

# The Gothic Novel Rhetoric of Fear

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**The Gothic Novel Rhetoric of Fear**

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## **Abstract**

The rhetoric of fear is a complex notion that incorporates the theory of the fantastic narrative as well as the techniques of subversion in literature. Its primary goal is to evoke distress and fear in the reader in order to make him question the truth behind the dominant ideology and to challenge the notion of absolutist perspectives of the reality. To achieve this, it employs the rhetorical figures of paradox, transmutation and metonymy, to name a few, along with the narrator's perspective on the events in order to introduce the uncanny and the marvellous which disrupt a supposedly ordinary world. The Gothic novel, which emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century England, employs these strategies in order to subvert either the ideas of the *Enlightenment* or Victorian strict rules of propriety. The theme it explores is the supposed duality of the human psyche. The three novels used for exploring the application of the Gothic version of the rhetoric of fear are Shelley's *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus*, Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and Stoker's *Dracula*. These narratives apply various devices offered in the inventory of the rhetoric of fear, but what they all have in common is the adoption of multiple perspectives, monsters as metaphors of subversive ideas and ambivalence of their structure allowing for variety of divergent interpretations.

**Key words:** Gothic novel, rhetoric of fear, the fantastic, subversion, the *Enlightenment*, *Frankenstein*, or the *Modern Prometheus*, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *Dracula*

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## Introduction

The Gothic novel, its origin, themes and its various representations had been an interest of mine since I read my first one, Emily Brontë's masterpiece, *Wuthering Heights*. In this work, my goal is to interpret the Gothic narrative from the perspective of the rhetoric of fear in order to discover the techniques employed in constructing the stories, but also to explore the reason behind the choice of provoking fear in the reader as the predominant aim of the novels.

The first part of my work will define the logic behind narratives of fear for the purpose of which I will delve into the theories presented in the works of esteemed theoreticians like Todorov, Lachmann and Jackson. It is not an easy task because I have to establish the principal grounds of the rhetoric of fear first, meaning, I had to unravel which literary devices and techniques are employed for the purpose of causing distress and fear in the readers.

In the second part of my work, in order to expand this theory to the Gothic novel I find it paramount to explore the sociohistorical context of the Gothic literature of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is important to learn how people were treated in that historical period, what they felt and what the areas of their interest and sources of anguish were because all that had been embedded in the Gothic novel, a novel that illustrates the issues of its time. The Gothic not only provides an insight into its time but also incites its readers to question the validity of the dominant ideologies and the norms they imposed.

Following the research on both the ideas behind the rhetoric of fear and the Gothic context, in the third part of my work I will endeavor to explore and interpret, from the perspective of the Gothic novel version of the rhetoric of fear, the three canonical novels of

the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Gothic literature of terror: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*, R.L. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

I have chosen these novels because I felt that even though they saw numerous interpretations for the problematic they explore, little thought had been given to the structural and thematic complexities that facilitated those perspectives. I hope that this work will provide a bridge between these realms.

## **1. The rhetoric of fear**

In this part of my work my aim is to discuss the theory underlying the notion of the rhetoric of fear. It is crucial to denote that the literature of terror implements more than just portrayal of disturbing and violent scenes to evoke the intense emotional reaction in its audience. It also relies on numerous techniques and specific modes of narration the purpose of which is to make the reader question not only the reliability of the narrative but also the changing notions of reality, the contemporary ideas and the existence of multiple interpretations of a single event. These techniques highly rely on the structures and the rhetoric of the fantastic literature, therefore, this paper will in the first part present the mode of the fantastic as a prerequisite for exploring and understanding the narratives of fear.

### **1.1. The Fantastic as a mode of writing**

In his extensive study, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1975), Todorov offers impressive insight into this genre, or, as Jackson (2009: 8) delineates, mode of writing.

Firstly, Todorov defines the fantastic as a phenomenon which occurs when an inexplicable event takes place in the otherwise known and familiar reality. The person who experiences it must opt for one of two options: either to reject it as a lapse of their senses, meaning accepting it as an illusion or a hallucination, or to concede that the event had actually happened, in which case the reality as he hitherto knew it functions according to laws different from the ones he was familiar with. Todorov emphasizes that notion of hesitation, of

this uncertainty as to how to interpret such an event, puts it in the centre of the fantastic. He claims that “*the fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. [It] is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural phenomenon*” (1975:25). According to this, the fantastic is situated in an interstice between the real and the imaginary. It lasts as long as the feeling of uncertainty, whether it is only for a short time or for the entire duration of the narrative.

But who decides which one to choose? Todorov (1975: 31) argues that the first condition for a text to be considered fantastic is *the reader's hesitation*, not the characters'. Characters may or may not believe what they experienced but, he claims, it is about the reader's perception of such events. Thus, the fantastic text requires the reader's immersion in the narrative world so that he feels motivated to ponder its reliability.

This shows a significant difference between the fantastic and the fantasy. The fantastic brings about a mystery into hitherto familiar reality, the reality of a world that is ours, the one we live in and understand and shakes it to its core. Fantasy, on the other hand, creates entirely new reality, a new world that we, the readers, accept as such, therefore, hesitation does not exist. Such works “move away from the unsettling implications which are found at the centre of the purely ‘fantastic’” (Jackson, 2009: 5). The fantastic, states Todorov (1975: 167) by the hesitation it causes, questions the very existence of the opposition between the real and the unreal. It blurs the boundary between them, making us wonder if anything is actually absolute. This uncertainty is meant to cause uneasiness, worry and anxiety by distorting the familiar reality.

Lachmann (2007: 30-32) further develops this thesis by stating that “the fantastic texts legitimize their transgressions against reason and deviations from the laws of nature in elaborated topic of deception of the senses, of fevering madness in order to moderate the



insult”<sup>1</sup> they supposedly made to the literary norms. She explains the opposing views that philosophers and writers had on the fantastic narrative, emphasizing the ones which viewed it as a place prone to the Devil’s intrusion, precisely because of the ambiguous and therefore frightening nature of the fantastic narrative. Lachmann further asserts, as Todorov (1975) also pointed out, that the transformation of the reality that the fantastic performs, the unnatural constructs it creates, and the themes of death it explores cause fright and terror or, the very least, cause the feeling of disturbance and anxiety in the reader.

Taking that into account, it can be deduced that the fantastic is such a mode of writing that demands from its reader to be engaged and immersed in its story and characters, to experience the fear and uncertainty they feel. It provokes the reader to question the perspective of the characters and to draw his own conclusion of the events, an effort which the inconclusive structure of narrative - impedes. The very purpose of the fantastic is, to quote Todorov (1975: 92), “[to] produce a particular effect on the reader – fear or horror or simply curiosity – which the other genres or literary forms cannot provoke”.

Arduous as it is to define genres, it is even more problematic to classify a work of literature in relation to a singular genre. Todorov (1975: 20) explains how every work modifies the sum of the works that came before it, therefore modifying the genre it belongs to. Moreover, he adds (1987: 43) „every great book establishes the existence of two genres, the reality of two norms: that of the genre it transgresses, which dominated the preceding literature, and that of the genre it creates“. This means that a work of literature does not simply draw from an existing repertoire of themes, forms and conventions but always adds something of its own, something that distinguishes it from all the other similar works. Moreover, it suggests that literary works are not simply their author’s innovation but that their

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<sup>1</sup> My translation

creation was influenced and inspired by the works that came before them as well as by the cultural and social atmosphere that shaped the author's ideas and motives.

Todorov also claims that, since genres are constructed, not natural categories, literary works need not to coincide with such distinctions (1975: 22). Some of the oldest works, *Odyssey* and *Arabian nights* resist genre classification. However, there was a time in literary history when this was not the case. Classical tragedies, for example, were expected to follow the norms prescribed. We may conclude, therefore, that while genres as abstract notions may fit concise definitions, works of art are concrete structures, creative products that care not for the labels we wish to impose upon them.

Bearing this in mind, Jackson (2009: 8) suggests that the fantastic is not so much a genre as it is a mode of writing. She proposes this term instead to “identify structural features underlying various works in different periods of time” (2009: 4) to accentuate the a-temporality of the fantastic which resists strict classification because it includes many conventional genres, for instance: fairy tale, detective novel, fantasy, thriller and science fiction. She states that “fantasy is a literary mode from which a number of related genres emerge” and it “provides a range of possibilities out of which various combinations produce different kinds of fiction in different historical situations” (2009: 4). Piña (2008: 23) agrees, stating that “*we find fantastic elements throughout the Bible or the Koran. The ancient Greek cosmology has plenty of examples of the Fantastic right next to historical facts, thus creating a certain way of thinking in which legends, myths and History have not been so explicitly exclusive of each other as they have been since the scientific revolutions of the seventeenth century*”. The fantastic suffuses different works throughout many different epochs and through variety of genres, as well literary works and tales of different cultures. For that reason, we should consider the fantastic not as a genre but as a particular type of narrative, a method of writing.

## **1.2. The marvellous and the uncanny**

At some point, the reader has to decide whether he will accept the events presented in the narrative as real, in the scope of the text, or as character's imagination. At this point, Todorov argues (1975: 41), the reality of the fantastic dissolves and the text can be classified either as marvellous or uncanny, which he also considers genres.

He describes the marvellous as a genre in which "new laws of the nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena [described]" (1975: 41), therefore, the uncertainty is explained by the supernatural. Furthermore, he emphasizes that while the uncanny provokes a certain reaction in the reader, the marvellous "may be characterized by the mere presence of the supernatural events". Such a definition implies that there need not to be any particular reaction evoked in the reader or the characters of the story. This definition brings the marvellous in the vicinity of genres such as fantasy or fairy tale, so Todorov emphasizes (1975: 52) that in order for a narrative to be considered marvellous, it has to start as a fantastic, therefore evoking uncertainty and hesitation which only afterwards becomes evidently caused by the supernatural.

On the other hand, Todorov defines uncanny as a genre in which "the laws of reality remain intact" because there is "an explanation of the phenomenon described" (1975: 41). The ambiguous event is hence described either as a dream, a vision, a hallucination or some kind of the lapse of the senses or perception. Either way, there is a rational explanation of the presumed disruption of the reality. Furthermore, such events are depicted as "incredible, extraordinary, shocking, singular, disturbing or unexpected" (1975: 46). Such is the literature of horror in its pure state which entails scenes of cruelty, violence and themes of the ancient taboos (1975: 47) such as incest, cannibalism, madness. This suggests that these works cause

disturbance to the reader first by the ambiguous and often violent nature of their narration and themes, and afterwards intensify such impression by denying the relief the reader might have felt if they were placed in the realm of the more detached supernatural.

Jackson, on the other hand, does not fully agree with Todorov (1975) in regard to such classification and deems it confusing. She maintains that while the marvellous is a literary category, the uncanny is not. She proposes that the fantastic is to be placed between “the opposite modes of the marvellous and the mimetic” (2009: 19).

Jackson defines the marvellous narrative as such which is employed in romances, magic, fairy tale and the supernatural. The narrative voice in such tales is omniscient, it knows more than the characters. Furthermore, it denies the storytelling itself (2009: 19). This means that the narrative voice is above the characters and beyond their time and place, never a protagonist of the story and typically does not comment the events or the story. Such narratives do not require the reader’s activity, for it is not up to him to question their story but to believe it to be true, at least true to the world of the text.

The mimetic, on the other hand, encompasses the narratives that “claim to imitate an external reality” (2009: 20). This denotes that these are the narratives that are written for the purpose of being as similar as possible to the experience of the world that is the reader’s own reality, or at least that is the impression they try to make. Such are the novels in the period of the Realism and many of the historical novels, explains Jackson (2009: 20).

Defining the marvellous and the mimetic in a way different than Todorov did indicates that the description of the fantastic ought to be modified too. So, Jackson (2009: 20) views it as a mode which combines elements of both the marvellous and the mimetic. In fact, it creates a “real world”, a world that is similar to that of the mimetic narrative but adds marvellous elements and mechanisms in order to distort the familiar reality. The narrator is therefore

never omniscient, but, together with the reader, shows hesitation as to what to believe in. The fantastic serves as a way of distorting the known reality, meaning it creates a world that at first seems safe and familiar and then distorts that familiarity, hence causing anxiety and fear.

## 1.2. The rhetoric of the fantastic

The existence of the fantastic as a genre is dependent on the reader's (and sometimes the character's) uncertainty as how to interpret the ambiguous event they witnessed. There are several mechanisms that such narratives use in order to produce the effect of uncertainty, hesitation, anxiety and fear.

Lachmann (2007: 37) stresses the importance of certain rhetorical concepts for the literature of the fantastic. She selected *paradox*, *mendacium* (falsehood, mendacity), *oxymoron*, *adynaton* (a form of hyperbole where the exaggeration is taken to the extreme) and *transmutatio* (metamorphosis) stating that they confirm the autosubversion inherent to the rhetoric and thus can never fully erase their rhetorical roots. For example, she singles out the *paradox* which, in interplay with other notions, marks the marvellous, the unexpected, the amazing, the deceitful and the contradictory. Throughout history it was considered a genre and used for the purpose of the reversal of the hierarchical values, celebrating the things that do not deserve the celebration and presenting that which is not presentable (Lachmann, 2007: 37-38). It is evident that such a subversive figure would be employed in a wide array of different methods in the fantastic as a literature of subversion, of questioning the system and the hierarchy behind it. She also (2007: 39) adds that *adynaton*, as an essential element in the inversion of the world (meaning, of the reality, as the reader and the characters know it) goes hand in hand with the *paradox* in the construction of an inverted world and defines *oxymoron*

as the shortest possible form of paradoxal speech. She further explains that the *paradox* determines, discovers, but also makes up similarities and by doing so points to the differences that would have otherwise stayed hidden or gone unnoticed (2007: 40).

The most noticeable method of employing *paradox* in modern (18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>-century) novel are narrative structures where the narrator is telling a story while at the same time being a part of it; texts doing what they relate and the narrative space being also the space of the narration (2007: 48)<sup>2</sup> usually for the purpose of the specific modification and creation of knowledge and, more importantly, to imply that the knowledge we possess is in fact questionable, shaky and unreliable – but hitherto had been perceived as flawless. It is in the very purpose of the fantastic text to make the reader question not only the reality of the text, but his own reality, his own knowledge and its limits. The importance of the reader's hesitation takes a special turn in the fantastic literature of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Lachmann (2007: 47) conveys that the *paradox* was implemented to question the cognitive power of the senses, to expose their fallacious existence, meaning that the *paradox* also point to the possibility of the faulty and misleading interpretation of something that cannot actually be perceived, because it is not real. But, continues Lachmann, the reader inevitably gets the impression that the senses were not mistaken and that, in fact, is precisely what is scandalous in the eyes of the critics throughout centuries of the fanatics' presence, the fact that they have noticed something marvellous (eerie, supernatural). One can argue that the fantastic method mentioned creates double hesitation or confusion. The first makes the reader or the character question the efficacy of his senses, and if and when they prove valid, they further question either the laws of reality or his own sanity, the tormenting part being the notion that the world is the one distorted.

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<sup>2</sup> My translation

Lachmann (2007: 51) further explains that it is the natural laws, which the reason and the experience vouched for, by the breach of the fantastic lose their ground – which is to say that the *Enlightenment* and Realism are thus subverted. Furthermore, *adynaton*, takes its own form in the fantastic of the Romanticism – the impossible manifests itself as a contemplative experiment which, and this is very important for the Gothic novel, exploits the (hidden) potentials of physics, logics, anthropology and psychology. It adopts potent, though hyperbolized, scientific potential and by its own speculation, ambiguously, comes very close to the laws of nature (Lachmann, 2007: 51). This suggests that the fantastic envisions the extreme capabilities of the scientific developments, usually for the purpose of undermining the science itself or to emphasize its hidden ethical and moral problems.

Todorov (1975: 77-81) also discusses the rhetorical figures connected to the fantastic. One of their relations is the extension of the *hyperbole*, that is to say, supernatural originates in the figurative image which is presented as partly mimetic and driven to its extremes. *Hyperbole* may go alongside the *transmutation*, so, for example, a character is condemned to being eternally thirsty which makes him drink until there is no liquid left. Another relation he discusses is that of the fantastic producing a literal sense of a figurative expression i.e. by a simple curse, said in affect, coming to life in the text. Jackson (2009: 24) agrees with Todorov and adds that the way the fantastic realizes that is by employing *metonymy*: “*one object does not stand for another, but literally becomes the other, slides into it, metamorphosing from one shape to another in a permanent flux and instability*” (Jackson, 2009: 24). She stresses that such strategy is used in order to “bypass the obstacles of social censure” as well as to resist closed narratives (2009: 24). The third relation Todorov (1975) displays is explained as “the figurative expression”, which will become real as the story progresses, “introduced by modalizing formula” and preceded by series of comparisons (“It was as if...”) which

designate a supernatural element. This points to the raising anxiety experienced by the reader who senses the inevitability of a disturbing event.

In his later work, *The Poetics of Prose*, Todorov (1987: 156) discusses the *gradation* of the supernatural apparitions. They start with the narrator's representation within the story which facilitates reader's immersion in it, and there are allusions to the supernatural throughout the text which prepare the reader for the supernatural occurrence.

Todorov concludes that the fantastic uses the rhetorical figures because it originates in them. Moreover, supernatural is born in language and exists only in language – language is the one that helps us conceive vampires and ghosts (Todorov: 1975: 77-81), an argument supported by many other theoreticians, Piña, Lachmann and Jackson included.

While Lachmann relates solely the rhetorical figures the fantastic uses, Todorov (1975: 38) also selects two stylistic devices as means of creating ambiguity: imperfect tense and modality. They are introduced in the fantastic texts to modify the “relation between the speaker and his utterance”. Modality shows the speaker's uncertainty of the information he shares. There is a subtle difference between hearing “It is cold outside” and “I think it is cold outside”. Modality makes readers and characters question the validity of the information, for, if the speaker himself is not sure of it, there is no reason for anyone else to believe him more than he does himself. Imperfect tense, on the other hand, does not signify speaker's uncertainty but makes an utterance ambiguous to the hearer. It allows the speaker to hold back certain information from the reader. As Todorov (1975: 38) explain it, if one says “I used to love her”, this does not specify whether they still love her. It is unlikely that they do, but possible nevertheless, indicating that the reader cannot be sure of either.

In *The Poetics of Prose* (1987: 156) as a way of inducing hesitation, Todorov includes “alternative phrases of the ‘either-or’ type”. By using such phrases the narrator wonders



whether what he saw was real or a sign of madness. Piña (2008: 7) supports this by adding that „*In fantastic stories, the author will use both ambiguity and subtlety in language in order to achieve the sense that something supernatural might be going on without establishing it as a fact*“. It was noted before, that for the fantastic to exist, the notion of uncertainty must be evoked, so Solovyov, one of the first contemporary theoreticians of this genre explains, “*in the genuine fantastic, there is always the external and formal possibility of a simple explanation of the phenomena, but at the same time this explanation is completely stripped of internal probability*“ (Todorov 1975: 26). This is achieved by the figures and mechanisms mentioned, whose purpose is to distress the reader.

### **1.3. The narrative of subversion**

Jackson believes so strongly that the fantastic works have a common purpose that she put it in the title of her work: *Fantasy: A Literature of Subversion*. She claims that the fantastic literature's original function is exerting pressure against dominant hierarchical system (2009: 5) together with protesting against cultural constraints it aims to compensate for (2009: 2). This is achieved by transforming this known world into an unfamiliar, uncomfortable one, one which defies natural as well as human laws in order to expose the forbidden, the ugly. “*Fantastic literature points to or suggests the basis upon which cultural order rests for it opens up, for a brief moment, on to disorder, on to illegality, on to that which lies outside the law, that which is outside dominant value system. The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent'*“ (Jackson, 2009: 2). This is the reason why the fantastic literature starts within the world known to the reader and transforms it afterwards. It aims to show the

contemporary world from a different point of view, from the one that displays the wrongdoings and the *otherness* the dominant system either denies or conceals.

Jackson (2009: 2-53) proposes the connection between the subversive nature of the fantastic and three important notions: the desire, the repressed, and the unconscious. The first two are closely related because the society implements norms which are frequently incompatible with human's nature, especially in the Victorian period. In order to conform to the societal norms, people have to inhibit their own nature and their true desires. The repressed desires were the ones that were deemed by the dominant system as inappropriate, malignant and sickening. Expressing them would lead to condemnation, expulsion from the society and proclaiming the people criminals and outlaws. Because of it they are repressed and sometimes so determinately that desire lies only in the realm of the *unconscious*.

For that reason Todorov argues that there are not that many thematic realms in the history of literature, but there are some universal semantic notions that pervade through time and *desire* is one of this universals. Literature remains the only field where such sinister ideas can be, though not always freely, nor openly, explored (1987: 6). Consequently, this kind of literature causes fear because it taps on reader's latent, forbidden desires. It draws them out from the domain of the unconscious and exposes them for the world to see. But, if done transparently, this would imply transgression against the cultural norms and propriety, so, to mask them, the literature employs the fantastic mode of writing. „*A fantastic text tells of an indomitable desire, a longing for that which does not yet exist, or which has not been allowed to exist, the unheard of, the unseen, the imaginary, as opposed to what already exists and is permitted as 'really' visible*“, claims Jackson (2009: 52-53). This is why the visions, the monsters and the supernatural of the fantastic texts have many interpretations, many different forms - for they exist as an ambiguous representation of the desires and ideas forbidden to be expressed openly.

Jackson (2009: 28) argues that, in the endeavor to undermine the prevailing perspective, the fantastic „subverts dominant philosophical assumptions which uphold as 'reality' a coherent, single-viewed entity” thus making its reader question the beliefs they hitherto deemed true, or at least pointing to existence of multiple perspectives. To distance its ideas further from the repressive order, in my opinion, the fantastic employs what Jackson deems “*a dissolution of separating categories*“, a blurring of fundamental classifications like gender and genre (2009: 28). Such transgressions evoke before mentioned uncertainty, a core element of the fantastic. Because of the multiple, yet fragmented perspectives and the indefiniteness of their thematic and narrative forms, the essence of their ideas and motives remain open to interpretation.

Lachmann (2007: 27-28) acknowledges open-endedness of this narrative asserting that the fantastic „*breaks the pragmatic contract between the fictional text and its referential frame, which would otherwise establish reliable 'decryption (interpretation) key' and offer reading instructions, which leads to a kind of 'depragmatication'. But, cognitive and affective disturbance, which results from the mystery and terror, stimulates the pragmatics of decoding which takes into consideration the contemporary norms, more than the standard 'mimetic' texts, against which it has to act, would.*“

This presupposes that the reader is the one which asserts meaning to these narratives, based on either the contemporary norms or by projecting his own fears to this kind of ambiguous narrative. Jackson explains: „That which is not seen, that which is not said, is not 'known' and it remains as a threat, as a dark area from which any object or figure can enter at any time“ (2009: 29). If a text is not conclusive, it causes fear not only through one image, one idea, but by the way of almost anything its reader can imagine and ascribe to the narrative. It threatens the dominant values by questioning their very foundation. The fantastic questions the reality they wish to project through dogmas by asserting that there is more to the

truth than the repressive system reveals. Simultaneously, the fantastic reveals what lies beneath the masks, what monsters hide behind the façade, and poses existential questions surrounding the human mind, body and soul.

## 2. The Gothic novel: an introduction to the genre

The Gothic novel, Hume (1969: 282) states, “flourished between 1764 and 1820”. Unarguably, the first Gothic novel is considered to be Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), but, even though many critics, Hume included, argue that the genre reached its peak in 1820, some of the most notable works like Stoker’s *Dracula* and Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* appeared at *fin de siècle*. Moreover, the appearance of multifold successors of the form and the themes of the Gothic illustrates the continuous fascination with the genre.

The indisputable identification of the genre with the narrative of fear Hume explains as a shift from the neoclassical restrictions of order and reason “toward romantic belief in emotion and imagination” which endeavors to “rouse the reader’s imaginative sympathies” by employing terror as an important component of emotional involvement (1969: 282). Botting (1999: 2) argues as well that “in gothic production imagination and emotional effects exceed reason” but also that “ambivalence and uncertainty obscure single meaning”. Cavallaro (2002: 6) elaborates these arguments by relating that the narratives of fear nourish readers’ attraction to the unknown by employing such techniques and characters which imply something “beyond the human and hence beyond interpretation”. The reader’s immersion in the text, ambivalence and uncertainty, obscurity of reason and connotations of something beyond natural indicate that the Gothic fiction employs the fantastic mode of writing.

In the same fashion, inconclusiveness and abundance of possible interpretation signify open-endedness of the Gothic text which Lachmann (2007: 27-28) established as a substantial element of the fantastic narrative. Halberstam (1995: 13) broadens the idea by saying that the Gothic “inspires fear and desire at the same time” and does so by placing horror elsewhere, in

a foreign body “and by then articulating the need to expel the foreign body”. Botting (1999: 13) further argues that Gothic novels by the rejection of the foreign body and reestablishing harmony produce cathartic emotions. He explains that transgression and provoking fear enabled to define the limits. In other words, because of the violation of propriety, the norms were affirmed in its contrast. This is presumably why Gothic novels avoided censorship in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, the period which upheld high propriety standards – despite their harrowing themes, they ultimately persist in instilling moral values.

However, as Halberstam (1995: 13) indicates, in order to evoke fear and to avoid clarification of their ideas and purpose, the writers of the Gothic fiction transformed them into the infamous monsters. On surface, they might cause fear to the reader because of their hideous appearance or abhorrent behaviour, but not as much as when he realizes they not only represent physical manifestations of a man’s hidden desires and inclinations, but also that their obscurity and multiformity allows for almost any interpretation, any personal fear the reader unconsciously projects on them. Halberstam (1995: 6) argues that the Gothic novel “used the body of the monster to produce race, class, gender and sexuality”, while they also “make strange the categories of beauty, humanity and identity”. This invokes a “dissolution of separating categories” Jackson (2009: 28) proposed as a technique for subverting the dominant perspective. A similar reading of monstrosity supported by Jackson, Halberstam and Moretti advocates monstrosity as a representation of the unsuccessfully repressed emotions, meaning that “the perturbing element is within them: that it is they themselves that produce the monster they fear” (Moretti, 1997: 102).

Such readings indicate that based on the social climate in which they were conceived, i.e. depending on the norms of their time, similar monsters presumably convey different hidden inclinations and fears. One should keep in mind that their representation and meaning is also dependent on the poetics of their individual authors. For example, female writers more

often than their male colleagues highlight the submissive position of women. Emily Brontë, for example, in her novel *Wuthering Heights*, through the character of Isabella Linton depicts the violence women had to endure at the hands of their husbands, while the character of Catherine shows they had to marry someone they did not want, just because only men could inherit land.

When it comes to the structure and precursors of the Gothic novel Kilgour (2006: 4) and Botting (1999: 9-10) both agree that, like the Frankenstein's creature, the Gothic novel is a hybrid form which incorporates "*a wide range of literary sources out of which it emerges and from which it never fully disentangles itself: British folklore, ballads, romance, Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy, Spenser, Milton, Renaissance ideas of melancholy, the graveyard poets, Ossian, the sublime, sentimental novels and German traditions.*" The adoption of various techniques and styles inevitably leads to the fragmentation of the text, on the structural as well as thematic level and adheres to the multiplicity of meaning in the narrative.

## **2.1. Historical and philosophical context of the Gothic subversion**

The Gothic novel, a complex genre which emerged in the 18th century, a century of great scientific, technological, political, social and economic change is considered both a product and a reflection of that overwhelming transformation of the known world. Jackson (2009: 57) states that the Gothic is "a reaction to historical events, particularly to the spread of industrialism and urbanization". Kilgour (1995: 3) notes that the critics positioned Gothic novel "in relation to the rise of the middle class and the novel proper" and was considered "a rebellion against a constraining neoclassical aesthetic ideal of order and unity, in order to

recover a suppressed primitive and barbaric imaginative freedom”, presenting emerging values of the Romanticism: “an interest in the bizarre, eccentric, wild, savage, lawless and transgressive, in originality and imagination”. Botting (1999: 1) continues claiming that the Gothic “shadows the despairing ecstasies of Romantic idealism and individualism and the uncanny dualities of Victorian realism and decadence”. He also emphasizes Gothic’s recourse to transgression and the representation of the anxiety over cultural limits.

But why did the authors of the Gothic novels resort to such modes of writing? The answer might be found in the turmoil of their particular historical and cultural context. Cavallaro (2002: 39) explains “it is vital to acknowledge the prominent part played by the class tensions, uncertainties about the relation of the present to a nebulous past, and apocalyptic anxieties about the future”.

Following the collapse and the final abolition of the feudal system at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the Industrial revolution which emerged almost at the same time as the Gothic novel, the English society was no longer divided into two fundamentally different classes, the rich nobles and the poor peasants, but saw the rise of the cities and the middle class, as well as a new type of readers. This entirely new class acquired wealth, but not the respect from the upper class. Freed from the oppressive system people could finally express the frustration they felt under it in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Gothic by depicting nobles as violent villains. Horace Walpole, the author of what is considered the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764, and Ann Radcliffe, the author of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) were prominent writers of the Gothic fiction of this kind.

However, following the violent demise of the French revolution of 1789, the dream of the unity and freedom people fought for was shattered. The perseverance of the class system seemed inescapable. It could be argued that the ideas of the *Enlightenment* that had awoken



false hope were subjected to scrutiny in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Gothic literature. Moreover, the new wave of the Gothic literature abandoned the motif of aristocracy as a locus of an outward threat and turned to the exploration of the frightening and hidden potentials of the human psyche instead, in the way of subverting the *Enlightenment's* ideals of a stable, rational and unitary *self*. For this reason, it seems important to explain the fundamental ideas of the *Age of Reason* the Gothic novel subverts.

According to *All about History: Age of Enlightenment* the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> century were the times of curiosity when questioning scientific methods, reductionism and the Church ideals was advocated. Following such ideas, the influence of religion subsided, and motifs of transcendence faded. People turned away from the divine dimension and started exploring the world around them (2018: 16).

Literacy rose unprecedentedly with urbanization and new stratification of the classes. Even common people were encouraged to educate themselves and discuss new and exciting ideas of the *Age of Reason* in famous saloons and public gatherings. People became interested and engaged in public life. Public libraries were open for the purpose of promoting education as many philosophers chose to make their ideas accessible to all classes of readers, many of which would not have been able to afford to buy books, which would later prove important for the spread of the novel (2018: 76-77). This led to the development of critical thinking which was no more reserved for the privileged. Before this expansion of cities and libraries, literacy and reading was a luxury reserved only for the aristocracy and clergy, but with technical and educational innovations it became the primary mode of expressing and spreading ideas.

Some of the philosophers, like Bacon, professed people attain knowledge solely from physical and sensory experience. Others, like Pascal and Leibniz, strongly believed that the

only way to gain knowledge was through reasoning (2018: 18-19). The Gothic novel will undermine the ideas of both, promoting emotions and imagination in the place of reason and creating narratives which greatly undermine the assumed confidence in sensory experience and perception. Inspired by these arguments about the structure of human thought, philosophers started to explore the very idea of human nature (2018: 18-19) whose redefinition, mostly based on Locke's ideas of a character acquired rather than innate, would be a topic of great interest for the British culture, claims Heller (1992: 1).

The construction and destruction of a person's identity became one of the central themes of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Gothic novel, aimed to subvert the *Enlightenment's* ideal of a stable personality. Kilgour (1995: 11) explains their deviancy as a critique of "Protestant bourgeois values". She argues that it frequently attacks "the modern liberal assumption that individual is a self-regulating autonomous entity who is able to govern his own passions rationally without help, or hindrance, of external restraints". For this reason 18<sup>th</sup>-century Gothic monsters frequently portray the self as divided, governed not by reason but by passion and obsession, acting on impulses repressed by modern society. They no longer appear as highly supernaturalized creatures, but as palpable manifestations of a divided entity. Moretti (1997: 105-106) maintains that monsters are metaphors and tend to be perceived as such, but "in the literature of terror this rule no longer applies. The metaphor is no longer a metaphor: it is a character as real as the others", just as Jackson (2009: 24) and Todorov (1975: 77-81) explained. Jackson (2009: 48) stresses the impact of this subversive technique: "*It is important to understand the radical consequences of an attack upon unified 'character', for it is precisely this subversion of unities of 'self' which constitute the most radical transgressive function of the fantastic*". This shows how important and yet undermining the most popular Gothic topic appeared to contemporary society.

Such themes have not only emerged from the questioning of philosophy, but appeared with the advance of science, which also came under scrutiny. Darwin revolutionized natural science by proposing that all species evolved from the common ancestor. This gave way to the rise of themes concerning the notion of human primal instincts and men's supposedly inherent violent nature that the monsters of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Gothic present, illustrating the growing fascination with the obscure areas of knowledge.

The narrative aimed to present disquieting aspects of the progression of science, especially when exploited by unstable individuals. Lachmann (2007: 113-114) illustrates that *“the marks of scientism manifest in the literary work via complex techniques. What emerges is a multi-layered text pregnant with implications and elaborated structure of various indications. Elements of knowledge are being cited, terminologies emerge, operative practices are being demonstrated, concepts are being discussed (...). In relation to defined status of knowledge heterodoxies arise by the modes of hyperbolization, stimulating the extremes and portraying the aspects of the impossible”*. The Gothic novel thus expresses concerns about the path and the possible deviation of the scientific progress by subverting the scientific concepts in an extreme way of presenting them as monsters, aberrations and the manifestations of the degradation of the human values in general.

To conclude, the Gothic novel rose as the novel related to the common people, to problems and anguishes of the contemporary society. It continuously changed according to the social, philosophical and political climate of the time, often aiming to bring forth the troubling notions which could not be discussed openly. It displays those ideas not only by the mode of the fantastic, but also in the excess of meaning, abundance of metaphors and overall explosion of imagination, which suggests why such narratives remain open-ended and thus inspire variety of interpretations.

### **3. The Gothic novel rhetoric of fear in *Frankenstein, or The Modern***

#### ***Prometheus***

Mary Shelley's masterpiece, *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* is considered one of the most famous works that employs the narrative of fear, a predecessor of the modern horror novel. In 1831 Introduction to the novel, the author openly declares that what she wrote is a narrative of terror made for the very purpose of frightening the reader: "*I busied myself to think of a story (...), one which would speak to the mysterious fears of our nature and awaken thrilling horror – one to make the reader dread to look around, to curdle the blood and quicken the beatings of the heart. (...) I opened mine [eyes] in terror. (...) I have found it! What terrified me will terrify others*". In this part of my work I will explore the narrative techniques of the rhetoric of fear theorized in the first part that the author chose.

#### **3.1. Mary Shelley's fantastic mode of writing**

The first thing that points to *Frankenstein* being a fantastic novel is that the world created is presented as an imitation of our own and will only later in the story gradually become usurped by the unusual. The narrator, who goes by the name of Captain Robert Walton, casually mentions the factual places and historical figures in order to show that the reality shown is considered a familiar one: "*I am already far north of London; and as I walk on the streets of Petersburg (...) I imagined that I also might obtain a niche in the temple where the names of Homer and Shakespeare are consecrated*" (Shelley, 1992: 3-5). In the following text, the narrator carelessly describes the events of an everyday life, conveying to

his sister to whom he writes the sights he observes and the preparation he undertakes for the voyage on which he hopes to discover the mysteries of the North Pole.

At first, everything seems ordinary as Walton's ship advances on its exploration: "No incidents have hitherto befallen us that would make a figure in a letter", Walton writes in his third letter (1992: 11) demonstrating the monotonous routine of his days. However, as they progress further they find themselves surrounded by ice and in such perilous circumstances the first premonition of the disturbing events occurs. Firstly, the ship was trapped in ice and shrouded in dense fog which caused uneasiness to Walton, disquiet which serves as a prelude to the inexplicable event about to happen: "*Some of my comrades groaned and my own mind began to grow watchful with anxious thoughts, when a strange sight suddenly attracted our attention*", states the narrator (1992: 12). By describing this sudden anxiety, the narrator slowly guides the reader beyond the familiar world, just like he tries to guide his crew on a journey beyond the known paths in the North Pole.

Since the suspense is achieved, the reader acquainted with the characters and immersed in the story, the first glimpse of the uncanny event is presented: "*We perceived a low carriage, fixed on a sledge and drawn by dogs, pass on towards the north, at the distance of half a mile: a being which had the shape of a man, but apparently of gigantic stature, sat in the sledge and guided the dogs*" (1992: 12). This careful choice of words firstly disrupts the reality by presenting the reader with a being which *only resembles a man*, thus indicating that it is something other than human, which might not be in itself such a strange occurrence in the unexplored part of the world had it not been doing something only man could be able to do: riding a sledge. This is the first *paradox* introduced, and it, as Lachmann (2007: 47) explained its purpose, makes Walton "question the cognitive power of his senses" which is implied by his choice of words. "We perceived" he says, instead of using the more decisive "we saw", suggesting his reluctance to fully accept the scene before him. "[A] man, but *apparently* of

gigantic stature”, he adds, as though he hesitates to trust his own eyes over the unsettling image. But, the fantastic is introduced *gradually*, as customary in the narratives of fear and many more pages will pass before Walton gains full understanding of this sight.

Victor Frankenstein, whose story is embedded in that of Walton, is the one who will present the reader with the narrative that will explain the origin of the entity Walton and his crew “perceived”. It had often puzzled me as to why he delays his story, filling up many pages with reminiscence of his parents’ life and his own childhood. I believe there are three main reasons for adopting this narrative technique.

Firstly, it seems that Frankenstein deems the story too terrifying and disturbing so he forestalls its recount. He does not want to remember all the awful things he did nor does he feel glad to convey his transgressions to the last friend he has in this world. The only reason he decided to share it with Watson in the first place is to warn him against obsessive and reckless scientific experiments: *“I reflect that you are pursuing the same course, exposing yourself to the same dangers which have rendered me what I am, I imagine that you may deduce an apt moral from my tale; one that may direct you if you succeed in your undertaking and console you in the case of failure”* (1992: 18).

Secondly, because the story he will tell is a fantastic one, considering the marvellous element of reviving amalgam of corpses, he starts his narrative in the same mode as Walton does: by first presenting the reality in its ordinariness, emphasizing the familiarity and beauty of the world by naming the famous locations (*“From Italy, they visited Germany and France. I, their oldest child was born at Naples...”*, 1992: 23) and stories (*“...heroes of Roncesvalles, of the Round Table of King Arthur...”*, 1992: 28) only to make the later disruption of it all the more chilling (*“No mortal could support the horror of that countenance. A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch”*, 1992: 51).

Thirdly, taking into account the sociohistorical setting of the novel, one might argue that in depicting parents of Victor Frankenstein's, a man whose life and transgressions feel so unsettling and anti-social, as people who upheld the highest moral standards, the novel mocks the importance the contemporary society puts on the bourgeois status and family values. In spite of the privileged status of his kin, Frankenstein faced the fall far worse than criminal. The way the disgraced scientist takes pride in his noble ancestors thus seems almost comical: "*I AM by birth a Genovese, and my family is one of the most distinguished of that republic. My ancestors had been for many years counsellors and syndics, and my father had filled several public situations with honor and reputation. He was respected by all who knew him for his integrity.*" (1992: 21). The narrative later shows his actions will be the death of his family as well as their good name.

The multifaceted form of the novel poses the question Todorov placed in the center of the notion of the fantastic: *Do we believe them?* Lachmann (2007: 38), as I have explained, argues that a story in which the narrator poses also as a character remains *paradoxical* because it, on the one hand, diminishes the reliability of the story, and on the other, immerses the reader in it, urging him by appealing to his emotion to believe the story. Reader indeed identifies with each of the character as he reads their confessions and empathizes with their sufferings, but at the same time cannot ignore the fact that not only each of them could lie, but also that Walton alone might have "invented" all of it. A reader determined to deem it a fabrication needs only to return to the first letter in which Walton confesses "(...) *my daydreams become more fervent and vivid*" (1992: 3), or to the second, where he expresses his fascination with the extraordinary ("*...there is a love for the marvellous, a belief in the marvellous*", 1992: 10) to diminish the whole story as a construct of a bored dreamer, who himself strongly identifies with Victor Frankenstein, whose story he relates to us. In this

relation, the reader may hesitate to the very end and the story, whether by Todorov's or Jackson's definition, remains in the realm of the fantastic.

### 3.2. Disturbing scenes

Another cultural aspect the novel puts under scrutiny is the scientism and the reckless progress of science, especially in the light of the discoveries of Charles Darwin who Mary Shelley mentions in her *Introduction to Frankenstein*. The narrative displays Frankenstein's obsessive pursuit of the knowledge that was deemed dangerous: "*All that [the professor] said threw greatly into the shade Cornelius Agrippa, Albertus Magnus, and Paracelsus, the lords of my imagination (...)*" (1992: 32), but he follows his inclinations. In doing so, he shows no reason, but passion that ultimately proved destructible.

The story darkens as Frankenstein questions the origin of life: "*One of the phenomena which had peculiarly attracted my attention was the structure of the human frame, and, indeed, any animal endued with life. Whence, I often asked myself, did the principle of life proceed? (...) Darkness had no effect upon my fancy, and churchyard was to me merely the receptacle of bodies deprived of life, which, from being the seat of beauty and strength, had become food for the worms*" (1992: 43-44). The easiness with which he talks about death and decay, the way he negates the sanctity of the corpse seems in itself as disturbing as indication of the unnatural path he is about to take. His words cause tension and fear in the reader who cannot help himself but to wish to warn Victor Frankenstein to stop his transgression.

But he does not stop, he ignores his every moral and ethical instinct in his pursuit of the grandeur: "*Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I shall first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator*"



and source. (...) Pursuing these reflections, I thought that if I could bestow animation upon lifeless matter, I might in the process of time (although I now find it impossible) renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption” (1992: 46). He had done the unimaginable, the sickening, committed sacrilege in order to carry out his experiment: “Who shall conceive the horrors of my secret toil as I dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave or tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay” (1992: 47). Frankenstein desecrated graves and tortured helpless animals, all for doing something even worse than that: creating a being out of the conglomerate of different corpses and animal parts. Only when he succeeded in his intent did he fathom what he had done: “How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains I endeavored to form?” (1992: 50). Victor Frankenstein had not only recklessly transgressed the laws of nature and ethic in creating the monster, but had also abandoned his own creation, his child, out of his inability to deal with the consequences of his passions. With this rejection of the newborn being that had no one but him, Frankenstein also violated the very institution of a family.

The narrative further adopts tropes typical for a horror story – violence and murder – to depict the savage progress of an abandoned creature. However, this is where the opposition between right and wrong, good and evil becomes blurred. Once the creature is permitted to speak with Victor, who once more expresses his disgust in him, he conveys his sorrows that followed after being rejected by his creator: “I expected this reception. All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things!” (1992: 96). Frankenstein is indifferent to the suffering of his creation and vigorously attacks him, but the creature remains calm to his insults, showing more restraint than the human did. “Be calm! I entreat you to hear me before you give vent to your hatred on my devoted head. Have I not suffered enough (...) but I will not be tempted to set myself in opposition to thee. I am thy

creature (...) Oh, Frankenstein, be not equitable to every other and trample me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency and affection, is most due. (...) I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous” (1992: 96).

The creature had committed unspeakable crimes, but one cannot but feel sorry for him. His confession demarks the boundaries between good and bad people and makes the reader wonder if anyone is ever truly bad. Indeed, after listening to him the reader notices how the monster represents the feelings of the people on the bottom of the social ladder. He reminds us that they too long for acceptance and feel the pain of society’s rejection. The story of creature’s hurtful and difficult life evokes even deeper emotions in the reader as the creature becomes the third narrator in this novel.

### **3.3. Interpretations**

The novel’s inconclusiveness of the structure is mirrored in the open-endedness of its ideas. Over the centuries, the creature, in his ambiguity, inspired multiple interpretations of which I will mention only a few to demonstrate the multiplicity and variety of meanings such a complex narrative evokes.

Gilbert and Gubar (2000: 220-243) offer a “women’s reading” of *Frankenstein* considering it a (sub)version of Milton’s patriarchal work *Paradise Lost*, a version in which all the characters portray the character as the fallen *Eve* and the world mimics the *hell* that is their (and women’s) story. Gilbert and Gubar’s explanation fits surprisingly well with the narrative, but, on the other hand, so does Moretti’s (1997: 83-90). He envisions *Frankenstein* a narrative of terror which feeds of the contemporary fear of a split society, evoked by the capitalism. Moretti interprets Frankenstein’s creature as a metaphor of the *proletariat*, who is

„denied a name and an individuality” and demands its rights which causes dread to its creator once he realizes that “he has given life to a creature stronger than himself”.

To this I shall add my own observation, an interpretation not so much of the story as of the form (that of the Gothic novel in general is considered a hybrid), as the embedded narrative form strikingly reminds me of the one of the *Arabian Nights*. Since his arrival on the Walton’s ship, Frankenstein teases Walton with hints of his story, but, as mentioned before, delays it for days while enjoying commodities and company of Walton: “*He then told me he would commence his narrative the next day when I should be at leisure*”, says Walton, as a figure of Scheherazade enters my thoughts. The image becomes stronger each time one of the narrators adds a story of some new character, further perplexing the narrative line, just as the Arabian princess did to amuse the king so he might spare her life for one more day.

Halberstam (1995: 28-46), with whom I strongly agree, suggests multiple interpretation of the novel, the ones before mentioned as well as those implying the repressed sexual desire, but refrains from choosing either one and rather claims that “*The cannibalism of the Gothic form, its consumption of its own sources, allows for the infinitude of interpretation because each fear, each source, each desire, each historical event, each social structure that the text preys upon becomes fuel for the manufacture of meanings*”. I will complement her explanation by maintaining that in addition to the sociohistorical fears that may be attributed to the monster, his ambiguity allows for the projection of reader’s own fears on him, making him all the more terrifying.

## **4. The Gothic novel rhetoric of fear in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde***

R.L. Stevenson's work, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* further elaborates the modes of the Gothic rhetoric of fear introduced seventy years prior by Shelley's *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*. Both follow a story of brilliant scientists that crossed the ethics of science in creating violent monsters that will lead to their destruction. However, the novels differ in their connotations, as well as the narrative techniques employed to evoke fear.

### **4.1. R.L. Stevenson's fantastic mode of writing**

*The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is divided into two narrative parts. The first one is told by an omniscient narrator who follows the perspective of Mr Utterson who seems only marginally connected to the title characters as a lawyer of the first one, and the second in the form of letters and confession, one of Dr Lanyon and the other of Dr Jekyll. Even though the narrator of the first part appears omniscient, which in a way diminishes the uncertainty so strongly presented in *Frankenstein*, the perspective of the story given by a distant character increases the secrecy and mystery that surrounds it. Moreover, Mr Utterson himself at first becomes introduced to the strange event by another character, his friend Mr Enfield, who reveals to him "a very odd story" (Stevenson, 2003:7). However, it appears Mr Enfield purposely expands the tale as Mr Utterson's interest rises, which makes the reader wonder whether the narrator is making things up only to entertain his friend who he might be

interested in romantically: *“the two men put the greatest store by these excursions, counted them the chief jewel of each week...”* (2003: 6).

The story of Jekyll and Hyde unravels in a steady gradation, a gradation of the uncanny as well as of the violent acts of Mr Hyde. Mr Enfield explains the first transgression of Hyde who stepped upon a little girl and left without apologizing. Even more odd was that he, pressured by the bystanders, in the dread of the night, returned with a cheque signed by one of the most respectful citizens, Dr Jekyll (2003: 7-8). The suspense rises as Mr Utterson remembers Dr Jekyll instructed in his will that in the case of his death or long absence, all his possessions are to be passed on to Mr Hyde. This unsettles the protagonists, as Mr Hyde’s behaviour is the polar opposite of the respected Dr Jekyll’s manners. The two friends discuss the possible reasons for Jekyll to be aiding Hyde. Slowly the doctor’s character is presented as a dual one. Currently a model citizen, the doctor *“was wild when he was young”* (2003: 17).

Utterson and others depicts Hyde as bizarre, but his oddity defies definition, insinuating the supernatural aura around him: *“He is not easy to describe. There is something wrong with his appearance, something displeasing, something downright detestable. I never saw a man I so disliked, and yet I scarce know why. He must be deformed somewhere; he gives a strong feeling of deformity, although I couldn’t specify the point...”* (2003: 10). The inability to even discern Mr Hyde undermines the sense of sight. Utterson *had seen Hyde*, but *cannot describe him* anyway.

The chilling story of Hyde’s violence continues with him beating a man to death showing that primal nature has further progressed: *“with ape-like fury, he was trampling his victim under foot and hailing down a storm of blows, under which the bones were audibly shattered and the body jumped upon the roadway”* (2003: 21-22). Stevenson uses highly disturbing vivid images of *bones shattering* to depict the heinous crime committed. However,

notwithstanding the suicide of Dr Jekyll, the novel never reveals other transgressive acts Mr Hyde had committed.

The veil of mystery around Hyde becomes even more uncanny as the characters find out that “*My Hyde had numbered few familiars – even the master of the servant-maid had only seen him twice; his family could nowhere be traced; he had never been photographed; and the few who could describe him differ widely, as common observers will*” (2003: 24-25). His striking absence and paranoid secretiveness seem very strange for someone who knows the city well. This gradation and mystery create a suspenseful atmosphere whose purpose is foreshadowing the introduction of the marvellous.

Mr Utterson dedicates himself to find the truth about Hyde in a suspenseful detective-like pursuit where he knows the name and the appearance of the proprietor but nothing that would lead to his capture. The self-proclaimed detective fruitlessly investigates the relation between Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde until he is called to the house of the former by a worried butler, Poole, who maintains that the man in Jekyll’s room is not his master but the criminal Hyde. Poole recalls numerous strange occurrences that happened in that house in the preceding months but this only raises more questions. Finally, Mr Utterson and Poole break the door only to find Mr Hyde moments before he dies of suicide, in a chilling scene of a very painful death: “*Right in the midst there lay the body of a man sorely contorted and still twitching(...)*”, while Dr Jekyll is nowhere to be found (2003: 44). The mystery is afterwards explained by the letters left by Dr Jekyll and Dr Utterson, but because of the shift from the omniscient to the unreliable first-person narrator, hesitation occurs as to what to believe, which, coupled with the supernatural explanation of the uncanny events, places the novel in the realm of the fantastic according to theories of both Jackson (2009: 5) and Todorov (1975: 25).

The letters explain Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde were actually a single person, a person who changed its appearance and identity willingly with the aid of a potion of his own creation. In the revelatory confession Dr Jekyll explained how he had repressed one side of him his whole life: “(...) *the worst of my faults was a certain impatient gaiety of disposition, such as has made the happiness of many, but such as I found it hard to reconcile with my imperious desire to carry my head high, and wear a more than commonly grave countenance before the public. Hence it came about that I conceal my pleasures; and that when I reached years of reflection, and began to look around me and take stock of my progress and position in the world, I stood already committed to a profound duplicity of life*” (Stevenson, 2003: 55). Dr Jekyll, as his friends indicated in the beginning, possessed a “wild side”, inappropriate inclinations which he repressed for the better part of his life to preserve his good reputation. However, in a plain and strong criticism of the theory of the unity of the self, or perhaps, in taking Charles Darwin’s primal instinct theory to its extremes, combined with what Moretti (1997: 98) designated “the return of the repressed”, Dr Jekyll declares: “(...) *man is not truly one, but truly two*” (2003: 55) and lets his other side out in the world.

The rhetorical figures used for the textual creation of Mr Hyde are *metonymy* and *transmutation*. *Metonymy* is employed as a literal sense of the figurative expression “two-faced person”. Jekyll believed he was made of two different sides, one good the other bad, so he literally creates a second face and a body for the neglected self to occupy. However, he does not divide them physically so they cannot exist at the same time separately, and this is where *transmutation* becomes necessary. One transforms into the other by drinking the special potion. Changing appearances pleases Dr Jekyll until *transmutation* becomes semi-permanent and Dr Jekyll involuntarily becomes Hyde and has to excessively drink the potion in order to become his formerly dominant self: “*whereas, in the beginning, the difficulty had*

*been to throw off the body of Jekyll, it had of late gradually but decidedly transferred itself to the other side*” (2003: 62).

## **4.2. Interpretation**

Just like *Frankenstein*, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* condemns the reckless employment of scientific progress. It calls for a strong judgment of its usage and thorough consideration of the possible repercussions by showing what the alternative has done to Dr Jekyll and his intimate friends. It even subverts scientism in indicating that part of the discoveries has been made by a chance alone: “(...) *and I am now persuaded that my first supply was impure, and that it was that unknown impurity which lent efficacy to the draught*” (2003: 70). Thus, in one of the final sentences he wrote before killing himself, Dr Jekyll highlighted that only by mistake, not knowledge or intellect, he made the marvellous potion.

I believe one of the most important messages the novel conveys is that the desire cannot stay repressed. *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* asserts that the human psyche tends to be far more complex than either positive or negative. Jekyll created Hyde and claimed him to be the manifestation of all the criminal proclivities he had, but he had created him exactly for the purpose of acting on those undetected. He enjoyed being Hyde, but he was never really anyone other than himself without the constraints of societal judgement. Hyde was but an alias created to protect Dr Jekyll’s reputation, an evidence of which may be that he never lost track of what Mr Hyde had done. However, while he insists Dr Jekyll remained a conglomerate of his opposing sides (2003: 63), he claims that the evil he ‘duplicated’ grew stronger, and while he enjoyed transgressions at first, he could not control their progression any more. The novel depicts this as Dr Jekyll conveys the (de)gradation of his enjoyments:



*“The pleasures which I made haste to seek in my disguise were, as I have said, undignified; I would scarce use a harder term. But in the hands of Edward Hyde, they soon began to turn toward the monstrous”* (2003: 60). In this context, the desire is portrayed precisely like taking drugs, as Dr Jekyll did, the effect of which is shown in the narrative – the more you use, the more you will need to achieve the necessary feeling. The more Mr Hyde ventures, the more horrid his actions become.

One of the strikingly different aspects of this narrative compared to that of *Frankenstein* remains that it not occurs in some distant murky place nor in distant past but in the heart of the British civilization – in contemporary London, which makes it all the more frightening. One can disengagedly read about the monsters committing various transgressions worlds away but when they come so close to home the reader cannot help but wonder – could the monsters be living next door?

## 5. The Gothic novel rhetoric of fear in *Dracula*

Bram Stoker's immortal masterpiece, *Dracula* continues to be one of the most popular Gothic novel, a narrative that inspired its own subgenre, the vampire novel. The fight between good and evil is once again portrayed, but in contrast to *Frankenstein's* or *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde's* ending, the bourgeois heroes celebrate their victory at the finale.

### 5.1. Bram Stoker's fantastic mode of writing

Perhaps the most noticeable indicator of the Gothic version of the fantastic mode of writing in Stoker's *Dracula* remains its hybrid form, a melter of confessions and different points of view. Had it not been written in that way, the story of the famous vampire would have been marked as marvellous. The novel consists of numerous letters, newspaper articles, diary entries and Mina Harker's transcriptions of the conversations and the mysterious events that distorted their world. Such structure alone encourages the reader to question what and who to believe.

The hesitation grows stronger as the characters themselves question their own version of events. Their ambiguous perception of the events is conveyed by heavily employing modality: "*I think I must have fallen asleep and kept dreaming of the incident, for it seemed to be repeated endlessly, and now, looking back, it is like a sort of awful nightmare*" (Stoker, 1994: 22). Jonathan Harker, the character who writes these words, seems so uncertain as to what he saw that he repeatedly mentions the possibility of it being a dream while also emphasizing the improbability of such events: *I must have fallen asleep, because this cannot*

*be true*. But, by using that excessively many indicators to his disbelief (*I think, must have, dreaming, it seemed, like a sort of*) he subtly indicates that a part of him trusts his senses instead his reasoning. In other words, Harker *saw* something clearly, but decided not to trust his senses because the oddity of the event defies his (rational) perception of the world. As the strangeness of the events increases, Harker begins to question his sanity: “*When I look back after a few hours I think I must have been mad (...)*” (1994: 39). The appearance of the vampires shook Harker’s world so much that he prefers to have imagined it all. However, still battling with this tremendous change in his *cosmivision*, Harker starts to trust his senses, accepting that the laws of nature may be changed; “*I suppose I must have fallen asleep; I hope so, but I fear, for all that followed was startlingly real – so real that now, sitting here in the, broad, full sunlight of the morning, I cannot in the least believe it was all sleep*” (1994: 50).

The narrator also employs the alternative phrases of ‘either-or’ type Todorov (1987: 156) described in order to imply that something supernatural is occurring without having to establish it as a fact: “*I am, I know, either being deceived, like a baby, by my own fears, or else I am in desperate straits (...)*” (1994: 50). Dr Van Helsing does it also when he refuses to accept the dangers but holds on to hope that he imagined something; “*Either there was a roaring in my ears or I heard afar off the howl of wolves*” (1994: 438).

## **5.2. Violent scenes**

Of the three novels discussed in this work, Stoker’s arguably includes the scenes of the most detailed violence. Where *Frankenstein* and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* merely denote that a vicious act has been performed, *Dracula* delineates every aspect of the scene. One of the most distressing ones is that of Lucy’s murder. Lucy had been turned into a

vampire and by the time her friends decided there was no way to help her, she had already drunk the blood of the young children, a transgression so terrifying that she must be killed. *“Arthur placed the point over the heart, and as I looked I could see its dint in the white flesh. Then he struck with all his might. The Thing in the coffin writhed; and a hideous, blood-curdling screech came from the opened red lips. The body shook and quivered and twisted in wild contortions; the sharp white teeth champed together till the lips were cut and the mouth was smeared with a crimson foam. But Arthur never faltered. He looked like a figure of Thor as his untrembling arm rose and fell, driving deeper and deeper the mercybearing stake, whilst the blood from the pierced heart welled and spurted up around it.”* (1994: 258-259). The killing of Arthur’s beloved and powerless fiancée becomes even more disturbing as the narrator refers to her as *it* and *the Thing* while comparing him to the Nordic God of Thunder which seems absurd as he was violently destroying a fainted person. The way this is portrayed also implies the sexual component of the violent act of a man overpowering a helpless woman.

Another disturbing scene which depicts violence towards women is shown when the Count Dracula forces Mina to suck his blood which also heavily connotes sexual violence. *“With his left hand he held both Mrs Harker’s hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man’s bare breast, which was shown by his torn-open dress. The attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten’s nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink”* (1994: 336). In this scene the woman is once again represented as defenseless when a man, or, a monster, indefinitely stronger than her forces himself onto her. She could do nothing but hope someone else would help her. On the other hand, this novel also shows a man who faces a danger from women who want to penetrate his skin with their teeth which

points to the reversal of gender and sexual roles. “(...) *for nothing can be more dreadful than these awful women, who were – who are – waiting to suck my blood*” (1994: 54). Women might be just as terrifying as men.

### 5.3. Interpretations

It could be argued that, like *Frankenstein* and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* a variety of indications and meanings could be ascribed to Stoker's *Dracula*. Albeit I have emphasized its sexual and violent dimension, many theoreticians have put more focus on exploring the other undertones this novel insinuates.

Moretti, for example, propounds that while he perceives Frankenstein's creature as a representation of the *proletariat*, the Count “is an aristocrat only in a manner of speaking” and actually stands for the capitalism itself, the capitalism that scared the bourgeois society of that era and who believed only nationalism – in the form of Jonathan Harker and his friends – could save them from its all-consuming force. *Dracula* and capitalistic monopoly both destroy the hope of independence, but because the bourgeois society does not want to accept it as such, the threat must be transformed in the one they already hated and defeated – the aristocracy (1997: 83-92).

Matek and Međedović (2017: 143-159), on the other hand, propose that the novel's purpose is to interpret and comment on the social and political climate of the Victorian Brittan. They suggest the novel warns its readers of the moral transgressions bound to happen because of the contacts with various different cultures due to Britain's imperialistic expansion. The other cultures seem presented in the form of the Count who threatens the British values, its tradition and the very stability of the Empire. Therefore, the novel represents their fear of

the reverse colonization, as well as the emancipation of women which also threatens the patriarchal values of the British civilization. They conclude that in monstrous representation of the „radically other“ the Victorian ideology actually mirrors itself.<sup>3</sup>

Schaffer (1994: 381-385), however, stresses the homoerotic component of *Dracula* explaining how, when his friend Oscar Wilde was convicted because of his homosexuality, Stoker wrote this work as a sort of defense of the exploration of the sexuality. She maintains, as it is evident for the time they lived in, that he could not do it openly, therefore he identified and 'transformed' Wilde into a vampire, depicted him as a being that has mixed characteristics of both genders, which was how the Victorian society viewed homosexuals.

These various interpretations of Stoker's *Dracula* suggest the novel, albeit the founder of the popular contemporary novels of the vampire topic, is a multi-layered, complex text which explores and exposes the crucial problems and ideas of the Victorian Britain. The Gothic monster is illustrated once again as multi-faceted and inconclusive which is why it represents various threats to the traditional values.

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<sup>3</sup> My translation

## Conclusion

The Gothic novel rhetoric of fear employs the techniques typical of the fantastic mode of writing. The narratives depict a world that at first imitates our own in which the mysterious and the marvellous gradually enter, thus transforming the known reality into a place of fear and uncertainty. The terror seems heightened by the portrayal of violent and unnatural events depicted in great detail. The purpose of the narration is to frighten the reader but also to make him question the hidden potentials of science, the harmful restrictions of societal norms and reality itself he hitherto considered absolute and possibly virtuous.

One of the most frequent strategies of ensuring reader's immersion in the narrative and the questioning of its reliability is employing the technique of multiple points of view and a first-person narrative perspective, employed in the three novels discussed in this work. As long as there is no omniscient narrator, the reader cannot fully trust the events of the story because there always exists a possibility that the character either lies or that his perception of events is inaccurate. Multiple points of view also encourage the reader to consider that there might be more to the story than the character wants to share.

The intention of the authors of the Gothic novel is to question and thus subvert the restrictive and dominant ideologies of their respective times, to express their concerns and distrust which could not have been done openly, so they created the infamous monsters to serve as their metaphors.

Because the monsters and the stories themselves appear highly ambiguous, they allow for a variety of fundamentally different interpretations. This array of meanings indicates the complexity of the themes and the open-endedness of the structure that encourages the reader to contemplate about the novel. For this reason, they are highly allusive and emotionally

charged – the Gothic novel, through its rhetoric of fear, aims to engage with the reader in hope of stimulating his curiosity and making him revalue the ideas and the objectives of the dominant societal, religious, political, scientific and philosophical positions.



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