

## THE GOTHIC FEAR/FAILURE OF REPRODUCTION IN NEO-VICTORIAN FICTION

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*Abstract: The Gothic tradition of the nineteenth century is reworked in the Neo-Gothic novels of the twentieth. Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, Bram Stoker's Dracula, Alasdair Gray's Poor Things, Doris Lessing's The Fifth Child and Ben in the World all focus on the fear of the Other, as well as – more insidiously – on the fear that the Other might reproduce. From a creature's desire for a female counterpart and the destruction of the said counterpart, the undead's inability to reproduce (except by blood exchanges) to the non-existent atavistic throwbacks (except for Ben) and the death of any offspring without issue, the authors of these novels find various ways to leave their creatures/monsters childless. Be it fear of the reproduction of the Other or a failure of various kinds, the Other is left with no possibility of survival into the future. Implicitly, the fear ought to be transposed from the realm of the supernatural into a more mundane one which deals with the uncontrollable possibility of proliferation that the Other boasts. The danger portrayed was that of an England overrun by those considered inferior.*

*Keywords: Gothic fear, Other, reverse colonization, degeneration, proliferation.*

### **Introduction**

The fear of reproduction the paper focuses on is an intricate issue in certain gothic novels of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The same theme is reprised in loose re-writings of gothic novels from the 20<sup>th</sup> century or in novels that employ the conventions of the genre and use a creature as a purveyor of horror or terror. The fear of the Other and its uncontrollable proliferation pervades 19<sup>th</sup> century gothic novels, which reveal that racial purity and the values it upholds would come under attack, leading to a faltering Empire. Being overrun by those it considered inferior, in a reversed colonisation, would lead to decline and degeneration. Gothic novels veiled these fears under a supernatural and/or horrific guise. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the writers who employ pastiche in the creation of their Neo-Victorian novels with gothic overtones seemingly employ realist conventions and appeal to theories of psychology to redeem their monstrous protagonists, who are nevertheless not supernatural, even while they horrify.

The fear of the uncontrolled reproduction of undesirable elements was expressed in 1883 by eugenicist Francis Galton who wrote in "Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development": "Those whose race we especially want to have, would leave few descendants, while those whose race we especially want to quit of, would crowd the vacant space with progeny" (qtd in Greenslade 39). Victorian England felt a distinct peril in the possibility of invasion by the racial Other who would weaken the position of a faltering Empire. As several scholars (Stephen Arata, Judith Halberstam) remark, one of the dangers resided in the large numbers of Eastern European Jewish immigrants who had found a home on British soil and who became a scapegoat, bearing the "weight of the culture's fears over its declining status" (Arata 629) and were marked "as a threat to capital, to masculinity, and to nationhood" and as a form of "internal colonization" (Halberstam 14). The danger in this was that England would be overrun by those it considered its inferiors, in a reversed colonisation, which Carol A. Senf discussed as "a kind of reverse imperialism, the threat of the primitive trying to colonize the civilized world" (97). It was felt that an era of decline of the Empire would follow and that

Victorian society would suffer as a result of degeneration. In *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, H.L. Malchow discusses this fear of racial hybridity in relation to the idea that the half-breed transgresses boundaries and is caught between worlds, revealing “hidden threats – disguised presences bringing pollution of the blood” and living in the midst of the unsuspecting (168). Stephen Arata notices that the fin de siècle “was saturated with the sense that the entire nation – as a race of people, as a political and imperial force, as a social and cultural power – was in irretrievable decline” (622). Gothic novels took these fears very seriously and exaggerated their likelihood. At the same time, these novels veiled the fear under a supernatural and/or horrific guise. The monstrous Other portends the decline of the dominant society since, while it comes from outside initially, it conceals itself in the bosom of British society and becomes a threat *from within*.

### **Problematizing the Other as Monstrous**

The authors of 19<sup>th</sup> century gothic peopled their novels with constructions of monstrosity which revealed dichotomies between inside/outside, pure/impure, good/evil, and human/monster. Gothic fiction, we are told by David Punter, is characterized by simulacra of human beings (Frankenstein’s monster, zombies, golems, ghosts) as doubles (or *doppelgängers*). (Punter 124) They are different from humans since, by means of sight, they can be distinguished as not the same as us. As we come to this realization, we are also given a warning. In addition, we establish a clear boundary that separates us from them. This dichotomy between us and them sets up an adversarial relationship. On the one hand, the very origin of the word monster aids this interpretation (*monstrum: monstrare* versus *monere*) since it leads to both revealing and warning. On the other hand, the monster is located within culture and language. Or, more likely outside it, since it is marginalized, it is not an object of desire, but rather of rejection and repudiation. The desirable behavior or norms of the body is what people strive to achieve, whereas when the body is aberrant, this is directly visible, leading to being coded as monstrous. (Ng 2) In terms of culture, we have to be aware that in gothic fiction monsters are also metaphors of societal fears, functioning on a symbolic level. However, by representing fears and dangers, “contemporary society seeks to deny and expurgate” them and in this process they are transformed in scapegoats. (Ng 1) To a certain extent, gothic novels may provide a key to understanding the culture and ideology that produced them since they reveal how “how monstrosity is profoundly interrelated with the culture that produces, camouflages, marginalizes and resists it.” (Ng 1)

### **Monstrous Progenitor**

The theme of creation in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein or Modern Prometheus* is suggested by the subtitle, referring to Prometheus from Greek mythology, the creator of the human race. Prometheus was punished for his creation and for his perceived arrogance by Zeus. Victor Frankenstein was fascinated by the possibilities of science since he believed that the modern scientists had acquired “new and almost unlimited powers” mocking “the invisible world with its own shadows.” (Shelley 46-7) His own ambition was to achieve more than his predecessors, believing himself a pioneer who would “explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation.” (Shelley 47) Thus, his lifelong ambition was to animate lifeless matter and create a new species which would regard him as a god and as their progenitor: “A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs.” (Shelley 53) The monstrous progenitor places himself at the center of nature and creation, suggesting that he is trying to gain mastery over nature through his creation. His arrogance, too, was punished, as shown by the tragic ending of his family members and his own. After animating lifeless matter, he is horrified by

the monster created. Victor Frankenstein flees from his own creation: “breathless horror and disgust filled my heart.” (Shelley 57) Victor Frankenstein’s reaction to his creation stems from the way in which the creature challenges the boundaries between the natural and the unnatural, the real and the unreal:

“The creature is both natural (made up of human parts, and possessing a recognizably human inner life) and unnatural (because he has been stitched together from dead bodies). The fact that he is both real and unreal disturbs Victor Frankenstein’s belief that the natural world is a transcendent one.” (Smith 43)

Victor Frankenstein sees himself as a god of a newly created species but he feels abject horror at the sight of his first creation. By running away he declines responsibility for the creature and he does not blame himself, but rather transforms the creature into a scapegoat and refuses to nurture it. From its very inception, the creature is encumbered with its progenitor's guilt. Frankenstein is initially haunted by his monster metaphorically – due to his guilt – and then literally, when the creature starts killing his family members. Finally, on top of Mont Blanc, the creature – in search of companionship, yet perpetually alone due to its misshapen appearance – asks its creator to make it a companion. As his work on the companion is nearing its end, Frankenstein decides that the danger is too great and destroys it just as the monster was watching. Consequently the creature swears revenge and threatens to be with Frankenstein on his wedding night. Indeed, his young bride is killed on their wedding night. As a result, reproduction is stalled for both creator and creation. Given Victor Frankenstein’s hostility towards domesticity, his childless end is fitting. But his creature apparently craves companionship and yet, through no fault of his own, he is left all alone. In Mary Poovey’s words: “In *Frankenstein*, the monster simply acts out the implicit content of Frankenstein’s desire; just as Frankenstein figuratively murdered his family, so the monster literally murders Frankenstein’s domestic relationships.” (126)

### **Monstrous Progeny**

Frankenstein’s monster is left to its own devices and has to learn language on its own in order to communicate. He equates language with godlike science. (Shelley 116) But even then, the monster remains nameless since it is hard to name the unknown or the wholly other. Readers nowadays use the maker’s patronymic to refer to it. This is indeed appropriate since the creator in this text does not use sexual reproduction, but rather he becomes a ‘single parent’ leading to a paternal propagation. The creature curses its makers, however: “‘Hateful day when I received life!’ I exclaimed in agony. ‘Accursed creator! Why did you form a monster so hideous that even YOU turned from me in disgust?’” (Shelley 136) As he is blaming its creator, the creature shows reason and uses biblical allusion – calling himself Adam and a fallen angel – thus, becoming more than a monstrous progeny in Frankenstein’s eyes.

The creature Victor Frankenstein initially sees as the culmination of his creation and the first of a new race for which he is the progenitor becomes the millstone around his neck. Furthermore, the creature was meant to be a new form of life, but on its ‘birth’, Victor Frankenstein was merely reminded of death: “the creature’s composition from dead beings literalises the presence of death even as his supposedly terrifying appearance promises violence.” (Smith 45) The physical ugliness of the monster determines its creator to recoil from it in horror, but it is sight that identifies the creature as a monster, yet hearing provides an alternative, once Victor Frankenstein listens to its story of rejection and abandonment: “His words had a strange effect upon me. I compassionated him and sometimes felt a wish to console him, but when I looked upon him, when I saw the filthy mass that moved and talked, my heart sickened and my feelings were altered to those of horror and hatred.” (Shelley 192) Despite the creature’s efforts to acquire language and to create itself through speech as a feeling, thinking being, Victor Frankenstein cannot move beyond its monstrous appearance.

Furthermore, as he assumes the role of the scientist, eminently rational in his worldview, the reader takes on his judgment of the creature and places it on the outside / impure / evil / monster pole of the dichotomy. Victor Frankenstein is granted authority and assumes it as his due as the creator of a new race, who has the right to decide that his creature is monstrous. But in a postmodern reading, his right to authority would be challenged – the danger does not come *from outside*, from his monstrous creature, but *from within*, from himself, since he is the progenitor of the danger represented by the Other.

### **Reverse Colonization and Degeneration**

In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the East is constructed as menacing Other for Jonathan Harker as the representative of civilization and the colonizing power of the British Empire. Dracula suggests that a threat of the Other, of the East – extrapolating from this, of the colonial subjects – is imminent. The peril is located at the level of blood, legacy, and reproduction. Similarly to British travelers who had reached Transylvania in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Jonathan Harker describes the moment when he leaves civilization behind on the very first page of the novel – “we were leaving the West and entering the East.” (Stoker 1) Transylvania – or the Land beyond the Forest (as the Latin origin suggests) – is a liminal space of otherness. Apprehension pervades the protagonist's journey to Dracula's abode: travelers and locals alike indicate that there's something wrong with his destination, the inhabitants of the castle and/or the day of his arrival, yet Harker initially relegates their warnings as signs of superstition and cultural inferiority. Thus, Harker is preconditioned to expect the unexpected, the abject, and the supernatural, yet his rational, English mindset keeps him from taking the warnings seriously.

On his arrival, he is attacked by three female vampires, but Dracula stakes his claim on Harker. This episode clarifies the situation for the protagonist and he escapes. The threat to his blood is clear at this point. Later the plot takes both protagonist and Eastern antagonist to London. Thus, no longer located in the East, the peril becomes more imminent. In a parallel with Britain's dominion over other territories, the Count seeks to create a race of British vampires who would be subordinate to him, mirroring the British Empire's imperial ambitions: “In Count Dracula, Victorian readers could recognize their culture's imperial ideology mirrored back as a kind of monstrosity.” (Arata 623) A group of men come together, representing British superiority, Western European knowledge and rational thought and American virility, representing the side of good and prepared to fight the threat from the exotic, inferior Eastern Europe. The Eastern threat is focused on Lucy Westenra and Mina Murray, inhibiting the production of heirs, by transforming the female characters into the undead. Lucy falls prey to Dracula first and dies, despite the blood transfusions which are meant to preserve her racial purity. Mina is saved however, through the collaborative efforts of those enterprising enough to travel back to Transylvania to defeat their fears and the enemy. The ominous and liminal space of the Carpathians – “one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe” (2) – is thus defeated, if not civilized. Blood is restored, as is the possibility of descendants, and the West triumphs. Or does it?

Transylvania is presented in the novel as a contested space, occupied by various empires, in the path of migrations, influenced by the influx of ‘new blood’. A colonized space, which was not the case of Britain, occupied by a succession of empires that held power over this territory, Transylvania reveals the implied threat that as empires evolve and grow, once they reach their peak, they can only head towards decline and collapse. Within the space of Transylvania, Dracula's blood identifies him as a product of this miscegenation and a conqueror and invader in his own right. Stoker “departs significantly from his literary predecessors (...) [since] Stoker makes Dracula vigorous and energetic.” (Arata 628) Furthermore, since he can transform men and women, the Count's threat resides in his virility,

which will easily proliferate in Britain. The threat he poses to Britain is not a territorial one, yet it is a colonizing one, in the sense that he colonizes the body of both females and males, thus creating an internal threat, in that he transforms his victims into vampires who will colonize Britain *from within*, even though the initial threat was located outside the Empire, outside England. Harker correctly identifies this threat and begrudges his role in its implementation:

“This was the being I was helping to transfer to London where, perhaps for centuries to come, he might, amongst its teeming millions, satiate his lust for blood, and create a new and ever widening circle of semi-demons to batten on the helpless.” (Stoker 67)

An alternative avenue for analyzing *Dracula* involves the issue of degeneracy. In Mina’s words: “The Count is a criminal and of criminal type. Nordau and Lombroso would so classify him.” (Stoker 342) She makes reference to Lombroso’s theory of criminality and Nordau’s degeneracy in art. The Count’s physiognomy mirrors the archetypal descriptions of the two authors mentioned above, consequently, he cannot be redeemed. Yet, his warrior-like disposition and his manliness are also needed as attributes in those who seek to obliterate him. One of the threats identified by authors and social critics in turn-of-the-century England was the masculinized threat of the New Woman and the effeminized threat of the dandy, related to how that would impact the Victorian ideal of domesticity. While the Count represents an external threat to the proliferation of the race, there is an implied threat within. As such, it could be argued that despite the fear of ‘new blood’ coming into England, that “new blood” (consider the blood donations/transfusions in the novel) is actually needed to revitalize “the threatened Britishness in the novel.” (Smith 116)

Despite being defeated in the end, the Count does ‘colonize’ the male characters in the novel, given that they have to assume his behavior in order to become successful in their endeavor to defeat the threat he poses. Yet, his virility is defeated since both the Count and his progeny do not survive. Nevertheless, Mina and Jonathan’s child also bears the Count’s blood. In a subtle way, Bram Stoker reveals that despite winning the battle, the war might not be won, given that the virile blood of the County does survive in one form, in the next generation. This next generation is meant to rejuvenate the British nation, but the implied threat is still there. Given that the group of male characters that defeats Dracula stand on the side of good, on the right side of nationhood and Empire, the reader assumes that their quest to defeat the Eastern invader is a righteous one and grants their account its claim to authority. However, in its account of invaders, conquerors and colonizers, the novel also reveals how the British Empire itself might have been perceived by the colonized, sowing the seed of doubt and white guilt.

### **The Atavistic Progeny and the Monstrous Mother**

Doris Lessing follows Margaret Thatcher’s 1983 exhortation to return to Victorian values in her 1988 novel *The Fifth Child*, yet those values become frayed at the edges. Though not strictly a Neo-Victorian novel, the Victorian mansion in which the Lovatts live, the baby-making bed, their desire for a numerous family and the traditional gender roles they assume despite meeting in the 1960s, allude to the 19<sup>th</sup> century: “what was it about these that made them freaks and oddballs? It was their attitude to sex! This was the sixties!” (Lessing 1988: 4) The Lovatts believe in the husband as the breadwinner and the mother as the domestic nurturer. David and Harriet are marked as deviant for their times since they want a large family: “Do you realize that having six children, in another part of the world, it would be normal, nothing shocking about it—they aren’t made to feel criminals.” “It’s we who are abnormal, here in Europe” (Lessing 1988: 16). The desire for a large family comes to fruition, but the Victorian ideals the two protagonists long for are revealed to be a mirage and unattainable. David needs his father’s help to buy the Victorian mansion, to keep his house

solvent and to educate his children, while Harriet requires that her mother Dorothy live with them and help her with the first four children. Both David and Harriet fall short of the ideal they had set up for themselves, and the fifth child, a throwback to an earlier version of humanity, ruins everything.

Harriet's fifth and most difficult pregnancy results in a child described by her as "a troll, or a goblin or something." (my emphasis, Lessing 1988: 49) Having already had four children in quick succession, Harriet is bone tired and unable to find it in herself to love Ben, so she wonders "what the mother would look like, the one who would welcome this—*alien*." (my emphasis, Lessing 1988: 50) The names Harriet uses to refer to her child move away from the conventions of realist fiction and into the fantastic: Neanderthal (65), dwarf (68), changeling (72) and gnome (89). Later on he becomes "Ben, the alien, the destroyer." (Lessing 1988:130) The unclassifiable presence becomes that of an enemy from within, which destroys the carefully constructed narrative of familial happiness, and provides an embedded political commentary which might relate to both late 1940s legislation which allowed immigration into England from the former colonies and the race riots of the 1980s: "As Ben wrecks the family from within, so allegorically, England is threatened by an otherness engendered from within. Internal monsters are often more destructive because they are not immediately recognisable." (Ng 127) Nevertheless, this enemy is genetically part of the family, having been expelled from the mother's body and put there by the father's sperm and manages to destroy the family from within with the fear and horror he engenders, the father's denial of his paternity ("'He's our child'. 'No, he's not (...). Well, he certainly isn't mine.'" Lessing 1988: 74) and Harriet's refusal to leave Ben locked away in an institution.

Lessing prompts the reader to view the human/monster dichotomy from two angles. On the one hand, the atavistic progeny of a family that is a throwback to the 19<sup>th</sup> century becomes the monster, the Other within, which destroys the family. On the other hand, the monstrous mother, her lack of bonding and nurture to the fifth child and her decisions might be the factors that spell ruin for the Lovatts. Harriet's exhaustion and probable post-partum depression and inability to bond with Ben could possibly part of the problem given that motherhood is supposedly instinctual (Woollett qtd. in Nicolson 59) and we hold a rather romanticized view of mothers as filled with love and selflessness, but this ideal image does not necessarily exist in reality, therefore mothers will disappoint themselves and their children. (Nicolson 8) In the end, as Andrew Ng argues, "Ben's monstrosity maybe merely a demonized projection of Harriet's inability to articulate her anger, frustration and depression." (108) Nevertheless, in the finale of the novel, Harriet wonders whether Ben will find others like him and if he will father children, and while she herself had five children, they all leave her behind.

In *Ben, in the World*, the atavistic progeny becomes the protagonist on a quest to find his people, as he was unable to identify with his family. In this novel published in 2000 Doris Lessing answers Harriet's implied questions – Ben is taken to some caves where he sees pictures of people like him. With the light of the sun reflected on the wall at certain times of day, he sees those images as if in motion, but they disappear with the sunset. Ben, realizing that there are no people like himself anymore, commits suicide. Thus, the monster from within, which had destroyed the Lovatt family, meets his end, without issue.

### **A Monster of Unbearable Beauty and the Monstrous Father**

Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things*, in rewriting Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, does not propose to the reader a monster of unbearable ugliness, instead the protagonist's beauty is turned against her by the male gaze which appropriates her body and rewrites her identity. Her behavior that defies the norms of the age turns her into the deviant that is interpreted as monstrous by male authority.

The ‘mad’ scientist in the novel *Poor Things*, Godwin Baxter, God for short, is described as having a “dwarfish look” and an “ogreish body”, he is taller than most by a head and dressed in a manner that conceals “his odd figure”. (Gray 12) The name sends us back to William Godwin, who fathered Mary Shelley, who in turn gave ‘birth’ to Frankenstein. In the novel, Godwin fathers both (Hawley 176), while his ‘daughter’ Bella, after being given life through scientific methods becomes an independent, professional woman, a doctor, in fact. She thus assumes a male role, becoming a New Woman who effeminizes her husband in whom she has “a very good wife” (Gray 303). This is a rendering of Victoria McCandless’ words by the editor Alasdair Gray; however, Archibald McCandless assumes a feminine role himself in his own narrative, when he echoes Jane Eyre’s words: “Reader, she married me and I have little more to tell.” (Gray 240)

In Archibald McCandless’ account, he is a mad scientist who has replaced Victoria Blessington’s brain with that of her daughter, in an act reminiscent of Victor Frankenstein, which would make him a monstrous progenitor. Godwin refused Bella’s advances because he had a syphilitic disease inherited from his father and did not want to father children himself since the disease would cause insanity and general paralysis (Gray 266), thus the monstrous father-figure remains childless. Dr. Victoria McCandless’ account in her letter dispels the authenticity of her husband’s story, yet the ‘editor’, Alasdair Gray, places her letter at the end, since he finds it perplexing and does not set much store in its truthfulness, favoring the male version of events over the female accounting: “I print the letter by the lady who calls herself “Victoria” McCandless as an epilogue to the book. Michael would prefer it as an introduction, but if read before the *main text*, it will prejudice readers against that. If read afterward we easily see it is the letter of a disturbed woman who wants to hide the truth of her start in life” (Gray xi). Furthermore, given the editorial introduction in which he claims to “have collected enough material evidence to prove the McCandless story a complete tissue of facts” (Gray xii) he clearly doubts the authenticity of the female version of events and calls Victoria McCandless ‘disturbed’.

There is a certain commonality in the descriptions of Victoria Blessington / Bella Baxter / Victoria McCandless and her construction of monstrosity in the mental and medical realm, rather than the physical. *Poor Things* creates a monster, but it is not through physical defects that the monster is identified, but through the male gaze. On the one hand, her body is commodified since, according to her husband Blessington: “She had the soul of an innocent child within the form of a Circassian houri—irresistible.” (Gray 215) and her sexual appetite is seen as abnormal, as Dr. Prickett describes her as an erotomaniac who was supposed to have a clitoridectomy to eliminate her sexual appetite. (Gray 218) Blessington also describes her as mad (219), Baxter as a hysteric (221) and she is blamed for ruining Wedderburn “bodily, mentally and financially”, leading to his being locked away in the Glasgow Royal Lunatic Asylum. (Gray 220) Moreover, Baxter takes her to alienists abroad in order to have her mental state assessed and the conclusion of the doctors is that “she shows no signs of mania, hysteria, phobia, dementia, melancholia, neurasthenia, aphasia, catatonia, algolagnia, necrophilia, coprophilia, *folie de grandeur*, *nostalgie de la boue*, lycanthropy, fetishism, Narcissism, Onanism, irrational belligerence, unhealthy reticence and is not obsessively Sapphic.” (Gray 222) Thus, Bella’s monstrosity is based in medico-juridical regulations of the body, since she is given accounts from psychologists, doctors and a lawyer.

Baxter’s supposed actions in using the foetus’ brain to revive Bella would also explain her sexual appetite. Since the contents of the womb were placed in the brain, a baby’s brain in the body of an adult, sexually and physically Bella was a mature woman with the ability of an infant to think, reason and suppress her desires. Bella’s love for God, the father figure, could be explained as an Oedipal complex. The construction of monstrosity in *Poor Things* is supposedly passed onwards to the next generation since Victoria McCandless gives birth to

three boys over a period of six years, but the foreword reveals that there were no surviving descendants (Gray x) and the historical notes at the end inform the reader that Baxter, Godwin and Archie all died before their mother (Gray 305), who dies without heirs in 1946, though she had written a letter addressed to her descendants living in 1974. The final note offered by the editor reveals that the division between the monstrous and the human in the protagonist's case resides in the realm of the biological (Hawley 175):

“Dr. Victoria McCandless was found dead of a cerebral stroke on 3rd December 1945. Reckoning from the birth of her brain in the Humane Society mortuary on Glasgow Green, 18th February 1880, she was exactly sixty-five years, forty weeks and four days old. Reckoning from the birth of her body in a Manchester slum in 1854, she was ninety-one.” (Gray 317)

Alasdair Gray's intertextual pastiche, Godwin Baxter's physical surgery and McCandless' literal account of Bella Baxter / Victoria McCandless create the literary monster, similarly to the body parts Frankenstein was made of, *Poor Things* is made up of pastiche as the female protagonist rightly remarks:

“My second husband's story positively stinks of all that was morbid in that most morbid of centuries, the nineteenth. He has made a sufficiently strange story stranger still by stirring into it episodes and phrases to be found in Hogg's *Suicide's Grave* with additional ghouleries from the works of Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe. What morbid Victorian fantasy has he NOT filched from? I find traces of *The Coming Race*, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, *Dracula*, *Trilby*, Rider Haggard's *She*, *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes* and, alas, *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*; a gloomier book than the sunlit *Alice in Wonderland*. He has even plagiarized work by two very dear friends: G. B. Shaw's *Pygmalion* and the scientific romances of Herbert George Wells”. (272-273)

Alasdair Gray, the editor, might have decided to place Victoria McCandless' letter at the end of the novel so as not to create bias in the readers, yet he offers her the last word in matters of the claim to authenticity of the narrator voice. On the one hand, she mocks her husband's tendency to place himself within the Victorian Age – his story ‘stinks of Victorianism’ (Gray 275), in her words – as well as his inability to be original, since he filches ideas from great Victorian authors. She also frowns upon his grotesque choice of subject matter, since she uses the words ‘ghouleries’ (Gray 272) and ‘sham-gothic’ (Gray 275) On the other hand, she is offered the chance to redeem herself: “I am a plain, sensible woman, not the naïve Lucrezia Borgia and La Belle Dame Sans Merci described in the text.” (Gray 251) However, the editor's choice is deceptive in that he has the last word in the novel, undermining Victoria McCandless' redeeming narrative of her life.

The infantile inability to control her impulses makes Bella Baxter the monster within in *Poor Things*, a monster that is well hidden behind physical beauty. In Godwin's case, the monster is also an internal one in terms of genetics and the inheritance of an illness from his father. Thus, in Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things* the female/male body and sexuality represent the site for the monstrous, partially through the male gaze.

## Conclusion

Chronologically the first of the authors considered in the present paper, Mary Shelley – in the 1818 Preface to her novel – bids her hideous Progeny to go forth and prosper. The creature within the pages of the book, as well as its creator, remain childless. Nevertheless if we are to take the words written by her as her progeny, then it has prospered. Frankenstein is very much a part of the Western cultural imaginary, while *Poor Things* is, in a way, its brainchild. The same may be said of Stoker's *Dracula* and the typology of the vampire that has become ubiquitous in films and books in recent years. The Neo-Victorian constructions of monstrosity in Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* and *Ben in the World*, and Alasdair Gray's

*Poor Things* do not deal with monsters in the same way as the 19<sup>th</sup> century version of the Gothic does; the monstrous is mostly hidden from sight, as opposed to easily identified at a glance. This new version of the Gothic is clearly influenced by the development of psychology, since the 20<sup>th</sup> century texts reveal the ugliness within, concealed by the pleasant exterior, or show that despite external ugliness, underneath there is still reason and human feeling.

The authors of 19<sup>th</sup> century gothic peopled their novels with constructions of monstrosity which revealed dichotomies between inside/outside, pure/impure, good/evil, and human/monster, with a tendency to value the positive pole due to the fact that:

“Western thought equated the Good with notions of self-identity and sameness, the experience of evil has often been linked with notions of exteriority. (...) The prejudice against exteriority [has made it so that] (...) the other is an adversary, the stranger a scapegoat, the dissenter a devil. It is this proclivity to demonize alterity as a menace to our collective identity which so easily issues in hysterical stories about invading enemies.” (Kearney 65)

On a basic level, the difference between the 19<sup>th</sup> century monsters and the 20<sup>th</sup> century ones that are prohibited from reproducing is that the first type of monster will be located externally, into an elsewhere which is “geographically and physically other” (Ng 1) whereas the latter type will be placed “*within* the subject”. (Ng 2) While 19<sup>th</sup> century readers would assume the superiority of the narrator’s voice which assumes the positive pole of dichotomies between inside/outside, pure/impure, good/evil, and human/monster and grant it its claim to authority, 20<sup>th</sup> century readers would question the same.

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