“Florence Marryat’s *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897): Negotiating Anxieties of Genre and Gender at the *Fin de Siècle*”

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Abstract

The heroine of Florence Marryat’s *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897), Harriet Brandt, is an energy sucker and a formidable predator. However, unlike Bram Stoker’s famous vampire (*Dracula* was published in the same year), she is also a tragic figure who only realises towards the end of the novel that she has killed the people she is closest to. Marryat at once grants her female vampire freedom and disempowers her. Furthermore, Harriet’s vampiric nature and mixed-race ancestry potentially cast her as a racially threatening Other, but one with whom the reader is increasingly encouraged to sympathise. Marryat also plays with genre, especially the popular genre of the Female Gothic, and mixes Gothic elements such as the vampire with distinctly un-Gothic ones, such as the Belgian seaside resort of Heyst, in order to reflect the comparatively liberated, but still precarious, position of women at the end of the nineteenth century. This article analyses character, setting and genre in order to show that the figure of Harriet is a reflection upon the position of not just the New Woman, but *fin-de-siècle* British women more generally.

Key Words

Female Gothic; degeneration; vampires; Marryat; genre; woman question

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“Florence Marryat’s *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897): Negotiating Anxieties of Genre and Gender at the *Fin de Siècle*”

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Introduction

Florence Marryat’s *The Blood of the Vampire* appeared in 1897, the same year that Bram Stoker published *Dracula*. Although some dismissed Marryat’s novel as one of a “swarm of ill-conceived and ill-executed imitations [of *Dracula*] by inferior writers” (“Fiction” 1898: 29), Marryat’s novel does not feature the kind of fanged bloodsucker that such a judgement may imply. Her vampire, Harriet Brandt, is an energy sucker, whose abundant vivacity is stolen from the people around her.¹ Compared to *Dracula*’s female vampires, Harriet is a formidably effective predator. In Stoker’s novel, Dracula’s three brides fail to dine on Jonathan Harker and feed only on babies brought to them by the Count. Dracula’s other victim, Lucy Westenra, only preys on children, and does not kill them. In comparison, Harriet kills at least five people ranging from a young baby to a grown man, and severely weakens four others. Harriet is also young, beautiful and financially independent, meaning she can easily get close to her victims. Moreover, she can travel freely, not having to worry about inconvenient boxes of earth as Count Dracula does. Another significant difference is that whereas the vampires in *Dracula* are intentional hunters, Harriet is a tragic figure who only realises towards the end of the novel that it is her “love that [has] killed” those she is physically and emotionally closest to (Marryat [1897] 2010: 161).² Marryat at once grants her female vampire freedom, and disempowers her. In so doing, Marryat engages with questions of women’s relationship to individual agency, responsibility and liberty which had been prevalent in Victorian society since the emergence of the “Woman Question” earlier in the century, but which were restated with new urgency as a response to the rise of the New Woman.

Marryat’s interrogation of the changing status of *fin-de-siècle* women utilises a number of tactics, particularly in her depiction of Harriet and her relationship to the novel’s settings. Harriet’s vampiric nature and mixed-race ancestry are influenced by the discourses of heredity and degeneration that were so pervasive at the *fin de siècle*; this sets her up as a racially threatening Other but, paradoxically, one with whom the reader is increasingly encouraged to sympathise. Marryat also plays with genre; as well as capitalising on the vogue for vampire fiction, *The Blood of the Vampire* draws on, and develops, the popular genre of the Female Gothic, which originated with writers such as Ann Radcliffe in the late eighteenth century and offered a nightmarish image of women’s

¹ Actually, Marryat’s novel has more in common with Arabella Kenealy’s “A Beautiful Vampire” (1896), which also concerns a seductive energy sucker.

² All further quotations are cited in-text and are to this edition.

position in patriarchal society. Whereas early Female Gothic is predominantly concerned with male oppression, *The Blood of the Vampire* reflects the comparatively liberated, but still precarious, position of women at the end of the nineteenth century. One of the ways in which Marryat achieves this is to mix Gothic elements such as the vampire with distinctly *un*-Gothic ones, such as the mundane Belgian seaside resort where the novel begins. Harriet moves, like *Dracula*, to London and, like *Dracula*, the city becomes a nightmarish Gothic space, but this gothicisation is experienced by the vampire herself, who begins to take on attributes of the Female Gothic heroine. By offering analyses of character, setting and genre, this article argues that the figure of Harriet is a reflection upon the position of not just the New Woman, but *fin-de-siècle* British women more generally, who found themselves with unprecedented levels of freedom and responsibility, but not necessarily with the education or upbringing to allow them to enjoy these maturely or safely.

Degeneration and Ethnicity

After she is orphaned at the age of eleven, Harriet Brandt is raised in a Jamaican convent. When she comes of age, she takes her sizable inheritance and leaves for Europe determined to enjoy her life and her freedom. At the seaside town of Heyst, Belgium, Harriet meets three English women, all of whom suffer through their acquaintance with her: Margaret Pullen, Elinor Leyton and the Baroness Gobelli. Harriet starts an affair with Margaret's brother-in-law Ralph, whom she does not know is the fiancé of the cold and aristocratic Elinor, and offers him the demonstrative devotion, and sexual freedom, that Miss Leyton refuses him. Meanwhile, Margaret Pullen's baby girl grows ill and dies after being cuddled for long periods of time by Harriet. The Baroness Gobelli invites Harriet back to England, and once there Harriet drains the life of the Baroness's son, Bobby, who is besotted with her and spends hours every day physically close to her. When the Baroness accuses Harriet of carrying "the curse of black blood and of the vampire's blood which kills everything which it caresses", Harriet is understandably rather alarmed (156). She visits Dr Phillips, Margaret's godfather, who is aware of Harriet's parentage. The doctor reveals that her father was a vicious English vivisectionist who used to experiment on his workers until "he was finally slaughtered on his own plantation by his servants" (76). Harriet's mother was her father's mixed-race mistress, with a "thirst for blood" (79), who was the daughter of a slave belonging to a Judge of Barbados, and who was "bitten by a Vampire bat" (69) during pregnancy. Dr Phillips refers to the "curse of heredity" (78) in relation to both Harriet's racial make-up and "the fatal attributes of the Vampire that affected her mother's birth" (79). Due to this disastrous hereditary makeup, he tells Harriet not to marry, or even cultivate close relationships, if she does not want to kill anyone else. However, by this point in the novel, Harriet has fallen in love with Anthony Pennell, who urges her to ignore the doctor's warnings and marry him. During their happy honeymoon, Harriet spends a night sleeping on the arm of her husband, only to find him a

corpse in the morning. Convinced that she has drained his life force, she takes chloral, leaving a suicide note which expresses her conviction that her parents have “made [her] unfit to live” (187).

As this overview reveals, the novel is heavily influenced by *fin-de-siècle* ideas of degeneration and eugenics. “Degeneration” was a blanket term that referred to the common belief that undesirable elements (physical, mental or moral) were hereditarily transmitted, with increasing virulence, from generation to generation, and was a threat not only to individual families, but to British society as a whole. Miscegenation counted as one way of polluting the bloodline. Harriet is a danger because of her mother’s bloodlust, instigated by the bite of the vampire bat, and also because she is descended from slaves: the Baroness’s accusation of Harriet tellingly references her “black blood” and her “vampire’s blood” in the same sentence. Sarah Willburn has argued that Harriet’s “curse, while unintentional, is powerful and through it her race itself is granted a malign supernatural enchantment” (2008: 441). Howard Malchow goes even further, asserting that “the vampire’s bite suffered by Harriet’s fiend-mother while pregnant, is in fact nearly superfluous. The hereditary dice are already loaded” (1996: 170). Yet Harriet’s ability to pass as white, with her “colourless but clear” skin and “straight and small” nose (4) allows her the freedom to approach, and entice, Englishmen, making her an effective threat to white blood. Only the medically-trained Dr Phillips can identify the signs of a “quadroon” and warns Ralph “she shews it distinctly in her long-shaped eyes with their blue whites and her wide mouth and blood-red lips! Also in her supple figure and apparently boneless hands and feet” (77).

Phillips reveals Harriet’s ancestry to other characters on a number of occasions, claiming that it would be “criminal” to withhold the truth about her (76). In some cases, Phillips’s warning is effective. While Ralph is initially unconcerned that Harriet’s dark eyes may be due to “a drop of Creole blood” (49), and insists that her situation makes her “all the more [in] need of the protection and loyalty of her friends” (78), the confirmation that it is rather more than “a drop” contributes to his abandonment of Harriet, and he later congratulates himself on his narrow escape from begetting a “piebald son and heir” (143). Margaret also begins by protesting that, “terrible as all this is [...] it is not the poor girl’s fault. Why should we give up her acquaintance for that?” (69), but under Phillips’s persistence she resolves (too late to save her child) to “take [his] advice and drop [Harriet] as soon as possible!” (69). Already we can see that, as Terra Walston Joseph notes, Marryat’s treatment of mixed-race characters is much more negative than the depictions of “‘almost white’ victims” and “the ‘tragic mulatta’” who appeared in mid-century “melodramas about the cruelty of American slavery” (2018: 198), such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *The Octoroon; Or, The Lily of Louisiana* (1861-2) in which the heroine is raised in England and, on returning to America, finds herself sold into slavery.

Phillips repeatedly asserts that other characters’ generosity and pity for Harriet are dangerous and short-sighted. He accepts that Harriet cannot be morally judged for her parents’ failings, assuring her it “is not your fault you know. It is a

natural organism” (162). Yet he is equally certain that she must be segregated from other (white) people and is “not fit to marry into any decent English family!” (118). That the degenerate subject could not be held accountable for his or her nature was a common claim. The influential Dr Henry Maudsley, for example, asserted that “the wicked are not wicked by deliberate choice [...] but by an inclination of their natures” (1874: 25). Regardless of the degenerate’s innocence, precautions had to be taken to make sure that “wickedness” or whatever the degenerative threat was, did not spread. Such thinking bolstered the dissemination of eugenic theories which would continue into the twentieth century. Proponents of theories of hereditary degeneration used language which asserted that heredity was inescapable, and that the “destiny of an individual is innate in him” (Maudsley 1863: 490). Significantly, Phillips tells Margaret to stay away from Harriet, not because of anything that she has done, but what he feels she is sure to do:

My dear Margaret, are you so ignorant as not to see that a child born under such conditions cannot turn out well? The bastard of a man like Henry Brandt, cruel, dastardly, godless, and a woman like her terrible mother, a sensual, self-loving, crafty and bloodthirsty half-caste—what do you expect their daughter to become? She may seem harmless enough at present, so does the tiger cub as it suckles its dam, but that which is bred in her will come out sooner or later and curse those with whom she may be associated. (69)

The death of Margaret’s baby, and the ending of the novel, seem to affirm that any pity for, or attraction to, the degenerate subject must be overcome. Harriet’s beloved Anthony Pennell – an open-minded socialist who believes in gender equality – is aware of Harriet’s background but declares with bravado, “Doctor Phillips be damned! [...] Vampire be hanged! [...] if it were the truth, I for one could not wish for a sweeter death! Come along, Hally, and try your venom upon me!” (166). Anthony’s death and Harriet’s subsequent suicide reinforce the unpreventable nature of hereditary degeneration as well, perhaps, as the hopelessness of socialist and feminist ideals. For all her financial independence, Harriet is unable to escape the influence of the vampiric (and black) blood that flows in her veins. She is stripped of any control over her life beyond the decision to end it.

A focus on this novel’s enactment of late-Victorian British fears of degeneration – particularly resulting from miscegenation – positions Harriet as the dangerous “Other” in line with readings of *Dracula* as a reverse invasion narrative.³ There are certainly hints, beyond Phillips’s warnings, that there is something disturbing about her which distances her from the reader. Ironically Harriet’s racism is one of the most telling signs – she fondly remembers the treatment of the workers on the plantation as a child:

³ See, for example, Stephen D. Arata’s, “The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization” (1990). A number of critics have offered postcolonial readings of *The Blood of the Vampire*, (Malchow 1996; Willburn 2008: 438–44; Joseph 2018: 198–207), often reading Harriet as an example of reverse colonization (Costantini 2013: 89; Haefele-Thomas 2012: 108).

When I was a little thing of four years old Pete used to let me whip the little niggers for a treat when they had done anything wrong. It used to make me laugh to see them wriggle their legs under the whip and cry! (17)

The “voice of pain” (17) with which Margaret begs her to stop talking (which Harriet does not) represents the ‘proper’ English response to such violence. Colonial rule was partially justified in Britain by the “notion of a civilizing mission” which “presupposed racial superiority of” whites over non-whites (Robert J. C. Young, cited in Willburn 2008: 437). While it was generally accepted that the assertion of “justice” might take a physical form, open enjoyment of cruelty towards non-whites did not fit with the Empire’s enlightened self-image. Another alarming aspect of Harriet’s behaviour is her fascination with the disturbing pictures of Antoine Wiertz. She is “entranced, enraptured” by “the representation of Napoleon in Hell being fed with the blood and bones of his victims” (84) and declares, “I like them—I like them!” whilst “moving her tongue slowly over her lips” (85) in an echo of her mother’s bloodlust.

However, these disturbing elements in Harriet’s character do not necessarily mark her out as vampirically or ethnically Other. As part of her compelling argument that *The Blood of the Vampire* depicts “a creolized Caribbean as dangerous because it threatens British colonial dominance” (2018: 190), Terra Walston Joseph argues that the novel shows that “‘black-on-black’ crime” was a result of “black liberty” in the West Indies (2018: 200). The fact that it is the black overseer of the plantation who facilitates Harriet’s whipping of the workers certainly supports this. It is also important, however, that at the age of four Harriet is encouraged to enjoy brutality whilst performing the role of white master disciplining workers; this says as much about the morally unwholesome conditions in the West as it does about Harriet’s ‘nature’. Moreover, while Harriet’s obsession with Wiertz’s graphic paintings may be excessive, it echoes the fascination of the British public. Tourists to Brussels were recommended to visit the museum, and especially directed to the most “gruesome” paintings, including one of Harriet’s favourites, “Napoleon in the Infernal Regions” (Field 1894: 113).⁴ The paintings also featured in other Victorian popular fiction and, as with *The Blood of the Vampire*, could be used to suggest worrying elements in a character’s personality. For example, in Rhoda Broughton’s “The Man with the Nose” (1872), a young bride’s amusement at Wiertz’s “horrible cholera-picture” indicates that there may be something wrong with her; importantly, however, it does not suggest that she is in anyway racially or nationally “Othered”.⁵ While, therefore, Harriet’s ethnicity and vampirism are certainly an easy explanation for her more unattractive characteristics, her enjoyment of colonial violence and

⁴ Baedeker’s *Belgium and Holland: A Handbook for Travellers* also recommended the Musée Wiertz (1897: 99). Wiertz’s Napoleon painting can be seen here: <http://www.museumsyndicate.com/images/5/47090.jpg>

⁵ Precisely *what* is wrong is debatable in this enigmatic short story, but the male narrator is confused that his “nervous” wife is not “impressed” by the paintings in the way he would expect (Broughton 1995: 20).

attraction to the macabre were, unwelcome as they may be, not disassociated from Britishness.

While *The Blood of the Vampire* certainly taps into late-Victorian colonial anxieties, Harriet's ignorance of the truth about her own ancestry (she confidently asserts that her "father was English", and that she is "an Englishwoman" (13)) also plays into *fin-de-siècle* concerns that hereditary degeneration could be anywhere – hidden or latent – even in those who believe themselves to be 'normal' and respectable. Labelling an individual or group as degenerate was usually a tactic and justification to distinguish, separate and control (through eugenics and legal measures) those who were undesirable, sometimes due to ethnicity, but also due to mental and physical illness, or socially unacceptable behaviour. However, another common anxiety was that degeneration might not be a problem of abhorrent individuals or social groups, but a sign of the true nature of civilised society. Stoker alluded to this possibility in *Dracula* with the "turning" of Lucy: the Count may be a foreign threat invading London, but his ability to turn "sweet" young women into "voluptuous" vampires suggests that the potential for this change must have been there all along ([1897] 2011: 108, 196). Gender is of course important here, as it is with the female enjoyment of Wiertz discussed above, because part of the shock for Seward (the narrator), and for the reader, is witnessing someone as gentle, "pure" and feminine as Lucy become "unclean" (Stoker [1897] 2011: 197). The question these texts ask, from this collective perspective, is whether these are cases of individual defective femininity, or something potentially dangerous about femininity itself. Octavia Davis explores these issues by reading *The Blood of the Vampire* in the light of late-Victorian scientific notions about "the evolutionary continuum [which] defines all people, particularly women, as too close for comfort to Nature and the hereditary Other concealed inside" (2007: 52). Davis argues that Marryat, like many other Victorian women, was influenced by "popular and scientific understandings of heredity and sexuality, which constructed the sexually mature female body as dangerous and in need of control" (2007: 40), and that she "endows her fictional vampire with the same destructive characteristics she attributes to herself and to other women, indicating that she had incorporated and internalized claims that white middle-class British women exhibited vampiric tendencies similar to those of the degenerate Other" (Davis 2007: 42). Harriet's black vampiric blood stands as a metaphor for the uncontrolled sexuality, desire, and hunger that lurks in every well-bred English woman and needs to be carefully controlled.

Whereas Margaret and Ralph are initially drawn to Harriet, but then persuaded to give her up by Phillips, the reader (who may be initially disgusted by her gluttony⁶ and moral laxness, not to mention her love of violence discussed above) is increasingly invited not just to pity her, but to sympathise with her fears and her desire for love and companionship: "Money Harriet had no need of, but

⁶ For a discussion of the significance of Harriet's "abnormal appetite," see Costantini (2013: 90).

love—love she had thirsted for” (179).⁷ When Harriet goes to consult Doctor Phillips after the Baroness’s accusation, she demands to know ‘shall I always kill everybody I love? I *must* know—I *will*!’ (161, emphasis in original), and is told “you must never hope to keep anyone near you for long, without injuring them [...] I should advise you seriously *not* to marry!” (162, original emphasis). When she subsequently tries to persuade Anthony Pennell that they must not marry, she admits “I have been so lonely and friendless all my life [...] and I have longed for love and sympathy so much, and now that they have come to me it is hard, O! so hard, to have to give them up” (178). Having a knowledge of Harriet’s unpleasant and often isolated upbringing makes this moment poignant, especially for many Victorian readers who had been raised to see marriage as the surest road to female happiness. At least one reader, the reviewer for the *Manchester Guardian*, acknowledged that Marryat “softens” towards Harriet to the point that “before the close no ingenuous reader can feel other than compassion for the helpless victim of a hereditary curse.” While the reviewer suggests that Marryat is “at first undecided as to the amount of responsibility she should attach to the fair Harriet” (assuming that her modifications of narrative distance and perspective are not tactical) they finish their review by asking, “Only, if it comes to that, are we not all more or less weighted by the malignant tendencies of our forefathers?” (“Novels” 1897: 9). This move towards anxious self-reflection through contemplation of a monstrous character suggests that Marryat’s narrative manoeuvres are more effective than some more recent readers have realised.

When Anthony refuses to give her up, Harriet, usually frivolous and selfish, spends a night of tortured self-seeking, torn between his insistence and the diagnosis of Dr Phillips: “The poor child saw her destiny entangling her as in a net—she longed to break through it, but saw no means of escape” (177). She remembers everyone who has died after being in her company “until she felt as though she should go mad” (176); she thinks of her life ahead of her and how lonely she will be if she can no longer cultivate intimacy with anyone; she feels anger at her parents for infecting her with such a condition and rebels “against the cruel lot that heredity had marked out for her” (177). The supposed hereditary natures of many conditions, both physical (for example syphilis⁸) and mental (such as insanity), led to warnings to assert caution when considering marriage. One *Westminster Review* article, for example, cautions that “the man who contemplates marriage [must] make his selection from a good stock, if he looks for happiness”, but adds resignedly that “love is blind”, and that a “pretty girl with charming manners, whose heredity is tabulated by generations of tubercle, insanity, and vice, is far more sought than one who is less gifted” (Foard 1899: 542). The same article also asserted that “the power of the hereditary strain has been shown to be certain in its results, and parents should be on their guard respecting the different forms of degeneracy a morbid descent may produce in

⁷ Marryat’s choice of “thirsted” is obviously a reminder of Harriet’s vampirism.

⁸ Alexandra Warwick notes that “the terms of Phillips’” diagnosis [of Harriet] draw obvious parallels with syphilis, particularly his emphasis on the danger to those closest to her” (1995: 210).

their children” (Foard 1899: 546). In these examples, responsibility is laid on the prospective husband and parents to be vigilant about the choosing of a spouse, but Harriet, an orphan whose lover is blinded by her “pretty” face and “charming manners”, is left to decide on her own, when she is hardly equipped to make such a decision. This is one way in which Harriet works as a Gothic metaphor for British *fin-de-siècle* women who were experiencing greater independence than ever before, but without the education and upbringing to prepare them for the concomitant responsibility.

Genre Play: Setting and the Female Gothic

One of the significant effects of making the reader more sympathetic to Harriet by the end of the novel is that as well as being a Gothic threat (the vampire), she also takes on traits of the Female Gothic heroine. The term “Female Gothic”, coined by Ellen Moers in the 1970s, initially referred to late eighteenth-century Gothic novels by women, especially the extremely influential works of Ann Radcliffe. The definition of the Female Gothic has since been contested; here the term is used to refer to a subgenre of Gothic literature that is usually written by women, often for women, and which reflects the experience of women within patriarchal society.⁹ Early Female Gothic achieves this by depicting vulnerable women threatened and pursued by patriarchal tyrants, and the use of what Diana Wallace calls “female Gothic metaphors”, imagery of female entrapment, live burial and women as ghostly figures (Wallace 2009: 26–27). *The Blood of the Vampire* is very different in tone to Radcliffean Gothic, and conspicuously lacks this kind of imagery.¹⁰ Harriet’s tormented night, discussed above, is described in language of restraint and entrapment, but she is torn by her own ethical dilemma and mental anguish (albeit with Anthony and Phillips providing psychological pressure in the background), not physically trapped. By the *fin de siècle*, women’s situation was very different from that of Radcliffe’s readers. Along with political and legal changes relating to marriage, divorce and property ownership, society was reshaping itself in such a way that more women from the respectable classes could – and often needed to – move more freely through public spaces, to visit shops, to go to work, to attend lectures, and so on. And of course the *fin de siècle* is the era of the New Woman who was associated with increased social and sexual, as well as political, freedom. Harriet’s position as a financially independent, wilful and

⁹ Critics have questioned, for example, whether “Female” should apply to the gender of the author, the protagonist or the structure of the plot. See Wallace and Smith 2009.

¹⁰ Another apparent departure from Radcliffean Female Gothic is that Radcliffe frequently employed the “explained supernatural” in which supposedly unworldly events turn out to have a natural explanation, thus locating the source of fear in the real world (usually in the patriarchal villain), and emphasising women’s vulnerability within patriarchal structures. In *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), for example, apparently ghostly noises are caused by a woman imprisoned under the castle by her husband. Radcliffe certainly did not write about vampires. On the other hand, Marryat’s attribution of Harriet’s vampirism to heredity and infection, as explained by a medical doctor, could be perceived as a variation on the explained supernatural.

sometimes shockingly liberated young woman, reflects a society in which women were increasingly able to act as independent beings. This is not to say that women did not continue to feel oppressed or reduced in patriarchal structures, and Female Gothic metaphors of entrapment remain a part of much twentieth-century Female Gothic literature, in the work of Daphne Du Maurier or Angela Carter, for example. But Marryat, in this novel, contributes to the Female Gothic genre by focusing on a different aspect of female experience and offering a different type of metaphor through the character of Harriet.

However, *The Blood of the Vampire* is not, perhaps surprisingly considering the title, a predominantly Gothic work. In fact, as this section will show, Marryat's interrogation of the precarious position of modern women is in part a product of the way in which she introduces Gothic figures and tropes into resolutely un-Gothic settings and scenarios. Both Victorian reviewers and more recent critics have been troubled by the un-Gothic elements of *The Blood of the Vampire*. An example of one favourable reception of Stoker's *Dracula* in the *Saturday Review* makes a useful point of comparison:

Mr. Bram Stoker was not content with the small honour he could have gained by leaving [Count Dracula] in an out-of-the-way corner of Europe. That would have been merely to revert to the Mrs. Radcliffe style of fiction. So Count Dracula is brought to London, and Jonathan Harker, a quite ordinary everyday solicitor, has a very bad time with him indeed.

(“*Dracula*” 1897: 21)

The critic appreciates that, while Radcliffe tended to set her novels on the Continent, Stoker brings the Gothic threat closer to home.¹¹ *Dracula*'s London is a Gothicised rendering of the city, a place of poorly-secured lunatic asylums, escaped wolves, abandoned buildings and violated homes. By the mid-1890s, Victorian readers were accustomed to viewing the metropolis through a Gothic lens, and to seeing “everyday” heroes threatened by Gothic monsters. Other urban Gothic bestsellers, like Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan* (1894), were already published, and Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897) came out a month after *Dracula*. It was thrilling for readers to imagine that, as one character tells another in *The Great God Pan*, “you may think you know life, and London, and what goes on, day and night, in this dreadful city; [...] but I tell you you can have no conception [...] not in your most fantastic, hideous dreams” (Machen 2009: 198). So Stoker (like these other authors) mildly confounds the reader's “horizons of expectation” (Todorov 1976: 163) in relation to the Gothic by moving from Transylvania to London, but only enough to be interesting, and in such a way as

¹¹ The European setting of the first part of Stoker's novel is not as similar to Radcliffe as the reviewer implies; while *Dracula* lives in the Carpathians, Radcliffe's novels are usually based in Mediterranean Europe. As observed in n. 10 the inclusion of a vampire is also a clear departure from Radcliffian Gothic. *Dracula* is much more supernatural than Harriet; although Van Helsing does suggest that “the strangeness of the geologic and chemical world” must have influenced the creation of *Dracula*, Stoker's vampire is very much “not of nature” (2011: 296, 223).

to intensify the horror of the novel. Most importantly for the *Saturday Review*, this did not violate, but rather effectively adhered to, the number one rule of what we would now call the Gothic: it has to be scary. As Derrida observes, “as soon as the word ‘genre’ is sounded [...] a limit is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind” (1980: 56). While “Gothic” was not commonly applied to fiction in the 1890s, critics of the period certainly had a clear idea of what kind of fiction a novel featuring a vampire should be. The *Dracula* reviewer called the novel “story-writing of the blood-curdling order”, and felt sure that readers would “feel their flesh creep” (“*Dracula*” 1897: 21). This draws a pedigree from *Dracula* back to the “nightmare romance” of Ann Radcliffe and other late-eighteenth-century writers of “tales which used to curdle the blood of our great grandmothers”, as one *Westminster Review* journalist put it (Billson 1892: 612).

One of the accusations of the *Speaker* critic, whose disdainful review of *The Blood of the Vampire* opened this article, is that Marryat is “trying hard to be fashionably ‘creepy’” but “has not succeeded in that ambitious attempt”. It goes on, “Truth to tell, this vampire is no more terrifying to grown-up minds than would be the turnip-bogey of our childhood” (“Fiction” 1898: 29) and that “instead of being, as it is intended to be, appalling and blood-curdling, “The Blood of the Vampire” produces an impression of tediousness and disagreeable sensationalism” (“Fiction” 1898: 30). For the *Speaker*, it is not a case of Marryat overstepping the “limit[s]” of the genre, or transgressively “mixing” them (Derrida 1980: 57) but simply failing to satisfy the requirements for the genre in the first place. Like the, albeit more complimentary, *Manchester Guardian* reviewer discussed above, the *Speaker* assumes Marryat’s failure to conform is an accident rather than a tactic. Greta Depledge points out that maybe Marryat did not want to be “creepy” (2010: xi), and was aiming for a different effect: “it is important not to read this novel with the expectations of experiencing the feelings of horror or terror that we might expect when reading a more typical “gothic” novel” (2010: xii), because the themes of *The Blood of the Vampire* are “much more prosaic everyday issues in the late nineteenth-century” (2010: xi). Depledge goes on to list some of these themes: “the medical pathologisation of women, sexually transgressive behaviour, heredity, eugenics, the non-white “other”, and the occult” (2010: xii) and suggests that “Marryat might have been looking to display characteristics and concerns of real women” (2010: xi). While Depledge offers a good overview of the main themes of the novel (Harriet, like most vampires, carries multiple cultural anxieties within her), by trying to combat the *Speaker*’s criticism of *The Blood of the Vampire*, she somewhat overlooks the fact that these themes are a key part of much Gothic fiction that is deemed scary – including *Dracula* – and that, as summarised above, displaying the “concerns of real women” is fundamental to the Female Gothic. Therefore, neither identifying the novel’s thematic concerns or its relevance to modern Victorian women is really an explanation for why Marryat wrote a vampire novel that is not overtly scary. In fact, it is the way Marryat blends the Gothic with a more domestic, mildly sensational form of popular fiction, which makes her version of the Female Gothic modern, relevant and effective. Rather than gothicising the normal,

bringing the everyday into the Gothic realm, she takes the Gothic figure of the vampire and puts it into a setting that (for the most part) remains resolutely ungothicised. In so doing, Marryat far more radically confounds our “horizons of expectation” than a novel such as *Dracula* does.

By setting the first part of her novel in the popular seaside town of Heyst, Belgium, Marryat modifies and updates the traditional trappings of the Female Gothic, so as to accommodate the new freedoms and stresses experienced by modern Victorian women. The opening scene of *The Blood of the Vampire* sets up an atmosphere in which women are portrayed as independent and free from male control. The first paragraph begins with references, by name, to male servants who will only play a small role in the rest of the novel: Henri, Philippe and Jules are laying the table for dinner at the Hôtel Lion d’Or. Within the same paragraph we are introduced to more important characters: the Baroness Gobelli with her husband and son; Margaret, whose husband is serving abroad in India; and Elinor, who is awaiting her fiancé Ralph. On the same page they are joined by Harriet, whose female companion (a friend from the convent, travelling to meet her brother) is currently bed-ridden after sharing a cabin with her. Because of the semi-domestic surroundings (a dining table), and the initial mention of male names, it is easy to overlook that this is a collection of largely unprotected Englishwomen. The Baroness’s son and husband are present, but nineteen-year-old Bobby is “always treated as if he had been a boy of ten years old” and “dared not say Bo! to a goose in presence of his Mamma” (3), and the Baron is “completely under her thumb” and “servile in her presence” (5). While the opening pages also mention the “motley crew of English, Germans, and Belgians” who sit down to dinner, and “a sprinkling of children, mostly unruly and ill-behaved” (3), men with any level of authority or influence are absent from the opening narrative. Talking about female tourists, Janice Schroeder explains that

The sight of the woman in the public context of “abroad” directly challenges the notion that women are to remain content as the unseen, unseeing objects of male desire within the private, domestic space. Tourism contradicts domestic ideology by presenting women as travellers and as the subjects (as opposed to the objects) of the gaze.

(Schroeder 1998: 123)

Whilst in early Female Gothic, the heroine is usually forced into a position of lone vulnerability in a sublime and terrifying landscape by the villain, here the novel begins with women who are willingly, voluntarily, alone in a foreign country.

Of course, this is a comfortable seaside resort; these are recreational tourists, not intrepid travellers in search of adventure.¹² This kind of European holiday is

¹² James Buzard explains that distinctions between tourists and travellers, and the “negative connotation[s]” of the former, were in place “by the middle of the nineteenth century”: “The tourist is the dupe of fashion, following blindly where authentic travellers have gone with open eyes and free spirits” (1993: 1). This supports my argument that this book is about modern British women generally, not specifically the New Woman. New Women, as discussed below, were conceived as active – they would

something that many readers would recognise, either through direct experience, through talking to friends, or through reading travel accounts in the popular press. Europe was “both foreign *and* familiar: foreign to the first-time visitor, yet none the less familiar from the general cultural discourse of home, which shaped visitors’ expectations and experiences” (Buzard 1993: 15, emphasis in original). Heyst is a particularly well-chosen setting on Marryat’s part. Belgium had become an independent nation in the 1830s and held a particular place in the hearts and minds of the British in the early nineteenth century; it was the site of the Battle of Waterloo (1815) and, as Pieter François explains, it was thought that “the Belgian national identity was similar to the British”, and the country was seen as “a little Britain on the Continent” (François 2008: 664).¹³ While this was less the case by the *fin de siècle*, Belgium was still, for the standard British tourist, the easiest place to get to that was not France (which, of course, carried far more entrenched and fraught associations in the English mind), and Heyst was a popular destination, an ideal mix of the domestic and the foreign. Indeed, the day-to-day tourist experience of Heyst, as depicted in *The Blood of the Vampire*, is not much different from an English seaside holiday, consisting mainly of bathing, walking and dining, with the occasional additional mild excitement of a local celebration. As well as the *table d’hôte* in the first chapter, the novel includes typical scenes of the daily evening promenade along the Digue, bumping into acquaintances who are more or less welcome, and a comic description of tourists stumbling, embarrassed, from the bathing machine to the water – an “ordeal” that is “rather trying”, “especially [for] the English” (26).

Because of this combination of comfort and foreignness the English begin to let down their guard. As Eleanor says rather snobbishly: “There is not much ceremony observed amongst the English at these foreign places. It would be better perhaps if there were a little more!” (19) The Jamaican-born Harriet, whose father is English (and whose mother, as far as we know at this point, is white Creole), is counted as one of the English and can make acquaintance with them based on her nationality.¹⁴ The women are thrown into, and tolerate, each other’s company in a manner which would not occur in England, and this allows Harriet to seduce Ralph and drain the life from Margaret’s baby.

be travellers, explorers. Margaret, contrastingly, looks forward only to being reunited with her husband, Colonel Arthur Pullen, who is “toiling out in India for baby and herself” (8) but is due to return for Christmas.

¹³ Although Belgium is a Catholic country, it is not the Mediterranean, “exotic”, Catholicism that Radcliffe favours, and in fact “strong and creative efforts were even made to argue that the Belgians were in fact ‘hidden’ Protestants” (François 2008: 664). See also Longmuir 2009.

¹⁴ While Harriet associates with the English, she speaks French “perfectly” (13), and English (to her dismay) with a “slightly foreign accent that greatly enhanced its charm” (13). As French carried such longstanding and often morally worrying connotations in the English mind, Harriet’s proficiency with the language may well have seemed significant to readers.

While the death of Margaret's baby is certainly a terrible thing that occurs due to the actions of a Gothic creature, Belgium is not made into a Gothic place; it is not described as dark, scary, or a place of entrapment or mystery – this terrible thing happens in the most normal of places, while Margaret is at dinner and the baby is in the care of her nurse.¹⁵ Returning to the *Speaker* reviewer and their disappointed horizons of expectation, this may not be creepy or blood-curdling, but this part of the novel is effective because it is so un-Gothic, and yet such an awful thing still happens.

Genre Play: Character and the Female Gothic

Harriet loves sweets and toys, she is exuberant, generous and loving, but she is also selfish, superficial, thoughtless and (as we have seen) vulgarly racist. This makes her unlikable, but not a very likely Gothic figure. Nevertheless, she is Gothicised from the start. As the sniffy *Speaker* reviewer notes, "Our suspicions of her true nature are instantly aroused when we read that this beautiful [...] young woman has 'lips of a deep blood colour'" ("Fiction" 1898: 30). Of course, Harriet's "large" mouth can be read retrospectively as a sign of her Jamaican ancestry, but this description of her occurs only four pages into a book called *The Blood of the Vampire*. Those readers who had recently read about the "voluptuous", "ruby" lips of Stoker's female vampires would be especially primed to read Harriet's lips as vampiric ([1897] 2011: 38).¹⁶

Harriet's alluring and seductive manner, which fascinates both men and women, would also be familiar not only to readers of *Dracula* but to those who knew Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1871-2). On the night they meet, Harriet and Margaret go to a crowded café where the only spare seat is in a shadowy corner (the closest that Belgium gets to gothicisation). Once there, Harriet creeps "closer and closer" to Margaret, "encirc[les] her waist with her arm and lean[s] her head upon her shoulder". Margaret starts to feel "fainter and fainter", "as if something or someone were drawing all her life away. She tried to disengage herself from the girl's clasp but Harriet Brandt seemed to come after her, like a coiling snake" (18). Although Margaret does not "like" Harriet's behaviour, she begins to feel "some sensation which she could not define, nor account for—some feeling which she had never experienced before" (17). The homoerotic undertones of Margaret's response to Harriet clearly echo *Carmilla*, in which the heroine, Laura, is

¹⁵ Although Heyst itself is not Gothicised, Costantini identifies an "interpolated gothic narrative [...] based on an analepsis dating back to [Harriet's] childhood in Jamaica" (Costantini 2013: 89). References to Harriet's "ten long years of imprisonment" (10) in the convent, and her and Dr Phillips's descriptions of the violence and torture occurring in the colonies, mean that the Gothic is invoked but always seems out of place. More palatable conversational subjects are moved onto as soon as possible.

¹⁶ That Harriet's first victim (in the novel at least) is a baby is also a nod to Lucy and the vampire brides, although as mentioned previously, Harriet soon moves on to bigger prey.

confused and repulsed by, but also deeply attracted to, the physically intimate and emotionally intense attentions of Carmilla.¹⁷

So the novel begins with a Gothic figure in a non-Gothic setting. Things change when Harriet visits the Baroness Gobelli in her London home, the Red House. Gobelli is supposedly a powerful medium, who conducts séances for the rich and famous. Her house is full of antiques, and has “an unhomelike feeling” and a “coldness” about it which makes Harriet feel “inclined to sit down and burst into tears” (96-7). Harriet and Bobby, the Baroness’s son, walk around the “tangled” and “over-grown” garden, with its “rotten wooden benches”, with Bobby’s “arm round her waist and his head drooping on her shoulder” (103). Needless to say, after a time Bobby sickens and dies.

Even as she is unknowingly draining her next victim, Harriet’s position in the novel is changing. Despite her independent means, she feels trapped at the Red House, not sure what she would do or where she would go if she left. The Baroness is her only friend, but has extreme changes of temper, and sometimes puts Harriet to cook and clean like a servant. Harriet continues to be vampiric, with her “dark eyes still looking for their prey and the restless lips incessantly twitching and moving one over the other” (128), but she also begins to take on the attributes of the Gothic heroine (not just a Gothic figure), trapped in an oppressive domestic environment. When Anthony meets her, he is fascinated by her appearance, but also charmed by her musical ability – because Harriet can play with the talent and spirit of a classic Radcliffean heroine. When Harriet is told the truth about her parents and her vampirism, and finds herself turned out of the Red House after Bobby’s death, Anthony is given the chance to act like a Gothic hero and marry her. They travel back to Europe, this time to the far more Radcliffean setting of Italy. And there Harriet makes her penultimate kill – her husband – and her final kill – herself.

Joseph observes that “as formal evidence of Marryat’s imperial gaze and the novel’s discomfort with imagining Harriet’s subjectivity beyond the tropes that support empire, Marryat decentres Harriet in the novel, providing limited and inconsistent access to her subjectivity” (Joseph 2018: 204). However, this decentralization is lessened from the move to London onwards, both when *The Blood of the Vampire* becomes far more Gothic in its setting and in the oppression, depression and despair that Harriet experiences. Her decentralisation is mitigated even further as she and Anthony travel to Italy. Although she does not become less Gothic, her position in the novel develops so that she is both vampire and heroine at once. Pace Joseph, Marryat adjusts the focalisation so that events are increasingly described from Harriet’s perspective, encouraging the reader to understand that she has simply longed for “love and sympathy”, and to be pleased for her when she declares that in six weeks of marriage she has not just been “happy”, but “in Heaven all the while” (183). This also means that when she dies,

¹⁷ For a more sustained queer reading of Harriet and Margaret’s relationship see Haefele-Thomas (2012: 110–16).

the reader is in the unprecedented position of pitying, and even empathising with, the vampire.

Considering Freud's concept of the uncanny is useful here, specifically his description of the co-existence of the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich* (Freud [1919] 2003: 134). Marryat combines the familiar and the unfamiliar in contrasting ways during the course of the novel. Belgium is a familiar holiday destination, but the introduction of the vampire is both unfamiliar – Harriet is a Gothic figure in an unremarkable place – and familiar – she is recognizable as a vampire from the start. Later on the setting becomes more obviously Gothic, and hence more familiar for readers conversant with the genre; but paradoxically, as we become more familiar with Harriet, our view of the vampire becomes unfamiliar. Marryat confounds the reader's response to this problematic figure and her necessary yet tragic death. Her blending of different genres and expectations may not be blood-curdling, but it does have the potential to make the reader feel unsettled and disturbed, which is in itself a fundamental characteristic of the Gothic.

New Woman and Everywoman

As demonstrated above, one of the striking things about *The Blood of the Vampire* is how often female characters are portrayed interacting in public or semi-public foreign spaces without the presence of a male guardian; Harriet, Elinor and Margaret are all initially unaccompanied by men in Belgium. The behaviour of Margaret and Elinor is self-regulated for a number of reasons. They are travelling together and can act as mutual chaperones, and they are conscious of their status as English women with a duty to their absent husband and fiancé; more than once Eleanor refers to what would be done in England in a certain situation, and more than once Margaret considers what her husband would expect of her in a given circumstance.

Harriet has no such restrictions. With no parents and a large income she buys what she likes (which is mainly toys for Margaret's baby), eats what she likes (which is mainly bon bons), she goes where she likes; she dances wildly in public and kisses men she is not engaged to (although, that admittedly happens in the dark when no one is looking).¹⁸ A number of critics, including Brenda Mann Hammack, have read Harriet's unrestrained behaviour and independence as representative of the New Woman. Hammack convincingly shows how Harriet's "uninhibited behavior", particularly her sexual forwardness, "align[s] her with the radical New Woman of the period" (2008: 891), and notes that Harriet's "violent interests and inclinations were also being attributed to agitators for women's rights at the turn of the century. Suffragists were habitually cast as regressive, rather than progressive, characters" (2008: 890–91). Harriet's energy sucking is

¹⁸ Warwick notes that "one of the manifestations of vampirism in women is freedom of movement, connected with the inability of men to restrain them" (1995: 205), and connects this freedom with *fin-de-siècle* concerns about female sexual activity outside of marriage.

also relevant here, as one criticism of New Women was that they were selfishly turning away from their duties as wives and mothers, taking for themselves rather than giving to society, in such a way that “materially jeopardized the next generation” (Marks 1990: 116).

However, there is also plenty in Harriet’s behaviour that is not New Womanly: she happily marries Anthony Pennell and defers to his judgement as soon as she can, as Depledge has observed (2010: xxxiii). Harriet is also rather directionless: she has abundant time and money, but little idea of what to do with it and is “too naive to be political” (Hammack 2008: 891). As an article in the *Westminster Review* told its readers, the New Woman could be condemned as “an interloper into matters beyond and outside her stereotyped ‘sphere’”, or could be admired as having “a strong sense of her own importance, usefulness, and responsibility” (Arling 1898: 576). In either case, the New Woman was usually portrayed as active – whether she was campaigning, working, learning or bike riding. Harriet shows little purpose beyond wanting to have fun.

Harriet actually represents *fin-de-siècle* women more broadly – women raised with increasing independence in a society that (according to its critics) was increasingly decadent and accepting of moral laxity.¹⁹ Harriet’s story represents the concern that the education and upbringing of young women was not sufficient to prepare them for the politically, socially and sexually liberated *fin-de-siècle* world. In 1851 Harriet Taylor Mill had complained that “modern” education for women meant “superficial information on solid subjects”, which failed to prompt “the interest and dignity of thought” that would lead to “high mental powers in women”: “Public spirit, sense of duty towards the public good, is of all virtues, as women are now educated and situated, the most rarely to be found among them” (1851: 305, 307). By the time that Marryat wrote *The Blood of the Vampire*, there had been a number of educational reforms, new access to higher education and employment opportunities, and agitations for women’s enfranchisement, and increasing numbers of young women were beginning to take advantage of these changes. Nevertheless, standard female education was only slowly moving on from a focus on accomplishments such as singing and dancing, and “superficial” rather than thorough knowledge, and the majority of middle- and upper-class girls were still trained for the marriage market, not to take a place in society as self-sufficient, politically-responsible beings.²⁰ Tellingly, Harriet’s most attractive feature (beyond her overt sensuality) is her musical talent – an accomplishment she uses to entice men, but which is of little practical use.

This lack of suitable preparation for the modern world is further represented by Harriet’s convent education that has not cultivated maturity in her. Marryat herself had converted to Catholicism, and pokes fun at the “national Protestant

¹⁹ Not all writers and thinkers believed in the degeneration of society at the *fin de siècle*, but there was certainly enough interest and concern for the publication of numerous books and articles which questioned the existence and influence of “a class of indolent and dissipated lives” (“Are We Degenerating?” 1895: 127).

²⁰ I have explored the debates concerning female education in detail elsewhere (see Ifill 2018: chapter 6, particularly 185-8).

horror” her English characters experience when they hear the word “convent” (10). Nevertheless Marryat draws on stereotypes of the convent that are frequently employed in Radcliffean Gothic, which was often overtly anti-Catholic. In early Female Gothic fiction, the convent represented both the barbarity of the Catholic Church that prevented women from fulfilling their destinies as wives and mothers, and a place of sisterhood and sanctuary from male tyranny, a last resort for women disappointed in love, fleeing unwanted love, or left with no other choice. Nuns were often represented as kindly, but superstitious and inward looking, disconnected from the outside world.²¹ Radcliffe relied on her readers’ understanding of Catholicism as out-of-date, backward and unsophisticated, and Marryat is relying on Radcliffean stereotypes. Harriet seems to have learnt nothing of use during her time in the convent. If anything it exacerbates her behaviour – she declares “I’ve had any amount of religion crammed down my throat [...] But it does not signify, I am my own mistress now. I can be what I like!” (10)

Harriet represents a new generation of women – with more liberty, but little sense of, or training in, how to deal with it. Elinor and Margaret represent older ideals of femininity, both of which are out of date in their own way. Elinor, the aristocrat, is formal to the point of off-putting prudishness: she refuses to even acknowledge in public that Ralph is her fiancé, driving him into the arms of Harriet. Margaret is the Angel in the House, who is compensated for her kindness at the end of the novel because she is left Harriet’s inheritance, but who is generally ineffective without male guidance; by waiting for Dr Phillips to diagnose her child’s illness, then sending Anthony Pullen to persuade Harriet to renounce her claim on Ralph (which leads to Pullen’s falling in love with Harriet), Margaret inadvertently contributes to two of the deaths in the novel.

Whereas in classic Female Gothic literature, the characters are split neatly into heroine, villain and hero, Harriet Brandt is the vampire (the villain), and the vampire’s victim (the heroine). By the end of the novel she is also the vampire hunter (the hero). While Haefele-Thomas claims that the “ending” is “as tragic as *Romeo and Juliet*” (2012: 119), Harriet can be more appropriately likened to Othello, who, as he stabs himself, tells the tale of how he “smote” the “Turk” who “traduced the state” (Shakespeare 2008: 5.2.396-99); Harriet’s self-murder is similarly racially motivated, as she purges the degenerate threat to European purity. As this article has shown, however, she is not purely a dangerous product of miscegenation, but also a spirit of unrestrained sexual energy and female liberation. Her degeneracy is a means for reflecting upon white British anxieties about new challenges facing women. Harriet’s foreignness provides a distancing effect that allowed late-Victorian English female popular fiction readers to experience the thrills and dangers of her uninhibited behaviour without having to identify too closely with her. At the same time, the sympathy that is generated by

²¹ In *A Sicilian Romance*, for example, the heroine Julia takes refuge in a convent to avoid an unwanted marriage and befriends a nun, Cornelia, who has taken the veil following news of her lover’s death in order to “retire from a world which had tempted [her] only with illusive visions of happiness” (Radcliffe 2008: 121).

her fear and loneliness means that she ends the novel not only as an innocent victim of heredity, but as a humanised subject who has dared to claim love and companionship that have previously been denied to her. This is one of the reasons why the uncanny figure of the vampire works so well in Female Gothic fiction – it is a creature that has the capacity to be seen as Other, but also as a reflection of the self (however fearfully or reluctantly admitted). Ultimately, Harriet takes responsibility for her own behaviour, driving home the fact that if women are to be free (in whatever sense) they can no longer look only to men as sources of danger, nor can they continue to rely on men to play the hero.

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