

Neither Animal nor Human: An Ecogothic reading of the Monstrous Hybrid in *Dracula*, *The Beetle* and *The Snake Lady*

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the relationship between humans and animals, and more importantly between humans and their animality. Concretely, this project proposes an ecocritical reading of *fin de siècle* gothic fiction, as it provides insight on the ideological foundation of humanity's anthropocentric relation towards the environment. Through the analysis of the gothic hybrid monster, it is possible to grasp society's interpretation and assimilation of Darwin's revolutionary discoveries. However, not all gothic writers assimilated the apparent artificiality of humanity's superiority in the same way. Thus, I hereby argue that rejection and fear is not the only response to the

monstrous hybrid in *fin de siècle* gothic fiction. On the contrary, there are also critical voices who understood this new Darwinian human-hybrid identity as an opportunity to renew human relations towards nature.

Therefore, I analyse the constructions of and reactions to the hybrid monster in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* against Vernon Lee's *Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady*. By doing so, I aim at revealing and ultimately challenging the main dualism that sustains the hierarchical organization of the species: the privileging of culture over nature and reason over animality. The gothic genre is indeed characterised by the blurring of boundaries. Consequently, it reveals the human as irrational, the monster as natural and culture as repression, suggesting the need for the reconstruction of human identity and its place in the world.

Keywords: Ecocriticism; gothic; hybridity; animality; evolution; identity

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza las relaciones entre humanos y animales, particularmente entre humanos y su propia animalidad. En concreto, este proyecto propone un estudio de la ficción gótica inglesa de finales de siglo XIX desde un punto de vista ecocrítico. Esto permite ahondar en la base ideológica sobre la que está asentada la actual visión antropocéntrica del mundo. A través del análisis del monstruo, se observa como los descubrimientos revolucionarios de



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Darwin fueron asimilados e interpretados de distintas formas en el imaginario social. Así, no todos los escritores de novela gótica asumieron de la misma forma la revelación del ser humano como otra especie más, sujeta a las mismas leyes evolutivas que los demás animales. Por tanto, en este artículo arguyo que el rechazo y el miedo al monstruo no es la única respuesta presente en la ficción gótica del momento. Por el contrario, dentro de esta tradición literaria también hay voces críticas que entienden esta nueva identidad humano-animal como una oportunidad para renovar las relaciones del ser humano con el medio ambiente.

Para ilustrar este punto, este artículo estudia la manera en la que el monstruo híbrido es construido en *Drácula* de Bram Stoker y en *El Escarabajo* de Richard Marsh en contraste con el retrato que se hace de la Dama Serpiente en *El Príncipe Albérico* y *La Dama Serpiente* de Vernon Lee. A través de este análisis, se revela la artificialidad del dualismo sobre el que se sustenta la posición de superioridad de la humanidad sobre el resto de especies: la valoración de la cultura frente a la naturaleza y la razón frente al animalismo. El gótico, género característico por su capacidad para desdibujar fronteras, descubre al ser humano como irracional, al monstruo como natural, y a la cultura como origen de represión. En otras palabras, el estudio ecogótico del monstruo sugiere la necesidad de reconstruir la identidad humana y por consiguiente, también su lugar en el mundo.

Palabras clave: ecocrítica; género gótico; hibridación; animalismo; evolución; identidad



1. Introduction

The field of ecocriticism deals with the relations between culture and nature through the analysis of the written text. In other words, ecocritical approaches to literature attempt to identify within this cultural apparatus the discourses that have alienated humans from their environment throughout history. Typically, the main focus of this discipline is to demonstrate that human behaviour towards nature is not only abusive and oppressive, but also unjustified. Abusive, because it drains the Earth of its inhabitants, only understood as resources; oppressive because it denies fauna, flora and soil a voice, and unjustified because humanity's right to rule over the rest of vegetal and animal species on Earth is founded on a fallacy.

Revealing the dubious origins of humanity's superiority claims has been the goal of many scholars in ecocriticism. Hence, Lynn White for instance, identifies two cultural sources for humans' alienation from their environment. The first is hidden in the western lineal concept of time, as it also involves a faith in progress. In connection to the idea of progress, comes the notion that all beings in nature can be placed in a linear scale in which man belongs at the top. White points to the Judeo-Christian tradition as originator of this distorted superiority complex characteristic of the western civilization (1996). This theory is also supported by Alan Bleakley, who nevertheless, also indicates that Aristotle already favoured humans above animals on the grounds of animals' lack of a soul or conscience (2000). Therefore, for White and Bleakley, western rationalism is to be held responsible for our current ecological crisis. Started by the ancient philosophers such as Aristotle, consolidated by Augustinian Christianity and preserved throughout history, rationalism or the privileging of culture over nature has shaped our current anthropo-

centric approach to life on Earth (Bleakley, 2000).

There was, however, a time in history when anthropocentrism was shaken to its core by the revealing treatises of Charles Darwin. Darwin's theory of evolution described this process as random and capricious, denying the certainty of an advance towards progress. Moreover, evolution affected not only animals and plants, but also human beings. This demonstrated that humanity is not an entity excluded from and unaffected by nature, but part of it, and hence irremediably influenced by nature and involved in future changes and processes. However, in the context of technological and industrial development, urbanization, and colonialism, attempting to prevent the western world from governing, controlling and using the resources in nature at will was a complicated mission. Predictably, as White and Christopher Manes note, western culture "declined [Darwin's] invitation" to reconsider its place in the world (Manes, 1996: 22; White, 1996).

However, although it did not remove man from the top of the hierarchy, Darwin's treatises did have a huge impact on nineteenth century society, leading to multitude of scientific studies as well as an increase in gothic literary production. Hence, the *fin de siècle* in Great Britain is characterised for the literary commentary on the new scientific developments and their implications towards the future of western civilization. Particularly, Darwin's revelations provoked an active exploration of the human subject in connection with animals. This article looks closely at the new mythologies arising from Darwin's treatises and spreading through modern gothic fiction in order to deepen the analyses on the current relation between humans and the environment.

1.1. Ecogothic: an ecocritical approach to gothic texts

For this purpose rises a new branch of ecocriticism that applies an ecologically conscious lens to the reading of gothic texts. This new critical approach has been named ecogothic by Andrew Smith and William Hughes, or gothic ecocriticism by Başak Ağin Dönmez. In their book by that name, *Ecogothic*, Smith and Hughes lay the foundations by collecting thirteen essays where gothic studies are combined with ecocritical concerns. On the other hand, Ağin focuses on the theme of ecophobia in *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker. He tackles *Dracula* as a text that deals with the rejection of the animal arising from the anxiety that Darwin's revelation about the proximity between the human and the non-human spheres provoked (Ağin, 2015). Among others, these author's examples open up a new area of scholarly inquiry.

Traditionally, the study of the gothic monster has focused on issues regarding the fragmentation of human identity from a purely anthropocentric point of view. However, approaching the monster from a biocentric angle helps deepening the understanding of the relation between humans and animals (Ferri-Miralles, 2015). In this respect, the study of the *fin de siècle* gothic is particularly interesting, given the scientific context above mentioned. Darwin treatises confronted western society with the fragility of their binary life perspective. In other words, the sustainability of the hierarchical opposites such as culture/nature, rationality/animality or male/female crumbled. As a consequence, anxieties about a potential degenerative tendency by which humans would not progress, but 'descend' into animalism spread among sectors of the population.

These fears are reflected in the gothic production of the moment which is populated

by hybrid creatures: half animal, half human, half female, and half male. This monster embodies nineteenth century struggle coming to terms with the idea that humans are, after all, just another species on Earth. By destroying the binary culture/nature the claims to superiority of the white human male would also disintegrate, which is a change that the majority of society was not prepared to assume. Much of the gothic fiction of the time represents the Victorian male fight to maintain the previous anthropocentric world order by annihilating the Darwinian hybrid monster. However, despite common criticism, in this article I argue that there were also critical voices among the writers using the supernatural as a means to discuss human identity. In order to do so, this essay analyses Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* against Vernon Lee's *Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady*. The focus will be on studying the reactions of the characters to the animalised other, the monster in the first place and, ultimately, to the animalised self.

2. The human, the animal and the hybrid monster

As introduced previously, the first binary division by which all the others are sustained is the distinction between nature and culture. As Coupe states, dualism establishes difference based on a hierarchical relation. For instance, the term culture acquires meaning only when contrasted with its "inferior and alien" other: nature (Coupe, 2000: 119). Human society is given privilege over the world and the rest of its inhabitants on the grounds of our capacity for reason. Reason is actually held as the key element that separates the human animal from the rest of species and gives humanity the right to govern over the rest of irrational, and thus inferior, creatures (White, 1996; Coupe, 2000; Bleakley, 2000). The problem comes when the certainty about this unbridgeable

difference between humans and animals is shaken by new discoveries. What if humans were not as rational as it seems? What if animals were able of reason too? All this questioning led to discourses of bestiality by which any association with animals, physical or psychological, was considered dangerous. Irrationality was pathologised, considered a symptom of mental illness and/or of criminal nature. Gothic hybrid monsters were embodiments of all this fears, as they were neither human nor animal, and therefore they dissolved binaries and blurred boundaries. This article analyses the ways in which the hybrid monster is constructed as threat in *Dracula* and *The Beetle* using the above mentioned discourses of bestiality. Then, the article moves to presenting a different portrayal of the hybrid monster as endangered in *Prince Alberic and The Snake Lady*.

2.1. The monster as a threat: *Dracula* and the *Beetle*

As introduced above, physical or psychological similarities with animals were considered a sign of mental instability or degeneration. *Degeneration* was in fact the title of a bestselling book written by the physician and psychologist Max Nordau in which he diagnosed *fin de siècle* European society with an 'involutionary' tendency. Nordau blamed this phenomenon on the rapid changes of the technological and industrial revolutions, the growth of urban spaces, and also the new *avant-garde* tendencies in art and literature. According to him, the "brain centres" of certain weak individuals would not resist such pressure, and that would lead to retrogression in body and in mind (Mosse, 1993: xxi). Nordau was not alone in this association of bestiality and inferiority, as his theory drew from and agreed with Cesare Lombroso's investigations. Cesare Lombroso was a

criminal anthropologist famous for his study of criminals' facial features and skulls. The reason behind Lombroso's use of physiognomy and phrenology on criminals was to establish a series of common physical attributes that would allow the immediate identification of the deviate or criminal subject based purely on their appearance.

The motivation behind such a venture was to avoid "contagion" of animality by controlling, "curing" or eliminating the irrational, animal-like subject. This is in fact the final destiny of the gothic monster in *Dracula* and *The Beetle*. However, before being able to freely hunt and exterminate the creature, the main characters, a group of Victorian gentlemen, need to classify and label the Count and the Arab as non-humans. Thus, at the beginning of both novels, the reader gets a detailed report and analysis of their appearance. Beginning with *Dracula*, Jonathan Harker writes down that he had a "marked physiognomy", a physiognomy characterised by the Count's animalised features (Stoker, 1997: 23). Thus, "his face was a strong [...] aquiline" and his nose had a "high bridge [...] and peculiarly arched nostrils" (Stoker, 1997: 23). According to Lombroso, the resemblance of a nose with the beak of a bird of prey was considered a sign of the subject's fierceness and atavism (Hurley, 1996). However, the animal references emanating from *Dracula's* appearance are many more. Harker also refers to the Count's hairy brows, "cruel-looking mouth" and "sharp white teeth" that "protruded over the lips", as well as his pointed ears (Stoker, 1997: 23). Looking away from his face, Harker also talks about *Dracula's* hairy palms and long and sharp nails (Stoker, 1997). All of this, in their reference to the hairiness of apes, or to the shape of teeth and ears of dogs, wolfs and other dangerous carnivores point towards *Dracula* as a degenerate, a non-human hybrid (Hurley, 1996).

Moreover, Dracula's apparent physical animality is confirmed by his unorthodox behaviour. He unapologetically identifies with wolves, or the "children of the night", as he calls them (Stoker, 1997: 24). For all this, Harker is horrified in the Count's presence, a feeling also shared by Robert Holt, one of the protagonists in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*. Holt is the first to come face to face with the Beetle, and in their first encounter, he also produces a detailed account of the creature's appearance. The Arab is said to be "supernaturally ugly", maybe as a result of a "terrible disease" (Marsh, 2007: 16). Contrary to Dracula, he has no visible body hair, however his "cranium, and indeed, the whole skull, [is] so small as to be disagreeably suggestive of something animal" (Marsh, 2007: 16). Moreover, like Dracula, the Beetle also has an "abnormally large" nose that "resemble[s] the beak of some bird of prey" (Marsh, 2007: 16). Again, this was a signifier of the Arab's predatory nature. Holt proceeds to mention other 'deformities', such as the absence of a chin, the strange "blubber lips" and especially his enormous, bright eyes, all of which gave him the "appearance of something not human" (Marsh, 2007: 16).

Finally, similarly to Dracula, the Beetle also shows moments of sudden and uncontrolled "demonic fury", which according to Victorian mentality gave away the individual's unrestrained, irrational nature (Marsh, 2007: 27). Consequently, both their appearance and their behaviour pointed towards them as animalised, "hardly human" (Marsh, 2007: 28). On top of that, the creature's abnormal hybrid identity is further supported by also associating them with femininity. In Lombroso's words, "in figure, in size of brain, in strength, in intelligence, woman comes nearer to the animal and the child" (Lombroso qtd. in Hurley, 1996: 97). In other words, for nineteenth century medicine and science,

women were already some kind of hybrid creature, not completely human, due to the influence that their animalistic and instable sex organs had over them (Hurley, 1996). Therefore, when Holt notices that "there was something so feminine" about the Arab's face, he wonders whether he had "mistaken a woman for a man; some ghoulish example of her sex, who has so yielded to her depraved instincts as to have become nothing but a ghastly reminiscence of womanhood" (Marsh, 2007: 24). As mentioned earlier, women were considered to be already bounded to irrational behaviour, therefore it was easier for a woman to give in to her animal nature, becoming therefore a "ghoulish example of her sex", a monster.

Consequently, given their hybridised nature, neither Dracula nor the Beetle are considered human, as "nothing fashioned in God's image could wear such a shape as that" (Marsh, 2007: 20). Their image and the feeling of repulsion they provoke among the "sane" characters in the novels are signs of their lack of a soul, or in other words, their lack of humanity. The concept of soul in these novels goes together with Nordau's concept of morality as an inherent human quality that allows us to differentiate between good and evil (Nordau, 1993). Therefore, having a soul is considered in the narrative as the key element that distinguishes humans from other creatures. "I fear I am myself the only living soul within the place" claims Harker when he discovers that the Count does not cast a reflection in the mirror (Stoker, 1997: 30). In sum, Dracula and the Beetle are considered soulless as they do not share the other character's morality, and as such, they inspired feelings of rejection, nausea and horror among the sane population.

Finally, Mina Harker's words: "the Count is a criminal [...] Nordau and Lombroso would so classify him" mark the creature's scientific subhuman classification (Stoker, 1997: 296). From that moment on, Dracula's subjectivity

is denied, similarly to that of the Beetle. Thus, the protagonists refer to the hybrids using the pronoun “it” or the word “thing”. For instance, vampires are defined as “foul *things*¹ of the night [...] without a heart or conscience” (Stoker, 1997: 209). Therefore, the hybrids are not allowed a voice in these narratives in the same way as animals and nature are not allowed a voice within western discourses (Manes, 1996). The speaking subject is exclusively human; idea by which not only nature is silenced, but with it “women, minorities, children [...] and the insane” (Manes, 1996: 16). This gave the protagonists in the stories the authority to hunt the beasts and sacrifice them, in the exact same fashion in which Sydney Atherton captures and kills a cat for scientific (and revenge) purposes in *The Beetle*.

However, as Atherton recognises during his experiment: “there is no fathoming the intelligence of what we call the lower animals” (Marsh, 2007:95). Animal intelligence is unfathomable because they are not considered equals. The possibility of a non-human intelligence is fearful, and so animals and gothic monsters alike are repressed and subdued to human rule. However, the thinking hybrid monster is more threatening than the clever animal. Despite the protagonists’ efforts in cataloguing *Dracula* and the *Beetle* as non-human, it cannot be denied that there is so much of their appearance and behaviour that *is* human. Drawing from Bleakley, I want to argue that *fin de siècle* gothic monsters embody the return of the repressed animal within us. *Dracula* and the *Beetle* remind readers of humanity’s irremediably irrationality, uncontrolled emotions, connection with animals, and body physicality (Bleakely, 2000). The rejection against the animalised other is ultimately the fear arising from

confronting the reflection of our animalised self in the mirror.

2.1. The monster under threat: the Sneak Lady

There is however a different portrayal of the hybrid *fin de siècle* monster. This is the case of Vernon Lee’s *Sneak Lady* in her short story *Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady*. The angle from which Vernon Lee approaches the theme of animal hybridity is necessarily different to that of Marsh and Stoker given her condition as a woman writer. Vernon Lee is in fact the pseudonym of Violet Paget, a talented historic critic and writer whose work needed a male name in order to be taken seriously (Evangelista, 2006). Being not only a woman, but a queer woman also, Lee employs the figure of the hybrid as a tool to expand boundaries regarding human identity (Evangelista, 2006). Hence, her monster is a female monster, but one which deconstructs stereotypes of the *femme fatale* as well as discourses of bestiality. Like the snake, her monster is slippery and “resists simple categorizations” by subverting the first dualism of all: the opposition between reason and irrationality, nature and culture (Maxwell and Pulham, 2006: 11).

In order to do so, Lee rewrites the meaning associated with the traditional symbols of the Sun and the Moon. The Sun typically symbolises reason, “reflexion, good judgement [and] will power” and is identified with the masculine principle (Cirlot, 1971: 219). On the other hand, the Moon is connected with women, who are considered “the moon’s tool” given the influence of the lunar cycle upon women’s own menstrual cycle (Dijkstra, 1986: 340). Consequently, the Moon is also understood as a reference to the irrational, the instinctual, and the powers of feelings and the imagination (Cirlot, 1971). In Lee’s story the Moon and the Sun are represented by two different castles and

¹ My emphasis.

their rulers: the Red Palace and the Duke on the one hand, and the Castle of Sparkling Waters and the Snake Lady on the other.

Starting with the “brilliant tomato-coloured [walls] against the blue of the sky”, the Red Palace reminds readers of the big star (Lee, 2006: 189). Also, its imperial Renaissance style, symmetry and designed gardens help identifying the Castle as the realm of order and reason (Lee, 2006). Moreover, “the Duke and the Palace” are “a personification and visible manifestation of each other” (Lee, 2006: 189). Therefore, the Duke is described as a man of “enlightened mind” who disliked medieval literature, imagination, and particularly snakes (Lee, 2006: 184). Curiously enough, the name of the Duchy and the noble family is Luna, which means moon. Actually, there is a member of the Luna family which feels more identified with the realm of the Moon and that is Alberic, the Duke’s grandson. Young Alberic does not feel at ease in the Palace’s authoritarian atmosphere and takes shelter in observing the gothic tapestry hanged in his room. In contrast to the restricted gardens of the palace, his tapestry was a window to untamed, wild nature and animals:

There were bunches of spiky bays, and of acorned oak leaves, sheaves of lilies and heads of poppies, gourds, and apples, and pears [...]. And in each of these plants [...] there were curious live creatures of some sort –various birds [...], butterflies on the lilies, snails, squirrels, mice, and rabbits [...]. Alberic learned the names of most of these plants and creatures from his nurse, who had been a peasant [...] (Lee, 2006: 184-85).

Alberic is the only one to realise the artificiality of the Red Palace, in which gardens there were no living creatures. It is not surprising that when the Duke has his tapestry removed; Alberic’s anger leads him to destroying the substituting tapestry and

going on a hunger strike (Lee, 2006). It is then when the Duke decides to punish Alberic’s behaviour by sending him on exile to the Castle of Sparkling waters.

The Castle of Sparkling is the domain of the Moon and femininity. For example, the views from the Castle of “the deep blue sea [...] speckled with white sails” reminds readers of the moon’s powers over the waters, as well as its power over women (Lee, 2006: 194; Cirlot, 1971). Therefore, according to traditional symbolism, this Castle was supposed to be “the realm of the senses, [...] of darkness, of sex, of bestial desires”, a dangerous place where the “‘civilizing’ rays of the male sun could no longer guide and protect” Alberic (Dijkstra, 1986: 340). However, for Alberic, his stay there does not result a penance, but a beneficial and liberating experience. Firstly, because the Castle turns out to be a real life version of the green, wild world represented in his tapestry. Secondly, because it is also the home of Oriana, the Snake Lady also represented in said tapestry.

Traditionally, snakes have been associated with women in order to catalogue them as *femme fatale*. Drawing from Greek and Christian mythologies, snakes were used to refer to the sinuous beauty and dangerous influence of women upon men (Dijkstra, 1986). Both the animal and the woman associated with it are assigned fictitious characteristics that only exist in a mythological and ideological realm. Thus, for example, the shedding of the snake’s skin is understood a symbol of resurrection and continuous change. Similarly, snakes are said to be vicious, and that viciousness represents women’s evil, animal nature (Cirlot, 1971). This is, without a doubt, the opinion held by the Duke in the story, as Lee tells us that he “disliked snakes and was afraid of the devil” (Lee, 2006: 184). However, as a result of the complete neglect in which Alberic grew up, he never had access to his grandfather’s biblical

and mythological conceptions of snakes and of womanhood. On the contrary, his vision of the world was mainly shaped by a tapestry which celebrated nature and animality. Therefore, when he discovers that the lower part of the beautiful lady in the embroidery was a “green and gold [...] snake’s tail”, Alberic does not fear her, “for he knew nothing about snakes”, but loves her “only the more” (Lee, 2006: 195; 187-88). Consequently, when he faces the Snake Lady in real life, he reacts in the same way, accepting her as she is thanks to his lack of moral prejudice against snakes, ladies, and Snake ladies.

Moreover, Oriana turns out to be a loving and nurturing godmother, nothing like the expectations of viciousness and sexual thirst imposed by cultural stereotypes. On the contrary, the Snake Lady teaches Alberic to play and love, something that his grandfather had forgiven him (Lee, 2006). Under her influence and guidance Alberic becomes a vigorous and handsome man, apart from a “precocious young scholar” (Lee, 2006: 198-99). Not only is he well educated, but he is also physically fit and “the most brilliant of cavaliers” (Lee, 2006: 199). Therefore, for Alberic being in contact with nature, animal life and, more importantly, his animal side does not lead to degeneration, but proves incredibly beneficial for the subject’s personality.

Unfortunately for Alberic, his freedom does not last much longer, as the Duke soon calls him back to the Red Palace in order to force him into an arranged marriage. When Alberic refuses on the grounds of his loyalty towards the Snake Lady Oriana, his grandfather imprisons him in a cell of the Red Palace. Time after, when the Duke comes to visit Alberic in his seclusion, he discovers a sleeping “tame grass snake [...] placidly coiled up” next to him (Lee, 2006: 226). Given the Duke’s fear and hatred of snakes, he has his three servants kill the “The snake!

The devil! Prince Alberic’s pet companion” (Lee, 2006: 226). Despite Alberic’s attempt to save his friend, the Jester “crushed the head of the startled creature” (Lee, 2006: 226). After the assassination of his friend, Alberic refuses to eat, dying little afterwards. The Duke only lives for some months after Alberic’s death, as he is haunted by visions of his own terrible crime. The legend says that “the body of a woman, naked, and miserably disfigured with blows and sabre cuts” was found in the place of the dead snake in Alberic’s cell (Lee, 2006: 227).

By portraying the realm of reason and its main representative, the Duke, as cruel, bestial and restrictive towards Alberic’s identity in contrast to the freeing and beneficial influence that the Snake Lady has over him, Lee subverts misconceptions about nature, animals and femininity. This story shows that not only is beneficial being in contact with one’s own animal nature, but it is also essential for the future development of civilization. By ignoring and repressing the Moon side of human identity, humanity becomes alienated from its environment, imprisoned in the artificial world of the Red Palace. Ultimately, this attitude leads to extinction, as illustrated by the destiny of Alberic’s family, the house of Luna, which eventually becomes extinct (Lee, 2006: 227).

3. Conclusions: hybridity and ideology

Reading *fin de siècle* gothic fiction through the lens of ecocriticism allows deepening the commentary regarding human’s alienation from nature, and from our own animal nature. Through the study of literary reactions to Darwin’s revelatory theories, it is possible to track the origin of western anthropocentric mythologies. Hence, critics seem to agree that the divide between humanity and the environment comes from the constructed dualism culture/nature that originated in the Christian myth and was sustained and

confirmed during the Enlightenment (Bleakley, 2000). This binary supposes that culture possesses more value than nature because it involves the use of intelligence and reason. In other words, nature is understood as a resource, raw material for the creation of human societies, civilization and culture.

More interestingly, an Ecogothic approach allows an insight in how these mythologies were maintained even on the light of Darwin's revolutionary scientific discoveries. Thus, although they equated animals and humans in the subjection to random evolutionary changes, Darwin's treatises did not succeed in changing Victorian mentality. However, they did contribute to raising alarms regarding the future decline of western civilisation. This is thus a period deeply concerned with the identifying and controlling of the degenerate subject, the criminal, the enemy of society. The analysis of turn of the century gothic monsters is a good way to gain insight into the creation of the non-human hybrid and the medicalization of animality. This article has given some examples of the dehumanization of the hybrid in *Dracula* and *The Beetle* as way of maintaining the faith on the superiority of humanity. However, it has also shown that contrary to common belief, there are also critical voices among gothic and fantastic writers, such as the case of Vernon Lee's Snake lady.

Moreover, even within apparently conservative narratives such as *Dracula* and *The Beetle* the reader can find striking contradictions which blur the very categories that the story fights to ascertain. Both *Dracula* and *The Beetle* are denied humanity on the basis of their lack of soul, they are compared to animals, stigmatised as irrational, bestial, and ultimately catalogued as objects or 'things'. However, the male protagonists in the stories find them *uncannily* fearful, which means that their rejection and horror comes from their

similarities with the monster, rather than from their differences. In other words, the monster is fearful not because is an absolute animal other, but because it shares many physical and psychological features with human beings. If they look human and non-human at the same time, *who* are they? One possible reading is that the hybrid is the result of silencing and repressing the animal within us. Rejecting the other, not recognising their subjectivity also shows blindness and negation towards one's own "otherness" and hybridity. As a consequence, the protagonists in the stories also become some half-human other, as their totalising point of view makes them "grow increasingly barbaric and irrational" (Botting, 1996: 151). This brutal behaviour of the protagonists can be seen in Lucy's brutal assassination; as they stabbed her repeatedly with a stake in the heart "whilst the blood [...] welled and spurted up" (Stoker, 1997: 192)

This is also the case of the Duke in *Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady*, whose intransigence and irrational fear of snakes leads to Oriana's murder and provokes the extinction of the Luna family. The disappearance of the Duke's temple of reason, his Palace and Kingdom, might be a cautionary tale about the ultimate extinction of the human race that awaits us if we persist on ignoring first, our animal identity, and second, nature's subjectivity. This is further supported by Lee's positive portrayal of the Snake Lady's realm. This can be seen in Alberic's evolution from neglected child to a "youth of excellent morals, courage, and diligence" under the influence of his hybrid godmother (Lee, 2006: 217). The fact that despite growing up surrounded by nature and animals Alberic also turns out to be a cultured young gentleman shows that being in contact with your own animality and other's is not at odds with seeking cultural knowledge. It is precisely because of the

balance between culture and nature that Alберic’s personality flourishes.

In conclusion, these gothic fictions show that, alienated, culture and reason can be held responsible of unreasonable acts, whereas recognising and integrating the animal in our human identity could result in a better coexistence, both within human society, and on Earth as a whole. In Bleakley’s words: “what if we invite the animal back into our lives [...]? Then we may find that the animal brings a gift of both the beautiful and the sublime” (2000: 35). To do that, it is important to change conceptions of nature and animals as monstrous and as devoid of subjectivity. Nature seems monstrous because it has no aim, because it is unpredictable and ever evolving. However, horror is not the only available response to uncertainty, but “many reactions to the monstrous are possible” (Morton, 2016: 153; 156). Quoting Morton again, “perhaps trying

to establish rigid and thin boundaries between Nature and non-Nature is the monstrous act”; perhaps the key for a future healthier relationship with the environment starts with the destruction of dualisms, and the acceptance of our irremediable hybridity (2016: 147).

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