These insights underscore the vampire’s capacity to function as a symbolic repository for societal wounds by enabling contemporary narratives to explore how historical traumas continue to shape present-day anxieties.

Similarly, Buffini uses the seemingly ordinary setting of a small British town—a liminal space between the known and the unknown, a place where outsiders like vampires can potentially find refuge or face further marginalisation—in *A Vampire Story* to explore the complexities of queer experience through the figure of Ella, a teenage vampire haunted by her monstrous past. As both predator and prey burdened by the consequences of her actions, Ella embodies the queer Gothic vampire—a figure whose otherness, transgressive desires and precarious existence outside of human norms resonate with the anxieties and struggles faced by many queer individuals. Ella’s struggle to manage her monstrous past mirrors the play’s broader engagement with the Gothic’s preoccupation with memory and loss, as her past actions as a vampire continually threaten to disrupt her present performance of normalcy. The play examines how Ella navigates the tension between her true, monstrous nature and the performance of ‘normalcy’ demanded by her new life, a tension that underscores queer Gothic’s exploration of the closet and the challenges of concealing a stigmatised identity in a heteronormative society. Ella’s struggle to repress her vampiric nature mirrors the experience of many queer individuals forced to hide their true selves for fear of rejection, discrimination or violence. This tension between the hidden and the revealed as well as the private and the public is central to the play’s exploration of queer identity and the anxieties surrounding self-discovery and acceptance.

Moreover, as a figure of immense²⁹ age and aristocratic lineage, Dracula himself embodies the very Gothic tension between order and chaos, as well as reason and irrationality, by re-presenting a resurgence of a past that Victorians regarded with

²⁹ Even though Dracula’s age is not explicitly stated in the play, there are implications that his lifespan extends over centuries. For instance, Jonathan remarks “One would think you had been present at all these battles...” (Lochhead, 2009, p. 24) by hinting at his extraordinary longevity when Dracula mentions some historical battles that took place hundreds of years ago. Jonathan’s implication of Dracula’s presence in all the mentioned wars does not make much sense in the play as it lacks the textual support found in Stoker’s novel, where Dracula vividly recounts these battles in detail. Moreover, one of Dracula’s brides proclaims her age as “six hundred years old... thousands of years old” (Lochhead, 2009, p. 64). By implication, Dracula, as the vampire responsible for their transformation, must be technically even older.

ambivalence (Doran, 2015). He personifies facets of aristocratic power such as violence, disdain for modernity and awareness of ancient lineage and this depiction of Dracula as a figure who embodies both power and otherness, a remnant of an outdated past yet still a potent force in the present, aligns with queer Gothic's interest in exploring how queer identities are simultaneously marginalised and empowered. Aristocratic power both captivated and repelled Victorian society contending with anxieties about rapid social and technological transformation (Punter, 2013, pp. 20–21). This complex and contradictory relationship between the Victorian era and the aristocratic past is evident in the following conversation between Dracula and Jonathan:

- Dracula** [...] My country is a whirlpool. Of blood. The Berserker, the Hun, the Magyar, the Turk, he came, he conquered, he was conquered, he bred, and he bled. There have been so many battles on this soil that the earth itself... [...] Here in my country the grass... is flesh.
- Jonathan** I hope we are done with wars and bloodshed. Surely as the twentieth century dawns, mankind will see sense.
- Dracula** The twentieth century! Bah, I despise this twentieth century, it disgusts me.
- Jonathan** But it hasn't even begun yet.
- Dracula** Habsburgs! Romanovs! Mongrels. Upstarts. My race, Jonathan, my house, we Székelys of the noble line of Dracule, the little dragon; we always gladly receive the bloody sword.
- Jonathan** One would think you had been present at all these battles...
- Dracula** To a Boyar, the pride of house and name is his own pride, their glory his glory, their fate his fate. (Lochhead, 2009, p. 24)

This graphic and unsettling description of Transylvania reveals Dracula's intimate connection to a history of violence and his embrace of a warrior ethos, thereby mirroring the Gothic's recurring motif of the barbaric and the transgressive. This connection is further evident in his fervent declaration about the 'bloody sword.' For Dracula, the bloody sword is not just a weapon; it is a symbol of his lineage's power and its willingness to fight and defend its position. He embraces violence and conflict by seeing them as integral to his aristocratic heritage. His rejection of the modern world is palpable in his declaration that he 'despises this twentieth century.' This disdain, along with his very existence, also marks him as a figure disrupting the linear progression of time and challenging the Victorian faith in progress. Furthermore, Dracula proudly asserts his own heritage by identifying himself as a Székely, a group with a long history in Transylvania and as a Boyar, a term historically referring to a high-ranking member of the aristocracy

in Eastern Europe, particularly in Romania and surrounding regions. He further emphasises the antiquity of his lineage, the ‘noble line of Dracule’ by connecting himself to a powerful and enduring past and adds a layer of mystique and ferocity to his identity with the epithet ‘the little dragon.’ As Punter (2012) suggests, Dracula embodies those forces that “fatally undercut the ‘verbal compact’ on which, among other things, the modern state rests,” by becoming a figure who “deserves and needs to be investigated” precisely because he challenges the foundations of reason and order (p. 9). He represents, in this sense, the very essence of the Gothic and that which lies beyond the grasp of reason and which threatens to unravel the carefully constructed structure of the modern world. This inherent challenge to reason and order serves as a central commentary on the fragility of established systems when confronted with the unknown and the transgressive.

In contrast to Dracula’s aristocratic lineage and embodiment of a powerful – albeit barbaric – past, which aligns with traditional Gothic tropes of the ancient, the powerful and the transgressive, the vampires in *St. Nicholas* represent a more contemporary form of social otherness, reflecting a shift in the Gothic’s focus from external sources of horror to more internal, psychological anxieties. Unlike the grand castles and sprawling landscapes of classical Gothic, these vampires operate on the margins of society and hold court in a shadowy, almost claustrophobic domestic space. This shift in locale to a mundane, yet unsettling, private sphere underscores a key aspect of contemporary Gothic: the infiltration of dread and the monstrous into the everyday and familiar. This very change in the setting of the Gothic embodies late twentieth-century anxieties about sexuality, morality and belonging. By subverting the traditional Gothic setting of the castle or the graveyard and replacing it with a more mundane, yet equally unsettling space of hidden desires and transgressive acts, this claustrophobic domesticity itself becomes a site of Gothic unease. The horror thus becomes less about external, physical threats and more about insidious psychological manipulation and the breakdown of the self within seemingly safe environments, reflecting anxieties deeply rooted in the social and psychological landscape of late 20th-century Britain.

Central to *St. Nicholas*’s exploration of contemporary anxieties, the domestic space becomes a site of both confinement and transgression for the female characters in *Dracula*, particularly Mina and Lucy, whose encounters with the vampiric disrupt the seemingly secure boundaries of Victorian domesticity. They amplify the play’s

engagement with Gothic complexities, particularly the genre's fascination with female transgression and the blurring of boundaries between the innocent and the monstrous. While Mina and Lucy initially appear as conventional Victorian women, constrained by societal expectations and the limited roles available to them, they embody distinct responses to the allure and threat of the vampiric. With her restless desire for 'something to happen' (Lochhead, 2009, p. 5) and her fascination with the 'lunatics' in Seward's asylum (Lochhead, 2009, p. 45), Lucy embodies a curiosity about the forbidden that makes her vulnerable to Dracula's seductive power. As a recurring theme in Gothic narratives, this fascination with the transgressive foreshadows her willing embrace of Dracula's dark world. Her transformation into a vampire further underscores the play's exploration of the monstrous feminine, a figure that haunts the male imagination and disrupts Victorian ideals of feminine purity and passivity. The language used to describe her transformation, the animalistic imagery and the erotic undertones of her newfound vampirism (Lochhead, 2009, p. 71) align her with a long tradition of Gothic figures who evoke both fear and a perverse fascination.

Much like Lucy's initial fascination with the forbidden gradually transforming into a terrifying embrace of the vampiric, the protagonist's initial fascination in *St. Nicholas*, fuelled by a desire for something more, something beyond the confines of his predictable existence, gradually gives way to a growing unease as he witnesses the true nature of the vampires' world. The protagonist recognises the destructive potential inherent in their seductive power, a potential that mirrors the self-destructive impulses and moral compromises he has made in his own life. By echoing the horrific consequences of Lucy's complete submission to Dracula's will, the realisation that "this is all getting very Nazi now" (McPherson, 2011, p. 147) marks a turning point, highlighting the insidious nature of the vampires' influence and the potential for even seemingly alluring forms of otherness to devolve into something oppressive and dehumanising. Ultimately, he chooses to return to the familiar, yet flawed world of human connection and leave behind the seductive but ultimately empty promises of the vampires' world—a choice that Lucy is tragically unable to make. This rejection signifies not a triumph of good over evil, but rather a recognition of the complexities and limitations inherent in both the human and the monstrous and a cautious reaffirmation of the value of human connection, even in its imperfection.

The vampires' world is one of seductive allure, fuelled by a potent cocktail of eroticism, power and the promise of escape from the mundane—a promise that resonates with Lucy's own restless desire for "something to happen" (Lochhead, 2009, p. 5) in *Dracula* and her subsequent vulnerability to Dracula's seductive power. Both Lucy's and the protagonist's susceptibility to the allure of the vampiric highlights the Gothic's enduring fascination with the forbidden and the transgressive as well as its exploration of the seductive power of darkness. Like Lucy, the protagonist in *St. Nicholas* is initially captivated by the "heart-breakingly beautiful women" (McPherson, 2011, p. 165) whose allure is both visual and psychological, drawing him into a world that operates outside conventional social and moral codes. The vampires' power in both plays stems from their ability to manipulate desire and exploit the vulnerabilities of those, like Lucy and the protagonist, who seek refuge from the banalities and disappointments of everyday life. This manipulation of desire is a key element of both the Gothic and the queer Gothic as both explore the ways in which societal norms and expectations can be used to control and confine individuals, particularly those who exist outside of or in between established categories of identity and sexuality. While Dracula's manipulative tactics are rooted in his aristocratic power and otherworldly abilities, the vampires in *St. Nicholas* utilise a more contemporary form of manipulation by preying on the protagonist's emotional insecurities and his desire for belonging. This difference in the source of their power is reflected in the contrasting settings: the imposing grandeur of Dracula's castle versus the intimate, almost claustrophobic domestic space occupied by the vampires in *St. Nicholas*.

While both Lucy and the protagonist of *St. Nicholas* are susceptible to the vampires' seductive power, Mina in *Dracula* represents a contrasting figure of resistance to this allure. She initially represents a force of order and restraint by embodying Victorian ideals of reason and self-control. She seeks solace in the security and stability of Victorian norms, clinging to a life carefully structured around societal expectations. Her engagement to Jonathan Harker, a respectable solicitor, and her meticulous planning for their wedding (Lochhead, 2009, p. 16) are outward expressions of her desire for control. Though initially presented as antithetical to Lucy's transgressive impulses, this desire of Mina for order and control is ultimately challenged and disrupted by Dracula's invasive act and highlights the play's engagement with queer Gothic's recurring motif of the body's violation and corruption of its physical and psychological integrity. Unlike

Lucy, Mina however is not drawn toward this darkness; it is forced upon her through Dracula's deception and his violation of her body.

Dracula's bite evokes "the dangerous circulation of blood and data across the different categories of gender, race, species and machines" (Stephanou, 2014, p. 37) and creates a link between the archaic past and the modern world. The blood that they share becomes a symbol of a transgression that challenges not only Victorian morality but also the very notion of a fixed and stable identity. This violation also awakens a different kind of Gothic experience for Mina, one that involves a confrontation with the monstrous that she seeks to overcome not through a heroic embrace but through rational action and a determined effort to reclaim her autonomy. While her participation in the hunt for Dracula might appear to align her with certain aspects of the Gothic heroine, her primary motivation is self-preservation and the restoration of order, rather than a fascination with the sublime or a desire to transcend the boundaries of the human. Mina's struggle to reclaim her identity in the face of forced monstrosity resonates with the experiences of those who find themselves categorised as 'other' by dominant societal forces, particularly within the context of queer identity.

This struggle for self-preservation and the restoration of a sense of self in the face of an externally imposed 'monstrous' identity finds a compelling parallel in Buffini's *A Vampire Story* through the character of Ella. Like Mina, Ella engages with a monstrous identity that both defines and confines her. Both characters share a desire to control their narratives and shape their identities in a world that seeks to define them. This desire for control manifests itself theatrically in *A Vampire Story* through Ella's role as a playwright and a director. Ella's role within the play highlights the power of narrative to shape not only fictional worlds but also to rewrite and reinterpret lived realities. From the very beginning of the play-within-a-play, Ella's control is apparent as she directs the action by effectively writing the script for how identity is performed, a script to which the other characters adhere:

Ella Write a short scene incorporating some of Brecht's techniques of alienation. Subject matter: a secret

Ella starts to write. Characters enter and position themselves as she speaks.

A smoky, opulent room. Bodies lie drunkenly scattered in slumber. Ruthven, a gambler, and Darvell

[...]

Ella Are at a card table. They are deep in their game. Clara Webb serves them with drinks.

Ruthven and Darvell are at a card table. Clara serves them with drinks.

Clara, to us:

Clara This game of cards has been going on for the last five hours

Ella Ruthven:

Ruthven (to Darvell) I'll see your hundred and add two

Ella Darvell:

Darvell As you wish

Ella Darvell puts the last of his money on the table.

Darvell puts the last of his money on the table. (Buffini, 2015, p. 250)

As she reads the stage directions, the other characters become puppets enacting her words, blurring the lines between Ella as the author and the other characters as fictional creations. This collapse of distinctions between the playwright and her characters, and between performance and reality, is further emphasised by the way Ella manipulates and controls the narrative, even rewriting the past to suit her desires. For instance, when she reimagines the historical context of her characters, she places them in an early nineteenth-century orphanage where they celebrate “the rout of Napoleon in Russia” (Buffini, 2015, p. 232), an event that occurred decades earlier. This act of creation and control resonates with broader themes of self-fashioning and the performance of identity, central to both queer theory and queer Gothic.

A Vampire Story's innovative use of a play-within-a-play adds another layer of complexity to its exploration of identity, performance and the closet. The play-within-a-play itself functions as a metaphor for the closet—a hidden space where Ella can explore her true, monstrous self away from the judging gaze of ‘normal’ society. Ella's control over the narrative and characters in her play mirrors the self-regulation and self-censorship that many queer individuals practice in their daily lives. For instance, when Claire enters the drama studio unexpectedly, Ella quickly closes her book and attempts to hide the play's true nature by presenting it as a ‘drama coursework’ (Buffini, 2015, p. 256), reinforcing the closet's function as a space of concealment and protection. Within the confines of her play, by embracing her vampirism and exploring the transgressive potential of queer desire, Ella can safely experiment with different identities, desires and narratives. This experimentation is further facilitated by the play's fragmented, episodic structure, which mirrors the larger play's own non-linear narrative. This structure emphasises the instability of identity and the fluidity of meaning, central to queer Gothic,

and allows Ella to explore the fragmented nature of her own identity as a vampire attempting to navigate the human world.

However, this 'safe space' is ultimately precarious as the boundaries between the play-within-a-play and the 'real' world of the classroom begin to blur. The play-within-a-play's structure highlights how easily the performance of normalcy can collapse into the chaos of one's true, monstrous nature. This collapse is evident not only within the confines of Ella's play but also in the 'real' world of the classroom. For instance, despite her attempts to control her vampiric urges, Ella's consumption of animal blood in the classroom, a space intended for conformity and learning, becomes a stark reminder of her monstrous difference. Though an attempt to manage her vampirism in a less harmful way, this act disrupts the mundane reality of the school setting and underscores the precariousness of her performed normalcy. The animal blood, while not human, still marks her as other, highlighting the persistent presence of her vampiric nature and foreshadowing the potential for a more complete breakdown of her carefully constructed façade.

The play-within-a-play then becomes a microcosm of the larger social world, as the classroom itself transforms into a stage where performances of normalcy and deviance, conformity and transgression are played out. Just as Ella dictates the actions and dialogue of the characters in her play, social norms and expectations similarly script the performances of individuals in the real world by shaping their identities and determining their access to power and belonging. Narratives and performances can be used to construct and negotiate identity, challenge or reinforce social norms and ultimately exert power over others. Through this meta-theatrical device, Buffini highlights the performative nature of identity and the power of narrative to shape both individual and social realities. Ella's play therefore becomes a powerful metaphor for the strategies employed by marginalised individuals, particularly within the queer community, to navigate a world that often seeks to define and confine them.

So central to *A Vampire Story*, the exploration of female agency and the subversion of traditional narratives finds a darker and more grotesque expression in *Dracula* through the figures of the vampire brides. The grotesque parodies of Lucy, Florrie and Mrs. Manners, the vampire brides amplify the play's engagement with the monstrous

feminine—a recurring trope in Gothic narratives and here functioning as a grotesque parody of Victorian anxieties surrounding female sexuality and the ‘proper’ performance of femininity. Their appearance in “tattered and browning and even slightly bloodstained lacy bridal dresses” (Lochhead, 2009, p. 32) creates a deliberate contrast with the pristine image of the Victorian bride, traditionally clad in white and symbolising purity and innocence. This subversion of traditional bridal imagery resonates with the disruption of domesticity and heteronormative ideals often found in queer Gothic, particularly in texts that challenge or reimagine conventional notions of home, family and belonging. This subversion highlights the abject nature of the brides which disrupts “identity, system and order” (Kristeva, 2024, p. 4). Their insatiable hunger for blood constitutes a grotesque reversal of the nurturing role conventionally associated with women, embodying the unsettling possibility of female desire existing outside the bounds of acceptable Victorian femininity. That the brides possess a “voluptuousness which is both thrilling and repulsive” (Lochhead, 2009, p. 33) further underscores this duality by revealing the ways in which the monstrous feminine can simultaneously attract and repel, evoke both desire and dread. The vampire brides thus function as potent symbols of the darkness that Gothic suggests may lie at the heart of even the most seemingly civilised societies and of a darkness that threatens to unravel the carefully constructed boundaries of Victorian morality and social order. While the vampire figure often serves as a potent metaphor for queer experiences, these plays also feature characters whose identities and desires directly embody queerness (the critic in *St. Nicholas*) or reflect anxieties surrounding non-normative sexualities (Renfield and Lucy). This moves the analysis beyond mere metaphor to engage with actual queer representation and the vampire’s characteristic consumption of blood, often portrayed without regard for the victim’s gender, further underscores a transgressive sexuality that challenges conventional norms and contributes to the queer dimension of the figure itself.

Through her artful deployment of Gothic tropes, Lochhead crafts a theatrical experience that is both unsettling and compelling. In Lochhead’s interpretation, the play’s haunting settings, transgressive desires and monstrous figures converge to expose the precarious nature of boundaries often perceived as immutable. Reason collapses into irrationality (with the existence of vampires and vampirism), the carefully constructed order succumbs to the encroaching chaos (with Dracula’s arrival in England) and what

initially captivates reveals an inherent potential for profound aversion (namely, Dracula himself). Lochhead utilises the uncanny power of the Gothic to unearth primal anxieties that lie dormant beneath the façade of social decorum. Ultimately, Lochhead implies that these enduring forces remain embedded within the human experience by eluding definitive comprehension or control.

The juxtaposition of seemingly opposite experiences—order and chaos, reason and madness, attraction and repulsion—is a hallmark of both the Gothic and queer theory, as both seek to disrupt and destabilise normative categories and explore the spaces that lie outside or in between these categories. This is evident in *Dracula*'s exploration of the sublime, particularly its paradoxical ability to inspire both terror and transcendent wonder. This is a paradoxical experience also echoed in *St. Nicholas* when the protagonist describes his encounter with the vampires as both terrifying and alluring: "Jesus Christ. Heart-breakingly beautiful women. You could see them and you couldn't. [...] It was like drowning. Gulping water for air and not being able to stop" (McPherson, 2011, p. 165). By exploring how these seemingly disparate emotional and physical reactions exist simultaneously, both plays highlight the complex and often contradictory nature of desire, particularly its transgressive potential in a world that often seeks to repress and control it.

By exploring the vampire through these varied lenses of gender, age and social context, Lochhead, McPherson and Buffini demonstrate the remarkable adaptability of the vampire myth to contemporary queer concerns. In a world increasingly preoccupied with fixed notions of identity, heteronormativity and anxieties about a rapidly transforming global landscape, the vampire, as a figure of both transgression and otherness, embodies the fears and desires of those who find themselves existing outside of or in between the dominant culture's prescribed categories. *Dracula* utilises traditional Gothic tropes to interrogate the anxieties surrounding gender and sexuality in the Victorian era and the 1980s, anxieties which resonate with contemporary concerns about identity and social change. *St. Nicholas*, on the other hand, offers a more interior, psychologically driven exploration of these themes through the fragmented consciousness of an ageing theatre critic engaging with his own desires and his ambivalent relationship with a world of vampires. *A Vampire Story* additionally shifts the focus to female experience, portraying the lives of two teenage vampires in a contemporary setting, navigating the emotional complexities of identity formation, love, loss and the ever-

present threat of exposure and rejection in a world that demands conformity. Although each play offers a unique perspective, all three plays share a common concern with how the vampire, as a figure of both fascination and abjection, can be used to challenge normative narratives, explore the fluidity of identity and give voice to the anxieties and desires that lie beneath the surface of seemingly ordinary lives.

4.3. QUEERING THE BITE: HOMOEROTIC SUBTEXT AND TRANSGRESSIVE DESIRE

Having established the broader context of queer theory and Gothic conventions within these plays, it is now crucial to examine a more specific manifestation of queerness within the vampire myth: the homoerotic subtext embedded within the act of the bite. This section analyses the homoerotic subtext and transgressive desire present in the vampire narratives of *Dracula*, *St. Nicholas* and *A Vampire Story* by focusing on how the vampire figure can be read through the lens of queer theory as a means of exploring same-sex desire and challenging normative sexual categories. The vampire's liminal nature—its existence between categories like life and death, human and monster, and male and female—allows it to disrupt traditional definitions. This makes the vampire a potent symbol for exploring the complexities of queer identity, particularly the anxieties and possibilities that emerge when individuals challenge or transcend society's attempts to define and categorise them. As Elijah O. Okpanachi and Yakubu A. Emeje (2020) argue, echoing a familiar psychoanalytic discourse, non-normative behaviours and ideas such as homosexuality and bisexuality are frequently repressed and labelled “as abnormal, deviant and devilish [... as well as] unnatural, ungodly, not biological and not procreative” (p. 102) by religious and social institutions.

This repression often manifests itself as anxiety surrounding the exchange of bodily fluids, especially those exchanged during sexual activity, thereby further complicating the cultural significance of the vampire's bite. The association of the vampire's fang with the phallus adds another dimension to this representation of transgressive desire. By examining the portrayal of homoeroticism in these plays, a deeper understanding of how same-sex desire is both constructed and constrained within societies governed by rigid heteronormative structures can be gained.

Renfield in *Dracula*, for instance, provides a compelling example of how the vampire myth can be used to explore non-normative desires and the transgression of sexual boundaries within the framework of queer Gothic. While not a vampire himself, Renfield's vampiric practices, including his consumption of insects and his expressed desire for blood, align him with the transgressive desires and anxieties associated with the vampire myth. Lochhead employs subtle yet strategically placed hints to suggest Renfield's queer sexuality throughout the play. A particularly noteworthy instance occurs when he disrupts Mina's chamber at Bedlam to deliver a warning about Dracula. The attendants, Grice and Drinkwater remove him and Grice offers Mina a suggestive remark: "[H]e's madder than a broom-cupboard of brushes but I doubt if he's harmful in any way. Not to us ladies, if you get my drift" (Lochhead, 2009, p. 105). While delivered as a veiled insinuation, this comment serves as the closest confirmation the play offers regarding the object of Renfield's desire and challenges the rigid heteronormativity of the play's Victorian setting. This subtle yet significant suggestion of Renfield's queerness resonates with queer Gothic's project of uncovering hidden desires and giving voice to those marginalised for their non-normative sexualities. It also creates a link between Renfield's 'madness' and his queer desires, a connection that resonates with broader anxieties about the pathologisation of queerness³⁰ in both Victorian society and the present day. Moreover, Renfield's consumption of insects can be read not only as a perverse parody of normative consumption practices but also hints at the homoerotic anxieties often associated with sex and the exchange of bodily fluids, particularly in ways they relate to the abject. As a figure who claims to require blood to prolong his life—like many vampires in literature—Renfield can also be seen as embodying transgressive bisexual desires.

Within this context, bloodsucking functions metaphorically as an act of both sexual penetration and oral consumption. As a creature who can take sexual pleasure during the act of bloodsucking from any living being regardless of sex, the vampire then becomes a powerful symbol of unrestrained bisexuality. As embodied by Renfield's vampiric practices, this blurring of boundaries between traditional sexual categories echoes queer

³⁰ 'Pathologisation of queerness' here refers to the process of defining and treating non-normative sexual orientations and gender identities as medical or psychological illnesses or disorders. It involves framing queerness as a deviation from a presumed 'healthy' or 'natural' heterosexuality and cisgender identity.

theory's project of deconstructing binary oppositions and challenging the very notion of fixed sexual identities thereby demonstrating how even the association with vampirism can disrupt and destabilise heteronormative assumptions about desire and identity.

By transforming a violent act into a gesture of forbidden desire, the euphemistic substitution of a 'kiss' for the act of bloodsucking in both *Dracula* and *A Vampire Story* complicates the portrayal of the vampire bite. By opening up a space for exploring non-reproductive forms of eroticism through the lens of queer theory, this queering of a traditionally monstrous act disrupts heteronormative notions of sexuality. In *Dracula*, for instance, poising over Harker's body, the female vampires with "scarlet lips" and "white sharp teeth" (Lochhead, 2009, p. 33) create a scene fraught with erotic tension. While the brides' impending attack is predatory, Dracula's interruption, asserting his possessive claim over Harker—"When I am done with him, you shall kiss him at your will" (Lochhead, 2009, p. 34)—introduces a distinctly homoerotic element. While not indicative of same-sex desire on their part, the brides' suggestive offer when they state "There are kisses for us all" (Lochhead, 2009, p. 33) further contributes to the erotic charge of the scene. This exchange highlights Dracula's own homoerotic desire for Harker by establishing a dynamic of rivalry and thwarted desire. Initially a symbol of monstrous consumption, the bite is thus transformed into a complex gesture of erotic possession and transgressive homoerotic desire on Dracula's part and reinforces the idea that Harker is an object of desire primarily for Dracula. The ambiguity surrounding who owns the right to kiss Harker further complicates the scene and blurs the lines between violence, eroticism and homoerotic desire within the framework of the vampire myth.

In *Dracula*, the phallic symbolism of the fang adds another layer of complexity to the already erotically charged encounter between Harker and the brides. With their sharp teeth and predatory nature, the brides' 'kisses' can be interpreted as symbolic acts of penetration, a disturbing assertion of female sexual agency that subverts traditional gender roles and power dynamics. In this reading, the brides become aggressors and Harker is the passive recipient of their desires. This scene highlights the anxieties surrounding female sexuality and its potential to disrupt patriarchal structures, anxieties that are often expressed through the figure of the monstrous feminine in Gothic literature. The blurring of boundaries between violence, eroticism and homoerotic desire along with

the phallic symbolism of the fang makes this scene a potent site for exploring the transgressive potential of the vampire myth within a queer context.

In a very different context with a focus on adolescent anxieties, this blurring of boundaries, the queering of the bite as an act of both violence and desire as well as the phallic symbolism of the fang find a parallel in *A Vampire Story*. With Ella's fang becoming a phallic part of her body, the 'kiss' between Ella and Frank can be similarly interpreted as an act of penetration:

Ella Frank, I don't want to hurt you
Frank I wouldn't care if you did
Ella Scene eight
Frank Kiss me
Ella Scene eight
Frank That's what vampires do, isn't it? (Buffini, 2015, p. 265)

Frank's eagerness for the 'kiss' and his disregard for pain subvert normative masculine expressions of desire and vulnerability. Knowing its potentially dangerous nature, his desire for the bite suggests a fascination with both Ella's power and the transgressive act itself. A euphemism for the bite, the 'kiss' itself becomes charged with erotic significance, particularly given the phallic symbolism of Ella's fang. This symbolism transforms the act into one of penetration by further complicating the already blurred lines between violence, intimacy and transgression.

While *A Vampire Story* explores the anxieties and possibilities of adolescent queer desire through the symbolic act of the bite, *St. Nicholas* offers a more mature, albeit equally complex, perspective on homoerotic longing within the context of the vampire myth. It explores homoerotic desire within a contemporary context, using the vampire myth to examine the fluidity of desire and the transgressive nature of non-normative sexuality. The narrator's encounter with William, the leader of a community of vampires, becomes a focal point for this exploration. His first encounter with William is charged with erotic subtext: "We shook hands. He was cool. Not cold, like you'd expect a vampire to be. He was just right. I think I wanted him to touch my face" (McPherson, 2011, p. 157). This reveals a yearning for physical contact that borders on the explicitly erotic. This burgeoning desire is further intensified by the narrator's admission that William's presence makes it "hard to think" (McPherson, 2011, p. 157) and suggests a surrender to more primal instincts and a blurring of the boundaries between reason and desire.

Described by the narrator as “Not the power to make you do what they want. But real power. To make you want what they want” (McPherson, 2011, p. 158), William’s power resonates with the seductive allure often associated with the vampire figure, yet in this context takes on a distinctly homoerotic dimension. By further disrupting the social and moral codes that typically govern human behaviour and suggesting a connection between homoerotic desire and a more animalistic, uninhibited form of sexuality, his reference to “the older part of us. What we share with animals” (McPherson, 2011, p. 158) connects his desire to something primal and instinctual. This encounter with William ultimately reveals the narrator’s capacity for a fluidity of desire that transcends simplistic binary oppositions and suggests that the vampire’s allure lies in its potential to liberate desire from the constraints of social and moral codes.

In conclusion, these three plays demonstrate the remarkable versatility of the vampire myth as a vehicle for exploring homoerotic desire and challenging heteronormative assumptions. By queering the traditionally monstrous act of the bite, transforming it into a ‘kiss’ fraught with erotic subtext, these playwrights open up a space for examining the complexities of non-normative sexuality and the anxieties it provokes. The vampire’s liminality, its existence between established categories becomes a powerful metaphor for the fluidity of desire and the instability of identity, particularly within the context of queer experience. From Renfield’s coded queerness and transgressive consumption in *Dracula* to the narrator’s explicit homoerotic longing for William in *St. Nicholas* along with the complex interplay of desire, danger and adolescent anxieties in Ella and Frank’s ‘kiss’ in *A Vampire Story*, each play offers a unique perspective on the intersections of the vampire myth, queerness and the Gothic. The playwrights likely utilise these implications to not only depict the fluidity of desire and challenge restrictive societal norms but also to offer a space for exploring the often-hidden desires and anxieties that surround sexuality, particularly within contexts where such expressions are marginalised or repressed. By using the vampire figure, with its inherent transgressive potential, these plays create a space for audiences to confront their own assumptions about sexuality and identity, thereby ultimately contributing to a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of human desire. The vampire in these plays becomes more than just a monster, it becomes a powerful symbol of the fluidity, complexity and transgressive potential of human desire in all its forms.

4.4. QUEER UNCANNY: THE VAMPIRE AS DOUBLE

As a paradoxical figure existing between life and death, the vampire embodies a complex relationship with the uncanny; it simultaneously evokes fascination and repulsion, desire and dread. Such duality stems from anxieties surrounding mortality, sexuality and the transgression of boundaries. The vampire's inherent ambiguity, its unsettling blend of the familiar and the strange positions it as an ideal figure for exploring the concept of the queer uncanny. As Nicholas Royle (2003) astutely observes, there is a profound connection between these two concepts: "The uncanny is queer. And the queer is uncanny" (p. 43). Since this connection warrants further investigation, it is crucial to establish a firm understanding of the uncanny itself to fully grasp the implications of the link between the queer and the uncanny.

In his 1919 essay "The 'Uncanny'," Freud offers a nuanced definition of this complex phenomenon. He describes the uncanny as a disquieting sense of something both known and alien, both comforting and disturbing (Freud, 1955, p. 220). It arises from the return of something once familiar but repressed, rendering it both strange and recognisable (Freud, 1955, pp. 220–221). The concept of the 'return of the repressed' is not only central to the general understanding of the uncanny but also holds a particular relevance for the queer uncanny as it mirrors the resurfacing of suppressed desires and fears associated with non-normative identities. The uncanny's inherent ambiguity and haunting presence of the past lie at its very heart and make it a particularly fertile concept for understanding the vampire myth.

Further illuminating this concept, an etymological examination of the word 'uncanny' reveals its inherent paradoxes. Derived from the German word *unheimlich*, meaning 'unhomely,' it is inextricably linked to the word *heimlich*, which signifies both "familiar and agreeable" and "concealed and kept out of sight" (Freud, 1955, pp. 224–225). This duality is key to understanding the uncanny as it reflects the blurring of boundaries between the known and the unknown – a confusion further intensified by the fact that the uncanny often arises from something that was once known and has become alienated from consciousness through the process of repression. As Freud (1955) clearly articulates, "the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (p. 220). Therefore, one experiences the uncanny not as

something simply unfamiliar but rather as something once a source of comfort or security and now transformed into a source of dread. Innocent childhood games with dolls can, for instance, become uncanny when those dolls appear to be alive by blurring the lines between the inanimate and the animate and evoking primal fears of death and reanimation. The seemingly impossible animation mirrors repressed anxieties from childhood when the distinction between fantasy and reality is less defined. Such a destabilisation of categories exposes a fundamental anxiety about the nature of life itself and the possibility that the sense of agency and control might be an illusion (Barnaby, 2015, p. 982).

This anxiety is amplified in figures that embody the uncanny's blurring of boundaries while simultaneously queering them. As a figure that destabilises not only life/death binaries but also heteronormative notions of desire, identity and belonging, the vampire, for instance, operates as a quintessential site of the queer uncanny. As Colin Davis (2007) emphasises, vampires embody the "deadlock of Eros and Thanatos, their irresistible and unsustainable entanglement with one another" (p. 35). Rather than simply representing evil, vampires possess a paradoxical nature by representing the conflicting forces of life (Eros) and death (Thanatos) intertwined within a single figure.

In fact, the vampire's embodiment of the queer uncanny extends beyond its representation of Eros and Thanatos. As Paulina Palmer (2012) notes, the vampire often carries connotations of 'excess,' a concept frequently associated with queerness (p. 7). This excess can manifest in various ways, including the vampire's unrestrained sexuality, its transgression of social boundaries and its very existence outside the realm of the human. The perceived excess generates anxieties in a heteronormative society, further reinforcing the vampire's position within the framework of the queer uncanny (Palmer, 2012, p. 7). The vampire simultaneously embodies the allure of immortality and the horror of consuming life force as well as the promise of forbidden pleasure and the threat of inescapable destruction. The resulting tension mirrors the uncanny's own blurring of boundaries between the familiar and the strange, the desirable and the repulsive by creating a sense of unease that is both captivating and disturbing. These theoretical frameworks provide a lens through which to analyse the depiction of the vampire in contemporary literature and drama.

Lochhead's *Dracula* is a play that actively engages with the theoretical frameworks of the queer uncanny and incorporates Freud's 'the return of the repressed' as well as Palmer's 'disturbing transformation of the familiar' into a narrative that transcends its Victorian roots to interrogate contemporary anxieties. Her portrayal of the monstrous in the play is not merely a historical exploration of Victorian anxieties; it rather centres on the potential for disruption and chaos as a warning about the consequences of failing to acknowledge these ever-present forces within the human psyche and the seemingly stable structures of society. The duality between Victorian context and modern resonance reflects the queer uncanny's timeless ability to destabilise heteronormative structures. A pervasive sense of unease permeates the play which is partly cultivated through Lochhead's skilful use of the queer uncanny, a category of fear characterised by its ability to make the familiar seem strange and threatening. While rooted in 19th-century anxieties, this dread deeply felt in the late 20th-century fears of instability and societal collapse mirrors the uncanny's power to blur temporal boundaries.

Lochhead employs the uncanny to destabilise the audience's sense of security and control, primarily through the figure of Dracula. As the archetypal vampire, Dracula embodies the uncanny's paradoxical duality: he is both alluring and repulsive, a seductive yet terrifying figure of immense power. Lochhead emphasises this paradox by characterising Dracula as a charismatic and sophisticated gentleman whose refined manners and eloquent speech—particularly in his initial interactions with Jonathan—mask a predatory nature. This veneer of respectability belies his monstrous intentions and unsettles the audience by blurring the line between the civilised and the savage. By exposing the fragility of boundaries humans construct to separate the familiar from the threatening, Lochhead disrupts the audience's sense of security. By reflecting the inherent instability of identity and societal order, this disruption serves to compel the audience to confront the uncomfortable truth that the boundaries between the 'civilised' self and the 'savage' other are porous and easily breached.

This disruption is amplified by the play's atmosphere, which stems from the uncanny's ability to subvert the familiar and destabilise illusions of control. Lochhead's stage directions further enhance this unsettling atmosphere through evocative sensory details, visual cues that blur boundaries and aural elements that heighten the play's sense of dread. When Dracula first appears in his castle, for instance, the stage directions

indicate that Dracula suddenly materialises by creating a sense of disorientation and suggesting the permeability of seemingly solid boundaries: “**Dracula’s castle. Doors swing open and Jonathan enters. No one there. [...] Nothing. No one. Suddenly Dracula himself is there**” (Lochhead, 2009, p. 20). Disrupting the familiar space of the castle, this sudden materialisation resonates with Palmer’s (2012) observation that the uncanny often manifests in queer narratives through the “disturbing transformation of the familiar [...] surroundings into the site of the supernatural” (p. 2). The seemingly solid architecture of the castle in this case becomes a liminal space where the repressed (Dracula’s monstrous presence) violently resurfaces.

Lochhead’s staging amplifies this uncanny tension through deliberate sensory subversion. The frequent use of shadows, mist and sudden shifts in lighting creates a visual landscape where the familiar can morph into the threatening at any moment (Lochhead, 2009, pp. 38, 47, 71). Sounds such as the howling of wolves (which Dracula describes as the “music [made by] the children of the night” (Lochhead, 2009, p. 26)) and the “*strange music of the vampire-brides theme*” (Lochhead, 2009, p. 32) likewise play a crucial role in contributing to a sonic landscape that unsettles the audience and foreshadows the intrusion of the monstrous. Through such techniques, Lochhead’s *Dracula* transcends a simple adaptation of a Gothic classic and resurrects the repressed anxieties of both Victorian and modern audiences by framing the vampire as a timeless embodiment of the queer uncanny’s power to haunt the margins of the ‘civilised’ world.

A hallmark of the queer uncanny, the unsettling of the familiar likewise finds a different expression in Buffini’s *A Vampire Story* through a domestic subversion. The play’s setting described as a “lovely smalltown surrounded by beautiful countryside” (Buffini, 2015, p. 16) initially appears familiar and safe. By the presence of Ella and Claire, the two vampires posing as sisters, this sense of normalcy is however disrupted, thereby transforming the familiar into a site of unease and potential danger. Their “slantwise” existence (Ahmed, 2006, p. 107) within this heteronormative space requires a constant performance of conformity and mirrors the familiar rituals and language of family to mask their monstrous nature. This performance is constantly threatened by the possibility of exposure, as suggested by Claire’s anxious question to Ella when she asks, “Why are you telling people that we’re vampires?” (Buffini, 2015, p. 279). The fragility

of this performance echoes the queer uncanny's oscillation between concealment and exposure.

Ella's liminal identity amplifies this dissonance. Evident in her declaration of longing "I spend most of the time wishing I was human" (Buffini, 2015, p. 243), she embodies the queer uncanny's destabilisation of categories by straddling the human and monstrous as well as adolescence and agelessness. Paired with the town's veneer of normality, this ambiguity transforms the play's world into a haunted heterotopia, wherein suppressed elements of desire and mortality infiltrate the everyday. Whereas Lochhead's *Dracula* employs the Gothic excess to interrogate societal anxieties, Buffini's work leverages suburban banality, proving the vampire's adaptability as a medium for exploring repression across temporal and generic boundaries.

4.4.1. The Vampire as a Figure of Duality and the Double

A psychic phenomenon characterised by the splitting or fragmentation of the self, the double serves as an umbrella concept encompassing various manifestations of divided identity in psychoanalytic theory (Rank, 1971, p. 83). A distinct subtype of this phenomenon, the *Doppelgänger*³¹ emerges as a spectral duplicate interpreted as "the ghostlike manifestation of *iterability*, which 'splits' each element while at the same time 'constituting' it through the split" (Weber, 1996, p. 144). Rank (1971) redefines the *Doppelgänger* psychoanalytically and frames it not as a literal entity but as "a spontaneous subjective creation of a morbidly active imagination" (p. 20), a psychological projection of repressed fears or desires. Central to both the double and the *Doppelgänger*, this fragmentation of the self may manifest symbolically as a mirror image, a shadow or a ghostly apparition, embodying aspects of the psyche denied by the conscious mind (Rank, 1971, pp. 61–62). Confronting the individual with a fragmented version of themselves, a reflection of both the familiar and the profoundly disturbing, the double initially serves as a defence mechanism against the fear of death (Freud, 1955, p. 235). This defence functions by offering a symbolic promise of continued existence or immortality; the double, as a duplicated self, serves as a psychological denial of the possibility of complete annihilation. However, as the individual matures and confronts their own mortality, the

³¹ *Doppelgänger* means "double goer" or "double walker" in German (Snodgrass, 2005, p. 83).

double transforms into “the uncanny harbinger of death” (Freud, 1955, p. 235), a reminder of the self’s inevitable disintegration. By symbolising both continuity and fragmentation, this transformation reflects the double’s inherent instability, as it is both a source of comfort and a source of terror. Valérie Bouville (2020) further explores this duality by suggesting that the double “represents the imagined personification of impulses which have been overcome, suppressed or even dissociated” (p. 28). The double, therefore, is not merely a reflection of the conscious self but rather a manifestation of the unconscious, a repository of desires, anxieties and impulses that the conscious mind has attempted to repress.

4.4.1.1. Gender, Sexuality and the Monstrous Feminine

This theoretical framework is central to *Dracula* and *A Vampire Story*, where the double functions as a site of uncanny anxieties related to identity, desire and the monstrous feminine. In *Dracula*, this concept is vividly illustrated through Lucy’s transformation into Vampire Lucy. Lucy’s return as a vampire exemplifies not only the uncanny duality of the familiar becoming frighteningly unfamiliar but also the unsettling return of the repressed. She embodies what Freud (1955) termed “something which is secretly familiar [*heimlich-heimisch*], which has undergone repression and then returned from it” (p. 245). Lochhead’s description of Lucy in the graveyard emphasises this unsettling mixture of recognition and estrangement. When she first appears, she is “*lovely and terrifying and ethereal, mist at her toes, [coming] almost floating,*” yet she leads “*a rude, ragged and palpable Boy and Girl Child by each hand*” (Lochhead, 2009, p. 71). This description highlights the unsettling juxtaposition of beauty and grotesqueness, innocence and corruption. While she is still recognisable as Lucy, her features are now distorted and her beauty is tinged with a grotesque allure. Even her reactions are a blend of the known and the unknown: when she sees the men, she “*draws back with an angry snarl, her eyes blaze with unholy light and her face becomes wreathed with a voluptuous smile*” (Lochhead, 2009, p. 71). This transformation however transcends a mere inversion of her former self. It embodies the return of the repressed, where Lucy’s desire for agency, power and unrestrained sexuality—once constrained by Victorian society—is now manifest in a monstrous and uncontrollable form.

Her vampiric state therefore can be interpreted as a manifestation of the societal anxieties surrounding female desire and its potential for disruption. Within the restrictive confines of Victorian society, women's desires, particularly sexual desires, were often suppressed and demonised. Lucy's transformation into a predatory and seductive vampire embodies these fears by suggesting the danger inherent in unleashing the female desire. Moreover, Lochhead's adaptation, written and performed during the 1980s—a period marked by a resurgence of feminist activism—invites a re-examination of these anxieties through a contemporary lens. Lucy's monstrous transformation becomes a focal point for anxieties surrounding female sexuality and agency in the late 20th century. The play's inclusion³² of Lucy's monstrous yet undeniably powerful transformation might be seen as both reflecting and challenging the ongoing debates about female sexuality, agency and the subversion of patriarchal norms that characterised this era. This duality—the simultaneous fear and fascination surrounding Lucy's empowered yet monstrous state—reveals how her vampiric form ultimately functions as a symbol of the anxieties and desires that society attempts to suppress but that inevitably resurface and disrupt the veneer of order and control. Through this portrayal, Lochhead suggests that suppressing female desire does not eliminate it but rather transforms it into something potentially monstrous and disruptive to the established patriarchal order.

The vampire brides further complicate the uncanny duality, exploration of female sexuality and class dynamics. As distorted reflections of the women Jonathan Harker encounters in Whitby, the brides represent not only the seductive allure of the vampire but also the anxieties associated with female sexuality. Often described as a 'kiss,' the vampire's bite, for instance, blurs the lines between pleasure and pain as well as intimacy and violation by generating a sense of unease that is central to the uncanny experience. This unsettling blend of pleasure and danger is vividly portrayed in the scene where the vampire brides surround Jonathan. Described as a "*sweet, honey-sweet [...] tingling through the nerves*" but with a "*bitter underlying the sweet*" (Lochhead, 2009, p. 33), their seductive advances capture the paradoxical nature of the uncanny, namely its power to both entice and repel. Their grotesque forms and insatiable desire for blood represent a dark inversion of Victorian femininity and embody persistent societal fears about the

³² Lochhead's decision to keep Lucy's transformation scene in her adaptation of Stoker's original work.

potential dangers of female sexuality and its power to disrupt established norms. The point of presenting the brides as grotesque parodies is to highlight the societal anxieties that demonise female sexuality and its potential to challenge established norms, framing female desire as something monstrous and threatening when it exists outside of patriarchal control.

While the scene of vampire brides is present in Stoker's original novel, Lochhead's adaptation infuses it with new layers of meaning relevant to the anxieties of her time. One of the most striking ways in which Lochhead utilises the uncanny is through the transformation of familiar female figures into monstrous vampire brides. Recognisable as distorted versions of Mrs Manners, Florrie and Lucy, these figures embody the unsettling return of the repressed, particularly anxieties surrounding female sexuality and its intersection with social class. By casting the same actress for Lucy and Vampire Lucy, Lochhead's potential use of theatrical doubling visually underscores the fractured, transformed self. This casting choice represents not that they are the same person but emphasises the uncanny link and disturbing transformation between the innocent Lucy and her monstrous vampiric form, mirroring the psychological duality theorised by Rank and Freud. Through the transformation of women from different social strata into monstrous figures, Lochhead highlights how societal anxieties about female sexuality are often intertwined with and amplified by existing power structures. In transforming these women into creatures both alluring and monstrous, Lochhead draws attention to the pre-existing anxieties surrounding their roles in Victorian society. While Lucy, a member of the upper class, represents a transgression of Victorian ideals of feminine virtue, both Mrs Manners and Florrie, as working-class women, already exist in a space vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The specific anxieties their transformations reflect are deeply inflected by their social standing and expose the hypocrisy and deep-seated anxieties about class and gender that underpin Victorian society. Lucy's transformation reflects the fear of upper-class female sexuality unleashed as a threat to the social order she represents. Mrs Manners and Florrie, on the other hand, seem to embody the horrors of a system that already treats working-class women as disposable and their monstrous forms highlight the dehumanisation they experience in their lives.

This unsettling duality—the simultaneous allure and monstrosity of the brides—further complicates the play's exploration of female sexuality. It suggests that women,

irrespective of their social class, are often perceived as both objects of desire and figures of fear, their power both enticing and threatening. With its explicit connection to sexual transgression, Lucy's transformation into a vampire exemplifies this fear of contagion and the loss of self. The vampire's bite marks her as both a victim and a carrier of his infectious power, thereby highlighting the anxieties surrounding individual vulnerability and social contamination. Thus, Lucy's transformation as well as the presence of the vampire brides not only exemplify worries regarding female sexuality, transgression and contagion but also serve as potent representations of the dangers inherent in inviting the monstrous into one's life, a theme that Lochhead examines in greater depth through other characters as well.

Unlike Lochhead's *Dracula*, Buffini's *A Vampire Story* reimagines the vampire as a site of temporal fragmentation, performative identity and queered survival, thereby extending the uncanny anxieties of duality, repression and desire into a contemporary context. In *A Vampire Story*, the double manifests not merely as a psychological split but as a collision of past and present selves. A 19th-century girl traumatised by sexual assault and vampiric transformation, Eleanor haunts her modern counterpart, Ella, whose existence literalises Freud's 'return of the repressed.' As a metatheatrical performance of Eleanor's brutal legacy, Ella's vampirism echoes Lucy's duality in *Dracula* but reframes it through a nonlinear temporality that destabilises identity. Eleanor's assertion that "People will always believe the most fabulous tale you can tell" (Buffini, 2015, p. 225) underscores the narrative's dual role as both concealer and revealer of trauma and binds the past and the present in a cycle of inherited violence.

Central to *A Vampire Story*, the duality of Clara and Claire further complicates the exploration of the monstrous feminine. Clara, a 19th-century prostitute dying of tuberculosis and Claire, her modern counterpart masquerading as Ella's sister/guardian, embody the intersection of marginalisation—their societal exclusion due to their gender, class and stigmatised roles (Clara as a sex worker, Claire as a vampire hiding in plain sight)—and vampiric resilience. Clara's rotting lungs (Buffini, 2015, p. 252) and Claire's predatory hunger mirror Lucy's grotesque allure in *Dracula*, but their vampirism transcends inversion to critique societal pathologisation of female bodies as the framing of women's physical and emotional states (Clara's tuberculosis, Eleanor's illness and rape as well as their vampirism) as deviant or diseased to justify control and punishment. As a

means of transcending death and exploitation, Clara's transformation frames vampirism as a survival tactic for women on society's fringes, while Claire's suburban masquerade exposes the rot beneath performative respectability. Like the vampire brides' 'bitter sweetness' (Lochhead, 2009, p. 33), their duality blurs pleasure and danger, but Buffini queers this tension by linking it to cyclical exploitation. Claire's vampirism compels the repetition of the same systems that marginalised Clara and frames female power as simultaneously alluring, threatening and inescapably bound to patriarchal violence—a reflection of how women's agency, even when monstrous or transgressive, remains constrained by the same oppressive structures (exploitation and gendered violence) it seeks to evade.

Buffini's reworking of the bite motif extends Lochhead's uncanny anxieties. In *A Vampire Story*, the bite symbolises not only erotic transgression but also inherited trauma. Eleanor's assault and transformation infect Ella across centuries, thereby rendering vampirism a contagion of unresolved historical violence. This queered temporality destabilises identity, as seen in Ella's metatheatrical playwriting—a futile attempt to sanitise her monstrous legacy—which mirrors Claire's suburban façade.

Unlike Lucy, whose vampirism embodies Victorian fears of unleashed desire, Ella and Claire frame monstrosity as negotiated resistance. Their duality, like Mrs. Manners and Florrie's in *Dracula*, exposes systemic dehumanisation, but Buffini positions their vampirism as a site of queer agency and a defiance of linear narratives that pathologise marginalised bodies. Ultimately, *A Vampire Story* reimagines the vampire as a fractured self, eternally adapting to violence and marginalisation. By dissolving the lines between Eleanor/Ella and Clara/Claire, Buffini reveals the monstrous feminine not as a patriarchal fear but as a way of survival, a defiant yet destabilising act of reclaiming identity from oppressive forces.

4.4.2. The Uncanny Home and the Violation of Boundaries

Lochhead's *Dracula* adds another layer of complexity to the destabilisation of identity through the theme of the invitation. Invitation becomes the means by which the monstrous gains access to the seemingly secure realm of the self, a motif particularly resonant within the vampire myth. As Lochhead (2009) herself notes, "First of all, you

have to invite him in” (p. vii). The vampire’s need for an invitation, often extended unconsciously, amplifies this unsettling infiltration. The act permits the monstrous to disrupt one’s sense of reality by blurring the lines between the self and the other as well as the familiar and the strange—which are core elements of the Freudian uncanny. By dismantling these distinctions, the act of welcoming the monstrous shatters the individual’s carefully constructed sense of self, forcing a confrontation with the terrifying possibility that desires, fears and even understanding of reality might be manipulated by forces beyond comprehension. I argue here that Lochhead reflects the experience of the queer individual who can feel that their life is subject to external forces, including homophobia and prejudice, as well as internalised self-hatred.

In Lochhead’s *Dracula*, this tension intensifies as the home, traditionally a site of heteronormativity and patriarchal control, becomes *unheimlich*—a space of queer anxiety and monstrous intrusion. The domestic sphere, symbolically tied to Victorian femininity and confinement, is subverted in the play. This resonates with anxieties found in lesbian feminist writing about the hetero-patriarchal home as a site of female entrapment (Palmer, 2012, p. 85). The vampire’s inability to enter without an explicit invitation reinforces the home’s symbolic association as a sanctuary, a space of feminine security and control. While this idea resonates with Victorian gender roles that largely confined women to the domestic sphere, the play subverts expectations of domestic safety. The vampire’s need for an invitation, while seemingly granting agency, simultaneously highlights the individual’s vulnerability, particularly through the manipulation of desire. This manipulation of desire is a key concept in queer theory’s exploration of fluidity and shifting desire. It parallels the queer experience of discovering socially “deviant desires” (Ahmed, 2006, pp. 176, 11), often linked to the unconscious and the eruption of the uncanny. Lucy’s violation within her own bedroom potently illustrates this manipulation and underscores the play’s message about the illusory nature of security and the pervasive power dynamics that render individuals vulnerable, even in seemingly safe spaces. Indeed, the notion of home as a ‘safe haven’ is complicated by its function within patriarchal structures, where this safety is often predicated on male control. By requiring an invitation, the vampire figure highlights this control and the act of inviting the monstrous in can be interpreted as a transgressive attempt by female characters to challenge patriarchal conventions and break free from confinement.

Lochhead complicates the notion of vulnerability by highlighting female resistance. Mina's active role in combating Dracula challenges the association of women with passive domesticity. Her willingness to transcend the boundaries of the home and fight alongside male characters suggests a more complex understanding of female agency. Mina's defiance critiques patriarchal structures that confine women, limit their agency and increase their vulnerability. This critique aligns with the broader queer project of contesting heteronormativity and its marginalisation of other sexualities. By subverting traditional notions of security, the play reminds the audience that the monstrous can penetrate cherished sanctuaries and confronting it requires a transgression of social roles. True safety and agency lie in challenging the internal and external manipulative forces that perpetuate restrictive boundaries.

The play's exploration of vulnerability within the space of home becomes particularly resonant when considered alongside the social and cultural anxieties of the 1980s. This era saw both increased interest in queer theory (Jagose, 1996, p. 3) and heightened awareness of the AIDS crisis, intensifying queer anxieties. Inviting the monstrous in leads to a fragmentation of identity and mirrors the blurred boundaries between the self and the other. This process, as Barnaby (2015) suggests, often involves delayed recognition of what one would rather not know (p. 987). Such disintegration resonates with anxieties surrounding victimhood and complicity in one's own downfall and reflects the decade's heightened awareness of a fragile self and a precarious social order. This was particularly true during the AIDS crisis, where certain behaviours were perceived as invitations to risk and infection. These fears resonated deeply within the gay community of the 1980s (Palmer, 2012, p. 28). The anxieties surrounding invitation and victimhood are intertwined with gender dynamics and female sexuality. The theme of victimhood resonates with anxieties in lesbian feminist writing about lesbian invisibility and the victimisation of women under patriarchy. The burgeoning second-wave feminist movement of the 1980s challenged traditional female roles and explored female desire and sexuality, themes Lochhead addresses through Lucy. Lucy's fascination with Dracula and her desire to escape Victorian constraints can be interpreted as mirroring the closeted lesbian's discovery of desires deemed socially 'deviant.' Her "horrible, horrible dreams [...] and premonitions" (Lochhead, 2009, p. 18) foreshadow the monstrous intrusion and reveal a subconscious desire that fuels vulnerability. This parallels the queer individual's

experience of discovering an uncanny sexuality (Royle, 2003, p. 43). Lochhead's portrayal of Dracula as both a seducer and an enslaver further amplifies anxieties about male aggression and control central to 1980s feminist discourse and resonates with queer portrayals of monstrous heterosexual masculinity and its inherent violence. Lucy's experience highlights the contradictory expectations placed upon women, where pursuing desire could be both empowering and dangerous, thereby resulting in both agency and victimhood.

4.5. THE QUEER AS MADNESS

Through their diverse portrayals of madness and its relationship to queerness, Lochhead's *Dracula*, McPherson's *St. Nicholas* and Buffini's *A Vampire Story* offer unique insights into the anxieties and possibilities of queer experience in a world that often pathologizes difference. *Dracula's* exploration of madness, particularly through the character of Renfield, is another key aspect of its engagement with the uncanny. Marked by his obsession with consuming insects, Renfield's descent into madness exemplifies the unsettling blurring of boundaries between sanity and madness as well as reality and delusion. His seemingly nonsensical prophecies, such as "My-master-that-I-worship-is-coming-in-his-warship" (Lochhead, 2009, p. 6), challenge the foundations of logic and reason by disrupting the audience's sense of a stable and predictable reality. Renfield's obsession with consuming life through the grotesque act of devouring insects transcends mere madness and becomes a desperate endeavour to assimilate vitality to resist the encroaching dread of mortality. His unravelling serves as a reminder of the fragility of the human psyche when faced with the fear of the unknown and death. Through Renfield's descent into madness, Lochhead suggests that the human mind is not a fortress of reason but a fragile entity vulnerable to the intrusion of the irrational. His monstrous desires and his inability to distinguish between reality and delusion mirror the uncanny's power to disrupt individuals' carefully constructed sense of order and expose the darker undercurrents of the human psyche.

While not explicitly linked to blood consumption, Renfield's pursuit of life through devouring reflects a primal urge that unsettles established categories. It mirrors the vampire's desire for blood as a potent symbol signifying both life and death, which intensifies its association with the uncanny. Whether through blood or insects, the act of

consuming life transgresses boundaries by engendering a primal fear of losing control and becoming infected with a foreign and uncontrollable force. This fear resonates with the central paradox of the uncanny: the unsettling experience of “coming to see how the origin that defines us—indeed, that *must* define us is our own and not our own simultaneously” (Barnaby, 2015, p. 987). In this sense, the ‘origin’ refers to the fundamental source of humanity’s being, namely the primal forces and instincts that shape its existence even as they are strived to be repressed or denied. In his pursuit of life through monstrous means, Renfield embodies this paradox. He confronts the audience with the unsettling realisation that humanity is inextricably linked to the very primal urges from which it seeks to distance itself. His actions reveal the fragility of the boundary between the civilised and the savage by forcing the audience to acknowledge the unsettling truth that their origins are both familiar and profoundly alien to them. Renfield’s paradoxical pursuit of life, therefore, highlights the play’s broader exploration of the uncanny’s power to expose the unsettling duality at the heart of human existence. Humans are both civilised and savage, drawn to life and yet haunted by the spectre of death. This tension between opposing forces creates a sense of unease and reveals the fragility of the boundaries constructed to maintain a sense of order and control.

As the asylum patient whose zoophagous habits and cryptic pronouncements mark him as an outsider, Renfield is a potent symbol of the Gothic’s preoccupation with madness and isolation. Like Victor Frankenstein, who “dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave” (Shelley, 1818, p. 90) in pursuit of forbidden knowledge, Renfield is a figure consumed by his own obsession to prolong his life; he is compelled to eat life, to consume life. Echoing the Gothic impulse to transgress the boundaries of life and death, this all-consuming desire relegates him to the fringes of society. His confinement to the asylum, a space designed to contain and control those deemed deviant, reflects the broader Gothic concern with the limits of reason and the ever-present threat of madness to disrupt social order. Gothic narratives often reveal that “the mind is never fully under the control of reason” (Botting, 2008, p. 116) and Renfield embodies this precarious balance. While rooted in Stoker’s Victorian context, Renfield’s portrayal resonates with the 1980s anxieties surrounding the treatment and perception of mental illness, particularly the tendency to dismiss the voices of those deemed ‘deviant’ or ‘irrational.’ With their references to “bats in the belfry” and the “spirits that stand by the naked man” (Lochhead,

2009, pp. 6, 34), Renfield's seemingly incoherent ravings operate on a level beyond rational understanding, suggestive of vampiric presence and the overturning of the natural order. The 'bats' foreshadow Dracula's arrival and the ensuing chaos, while the 'spirits that stand by the naked man' allude to the vulnerability of the human soul, stripped bare before both supernatural forces and the darker impulses within. His transgressive persistence in his consumption of life in its rawest forms echoes a broader sense of unease prevalent in the 1980s, a period marked by social and political upheavals that challenged previously unquestioned assumptions about stability and control. Far from mere madness, these pronouncements exemplify Gothic doubling by revealing how Renfield's seemingly irrational ravings contain a disquieting truth by foreshadowing the play's exploration of the monstrous hidden beneath the façade of Victorian respectability.

This blurring of the boundaries between reason and madness is also a central theme in *St. Nicholas*. An ageing theatre critic, the protagonist experiences moments of psychological fragmentation that mirror Renfield's own descent into madness. The setting of both Dracula's castle and the asylum, as places that defy or operate outside the norms of Victorian society, resonates with the liminal spaces occupied by the vampires in *St. Nicholas*—the shadowy, secluded house where they hold court and the seedy bars and clubs where they seek out their victims.

While both *Dracula* and *St. Nicholas* offer explicit depictions of madness through the characters of Renfield and the unnamed protagonist, respectively, Buffini's *A Vampire Story* explores this theme through a more nuanced lens. The seemingly ordinary setting of a small British town, in which the protagonists attempt to pose as 'normal' teenagers despite their true identities, becomes a backdrop for Ella's struggle with the social construction of madness itself. As a vampire, Ella exists outside of human norms, a difference that is compounded by her transgressive desires and her haunting past. As exemplified by her confession, "I freely confess that I have stayed alive for all these years by drinking human blood" (Buffini, 2015, p. 240), this otherness is perceived by others as madness and thereby leads to her being labelled as such. Ella/Eleanor explicitly questions this label—"Am I mad?" (Buffini, 2015, p. 290)—and highlights the play's engagement with the queer's interest in how society defines, confines and often pathologises those who defy its norms. Unlike Renfield's more overt madness in *Dracula*, Ella's madness is not a result of mental illness but rather a consequence of social

ostracism and the pressure to conform. This resonates with the protagonist's own experiences of judgment and rejection in *St. Nicholas* and underscores queer's concern with how queerness itself is often constructed as a form of madness. This tension between Ella's true, monstrous nature and the performance of normalcy she must maintain is further amplified by the play's culminating setting in Byzantium, which is described as an asylum or mental health facility. By placing Ella within this context, Buffini not only challenges traditional notions of madness and its association with the monstrous but also invites the audience to question the very systems and institutions that define and control who is deemed 'sane' and who is deemed 'mad.'

This theme of confinement also resonates with Renfield's imprisonment in the asylum in *Dracula*, where he is ostracised and dehumanised for his 'monstrous' desires as well as with the protagonist's self-imposed isolation in *St. Nicholas*, as he retreats to the shadowy world of the vampires and seeks refuge from the judgment and rejection of 'normal' society. In both plays, confinement becomes a metaphor for the marginalisation and social ostracism that queer individuals often experience and it highlights the ways in which society seeks to contain and control those who defy its norms. However, while Renfield's confinement is literal, Ella's is more metaphorical, represented by the ever-present threat of exposure and the social consequences of revealing her true, vampiric nature. This can be seen as a parallel to the protagonist's experience in *St. Nicholas*, where the threat of being 'outed,' though self-imposed, becomes a form of confinement that restricts his freedom and reinforces his sense of alienation. Furthermore, the final scene in *A Vampire Story*, set in Byzantium (an asylum), adds another layer of complexity to the play's exploration of madness. While *Dracula* and *St. Nicholas* present madness as a state of psychological and/or physical breakdown, *A Vampire Story* challenges this traditional notion by associating madness with otherness and difference, thus suggesting that madness itself can be a consequence of societal labelling and exclusion rather than an inherent pathology. This perspective aligns with the queer's broader interest in questioning normative categories and deconstructing the systems and structures that define and enforce them. By placing Ella within the context of Byzantium, Buffini underscores the play's engagement with how notions of madness can be weaponised to further marginalise those who already exist outside of accepted social norms, thereby echoing the experiences of many queer individuals throughout history.

While *Dracula* uses Renfield's character to depict madness as a state of overt psychological and physical breakdown and associates it with the monstrous and the abject, *St. Nicholas* explores the theme through the protagonist's more internalised struggle with obsession, addiction and psychological fragmentation as well as linking madness to the anxieties of self-discovery and the search for belonging in a world that rejects his otherness. *A Vampire Story*, on the other hand, challenges traditional notions of madness by portraying Ella's 'madness' as a consequence of social ostracism and the pressure to conform. All three plays however utilise the vampire as a potent symbol for exploring the complexities of queer identity in a world that often equates difference with deviance and 'madness' with monstrosity. By examining how these plays use the vampire to embody, challenge and reimagine traditional notions of madness, a deeper understanding of the ongoing struggle for queer liberation and the persistent anxieties that surround the performance of self in a heteronormative society can be achieved.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE POSTHUMAN VAMPIRE

Embodying both the anxieties of the past and the emerging realities of a posthuman age, the figure of the vampire serves as a potent lens through which to explore the disruption of the familiar, the blurring of categories, and the confrontation with repressed desires central to the queer uncanny. This figure resonates particularly within the framework of posthumanism, a philosophy that directly challenges the long-held humanist assumptions that have shaped Western culture for centuries. By disrupting the traditional view of the human as a distinct and superior being, it deconstructs the centrality of the human subject separate from and in control of the non-human world. As Cary Wolfe (2010) states, posthumanism “comes both before and after humanism” in its challenge to humanist thought (p. xv). Rather than a strictly linear progression, posthumanism can be understood as both preceding and following humanism—chronologically encompassing pre-humanist history, while conceptually emerging as its critique. This challenge arises partly from the recognition that the category of ‘human’ may not be as stable or universal as previously assumed. As Rosi Braidotti (2013) aptly observes, “Not all of us can say, with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human, or that we are only that” (p. 1). Posthumanism necessitates a re-evaluation of the very foundation upon which Western thought has been built—the idea of the human as a self-contained, autonomous individual, capable of rational thought and possessing a unique and privileged consciousness. The vampire, with its transgressive nature and its blurring of boundaries, becomes a key figure in understanding the anxieties and possibilities of this posthuman condition.

This traditional humanist ideal functions as “a normative convention,” which, while not inherently negative, “is highly regulatory and hence instrumental to practices of exclusion and discrimination” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 26). Posthumanism, in contrast, emphasises the interconnectedness of all beings, the blurring of boundaries between human and non-human, organic and technological, real and virtual thereby ultimately calling into question the very definition of ‘human.’ This blurring of boundaries is central to N. Katherine Hayles’ (1999a) conception of the posthuman, which she defines as an “amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity

whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction” (p. 4). This resonates with Braidotti’s emphasis on the interconnectedness of beings and further underscores the posthuman challenge to the traditional humanist ideal of the self-contained, autonomous individual.

Several key factors have contributed to the emergence of posthumanism yet perhaps the most significant is the rise of new technologies that fundamentally challenge the traditional understanding of the body. Deeply influenced by humanist ideals, Western thought viewed the body as a natural, inviolable entity—the seat of the self, the source of identity and the primary means of experiencing the world for centuries. However, fields like bioengineering, artificial intelligence and robotics increasingly blur the lines between the organic and the technological by forcing a re-evaluation of this traditional conception. This blurring leads to what Hayles (1999a) terms a “privileging of informational pattern over material instantiation” (p. 2). In other words, the posthuman perspective prioritises the flow and processing of information over the physical form it inhabits. The body is no longer understood solely through its physicality but rather through its capacity to process information and interact within complex organic and technological networks. This shift is evident in the growing prevalence of advanced prosthetics that integrate with the nervous system, allowing individuals to control artificial limbs with their thoughts, effectively merging the human and the technological in a lived embodiment of posthumanism.

This merging of the human and the technological shifts the focus from the material body to the informational patterns that govern the body’s function. Humans are increasingly perceived as a set of information processes—a pattern with the potential for replication or transference—rather than as a bounded and physical entity. Hayles (1999a) notes the significance of this shift when she states that “when information loses its body, equating humans and computers is especially easy, for the materiality in which the thinking mind is instantiated appears incidental to its essential nature” (p. 2). While central to the posthuman condition, this disembodiment of information should not be taken to mean that the material world has disappeared, it rather signals a shift in emphasis from material instantiation to informational patterns (Hayles, 1999a, p. 12). This shift has profound implications for understanding the relationship between the body and the self in a technologically mediated world. The pervasive influence of technological mediation

in contemporary life further intensifies this dematerialisation of the body. Braidotti (2013) aptly observes how “the global circulation of goods, data, capital, bits and bytes of information frames the interaction of contemporary subjects on a daily basis” (p. 59). Such everyday actions as ordering groceries online, communicating with friends across continents via social media or tracking one’s fitness through wearable technology, demonstrate how flows of information increasingly shape lives by blurring the lines between the real and the virtual as well as eroding the traditional distinctions between the physical self and the technologically mediated self. The posthuman body is therefore no longer conceived as a self-contained and inviolable entity, but rather as an information-processing system entangled within a vast network of technological and informational flows.

The increasing digitisation of the world further reinforces this informational paradigm by leading to a ‘dematerialisation’ of the physical (Hayles, 1999a, p. 19). Hayles argues that this dematerialisation is not simply a matter of the physical world disappearing but a complex cultural process driven by technological innovations and shifts in how individuals experience and understand the relationship between information and materiality. The emphasis on informational patterns, she suggests, creates a “hierarchy in which information is given the dominant position and materiality runs a distant second” (Hayles, 1999a, p. 12). The proliferation of virtual realities, augmented realities and online identities creates a new landscape for human experience in which the traditional distinctions between the physical and the digital, presence and absence, become increasingly fluid. This blurring is evident in the rise of immersive online gaming environments where individuals adopt avatars and interact in virtual worlds that can feel as real as physical spaces. Overlaying digital information onto the physical world, augmented reality applications also complicate this distinction, as in the case of the popular game Pokémon Go, where players use their smartphones to capture virtual creatures that appear in real-world locations. These technologies demonstrate how the human experience is no longer solely rooted in the physical world but is increasingly mediated by digital information and virtual interactions.

This shift also impacts the human body itself, which is no longer solely a biological entity but a site of potential technological intervention and enhancement. The development of sophisticated prosthetic limbs, genetic screening technologies and

performance-enhancing drugs demonstrate how the body is becoming increasingly intertwined with technology by challenging traditional notions of the natural and the artificial. The integration of technology into the body creates new possibilities for extending and enhancing human capabilities beyond the limitations of the purely biological (Hayles, 1999a, p. 3). This entanglement of the organic and the technological raises profound questions about the changing nature of ‘matter’ in the context of advanced scientific understanding. As Braidotti (2013) likewise explains, “the great scientific advances of molecular biology have taught us that matter is self-organised (autopoietic), whereas monistic philosophy adds that it is also structurally relational and hence connected to a variety of environments” (pp. 59–60). In other words, by blurring the lines between what is traditionally considered ‘natural’ and what is ‘constructed’ or ‘artificial’, scientific discoveries are revealing that matter is not a passive or inert substance but a dynamic and interconnected process. This shift in understanding has significant implications for traditional notions of identity and agency by prompting further investigation into the limits of self-sufficiency and the nature of the self in a technologically mediated world.

5.1. THE VAMPIRE AS A POSTHUMAN FIGURE: TRANSGRESSION AND TRANSFORMATION

Within this landscape of dissolving boundaries and technological advancement, the figure of the vampire takes on a uniquely potent significance by embodying both the anxieties and the desires of a posthuman age. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (1996) argues in “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” the monster is a “cultural body” that “incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy” (p. 4) by reflecting the deepest concerns of the culture that produced it. With its liminal existence and its transgression of categories, the vampire can be seen as a potent symbol of the anxieties and desires of a culture engaging with the implications of a posthuman future. Hayles’ (1999a) notion of the posthuman as a “point of view characterised by [...] privileging informational pattern over material instantiation” (p. 2) resonates with the figure of the vampire as a creature whose existence often transcends material limitations and whose power is often linked to its manipulation of information and knowledge. The vampire’s immortality with its ability to defy the natural

laws of ageing and decay can be seen as an extreme example of this privileging of informational pattern over materiality.

The vampire's 'undeadness' is perhaps its most potent characteristic within a posthumanist framework. It challenges the traditional humanist understanding of mortality, which views death as a definitive end, a separation of body and soul and a transition into an afterlife where religion is involved. The vampire however defies such categorisation by residing in a liminal space between life and death, its body animated, yet soulless, its existence marked by an uncanny longevity that transcends the normal span of human life. This liminality questions the very notion of a linear progression of time as a concept deeply embedded in humanist thought. While traditional humanist thought views time as a unidirectional arrow moving from past to present on to future—a framework that structures human experience and informs understandings of history, progress and the inevitability of death—the vampire exists outside the realm of human temporality. It is a creature of both the past and the present, a revenant that returns from death by carrying the weight of history and the shadow of mortality.

The vampire's immortality with its ability to defy ageing and disease also reflects the posthuman desire for transcendence, a longing for a future where technology might offer a way to escape the limitations of the mortal body and achieve a form of disembodied existence. This desire for a technologically mediated form of immortality often rests on the assumption that "information can circulate unchanged among different material substrates" (Hayles, 1999a, p. 1) as a yearning to transcend the limitations of the physical body by transferring consciousness or some essence of the self to a more durable form. In its undead state, the vampire serves as a reminder that even if a form of immortality were achievable, it might come at a high cost—the loss of one's humanity, the severing of the connection to the physical world and the very essence of what makes one human.

Existing in the interstitial space between the human and non-human, the vampire's hybrid nature serves to embody this dissolution of categorical stability by becoming a locus of anxieties concerning the fragility, fluidity and mutability of human identity. It signifies an apprehension regarding the loss of agency over one's corporeal form and self-conception within a technologically mediated context wherein the very definition of

human is subject to renegotiation. This apprehension is magnified by the frequent portrayal of the vampire within contemporary narratives as a product of scientific hubris or misapplication and as a being whose existence is interwoven with technological and bioengineered interventions and the manipulation of natural processes. This association with the technological further problematises the demarcation between the human and non-human, thereby amplifying the anxieties attendant upon the posthuman condition. Possessing both augmented capabilities and an ambivalent relationship to the natural and the technological, the vampire consequently emerges as a potent symbol of these anxieties within a world increasingly characterised by the ontological convergence of the organic and the artificial as well as the biological and the mechanical.

As explored in Lars Schmeink's (2017) "Of Posthuman Vampires," this entanglement of the organic and the technological is evident in narratives where vampirism emerges not from a supernatural curse but as a consequence of scientific hubris or corporate greed (pp. 56–71). In films like *I Am Legend*³³ (2007) and *Daybreakers*³⁴ (2009), the vampire serves as a warning about the potential for technology to be used for nefarious purposes or for the pursuit of profit to override ethical considerations for the sake of power and control. With its control over the production and distribution of synthetic blood, the corporation Bromley Marks in *Daybreakers* embodies this anxiety by representing a monstrous fusion of capital and technology that profits from the very 'undeadness' it seeks to cure (Schmeink, 2017, pp. 67–71). The vampire in these narratives embodies the fear that technological advancements—while offering the promise of progress and liberation—might also lead to new forms of exploitation and control by creating a world where the human itself becomes a commodity or a resource to be managed and manipulated by powerful, impersonal systems.

³³ An adaptation of a science fiction novel by Richard Matheson (1954), *I Am Legend* tells the story of a character named Robert Neville, seemingly the last human survivor in a world ravaged by a pandemic that has transformed the rest of humanity into vampiric creatures. Neville struggles to understand the plague, find a cure and survive the nightly attacks of the vampires while contending with the psychological challenges of isolation and the loss of humanity.

³⁴ A 2009 science fiction film set in 2019, *Daybreakers* posits an approaching dystopian future in which a pandemic has transformed the majority of the human population into vampires. Within this altered social order, a dwindling human populace serves as a vital resource for a dominant vampire society dependent on human blood for sustenance. The narrative centres on the character Edward Dalton, a haematologist seeking a blood substitute amidst a looming supply crisis by exploring themes of resource depletion, social hierarchy and the ethical implications of scientific advancement within a context of ecological collapse.

The vampire's relationship to blood further complicates its posthuman implications. Conventionally associated with life, energy and vitality, blood acquires a new, unsettling significance in vampire narratives. It transforms into a mode of technological sustenance, a vital resource the vampire requires to maintain its existence. While ostensibly biological, this dependence on blood acquires technological connotations in the posthuman context. The vampire's act of consuming blood evokes a sense of violation and manipulation that resonates with anxieties surrounding technological intervention in the body. This is readily apparent in Lochhead's *Dracula* where the use of blood transfusions to counteract the effects of Dracula's parasitic feeding on Lucy is juxtaposed with the scene where Dracula forces Mina to drink his blood by creating a perverse form of blood transfusion and thereby highlights the complex interplay of blood as both life-giving and life-threatening. This duality is further underscored by the shift from the literal act of transfusion for Lucy to the symbolic and disturbing exchange with Mina by emphasising the unsettling convergence of the biological and the technological within the vampire mythos. Traditionally a creature of the supernatural, the vampire becomes intertwined with the technological through this act of forced blood exchange and its existence is then linked to a form of biological 'hacking.' Dracula's act is not merely parasitic but also technological in its manipulation of Mina's biological systems. He uses blood as a vector to rewrite her genetic code and incorporate her into his network of control by effectively transforming her into a hybrid being and blurring the lines between the human and the monstrous as well as the organic and the technologically altered. This reframes the act of consuming blood not merely as a necessity for survival but as a perverse form of technological engagement, a manipulation of the biological systems of others. The vampire's thirst then becomes more than just a biological drive, it rather becomes a symbolic representation of the posthuman condition where the boundaries between the organic and the technological as well as the self and the other become increasingly fluid and contested. Ultimately, Dracula's manipulation of blood underscores the anxieties surrounding technological control and the potential for the violation and transformation of the self in the posthuman era. A substance traditionally associated with life and vitality, the blood becomes a tool for technological manipulation and a symbol of the precarious nature of individual identity in a world where the boundaries between the human and the technological are increasingly blurred.

Exemplified by the vampire's act of biological manipulation, this blurring of boundaries underscores the very nature of the vampire's thirst. It can be interpreted not merely as a biological imperative but as a metaphor for human dependence on technology in a posthuman age and highlights how technology becomes integrated into even the most basic biological functions. Mirrored in contemporary society's reliance on technology for communication, sustenance and even identity, this dependence raises profound questions about agency and autonomy in a world where the lines between the human and the technological are blurred. This blurring is further evident in Lochhead's adaptation, where Dracula's fascination with photography reveals his awareness of technology's power to manipulate and control representations of life and death, echoing the vampire's own manipulation of blood: "Is very wonderful thing, this photography. Although I am sure that portrait painters do not agree with us! Each common clerk can keep his last duchess in sepia inside his pigskin wallet" (Lochhead, 2009, p. 23). Even as he resists being photographed, Dracula's acknowledgement of photography's ability to grant a form of immortality to the past aligns with the vampire's pursuit of an existence beyond the limitations of mortality by further underscoring the vampire's complex relationship with technology as both a tool and a threat. This simultaneous attraction to and repulsion from technology reflects the deeper anxieties surrounding the posthuman condition itself—including the anxieties about control, agency and the very definition of life—that are mirrored in the vampire's parasitic yet technologically mediated existence.

Absent in Stoker's original novel, Lochhead's addition of the photography scene significantly amplifies the play's engagement with posthuman themes. As a technology mediating the relationship between the body and its representation, photography directly reflects posthumanist concerns about the blurring of boundaries between the human and the technological. Dracula refuses to be photographed by stating: "[Y]ou won't take my photograph! I am... too old and dry to say cheese and pose before your magic gadget. Believe me, it simply won't turn out" (Lochhead, 2009, p. 23). His refusal can be interpreted as a rejection of this blurring as a desperate attempt to maintain control over his image and identity in a technologically mediated world. By playing upon the audience's awareness of the vampire's traditional inability to be captured on reflective surfaces, this act of resistance introduces a layer of dramatic irony. His fascination with, yet simultaneous distrust of, this new technology capturing and fixing images much like

a mirror underscores the vampire's uncanny nature and its ambivalent relationship with modernity. Furthermore, Dracula's aversion to the camera can be read as a commentary on surveillance. Particularly within the context of a surveillance society, the act of photography functions as a means of capturing, categorising and ultimately controlling individuals. Dracula's resistance then becomes a broader rejection of such control and underlines a desire to remain elusive and undefined in a world increasingly obsessed with documentation and observation.

5.2. THE VAMPIRE AND THE SURVEILLANCE SOCIETY

The anxieties surrounding technology extend beyond its potential for physical harm or manipulation. The vampire's existence also highlights concerns about the erosion of privacy and autonomy in a world increasingly shaped by surveillance technologies. As Hayles (1999a) notes, in the posthuman condition, information becomes a key site of power and control over information serving as a crucial strategy for maintaining dominance (p. xi). With its ability to infiltrate dreams and minds as well as to observe and manipulate from the shadows, the vampire reflects a primal fear of unseen forces that can access and control one's most intimate thoughts and desires. This fear is amplified in a world where technology has made possible unprecedented levels of surveillance and data collection by blurring the lines between the public and the private as well as the personal and the political. Through its ability to move unseen and to exert influence from the shadows, the vampire embodies this anxiety by serving as a reminder of the pervasiveness of surveillance and the difficulty of maintaining privacy and autonomy in a technologically mediated world. This is especially relevant at a time when governments and corporations have access to personal data and when the very notion of a private self is becoming increasingly elusive.

5.3. TRANSFORMATION, TRANSCENDENCE AND THE LOSS OF SELF

The transformations of Lucy and Mina in Lochhead's *Dracula* and that of Eleanor in *A Vampire Story* further illuminate the posthumanist preoccupation with the instability of identity and the permeability of bodily boundaries. Imbued with connotations of both eroticism and subjugation, Lucy's transformation into a vampire bride signifies the loss

of her human autonomy and her entry into a liminal realm between life and death, wherein her identity coalesces with that of the monstrous other. Her initial yearning for something more from life (Lochhead, 2009, p. 4) foreshadows this metamorphosis by reflecting a desire for the kind of transcendence promised by the vampire—an escape from the mundane limitations of human existence and an embrace of a heightened, albeit monstrous, form of being. This yearning aligns with posthuman desires for bodily and existential transformation, even if those transformations come at a cost. By depicting Lucy's willing embrace of this transformation, Lochhead's play suggests that the allure of the posthuman lies precisely in its promise of exceeding human limitations, even if it means sacrificing one's humanity. The cost of this transcendence however is the loss of individual agency, as Lucy's fate becomes entirely dependent on Dracula. Thus, Lucy's transformation serves as a cautionary tale about the seductive, yet potentially dangerous, allure of posthuman desires: the pursuit of transcendence may lead to the very obliteration of the self. Her destiny becomes inextricably bound to Dracula's and her individuality is subsumed by the monstrous other.

Moreover, characterised by his entomophagy and his captivation with Dracula's power, Renfield likewise provides a distinct perspective on the posthuman condition in *Dracula*. Through the consumption of insects, a transgression of typical dietary boundaries, Renfield endeavours to transcend his human limitations by aspiring to an existence beyond the human. This desire for transcendence finds a perverse echo in his fascination with Dracula's power by suggesting that the posthuman condition might not just be about surpassing human limitations but also about the potential for domination and subservience within new power structures. Renfield's actions obfuscate the distinctions between human and animal by reflecting the posthumanist acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of all beings and challenging conventional humanist hierarchies that privilege human existence. He embodies the posthuman desire for the augmentation and extension of life through any available means, even those that contravene established ethical precepts. His subservient relationship to Dracula as an entity whose power surpasses human comprehension further accentuates the posthuman potential for human integration (or perhaps subservience) into more expansive and potent systems. This apprehension echoes profoundly in a contemporary context characterised by the unprecedented power and influence of technology, artificial intelligence and global

corporations where traditional humanist values of individual autonomy and self-determination appear increasingly imperilled. Ultimately, Renfield serves as a cautionary figure by embodying the anxieties surrounding the potential for the posthuman to lead not to liberation and individual empowerment but to new, insidious forms of hierarchy and control.

5.4. THE VAMPIRE AS A CATALYST FOR POSTHUMANIST REFLECTION

Alongside *A Vampire Story*, Lochhead's adaptation serves as a compelling case study for comprehending the broader cultural significance of the vampire within a posthuman framework, particularly when considering the ways in which it diverges from and amplifies themes present in Stoker's original novel. Both plays furnish a compelling exploration of the anxieties and desires that constitute posthumanist thought by prompting the audience to confront the disquieting realities of a world in which the categories delineating human existence (like human, monster, living, dead) are fluid and unstable. *Dracula* specifically highlights that these categories are susceptible to the transformative influence of technology and the escalating complexity and interconnectedness of the globalised world. By presenting these complex and often contradictory facets of the posthuman, the play encourages a critical engagement with its themes, prompting the audience to question their own assumptions about the boundaries of humanity and the implications of technological advancement. Nevertheless, both plays' engagement with these anxieties, their deconstruction of traditional categories and their emphasis on the transgressive and transformative capacity of the posthuman render them a potent and intellectually stimulating meditation on the meaning of human existence in an era marked by a profound shift in the very definition of humanity.

Lochhead's exploration of these anxieties through specific characters like Lucy and Renfield underscores the vampire's enduring appeal as a potent symbol of the posthuman condition. The enduring allure of the vampire resides in its capacity to function as a mirror to the posthuman condition by reflecting anxieties pertaining to technology, corporeality and the dissolution of established boundaries. However, as a figure of both horror and fascination, the vampire also necessitates a more profound engagement with the ethical and philosophical inquiries arising from a world in which human exceptionalism is no longer an uncontested assumption. By confronting the monstrous, engaging with the

anxieties it elicits and addressing the complex questions it raises, individuals are compelled to reassess their assumptions about themselves and the world they inhabit and to envision new possibilities for human existence within a posthuman age. *Dracula* does not proffer facile resolutions to these inquiries, it instead necessitates a re-evaluation of the very terms in which these questions are formulated. Ultimately, by including the vampire as a liminal figure, the play compels a confrontation with the complexities and potentialities of a posthuman future characterised by the ambiguity of the self, the pervasive influence of technology and the proximity of the monstrous other.

5.5. VAMPIRISM AS CONTAGION: A METAPHOR FOR VIRAL ANXIETY IN THE POSTHUMAN CONDITION

By reflecting societal anxieties surrounding viral epidemics, particularly the AIDS crisis, both *Dracula* and *A Vampire Story* offer compelling explorations of the vampire myth as a potent metaphor for contagion. This metaphorical resonance is particularly significant within a posthumanist framework, where the anxieties surrounding contagion intersect with broader concerns about the fragility and permeability of the body, the blurring of boundaries between the human and non-human, and the implications of technology. In both plays, the vampire becomes a potent symbol of these anxieties, embodying the fear of infection, the othering of the infected and the potential for technological manipulation and control.

In *Dracula*, vampirism operates as a potent metaphor for contagion and its implications resonate far beyond the gothic horror of the undead as this interpretation acquires particular potency when contextualised within the socio-cultural landscape of the 1980s, a period defined by the emergence and rapid spread of the AIDS epidemic. The first cases of what would become known as AIDS were identified in the United States in 1981 and quickly evolved into a global health crisis (Gilman, 1988, p. 246). Surrounded by mystery and misinformation, the virus unleashed a wave of fear and panic as the decade progressed. The devastating physical consequences of the disease, coupled with its association with marginalised communities—particularly the gay community—fuelled widespread stigmatisation and discrimination. This othering of the infected resonates with broader posthumanist concerns about the construction of the monstrous ‘other’ and the anxieties surrounding difference and deviance. As Sontag (1990) observes, alongside

diseases like leprosy and syphilis, AIDS has become a focal point for societal anxieties and a canvas onto which cultural fears and prejudices are projected (pp. 179–180). Emerging from this climate of fear and uncertainty, Lochhead’s adaptation explores these anxieties by integrating them into the vampire narrative.

Central to this exploration is *Dracula*’s persistent association of vampires with contamination while simultaneously framing vampirism as a viral phenomenon transmitted through bodily fluids. This conceptualisation of vampirism aligns with posthumanist anxieties about the body’s vulnerability in an age of technological and biological interconnectedness. Far from a romanticised act of passion, the vampire bite is consistently depicted as a bodily violation, with imagery of wounds and infection evoking the visceral terror of viral transmission. For instance, Van Helsing’s reaction to Lucy’s bite mark when he says, “Where come this wound?” (Lochhead, 2009, p. 53) reveals his understanding of the bite as a physical intrusion, a point of entry for a possibly dangerous, corrupting agent. Such a portrayal of the vampire bite mirrors the fear surrounding blood and other fluids during the AIDS crisis. This fear is not merely a contemporary concern but rather is deeply rooted in the historical understanding of blood as both a potent and vulnerable substance. Building upon this perspective, Moreno Tiziani (2009) notes, “the central element in the myths linked to [hematophages³⁵] is the vital energy taken from the victim, particularly by means of blood” (p. 134). In Lochhead’s play, *Dracula*’s obsession with blood echoes this historical understanding by highlighting not only his power but also the vulnerability of those he preys upon. The notion of vulnerability is further intensified in the posthuman context, where the boundaries of the body are increasingly blurred by technology and the self is no longer perceived as a stable, autonomous entity.

The fear of contamination extends beyond biology into the social realm and mirrors the stigmatisation of marginalised groups during the AIDS crisis. In *A Vampire Story*, the theme of contagion intertwines with anxieties about sexuality and morality while also reflecting the era’s conflation of disease with deviance. While Lord Ruthven’s illness is never explicitly identified as AIDS, the information that Ruthven dies “slowly of all the sexually transmitted diseases he’s picked up” (Buffini, 2015, p. 269) creates a strong association with the epidemic. Coupled with Eleanor’s subsequent illness after being

³⁵ The plural form of *hematophagy*, a term for the practice of the animals feeding on the blood of other animals (Boulton, 2018).

raped by Ruthven, this implicit connection strengthens the thematic link to the crisis. Eleanor's transformation into a vampire can then be interpreted through a posthumanist lens as a symbolic manifestation of these anxieties and highlights the fear of losing one's humanity and agency in a world increasingly defined by disease, technology and the blurring of boundaries.

The analogy between vampirism and disease gains historical depth through Sontag's (1990) analysis of 'plague' metaphors, which transform illnesses like leprosy, syphilis and AIDS into moralised symbols of 'the other':

The most feared diseases, those that are not simply fatal but transform the body into something alienating, like leprosy and syphilis and cholera and (in the imagination of many) cancer, are the ones that seem particularly susceptible to promotion to 'plague.' (p. 133)

This 'plague' mentality reflects a deep-seated fear of the other, the diseased and the monstrous—a fear that finds a particularly potent embodiment in the figure of the posthuman vampire. Like these diseases, vampirism inspires horror not merely through death but through the violation and transformation of the body, where the human form becomes grotesquely altered into something monstrous.

The parallel between vampirism and disease is vividly illustrated in Jonathan Harker's account of Dracula's castle, where he describes the three vampire brides as figures of "voluptuousness which is both thrilling and repulsive," licking their lips "like an animal" before attempting to feed on him (Lochhead, 2009, p. 33). Blending eroticism with animalistic hunger, this disturbing image underscores the deep-seated anxieties surrounding sexuality and contagion that were so prevalent during the AIDS crisis. The blurring of boundaries between the erotic and the repulsive, the human and the animal, mirrors the posthuman condition's destabilisation of categories wherein fixed identities dissolve into fluid, unstable constructs.

The very portrayal of vampirism in both plays thus functions as a strategic engagement with deeply rooted societal anxieties surrounding disease outbreaks, particularly those amplified by the AIDS epidemic. As Sander Gilman (1988) argues, the history of disease is inextricably linked to the process of 'otherising,' where societies project their fears onto marginalised groups and scapegoat them as carriers of contagion (pp. 227–242). Lochhead's *Dracula* engages with this dynamic of 'otherising' by reviving

the familiar trope of the vampire as a figure of foreign origin disrupting the established social order.

This exploration of contagion and disease gains further complexity through the lens of Buffini's work, which juxtaposes historical and contemporary anxieties. While Eleanor's narrative in Buffini's play is set in 1816, a character named Frank, existing in the present-day setting, explicitly mentions AIDS as a potential metaphorical interpretation of the vampire: "It might be AIDS, heroin, anorexia..." (Buffini, 2015, p. 257). Through this temporal duality, Buffini reframes the vampire as a transhistorical metaphor for societies' cyclical fear of the 'contaminated' body. By doing so, this juxtaposition encourages the audience to examine the historical narrative of vampirism through a contemporary lens and highlights the vampire's adaptability as a metaphorical figure across different time periods.

This fear of contamination finds further expression in the symbolic role of garlic as a defence against Dracula. While rooted in folklore, garlic also possesses scientifically recognised antibiotic properties (Block, 1985, p. 119), thus amplifying *Dracula's* engagement with anxieties surrounding the disease. Van Helsing's insistence on using garlic, his description of it as 'medicine' as well as its prominent display in Lucy's sick room point to a heightened awareness of the vampire as a source of infection (Lochhead, 2009, p. 54). The sense of invasion permeating the play is heightened by the contrast between the domestic familiarity of Heartwood House, initially a symbol of Victorian security, and the clinical sterility of Stoneyfields Asylum, a space designed to contain those deemed different or dangerous. Through these contrasting settings, Dracula's arrival at Heartwood soon reveals its insidious nature. His influence spreads like a disease by corrupting those around him and transforming the once vibrant atmosphere into something oppressive and menacing. Renfield's prophetic warnings foreshadow the pervasiveness of this invasion: "He is at hand. At hand? At throat, he is at it! Next door, next week, upstairs, downstairs and in my lady's chamber" (Lochhead, 2009, p. 61). This prophecy suggests that no space within Heartwood will remain untouched by Dracula's corrupting presence. Additionally, Renfield's experience of being ostracised also mirrors the real-world reactions to the AIDS crisis. Just as a lack of knowledge about HIV transmission, coupled with existing social prejudices, led to widespread discrimination against those infected, particularly within the gay community, in the 1980s, Renfield too

becomes an outcast by reinforcing the play's engagement with historical patterns of marginalisation.

Beyond the specific context of the AIDS crisis, this tendency to scapegoat those perceived as 'other' is also evident in both plays' exploration of anxieties surrounding female sexuality. In particular, *Dracula* captures this climate of fear and misinformation through its portrayal of Lucy's illness. Her gradual transformation into a vampire serves as an embodiment of the intersection between disease, morality and gendered anxieties. Initially depicted as a vivacious and innocent young woman, Lucy's growing attraction to Dracula and her increasingly erratic behaviours reflect anxieties surrounding female sexuality and the fear of female transgression. Her sleepwalking, her suggestive language and her fascination with the 'bloody friend' allude to an awakening sensuality that, in a deeply patriarchal context, is construed as dangerous and transgressive. This perceived transgression is further underscored by her eventual vampiric transformation, which is marked by overt eroticism and aggressive pursuit of men as traits that align her with longstanding cultural anxieties surrounding unrestrained female sexuality. Moreover, her transformation extends beyond a symbolic moral warning to a tangible representation of disease by drawing on historical associations between vampirism and physical affliction. Marked by physical deterioration and increasingly erratic behaviour, Lucy's transformation resonates with the symptoms of diseases like pellagra as Tiziani (2009) indicates:

[P]ellagra presents several symptoms compatible with the figure of vampire... Among its symptoms they report a severe dermatitis, which becomes more acute in sunlight, but also dementia, insomnia and dysphagia... anaemia and blood regurgitation. Blood staunching in the tongue and lips gives unnatural turgor and a vermilion colour and due to the edema the toothmarks often remain on the tongue surface, giving the impression that the subject has got teeth out of proportion. (p. 136)

The similarities between Lucy's vampiric state and the physical manifestations of pellagra underscore how the imagery of vampirism has historically drawn upon pre-existing cultural fears surrounding the disease and the grotesque transformation of the body. In this way, *Dracula* and *A Vampire Story* not only reflect anxieties about female sexuality but also intertwines them with broader fears of contamination, degeneration and loss of control over the body.

The societal tendency to ostracise and label those perceived as ‘other,’ particularly when associated with disease and contagion, finds further expression through the character of Renfield, whose zoophagous habits and erratic behaviours mark him as different. Confined to the asylum, Renfield becomes a subject of scrutiny and control by embodying a tragic example of how societies marginalise those deemed threats to collective health and order—even when no real danger exists (Gilman, 1988, p. 12). This evokes the experience of many individuals with AIDS, who were unjustly ostracised and stigmatised, despite posing no threat to others. Renfield’s consumption of insects and small animals can be interpreted as a twisted reflection of the anxieties regarding bodily fluids and contamination that were deeply ingrained in the public consciousness during the AIDS epidemic. By drawing these parallels between Renfield’s ostracisation and the societal response to the AIDS epidemic, Lochhead highlights the cyclical nature of fear and othering. She demonstrates how anxieties about contamination and disease present in both the Victorian era and the 1980s manifest in the exclusion and stigmatisation of those deemed different or threatening.

This stigmatisation of figures like Renfield exemplifies a broader societal tendency to moralise disease. As Sontag (1990) argues, the association of AIDS with sexual promiscuity and “perversity” (p. 26) led to its being perceived as a “punishment for deviant behaviour” (p. 64), even as anxieties grew about its potential to spread to “the innocent” (p. 27). This tension between culpability and innocence, between the fear of ‘them’ and the potential for ‘us’ to become infected, mirrors the anxieties surrounding the vampire in Lochhead’s play. However, Lochhead complicates these binaries through Van Helsing, whose character adopts a depth of compassion absent in Stoker’s original. He does not just celebrate the vanquishing of evil but sees tragedy in the vampire’s demise. “Who wrought all this misery,” Van Helsing asks, pondering Dracula’s end, “he is the saddest case of all. Whose victim was he, he made us suffer so?” (Lochhead, 2009, p. 84). By shifting the focus from retribution to understanding, Lochhead invites a reconsideration of traditional narratives surrounding disease and monstrosity and challenges the impulse to vilify the infected.

This empathetic perspective extends to Mina as well. Even after her ordeal as Dracula’s victim, Van Helsing does not consider her as irredeemably tainted or deserving of fear. Instead, he urges Jonathan to offer compassion:

Remember, husband, until today's sweet release she was likely to someday need such pity. Would you have had her denied it by someone with a heart as full of terror and revenge as yours? Forgive! (Lochhead, 2009, p. 84)

This forgiveness is not just about healing from personal trauma, it has a larger resonance. Van Helsing extends it even to the dead Dracula: "Dracula is dead, long live Mina and Jonathan. May God forgive all his poor creatures, the living and the dead" (Lochhead, 2009, p. 84). The repetition of 'forgive' underscores the healing power of releasing fear and blame, which are among the attitudes so easily projected onto those perceived as carriers of disease or those who are socially stigmatised, in other words, carriers of a literal or metaphorical contagion.

Rather than merely replicating the Victorian anxieties of Stoker's time, with its anxieties about moral and racial purity, Lochhead reframes them as a backdrop to explore the possibility of a more empathetic response. Through Mina's curse, the play highlights the enduring vulnerability of individuals and communities to unseen, often misunderstood forces. But instead of advocating for the further isolation or punishment of the marked individual—as was often the response to disease in earlier times, including the AIDS crisis of Lochhead's own era—the play suggests that exclusion and fear, rather than the disease itself, constitute the true existential threat. These forces perpetuate cycles of marginalisation and reinforce rigid distinctions between the human and the monstrous, thereby ultimately sustaining the very anxieties they seek to control.

Like Lochhead, Buffini interrogates the ways in which narratives of infection function as instruments of control by shaping societal responses to perceived threats. Through Eleanor's experience, *A Vampire Story* highlights the tension between autonomy and surveillance, as the vampire figure becomes a site of imposed narratives and reflects broader anxieties about identity, sexuality and moral authority. In doing so, these works push beyond traditional vampire lore and interrogate the ethical responsibilities of a society that constructs and polices the boundaries between the human and the monstrous, the healthy and the infected, the self and the other, and ultimately, the human and the posthuman. By foregrounding these tensions, both plays expose how narratives of contagion shape collective anxieties, ultimately suggesting that the real horror lies not in the vampire or the disease it embodies but in the mechanisms of exclusion and otherisation that sustain its monstrosity.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has examined the multifaceted representation of the vampire across five contemporary British plays: Liz Lochhead's *Dracula*, Conor McPherson's *St. Nicholas*, Stephen Briggs's *The Truth and Monstrous Regiment* and Moira Buffini's *A Vampire Story*. This study posits that the vampire serves as a potent, multivalent symbol through which contemporary playwrights explore anxieties and desires permeating late 20th and early 21st-century Britain. Moving beyond traditional interpretations of the vampire—often limited to its association with evil and transgression—the study analyses its dynamic re-articulation within contemporary British theatre. Furthermore, it interrogates what these reimaginations reveal about the cultural landscape of late 20th- and early 21st-century Britain and its complex negotiation of evolving social, political and technological realities. By meticulously interrogating the plays' engagement with neoliberalism, queer theory and posthumanism, the dissertation demonstrates how these theoretical frameworks illuminate anxieties related to identity, power, social change and the human condition in a technologically advanced age. The focus on theatrical representations differentiates this study from scholarship prioritising cinematic and literary depictions (e.g., Chemers, 2018; Lucendo, 2020; Stuart, 1993) and reveals the vampire's unique performative power on the stage and its potential to engender critical reflection on these anxieties within the dynamic context of the theatrical event.

This analysis yields several key and interconnected findings. The vampire consistently embodies anxieties associated with late capitalism and neoliberalism. Exemplified by consuming blood, the vampire's predatory nature becomes a potent metaphor for the economic and existential exploitation within these systems and exposes the dehumanising logic of consumerism and the commodification of life (Marx & Engels, 1992, p. 243). Dracula's accumulation of wealth and power through the exploitation of others, for instance, mirrors the unequal distribution of resources under neoliberal globalisation (Lochhead, 2009, pp. 9, 24). Similarly, the narrator's cynical observations about transactional relationships in *St. Nicholas* expose the dehumanising logic of consumerism and the commodification of human experience (McPherson, 2011, p. 139). Clara's commodification of sex work in *A Vampire Story* further reinforces this critique by reducing human connection to a mere economic transaction (Buffini, 2015, p. 250).

This metaphorical resonance, however, extends beyond mere representation. By staging the vampire as a figure of neoliberal excess and exploitation, these plays actively critique the dominant ideologies of late capitalism and prompt audiences to consider the ethical and social consequences of a system that prioritises profit over human well-being. This critique is not limited to representation but extends to the plays' formal structures. For example, the episodic nature of Lochhead's *Dracula* and Briggs's adaptations of Pratchett's novels mirrors the fragmented and often chaotic experience of living under late capitalism. With its quick shifts and lack of a traditional, linear flow, this structural choice reflects the instability and discontinuity inherent in late capitalist societies, where traditional structures are eroded and experiences are often mediated through rapid, fragmented exchanges, mirroring the pervasive sense of chaos and uncertainty.

Furthermore, the vampire's liminality disrupts normative categories of gender and sexuality, challenging heteronormative assumptions and enabling the exploration of alternative models of intimacy and selfhood. Mina's struggle to reconcile her progressive ideals with her ingrained classism in *Dracula* exemplifies the challenges of enacting social change within patriarchal structures (Lochhead, 2009, pp. 28–30). Lucy's transformation into a vampire, on the other hand, represents a more transgressive response to these constraints, as she embraces her monstrous desires and defies Victorian expectations of female sexuality (Lochhead, 2009, p. 71). In *St. Nicholas*, the narrator's homoerotic fascination with William, the vampire leader, exposes the fluidity of desire and challenges the rigid boundaries of heteronormative identity (McPherson, 2011, pp. 157, 165). The cross-dressing soldiers in *Monstrous Regiment*, including the vampire Maladicta/Maladict, similarly disrupt gender binaries and expose the performative nature of identity (Briggs & Pratchett, 2004, pp. 3, 8). Ella's creation of a play-within-a-play in *A Vampire Story* becomes a meta-theatrical exploration of the closet and the challenges of performing a 'normal' identity in a heteronormative world (Buffini, 2015, pp. 250, 225, 265). Through the homoerotic subtext of the bite (McPherson, 2011, p. 157) and the transgressive performance of gender (Briggs & Pratchett, 2004, pp. 3, 8), the queering of the vampire reinforces that to be queer "is to be different" (Hughes & Smith, 2009a, p. 3) and reflects anxieties surrounding nonconformity (Jagose, 1996, p. 3).

This queering of the vampire, however, also represents a powerful act of resistance against heteronormative ideologies. By embracing the abject and the transgressive, these

plays create a space for exploring the fluidity of desire and the multiplicity of identity, thereby destabilising fixed categories and offering insights into the possibilities of queer becoming. This aligns with Butler's (1999) notion of performativity, where identity is not a fixed essence but rather a fluid and contingent performance shaped by social and cultural forces (p. 25). By featuring characters who inherently embody the abject (the monstrous, the undead) and the transgressive (defying norms of life/death, gender, sexuality), these plays utilise the vampire figure to carve out a theatrical space that can accommodate and give voice to identities and experiences often excluded or marginalised by mainstream society. This opens up possibilities for representing difference not as a deviation to be corrected but as a valid mode of being, thereby fostering a potential for inclusivity. The vampire's inherent otherness, its existence outside normative categories and its capacity to embody both fascination and revulsion make it a powerful vehicle for exploring and challenging societal norms around difference.

Finally, the vampire embodies anxieties and possibilities associated with the posthuman, especially regarding technology and contagion. Dracula's fascination with and simultaneous resistance to photography underscores the vampire's ambivalent relationship with technology and its potential to both capture and control the self (Lochhead, 2009, p. 23). Its immortality, hybridity and liminality reflect anxieties related to embodiment, agency and the nature of the human in a technologically mediated world (Hayles, 1999a, pp. 2, 4, 12; Braidotti, 2013, pp. 1, 26). The plays extend the interrogation of the posthuman beyond these anxieties by using the vampire figure also to explore how humanity itself can adapt, create and find its place in its transforming ecological world and develop more dynamic and harmonious forms of existence within the reality of digitally networked shared physical and online virtual worlds and increasingly globalised communities. The vampire proves to be uniquely suited for this exploration precisely because it inherently exists across the boundaries that posthumanism interrogates: life and death, past and present, biological and potentially technological³⁶, human and non-human. Unlike human characters, who might explore posthuman conditions only after receiving technological enhancements like cybernetic limbs, undergoing genetic

³⁶ Specifically, the vampire's reliance on blood resonates with posthuman themes, as blood can be interpreted not just biologically but as a medium carrying the fundamental 'information' or 'code' of identity and simultaneously as the 'vector' through which the vampiric state—akin to a viral contagion—is transmitted and alters the host.

modification or facing a world-altering crisis like a transformative plague or environmental collapse, the vampire is already a figure of liminality and transformation. Along with its familiarity as an ever-evolving ancient monster, these characteristics make the vampire an exceptionally potent and economical symbol for dramatising these complex, often abstract, posthuman conditions and anxieties.

These plays utilise the figure of the vampire to explore anxieties associated with contagion and strategically incorporate its enduring metaphorical association with epidemic diseases—most notably AIDS—to embody fears related to infection, illness, moral decay and anxieties related to social and political othering. The association of vampirism with contagion, particularly in *Dracula* (Lochhead, 2009, pp. 33, 53) and *A Vampire Story* (Buffini, 2015, p. 257), resonates with anxieties surrounding viral epidemics, specifically the AIDS crisis, and reflects the ways in which such crises are often politicised and used to stigmatise marginalised communities. These narratives simultaneously provide a framework for exploring how these crises have been politicised within particular historical and social contexts. More optimistically, they also reveal how such crisis intervention has simultaneously generated powerful individual and social resistance, leading to significant progress and greater agency in the ongoing struggle towards justice, self-determination, equity and enhanced knowledge based on intersectionality. These frameworks, in turn, provide a foundation for reimagining a more inclusive world—not just for marginalised queer communities, but for everyone who does not fit normative models of being human. However, these plays also explore the potential for the vampire to become a catalyst for posthumanist reflection by prompting a critical re-evaluation of the human and its place within a rapidly changing world.

Building upon these key findings, this analysis reveals that the vampire myth's enduring power lies not merely in its adaptability but in its capacity to function as a potent site of cultural critique and a catalyst for social and political engagement. The playwrights strategically deploy the vampire not only to reflect evolving anxieties but to actively shape them, interrogate cultural values and expectations and challenge dominant narratives. These playwrights compel audience engagement in questioning and dismantling established cultural narratives which have normalised harmful, reductive, dehumanising or unjust practices. More specifically, they challenge the systems of

injustice that create, legitimise, extend and perpetuate such harm while furthering social inequities that deny fundamental rights.

By deploying minimalist staging, meta-theatricality, dark humour and evocative language and soundscapes, the plays amplify the vampire's unsettling power and expose underlying societal anxieties. For example, the vampire brides' distorted reflections of familiar female figures in *Dracula* amplify the play's exploration of the uncanny and the monstrous feminine (Lochhead, 2009, p. 32). Similarly, the narrator's direct address to the audience in *St. Nicholas* creates a powerful moment of meta-theatricality and blurs the lines between fiction and reality (McPherson, 2011, p. 165). In doing so, they challenge audiences to confront their fears and desires, fostering deeper critical awareness through active involvement in the production's provocative live performance space (K. M. Wilson, 1985, p. 578; Hughes, 2012, p. 144; Jones, 2016). This engagement extends beyond the intellectual content of the play's themes to promote essential public interrogation of human social relation dynamics and ideological forces, allowing these discussions to spill over beyond the theatre and into the world.

This dissertation makes an original contribution by providing a nuanced and historically grounded analysis of the vampire's multifaceted functions in contemporary British theatre. It scrutinises the pervasive engagement with an enduring gothic myth by playwrights writing for live performance, who engage with contemporary political and cultural debates through critical and theoretical frameworks. By examining how this recent dramatic literature reflects human concerns and anxieties, the study expands current theoretical explorations of these themes across literary and cultural studies, offering new insights into theatrical literature's inherent dynamism and its socio-cultural power to inspire progressive action beyond the stage. This study reveals how contemporary vampire dramas, through their representations of monstrosity and otherness, explore and critique systems of injustice, thereby prompting audiences to consider the importance of collaborative efforts, compassion and empathy in fostering social change and resisting oppressive ideologies rooted in fear, ignorance and prejudice. It builds on prior research (Cohen, 1996, p. 4; Summers, 2003, pp. 2, 18, 28; Melton, 2011, p. xxx; Barber, 1988, pp. 41, 44) while expanding the application of these theoretical approaches to dramatic works in performance. In doing so, it suggests valuable new interdisciplinary methodological practices that integrate performative and literary

theoretical scholarship with a deep exploration of history as the ever-present past shaping narratives. These narratives ultimately hold a reflective mirror up to nature, exposing humanity's best and most troubling impulses in relation to social, political and cultural power dynamics, as well as the ethical dilemmas emerging through active engagement with theatrical literature, criticism and performance. By connecting this potent form of dramatic storytelling to its live theatrical embodiment, this study demonstrates how performances themselves can move audiences, influence perspectives and shape cultural beliefs.

By understanding how these plays utilise the vampire myth to engage with contemporary anxieties, valuable insights into the ongoing human struggle for meaning, identity and agency in a world increasingly defined by uncertainty, fluidity and the blurring of established boundaries can be gained. In this context, the vampire, as a figure of both fascination and revulsion, ultimately becomes a potent symbol for the human capacity to both adapt to and resist the forces that shape people's lives. In conclusion, this dissertation underscores the vampire myth's enduring power and remarkable adaptability within contemporary British theatre and highlights its continuing relevance as a potent symbol for engaging with a vast spectrum of anxieties surrounding late capitalism, non-normative identities, pervasive technologies, the blurring of established boundaries, evolving notions of embodiment and the precarity of the posthuman condition. The analysed plays challenge audiences to confront these anxieties and reflect critically on their own embedded fears and desires, prompting analysis of the social forces and systems of power that shape individual and collective experiences. By reimagining the vampire for a new era, these plays harness the unique capacity of theatre to expose hidden anxieties, prompt critical self-reflection and ultimately inspire individual agency in resisting oppressive ideologies and constructing alternative, more equitable, just, compassionate and emancipatory social, cultural and political futures.

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