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**Deconstructing Gendered and Colonial Violence  
in the Re-Imagined Nineteenth-Century: Domestic  
Traumas in Neo-Victorianism on Screen**

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## **Mención**

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A mi pequeña familia gatuna:

Aarón, Dexter y Loki.



We're never gonna get to the root of this problem [accountability] if we don't go into the background... And the root and the cause, because violence in the home is the root of so many issues in this country [The US], in the world. It bleeds into almost every area of society, and we don't even realize it. And violence begets violence. It is a cycle. There are people that can stop the cycle and there are some people [...] that don't want help.

(Wood, "Evan Rachel Wood Speaks Out", 00:03:43-00:04:20).

A lot of people are abused, and not all of those people go on to abuse other people, but some do. And there's a difference between remaining a victim or becoming a survivor. You either have the resources or the mindset to get help and to face these demons, and to want to change, or you go the other way: and you stay in the trauma, you never face it, you never deal with it, you internalize it, you take all the pain that you feel and you perpetuate more and more abuse.

(Wood, *Phoenix Rising*, Part 1, 00:47:47-00:48:24).





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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	13
1.1. Motivation, Objectives and Hypotheses	13
1.2. Corpus of Analysis and Methodology	15
1.3. Structure of the Thesis	19
<b>2. THE VICTORIANS IN THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES: THE NEO-VICTORIAN PROJECT</b>	23
2.1. Definition and Contextualisation of Neo-Victorianism	24
2.2. Neo-Victorianism on Screen	34
2.3. Neo-Victorian Gothic Fiction: Definition and Scope	47
2.4. Neo-Victorian Gothic on Screen	56
<b>3. TRAUMA STUDIES</b>	65
3.1. Definition and Contextualisation of Trauma Studies	65
3.2. Neo-Victorianism and Trauma Studies	85
3.3. Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Trauma Narratives	93
3.4. Neo-Victorian Family Traumas	101
<b>4. HAUNTED AND HAUNTING SPACES: NEO-VICTORIAN HETEROTOPIAS ON SCREEN</b>	111
4.1. The Neo-Victorian House of Horrors: Staging Family Traumas on Screen	114
4.1.1. The House as the Locus of Family Traumas	115
4.1.2. Heterotopias of Crisis and Deviation in Neo-Victorianism on Screen: The Attic, the Asylum and the Orphanage	132
4.2. External Spaces Harboursing Inner Traumas	153
4.2.1. The Neo-Victorian Spectral Metropolis	153
4.2.2. Maritime Heterotopias: Coffin Ships Representing the Black and Green Atlantics	164
<b>5. PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS IN NEO-VICTORIANISM ON SCREEN: MONSTROUS MOTHERS AND ABSENT FATHERS</b>	175
5.1. Adapting Mother Figures for a (Neo-)Victorian Context: Monstrous Motherhood and Subversive Femininity	178
5.2. Perpetuating and Subverting the Ideal of Victorian Masculinity: Absent and Surrogate Fathers	202
<b>6. THE INCEST TROPE IN NEO-VICTORIAN FAMILY TRAUMAS ON SCREEN</b>	217
6.1. Sibling Incest in Neo-Victorianism on Screen	219
6.2. Lesbian Sibling Incest in the Neo-Victorian Family of Choice	235
6.3. Father-Daughter Relations in <i>Penny Dreadful</i>	242
<b>7. VICTIMS BECOME ABUSERS: PERPETRATOR TRAUMA IN NEO-VICTORIANISM ON SCREEN</b>	253
7.1. Imperial Male Perpetrators	255

7.2. Presenting Female Characters as Domestic and Mass Perpetrators: A Misogynistic Portrayal of Former Victims of Gendered Violence	273
<b>8. CONCLUSIONS</b>	283
<b>WORKS CITED</b>	295
<b>APPENDIX</b>	323
<b>RESUMEN</b>	331

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Motivation, Objectives and Hypotheses

Films and TV series have increasingly become a central part of Western culture, fundamental to understanding our contemporary societies –and even ourselves as individuals. At present, it is almost unthinkable to spend a quiet weekend at home without streaming a film or binge-watching a TV series on Netflix. Most casual conversations or Twitter threads nowadays start with a film recommendation or a discussion on the best and worst aspects of the latest show on HBO. As a result, I think it is safe to say that contemporary screen texts currently shape our understanding of our most immediate surroundings, but also of other cultures and societies abroad. This is also true of societies that are far away from us, not only in terms of space, but also of time, such as the Romantics and the Victorians. In fact, most of our conceptualisations and beliefs about the Anglo-American nineteenth-century past are influenced by cinematic depictions of the period, starting with the nostalgic (mis)representation of the Deep South in the classic Hollywood film *Gone with the Wind* (1939).

The turn of the twenty-first century is considered by some as “the new golden age” of television, “characterized by the emergence of highly regarded, well-crafted programs offered by a variety of providers ranging from traditional television networks to online streaming services” (Damico and Quay viii). Popular culture –especially on screen– is embedded in the historical period in which it is produced, so that it arguably represents our contemporary societies, as well as its underlying anxieties, crises and ideologies. As Amy M. Damico, Sara E. Quay contend, “[p]rograms, and television dramas particularly, can push against the status quo, explicitly (or implicitly) advocate for social change, frame challenges citizens are facing in new ways, or highlight flaws in institutions that govern viewers’ lives” (x). Nonetheless, they can also misguide the audience’s understanding of some ideological aspects in the show, or even try to push their political agenda by misrepresenting some characters or situations –especially in terms of race and gender.

Female characters used to be portrayed in classic Hollywood films as either passive agents and damsels in distress –thus embodying the ‘proper’ woman archetype– or as *femmes fatales*, whose active sexuality was regarded as inappropriate, so that they were usually victim-blamed or slut-shamed by both the audience and other characters in the film itself. Over the last decade, however, and thanks in part to the Me Too movement,

they are increasingly being depicted as heroines and strong-willed characters, not only in TV dramas, but also in more commercial screen texts, such as superhero movies.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Anglo-American films and TV series are also offering a platform to denounce domestic and gender-based violence, so that female viewers that might be suffering from similar experiences can see themselves reflected on screen. Finally, these contemporary shows also represent alternative family models –to account for the different family units that are possible in our society at present, apart from the traditional, nuclear one–, or varied understandings of both femininity and motherhood –even though these latter portrayals are not always positive.

Neo-Victorian screen texts are oriented towards both the nineteenth-century past and our present, but also towards the future. Indeed, they sometimes offer a presentist portrayal of the Victorian past so as to force the director's or producer's political agendas on the audience. As a result, part of this audience –particularly women– might be misled into embracing some of the anti-feminist undertones of these screen texts. The foci of this PhD thesis are gendered traumas –i.e., traumatic situations that people experience on account of their gender– that occur within the confines of the nuclear (neo-)Victorian family. Gendered family traumas might include intimate partner violence (IPV) or domestic violence, incest, child and psychological abuse, as well as sleep or food deprivation. What all these types of abuse have in common is that they usually take place in the nuclear family and are typically exerted by a man against his female partner or their children. The main aim of this PhD thesis is to explore the manner in which these gender-based traumas are portrayed in 2010s neo-Victorian screen texts.

My starting hypothesis is that these neo-Victorian screen works seem to offer a feminist representation of gender-based traumas within the traditional nuclear family and that their heroines subvert Victorian gender conventions. Nonetheless, these gender transgressions are eventually punished in the series, displaying a postfeminist agenda to manipulate the audience into accepting the obsolescence of feminist activism. If this hypothesis were to be confirmed, the corpus of screen texts under analysis could be expanded in future publications. It would include similar works that also make use of postfeminist manipulations in order to mislead the audience.

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<sup>1</sup> The Marvel film *Captain Marvel* (dir. Anna Boden, Ryan Fleck 2019) follows a young woman who is considered to be the most powerful superheroine of all times. Likewise, the release of future films and TV series focusing on the female versions of traditionally male superheroes, such as *Hulk*, *Thor* or *Black Panther*, have already been announced by Disney.

### 1.2. Corpus of Analysis and Methodology

Family is a central institution in both Victorian and contemporary societies. Since the turn of the eighteenth century, the ‘proper’ model of family has been the nuclear one –made up of a heteronormative couple, a husband and a wife, and their children. Nonetheless, this conventional family unit has been proven to be flawed and dysfunctional at times. It often creates monstrous mothers and absent fathers, whose violent and tyrannical behaviours have a decisive impact on their children’s development as adults. This is so because they sometimes cannot help continuing that very same cycle of violence against other individuals. The family house is usually the space that stages this sort of domestic violence, which usually triggers sexual ‘deviations’, most notably sibling or parent-child relationships. Indeed, twenty-first century neo-Victorian screen texts explore these family traumas in order to challenge the assumption that the nuclear family is the only natural and normal family unit. Likewise, it also strives to support new ways of conceiving family life –most notably surrogate mother/fatherhood, adoption, single parenthood, etc.

The screen texts that have been selected to be part of my corpus of analysis follow the abovementioned pattern, as they are all neo-Victorian texts that explore gendered traumas within the nuclear family, as well as its imminent collapse and fragmentation. Thus, I consider them optimal texts to be compared and analysed from the perspective of trauma studies in order to challenge the myth of the ideal nuclear family. Likewise, another aspect that they have in common is that they all seemingly display a feminist drive at first, but it is eventually curtailed, as the female characters are chastised for their gender transgressions.

Even though the classification of *Taboo* as a neo-Victorian text might be regarded by some as problematic, given that the series is set in the 1810s –some years before Queen Victoria’s ascension to the throne–, I understand the term ‘neo-Victorian’ in its broadest and most inclusive form. As I explain in the next chapter, some scholars contend that neo-Victorian writings should not be defined chronologically, but rather, aesthetically –i.e., taking into consideration common stylistic traits, plots and tropes. Thus, neo-Victorian fiction would include adaptations from “Romantic and pre-war fiction, ignoring historical data like the birth and death of the Queen” (Kirchknopf 55). This broad definition justifies my decision to include the TV series *Taboo* in my corpus of analysis. The series explores (neo-)Victorian topics that are common to the other three screen texts that complete this corpus, namely a revisitation of Imperial Gothic and postcolonial (mis)representations;

as well as the collapse of the nuclear family and its recurrent traumas and dysfunctionalities –such as incest, the house as the locus of family trauma, a monstrous mother and absent father.

The screen texts under analysis in this PhD thesis –in the chronological order in which they were released– are the following: John Logan’s *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016), Guillermo del Toro’s *Crimson Peak* (2015), Steven Knight, Tom Hardy and Chips Hardy’s *Taboo* (2017-present) and René Echevarria and Travis Beacham’s *Carnival Row* (2019-present). In order to prove the similarities and common themes of these neo-Victorian Gothic screen texts, I am going to briefly summarise the plot and main tropes that they explore.

First, *Crimson Peak* follows Edith Cushing, a young middle-class woman hailing from Buffalo (New York) in 1901, the end of the Victorian era.<sup>2</sup> Edith has always believed in the existence of ghosts, ever since her mother died of black cholera and her spirit paid her a visit when she was a little girl. As an adult, she tries to work through the trauma of her mother’s death by writing ghost stories. Nonetheless, she finds it difficult to have them published, as her editor believes that a woman should only write love stories. Soon, Edith falls in love with Sir Thomas Sharpe, an impoverished British baronet. Sir Thomas has arrived in America with the purpose of raising some capital for a machine that will help him modernise his family mines.

After her father is found dead, Edith decides to marry Sir Thomas and move with him and his sister, Lucille, to their family estate in northern England. There, she will be haunted by the ghosts of Thomas’s previous and secret wives –other rich heiresses who had been seduced by the baronet because of their money. When they were no longer useful, Lucille poisoned them and hid their bodies in the basement of the mansion. Edith also finds out that the Sharpe siblings have been engaged in an incestuous relationship ever since they were children, as a coping mechanism for their mother’s physical and psychological abuse. When their mother found out about their romance, Lucille stabbed her in the head with a machete.

After Edith learns about the siblings’ history of domestic violence, she tries to flee from the house with the help of her friend, Dr Alan McMichael. However, Lucille forces her brother to stab the doctor, leaving Edith unprotected. Sir Thomas then admits to Lucille that he has fallen in love with Edith, and tries to convince her that they can create

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on these screen texts, see the Appendix.



a new family with her. Feeling betrayed by her brother, she kills him, and then tries to do the same to Edith. With the help of Sir Thomas's ghost, however, Edith manages to kill her, before she runs away from the Sharpe estate with a fatally wounded Dr McMichael. Lucille's ghost is condemned to spend all eternity alone in her family's crumbling house.

Second, *Penny Dreadful* is a neo-Victorian Gothic series made up of three seasons and created by John Logan for Showtime and Sky. It is set in London in the 1890s and could be considered an adaptive collage of a number of Victorian intertexts, including Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Oscar Wilde's *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* (1890), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus* (1818), Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), and some famous penny dreadfuls, such as James Malcolm Rymer and Thomas Peckett Prest's *Varney the Vampire or The Feast of Blood* (1845).

The series follows Vanessa Ives, an independent and strong-minded medium with supernatural abilities, who is haunted by two daemonic brothers: Lucifer and Dracula. According to an Egyptian prophecy, if Vanessa –the reincarnation of the goddess Amunet– is seduced by either of these brothers, humanity will be condemned to a perpetual apocalypse. The first season of the series focuses on Vanessa and Sir Malcolm Murray, who recruit a group of unlike detectives to find his daughter Mina –an appropriation of Stoker's character in *Dracula*. However, upon finding her, they realise that she is beyond salvation, so Sir Malcolm has to kill her. Season 2 introduces new supernatural creatures: a coven of witches, who are under the patriarchal command of Lucifer. The group manages to vanquish them in the end, but then have to go their separate ways. In Season 3, Vanessa is seduced by Dracula, the master of vampires, but she finally decides to sacrifice herself in order to defeat him. Throughout the series, gendered and family traumas are explored, and the concept of family of choice is highly supported. Nonetheless, despite the show's apparent feminist drive, its main female characters are either killed or ostracised in the end.

Third, *Taboo* is a British TV series written by Tom Hardy, Steven Knight and Edward John 'Chips' Hardy, and produced by Scott Free London and Hardy Son & Baker for the BBC. The main cast includes Tom Hardy as the male protagonist, James Delaney, Oona Chaplin as Zilpha Delaney, his half-sister and lover, and Jonathan Pryce as Sir Stuart Strange, Chairman of the East India Company. A second season of the show was announced in March 2017, but its production has been continuously delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, among other factors ("Everything we Need to Know").

*Taboo* follows James Delaney, a British former slave trader who returns to London after his father dies. The series is set during the 1812 War between the US and the UK, and it explores the underbelly of nineteenth-century London, especially the misery of the working classes, prostitution and child exploitation, as well as political intrigues. It also touches upon the concepts of slave trade and the Middle Passage, particularly through James's flashbacks and hallucinations. One of the main aspects that I explore in *Taboo* is the trope of monstrous motherhood, sibling incest and, especially, the concept of perpetrator trauma. As I contend in Chapter 7, James is portrayed as an ambivalent perpetrator in the series. On the one hand, he seems to have PTSD symptoms from his time as a slave trader and feels responsible for his past actions. On the other hand, he plans to continue his imperial expansions in the Pacific coast of North America.

Finally, *Carnival Row* is an American TV series created by René Echevarria and Travis Beacham for Amazon Studios. The show is regarded as “a steampunk fantasy noir” (Fraser par. 2), leaning into Victorian aesthetics, history and culture. *Carnival Row* allegorically addresses the precarious racial relations between white and ethnic collectives in the British Empire. The show is set in a fantastically reimaged Victorian England to help us work through our ambiguous relationship with the empire and its legacies. It constructs mythological creatures –such as fairies, werewolves, centaurs or kobolds– as a metaphor for the racial ‘Other’ in a fantastical Victorian London known as “The Burgue”.

The series stars Orlando Bloom and Cara Delevingne as a half-human police inspector and a fairy refugee, respectively. Philo, the male protagonist, is a ‘half-blood’ man –the result of an interspecies relationship between a human and a mythological creature– but has been passing as human his whole life. Likewise, the series also explores gendered and family traumas. First, through Philo, as he was abandoned as a baby in a human orphanage. He does not find out who his parents are until much later in his life. Second, through Sophie Longerbane, the daughter of one of The Burgue’s main human politicians. Finally, the series also examines these traumas through Imogen Spurnrose, an impoverished upper-middle-class human lady that evolves from being the Victorian ‘Angel of the House’ to a ‘fallen woman’.

I believe that this discussion of the common topics and ideas shared by the screen texts under analysis validates my selection of them. Moreover, it also justifies my decision to apply a transversal or comparative analysis of the texts, where each chapter focuses on a common aspect of traumas within the nuclear family. Applying a cross-sectional

analysis, rather than examining each screen text in separate chapters, allows me to prevent unnecessary repetitions of common themes or features between them. In fact, I think that arranging the different chapters and carrying out the comparative analysis in this way will help me bring to the fore the common patterns and (mis)representations of gendered traumas in neo-Victorian Gothic on screen.

### 1.3. Structure of the Thesis

This PhD thesis is organised in eight thematic chapters, including the present one. Here, the motivation of the study, as well as its starting hypotheses, general objectives, justification of the corpus of analysis and discussion of the thesis's structure are presented. The remaining seven chapters reflect each and every step of my research on gender-based traumas in the (neo-)Victorian nuclear family.

Chapter 2 focuses on the main theoretical tenets of neo-Victorianism. First, in section 2.1., I offer the several –and, sometimes, opposing– definitions that have emerged for the label ‘neo-Victorian’ ever since its inception. I also touch upon the terminological debate of this discipline, from its postmodern origins to its current position in both the fields of literary and cultural studies. Finally, I also discuss the different temporal and spatial contextualisations of the neo-Victorian literary and screen texts. In section 2.2., I discuss the main characteristics of neo-Victorianism on screen, mainly following the ideas and findings presented by Antonija Primorac in her monograph, *Neo-Victorianism on Screen: Postfeminism and Contemporary Adaptations of Victorian Women* (2018). In section 2.3., I trace back the origins of one of the most exploited genres in neo-Victorianism –i.e., the Gothic– to Victorian Gothic literature, and discuss how it is usually adapted and appropriated in contemporary (screen) texts. In section 2.4., I offer an overview of neo-Victorian Gothic –or horror– on screen, from its origins to our present.

Chapter 3 offers a detailed discussion of the field of trauma studies, the critical approach that I implement in my corpus of analysis. In section 3.1., I offer an overview of trauma studies, including various definitions, history and contextualisation of the discipline –both in Psychiatry and the Humanities. At the end of this section, I also provide a brief introduction to the concept of ‘perpetrator trauma’. Then, in section 3.2., I establish the synergy between neo-Victorian and trauma studies, which is very common, particularly in neo-Victorian Gothic fiction. In section 3.3., I discuss one of the most recurrent tropes in neo-Victorian Gothic narratives (of trauma), that of haunting and spectrality. Here, I discuss the main theories on the topic put forward by Derrida and

Abraham and Torok. Finally, section 4.1. introduces one of the main topics explored in this PhD thesis: (neo-)Victorian family traumas, especially those that affect women on account of their gender.

Chapter 4 is the first chapter of analysis of this PhD thesis and the lengthiest one. It explores the genderisation and racialisation of spaces through the Foucauldian concept of heterotopias. This chapter is divided into two main sections. 4.1. focuses on indoor heterotopias of crisis and deviation, while subsection 4.2. deals with outdoor heterotopias. These are, in turn, subdivided into two different subsections, each. In 4.1.1., I scrutinise how the family house is usually portrayed in neo-Victorianism on screen as an indoor space of confinement and as the locus of gendered traumas within the nuclear family. In subsection 4.1.2., I first examine how the domestic space of the attic tends to be portrayed as the locus of patriarchal entrapment in (neo-)Victorian fiction, and then I analyse the manner in which some public spaces –the asylum and the orphanage– act as the sites of family trauma outside the family home. In other words, how they become heterotopias of crisis and deviation.

In subsection 4.2.2., I explore the concept of heterochrony in neo-Victorianism on screen through the recurrent reimagination of the city of London in my corpus of analysis. As I contend here, the appropriation of nineteenth-century cities and their portrayal as sites of memory and heritage, but also as the centre of Gothic horror, are inspired by Victorian representations of the city of London. This is so because Victorian cities continue to haunt contemporary metropolises (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Cities” 1). Thus, in this subsection I examine how 1800s London –and its fantastical adaptation through *The Burgue* in *Carnival Row*– becomes the spectral space where supernatural outcasts meet their tragic fate in the screen texts under analysis. Finally, subsection 4.2.2. focuses on the Foucauldian heterotopia of the ship, which, in neo-Victorian fiction, acquires new meanings due to its intimate relation with the Atlantic Ocean. Indeed, the massive deaths experienced by ethnic characters on the grounds of slavery and forced migration are encapsulated in the heterotopia of the “coffin ship”, in both *Carnival Row* and *Taboo*. This concept is particularly examined in relation to the massive transatlantic migration during Ireland’s Great Famine (1845-1852), but also to slave trade in the Middle Passage. However, as I contend in this subsection, it might also have a presentist agenda in neo-Victorian fiction, as it evokes contemporary diasporas experienced by individuals forced to leave their countries of origin. *Taboo* and *Carnival Row* touch upon the topics of racism, immigration and slavery, which are embodied in

the maritime heterotopia of the ship, both as a place of death and as the passage from freedom to slavery.

In Chapter 5, I focus on the manner in which parent-child relationships are portrayed in my corpus of analysis. Section 5.1. discusses the frequent (neo-)Victorian trope of monstrous and subversive motherhood. Moreover, here I contend that the female characters present in the screen texts under analysis are appropriations of mothers and daughters from both classical and biblical myths –e.g., Demeter and Persephone, Medea or the biblical Virgin Mary and her counterpart, Mary Magdalene–, who defied the gender conventions traditionally imposed on women. As I argue in this section, in transferring these classical characters to a neo-Victorian context, the creators of these screen texts are exploring the matrilineal connections between ancient, Victorian and contemporary women. In 5.2., I analyse another frequent trope in (neo-)Victorianism, that of absent fathers. I also explore the concepts of surrogate motherhood and fatherhood, which bring to the forefront contemporary anxieties about the collapse of the nuclear family with the rise of new family models, such as queer families, surrogate mother/fatherhood, adoption or single mother/fatherhood.

Chapter 6 deals with the incest trope, mainly following Mark Llewellyn's ("Perfectly Innocent") three-fold approach to neo-Victorian incest narratives –based on ethics, aesthetics and psychoanalysis. In section 6.1., I focus on the most frequent type of incest in my corpus of analysis: sibling incest, which is exploited in two different ways. First, the most common relationship is that between a (half-)brother and a (half-)sister, as it is present in all the texts in my corpus. Second, there is a non-heteronormative relationship between two sisters of choice: Mina Murray and Vanessa Ives in *Penny Dreadful*. Thus, section 6.2. is devoted to lesbian incest. Finally, *Penny Dreadful* also explores father-daughter relations, the type of incest explored in 6.3. Even though the characters involved in these incestuous relationships are not blood-related, they are surrogate fathers and daughters, as I contend in Chapter 5.

Chapter 7 scrutinises the concept of perpetrator trauma in the texts under analysis. Here, I demonstrate that all the characters that play the role of victimisers are usually former victims of child or domestic violence, who have not been able to overcome that trauma. In section 7.1., I focus on imperial male perpetrators, particularly Sir Malcolm and Ethan in *Penny Dreadful*, James in *Taboo*, and Philo in *Carnival Row*. Here, I argue that the ambiguous portrayal of these male characters further demonstrates the whitewashed and patriarchal undertones of the screen texts under analysis. Section 7.2.

discusses the misogynist and postfeminist depiction of female mass and domestic perpetrators, namely Lucille in *Crimson Peak*, Lily and Vanessa in *Penny Dreadful* and Sophie in *Carnival Row*.

Finally, Chapter 8 summarises the main ideas, motivations and findings of this PhD thesis. It presents the general and specific conclusions that have been reached throughout the different chapters. At the end of these conclusions, I also point out the potential further lines of research that could follow this PhD thesis. In this project, I hope to demonstrate that neo-Victorian Gothic texts on screen have a postfeminist component, whereby the heroines are first portrayed as seemingly empowered and transgressive, only to be punished for their gender transgressions in the end. As I argue throughout this thesis, this negative portrayal of subversive women might influence female viewers, as they might be led to believe that attempting to subvert the patriarchal status quo can be dangerous or pointless. As a result, these screen texts might actually be doing a disservice to the feminist cause, despite their seemingly feminist agenda.

Likewise, the ambiguous depiction of both gendered and racial traumas within the confines of the nuclear family further proves the postfeminist and whitewashed agenda of contemporary directors, in spite of their apparent inclusive activism. Finally, I also intend to prove that neo-Victorianism on screen usually displays a strong presentist drive.<sup>3</sup> This is particularly noticeable in the manner in which it explores contemporary anxieties regarding the collapse of the traditional nuclear family, and its support for alternative family units. With these findings, I expect to contribute to the current and ongoing debates on neo-Victorian (mis)representations of female characters, alternative family models and gender ideologies, both in the big and small screens.

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<sup>3</sup> Here the term ‘presentist’ is applied following Kohlke’s understanding of the deliberate changes or anachronisms made by neo-Victorian creators in the representation of the Victorian past in order to serve their (contemporary) political agendas (“The Lures of Neo-Victorianism Presentism” 2).

## 2. THE VICTORIANS IN THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES: THE NEO-VICTORIAN PROJECT

Contemporary writers and directors revisit the nineteenth century in order to challenge both our popular beliefs and prejudices about the period. They bring to the fore characters that were marginalised and silenced in both literature and historical accounts on the grounds of their gender, class, sexual orientation or ethnicity. Moreover, neo-Victorian fiction allows contemporary audiences to bear after-witness to the traumas experienced by these marginalised subjects so that they can establish a sense of empathy towards them. These audiences might find a link between the traumatic events depicted in neo-Victorianism and those they might be experiencing at present. This latter aspect can be deeply enriching from an ethical perspective, as it establishes a dialogical relationship between the Victorian era and the present, offering a fictional space where audiences can address contemporary anxieties that were also salient in the nineteenth century. Since the last decades of the twentieth century, this revisionist and self-reflexive effort on the part of neo-Victorian creators has been attaining critical acclaim, together with mainstream success, particularly in the case of some of the neo-Victorian screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis: *Penny Dreadful*, *Crimson Peak*, *Taboo* and *Carnival Row*.

In this chapter I provide an overview of neo-Victorian studies and neo-Victorianism on screen. In Section 2.1. I offer an in-depth contextualisation of the neo-Victorian project, as well as the main theoretical tenets, terminology and historical background of neo-Victorian fiction. In Section 2.2 I focus on neo-Victorianism on screen, with especial attention to previous studies tackling filmic and TV adaptations and appropriations of Victorian literature, history and culture. Moreover, in this section I argue that neo-Victorianism on screen has achieved ongoing critical praise during the last decade, pushing through the critical resistance towards popular culture that characterised neo-Victorianism in its early stages. In Section 2.3. I explore a subgenre of neo-Victorianism that has been gathering momentum in the last decades, both in literary and visual representations of the Victorian era: neo-Victorian Gothic. All the neo-Victorian screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis belong to this subgenre. Finally, in Section 2.4. I provide a brief overview of Neo-Victorian Gothic on screen, especially in terms of how early horror cinema has both shaped our contemporary understanding of Victorian Gothic literature and influenced neo-Victorian visual representations at present.

### 2.1. Definition and Contextualisation of Neo-Victorianism

The neo-Victorian project is a recent phenomenon departing from postmodernism, whose traits, aims and scope are still being delimited by the academic community. Neo-Victorianism is considered to have originated from historiographic metafiction, a term coined by Linda Hutcheon in her pioneering work *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988). This term encompasses “those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages” (5). In other words, historiographic metafiction refers to historical fiction that draws attention to its status as a human artefact while simultaneously rewriting the events from the past in order to make the audience reflect on them. Given that contemporary reimaginings of the nineteenth century engage with history and encourage their audience to rethink their conceptions about the period, they are clear examples of historiographic metafiction (60).

By contrast, Frederic Jameson labelled postmodern revisions of history a form of “nostalgia” that resulted in “a consequent weakening of historicity” (6). For him, the current obsession with the Victorian past would be characterised by an aesthetic and stylistic appeal, with a lack of understanding of the broader historical context of the period. However, Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham contend that Jameson’s own comments on the postmodern fascination with the past make the term “nostalgia” inadequate to account for “our postmodern engagement with history” (xii) in the case of neo-Victorianism. This is so because we look back to the nineteenth-century past with a retrospective and self-reflexive drive. Along the same lines, Dana Shiller states that neo-Victorian fiction challenges Jameson’s views on postmodernism by taking “a revisionist approach” and recovering not merely the aesthetic aspects of bygone periods, but also its socio-political and cultural concerns (540). Likewise, Cora Kaplan wonders whether our present fascination with all things Victorian might be more than mere nostalgia for “a past that never was” (3). She argues that ‘Victoriana’ should include a self-reflexive reimagining of nineteenth-century narratives with the purpose of bringing the silenced stories of ethnic or sexual minorities to the fore, including queer, colonised and female subjects, among others. In doing so, neo-Victorian writers would be challenging “the conventional understandings of the historical itself”. As a result, our contemporary obsession with Victoriana might be a sign that ‘history’ as a concept has not been lost, but has rather become “permanently restless and unsettled” (Kaplan 3).



Even though in recent years ‘neo-Victorianism’ has emerged as the preferred term to refer to contemporary rewritings of the Victorian period, there was a terminology debate in the early stages of the field. Shiller offered the term ‘neo-Victorian’, which stresses the postmodernist nature of the discipline, as well as its reminiscence of the Victorian past (1). Sally Shuttleworth preferred the label ‘retro-Victorian’, which points to a sense of nostalgia that some contemporary texts set in the nineteenth century overtly display. However, Daniel Candel Bormann rejected the prefix ‘retro-’, as the genre arguably places too much emphasis on the nineteenth-century past while throwing the present into the background (61). Cora Kaplan adopted ‘Victoriana’, which in the 1960s referred to “the collectible remnants of material culture” from the Victorian era (2), but by the late 1970s broadened its scope to include a wide range of cultural evocations and rewritings of the nineteenth century.

John Kucich and Dianne F. Sadoff introduced ‘post-Victorian’ to refer to the “historical continuity and disruption in late postmodernism’s returns to the nineteenth century” (Davies 1). Similarly, Kirchknopf pointed to the postmodern historical and aesthetic characteristics of the genre, which, for her did “not yet seem to exhibit enough distinctive features that would allow its separation from the current postmodern context” (59). ‘Faux-Victorian’ and ‘pseudo-Victorian’ are the least used terms to refer to this type of fiction, given that they hint at the genre’s lack of authenticity when compared to its literary forerunner. These terms establish a relationship between the Victorian text and the modern adaptation as “one between ‘original’ and ‘copy’”, and they might even establish a hierarchical relationship between contemporary and Victorian fiction, where the former would be considered of lower value (Heiberg Madsen 113). Finally, Julian Wolfreys formulated the label ‘Victoriography’, a quite broad term to include all kinds of Victorian rewritings, literary or otherwise (*Victoriographies*). Most critics today agree that, notwithstanding the prefix we attach to the term ‘Victorian’, postmodern rewritings of the nineteenth century necessarily must serve and reflect both the present (‘neo-’) and the past (‘Victorian’) (Heiberg Madsen 114). In this PhD thesis, I adopt the term ‘neo-Victorian’ to define the screen adaptations that make up my corpus of analysis, as they explore both nineteenth-century and contemporary anxieties in terms of gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity and (dis)ability, among others.

With regard to the definitions of neo-Victorianism, self-reflexivity seems to be “the *conditio sine qua non*” that most scholars agree on (Boehm-Schnitker 85). Marie-Luise Kohlke contends that in order to be considered neo-Victorian, a text must present

itself as “cultural happening, as socio-political critique, as reinvigorated historical consciousness, as memory work, as critical interface between the present and past” (Kohlke, “Introduction: Speculations” 1).

Along the same lines, Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn argue that neo-Victorian texts should “in some respect be *self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians*” (4, emphasis in original). In other words, neo-Victorian fiction should critically engage with the Victorian era, rather than merely displaying a sense of nostalgia or clumsily imitating the plots of this bygone era. However, Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss warn that this emphasis on self-reflexivity aims for a clear-cut distinction between neo-Victorianism and other historical fiction set in the nineteenth century, which might lead to the canonisation of the field (3). This might replicate a conservative division between highbrow and lowbrow literature, as in the case of Victorian fiction.

Thus, Kohlke offers a more inclusive conceptualisation of the field. She argues that neo-Victorianism should be used as an “integrative umbrella term to encompass virtually all historical fiction related to the nineteenth century, irrespective of authors’ or characters’ nationalities, the plots’ geographical settings, the language of composition or, indeed, the extent of narratives’ self-consciousness, postmodernism, adaptivity or otherwise” (“Mining the Neo-Victorian Vein” 27). Kohlke includes in her definition fiction that culturally and critically revisits the nineteenth century with the purpose of critiquing, but also imagining what we would have wanted the period to be like regarding questions of “national identity, the struggle for symbolic restorative justice, and indulgence in escapist exoticism” (“Mining the Neo-Victorian Vein 21). Due to this inclusive trend in neo-Victorian fiction, Kirchknopf states that its literary referents can range from early nineteenth-century writers –such as Jane Austen or the Romantics– through turn-of-the-century authors to the modernists. Thus, the periodisation of both the nineteenth-century originals and their rewritings is not constructed chronologically, but rather aesthetically, so that the term ‘Victorian’ “comprises Romantic and pre-war fiction, ignoring historical data like the birth and death of the Queen” (Kirchknopf 55). This is why I consider one of the TV series analysed in this thesis, *Taboo*, as neo-Victorian, despite the fact that it is set in 1814 –the Georgian era, rather than the Victorian one.

In any event, self-reflexivity remains a central characteristic to the development and consolidation of the field, particularly in the case of postcolonial neo-Victorianism (Boehm-Schnitker 86). Although Llewellyn and Heilmann warn that an expansion of the

field to a global scale might replicate imperialist and colonising policies, as “the replacement –or displacement– of the term ‘neo-Victorianism’ into international and global contexts [...] [suggests] an overarching narrative that erases the specificities of cultural memory and inculcates a homogenisation of heritage” (26). This might imply a loss of cultural specificity on the part of formerly colonised countries. Nonetheless, Antonija Primorac and Monika Pietrzak-Franger reject the possibility that a transnational expansion of the canon might be reductionist, as “‘neo-Victorian’ *can go* global to reference new contexts and geographies of Victorian texts’ and contexts’ engagement with local, inter- and transnational nineteenth-century pasts without necessarily being reductionist or immediately risking a homogenising, imperialist perspective” (7, emphasis in original). While the neo-Victorian screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis display a self-reflexive and critical drive, they fail to offer a solid transnational perspective, as they all focus on the British context –despite the presence of the colonies in the background– and mostly Western characters.

On a different note, one of the central characteristics of neo-Victorian fiction is the tension between the Victorian past and the present time. Louisa Hadley asserts that neo-Victorianism occupies a precarious position between these temporal realities, given that it is fiction created in our contemporary period, but echoing a previous one (5). Critics tend to prioritise the context of production in detriment of the era that is depicted in the texts. However, Hadley contends that historical fiction is defined by both periods, adopting a “dual approach” that includes a double concern for both the past and the present. This duality is most notably displayed in texts which combine events taking place in both the historical period that is being revisited and its contemporary context (6), although it is also present in all types of neo-Victorian fiction. Likewise, Kohlke states that neo-Victorian fiction needs to acknowledge both its nineteenth-century referents and its current context of production, as well as to “reflect on the present *in tandem with* – rather than *at the expense of*–the past” (“The Lures of Neo-Victorianism Presentism” 1).

Kohlke also underlines the ‘presentist’ component of neo-Victorian rewritings as one of its most defining characteristics, which might involve incorporating deliberate changes in the past that serve obscure political agendas of contemporary creators. In fact, detractors of presentism contend that this sort of fiction forces on its audience representations of the past that help corroborate their contemporary beliefs or ideologies (“The Lures of Neo-Victorianism Presentism” 3). In the case of neo-Victorian fiction, presentism could simplify or misrepresent the complexities of Victorian culture in order

to satisfy the audience's expectations and to confirm their stereotypes about the period. This is usually the case in neo-Victorian works that exaggerate Victorian sexual repression, so that, by contrast, we see ourselves as highly sexually liberated. This misrepresentation of the Victorians correlates with Michel Foucault's repressive hypothesis. If we see Victorian sexuality as repressed, "then the fact that one is speaking about it [now] has the appearance of a deliberate transgression" (Foucault, "The History of Sexuality" 6), so that we see ourselves as freed from Victorian prudishness. As I argue in this PhD thesis, this is the case of the TV series *Penny Dreadful*, which exaggerates Victorian sexual repression, so that the oversexualisation of its female characters can be perceived as empowering and liberating in the present context of postfeminism.

Regarding the chronology of neo-Victorianism, the end of Queen Victoria's reign marked the beginning of the so-called 'post-Victorian' fiction (Heilmann and Llewellyn 8). However, it was not until the 1960s that the two novels that are considered to be the forerunners of neo-Victorianism were published: Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) –a postcolonial reimagining of Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847)– and John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969).<sup>4</sup> In fact, Kaplan claims that our obsession with all things Victorian "has been a British postwar vogue which shows no signs of exhaustion" (2). Nonetheless, it was actually during the 1990s, with the publication of A. S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* in 1990 and its screen adaptation in 2002, that neo-Victorianism reached mainstream popularity. Kaplan also points to the success of neo-Victorian novels such as Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet*, *Affinity* and *Fingersmith* (1999-2003), as well as television and film adaptations that include Dickens's *Bleak House* (2005) and Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (2004), which greatly contributed to the relevance of the field in the 1990s and the 2000s.<sup>5</sup> Other successful neo-Victorian novels that have

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<sup>4</sup> There are other Victorian rewritings that predate these pioneering works, most notably Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938) –which could be considered as another reimagining of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847)–, Caryl Brahms and S.J. Simon's *Don't, Mr. Disraeli* (1940), Marghanita Laski's *The Victorian Chaise-Longue* (1953), Mary Dunn's *Lady Addle Remembers* (1936) and Patrick Hamilton's *Fanny by Gaslight* (1938).

<sup>5</sup> It is also worth mentioning the cultural and fan phenomenon known as 'Austenmania', which originated during the 1990s around the figure of Jane Austen and her novels, especially after the BBC 1995 screen adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). This six-part miniseries is still considered to be the most successful adaptation of Jane Austen's novels to date, as it reimagined "the novel in a thickly veiled sex-romp format" and produced another fan phenomenon named "Darcymania" by the press (Cartmell 9). Due to Austen's increasing popularity, many other screen adaptations of her novels have proliferated in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, as well as rewritings in book form, biopic films such as *Becoming Jane* (2007) or *Miss Austen Regrets* (2008), curated guided tours in Bath, and other cultural appropriations of her name (Pereira 50). All these reimaginings arguably derive from a sense of nostalgia and a romanticised view of the Regency era. This contributes to blur the chronological delimitations of the Victorian era by conflating it with other time frames from the long nineteenth century, so that adaptations

attained canonical status are David Lodge's *Nice Work* (1988), or Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002). As a result, the late 1980s and the early 2000 are considered as a turning point in the history of neo-Victorian fiction (Hadley 2).

Similarly, neo-Victorian literature by female authors experienced a revival from the mid-1980s to the 1990s. This feminist interest in the nineteenth century might stem from a wish to explore women's challenge of patriarchal discourse during the Victorian era. Some novels from the period that intersected historical fiction with feminist concerns include Angela Carter's *Night at the Circus* (1984), Michèle Roberts's *In the Red Kitchen* (1990), Valerie Martin's *Mary Reilly* (1990) and Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996). These novels serve one of the main purposes of neo-Victorian fiction: bring to the forefront the narratives of those who have been marginalised by Victorian discourse – both in fictional and historical accounts. In doing so, they establish a chronological bridge between the nineteenth century past and the present, which might “challenge the readers’ assumptions about historical reality” and reclaim an alternative “female history” (Heiberg Madsen 101).

At an academic level, neo-Victorian fiction used to be understood either in relation to its postmodern context of production, or as a mere extension of Victorian literature, rather than a literary genre “in its own right” (Hadley 5). However, in recent years, neo-Victorian fiction has been acknowledged as a solid academic field that requires its very own critical evaluation. Chris Louttit and Erin Louttit trace back the consolidation of “mainstream or ‘literary’ neo-Victorian studies” (2) to a wide range of post-2000 conferences and publications, as well as to the founding of the journal of *Neo-Victorian Studies* in 2008. At this point, neo-Victorian scholars were immersed in the abovementioned terminological debate, but agreed on the fact that the genre needed to be defined and established in the academic community. About a decade earlier, Diane F. Sadoff and John Kucich had called for the need to establish the neo-Victorian project in academia in order to acknowledge its impact in the fields of literary and cultural studies. The relationship between neo-Victorianism and academia is reflected in the way neo-Victorian fiction has followed the developments in gender studies –as in the case of Sarah Waters's works, highly influenced by queer theory– as well as in other scholarly fields, such as postcolonial, disability or diaspora studies.

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and appropriations of Austen and some of her contemporaries are considered by some as neo-Victorian (Hadley 11).

Even though neo-Victorian texts actively focus on the Victorian era, the ways in which they display this engagement might greatly vary. Some of them explicitly show their relationship with the nineteenth century by mediating it “through Victorian literature”, while others appropriate Victorian conventions (Hadley 4). In other cases, neo-Victorian fiction establishes an adaptive relation with a specific nineteenth-century text, be it in the form of a sequel –as Wilson’s *The Dark Clue* (2001), which follows Wilkie Collins *The Woman in White* (1860)– or as a reimagining. This is the case of both *Penny Dreadful* and *Crimson Peak*, as they both appropriate Victorian canonical works. The former is a collage of Shelley’s *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus*, Stoker’s *Dracula* and Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, whilst the latter is influenced by Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* or Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher”. All these possible engagements with nineteenth-century fiction are part of neo-Victorianism’s conscious process of adaptation and appropriation. In fact, a great deal of neo-Victorian novels and screen products are re-workings of nineteenth-century texts.<sup>6</sup>

With regard to the main characteristics of neo-Victorian texts, Kirchknopf notes that they either take place in the nineteenth century, or span both the nineteenth and the twentieth/twenty-first centuries, and are set –at least partly– in England or its colonies. This is the case of the neo-Victorian works analysed in the present PhD thesis, as they are all set in England, its colonies or, in the case of *Carnival Row*, in an alternative Victorian London. Thematically, neo-Victorian works evoke typical Victorian tropes, including “the definition and status of science, religion, morals, nationhood and identity” (Kirchknopf 54). Nonetheless, the most relevant feature of neo-Victorian fiction appears to be its capacity to establish a link between nineteenth-century and present societies, so that “contemporary rewrites manage to supply different perspectives from the canonized Victorian ones” (Kirchknopf 54). Llewellyn also stresses the capacity of nineteenth-century re-writings to establish a dialogue with the present and defines neo-Victorian fiction as “those works which are consciously set in the Victorian period [...] to re-write the historical narrative of the period by representing marginalised voices, new stories of sexuality, postcolonial viewpoints and other generally ‘different’ versions of the Victorian” (“What is Neo-Victorian Studies?”165). Indeed, the neo-Victorian works analysed in this PhD thesis both recuperate and give voice to ‘ex-centric’ Victorian

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<sup>6</sup> The concepts of adaptation and appropriation are explained in more depth in the next section.

characters in order to challenge the official history of the period and include other racial, sexual or non-normative perspectives that had not been considered before. Indeed, Llewellyn emphasises the potential of neo-Victorian fiction to subvert the seemingly stable nature of a “presumed hegemonic historical narrative” (“What is Neo-Victorian Studies?”165), a characteristic that is central to my corpus of analysis.

Likewise, our persistent engagement with the Victorian past seems to be due to the fact that we are trying to make sense of our contemporary socio-political and cultural realities through neo-Victorian fiction (Bowler and Cox 3). In fact, neo-Victorianism could be considered a distorted mirror where our contemporary experiences and anxieties are reflected. These anxieties might include “genetics, nanotechnology, and bioethics” that are mirrored in late Victorian concerns, such as “evolution, vivisection, and euthanasia and their implications for the limits and uniqueness of the ‘human’” (Bowler and Cox 10). Therefore, neo-Victorian narratives aim to critically engage with the Victorians by connecting our present concerns to theirs, in an attempt to address and – hopefully – overcome them, although this is not always the case. This could be the case of *Penny Dreadful* and its rewriting of Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, which coincides with current debates regarding surrogate motherhood, artificial insemination or the concept of queer families.

Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss also claim that another plausible reason for the current prominence of neo-Victorian fiction is that, due to its historical proximity, the nineteenth century is regarded as the point of departure of some of our socio-political concerns (5). As a result, neo-Victorian fiction “lends itself particularly well to negotiate ‘who we are today’, and [...], consequently, neo-Victorianism should openly survey the manifold strategies catering to today’s identity politics” (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss 5). Along the same lines, Julie Sanders argues that adaptations of nineteenth-century novels explore both Victorian and contemporary questions of identity. These include “environmental and genetic conditioning; repressed and oppressed modes of sexuality; criminality and violence; the urban phenomenon; the operations of law and authority; science and religion; [and] the postcolonial legacies of the empire” (Sanders 129). Some of these anxieties are tackled in the neo-Victorian works analysed in this PhD thesis, especially when it comes to repressed and liberated sexualities in *Penny Dreadful* or *Crimson Peak*, the urban phenomenon in the depiction of Victorian London in the case of *Penny Dreadful* and *Carnival Row*, or the postcolonial legacies of the British empire in both *Taboo* and *Carnival Row*. On a similar note, owing to the present health crisis

caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, more neo-Victorian fiction focusing on similar nineteenth-century crises will most likely be produced in the following years.

Hence, neo-Victorianism might also serve as a political tool to either spread or resist conservative ideologies, such as the construction of a national identity at a time of globalisation and political instability with the intention of spreading a sense of Britishness after the Empire (Heilmann and Llewellyn 5). During the 1980s and 1990s, the Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (in office 1979-1990) politically appropriated the Victorian era and urged a return to ‘Victorian values’, constructing the nineteenth century as “a ‘golden age’ from which the present has dropped off” (Hadley 8). According to Kaplan, these Victorian values included “thrift, family and enterprise” (5), and constituted an example of appropriation of the Victorian era to construct an identity politics of “late Capitalist modernity” (6). Moreover, for Hadley, Thatcher’s patriotic political agenda also seems to be tainted with a sense of nostalgia in the way she portrayed a biased, reductionist and optimistic interpretation of the past (9). Taking all this into consideration, neo-Victorianism should be understood as an active contributor in the process of negotiating both national and cultural identities. Due to the current state of political turmoil produced by Brexit in the UK, this conservative drive might achieve a more prominent role in neo-Victorian fiction in the near future, although neo-Victorianism might also serve as a cultural tool to resist such conservatism.

It is also worth mentioning that our present fascination with the nineteenth century seems to mirror the Victorian’s own obsession with past periods. According to Llewellyn, the Victorians felt “[a]nxious about their own position in the historical continuum”. As a result, they usually turned to classical times, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance to “provide sustenance to their own stability and potential” (Llewellyn, “What is Neo-Victorian Studies?” 173). This echoes our contemporary obsession of looking back to the nineteenth century in order to cope with our contemporary anxieties, a characteristic that neo-Victorianism shares with (neo-)Gothicism. The Victorians also looked for the multiplicity and relativity of history, and the possibility to possess “the knowledge of truth” (Llewellyn, “What is Neo-Victorian Studies?” 173). This latter goal seems to correlate with those of our contemporary neo-Victorian scholars, writers and directors who seem to desperately long for a sense of certitude and reassurance, lost in the precarious historical relativity of postmodernism.

This return to the nineteenth-century past in the fictional realm is possible because the Victorian period is no longer regarded contemptuously, as it was during the first half



of the twentieth century. According to Kaplan, modernist artists saw their Victorian ancestors as “disapproving” parents, and the nineteenth-century period was depicted in the postwar context as “the bullying bourgeois patriarch responsible for the twin cruelties of capitalism and empire” (Kaplan 6). At present, these assumptions on the repressive nature of the Victorians have been challenged, becoming the subject of a heated debate, both in fiction and academia. Hence, one of the main purposes of neo-Victorian studies is to put an end to the critique of the Victorian (Kaplan 6).

Neo-Victorianism appears to have reignited an interest in bygone eras, particularly those which have traditionally been considered as the founding pillars of our present societies, such as the Victorian period. According to Kaplan, in spite of our “ambivalent attachment” to this era, we nevertheless share with it “a cultural and political genealogy that, rather surprisingly, still presses on us in a personal as well as a public form” (12). Likewise, Hadley points to the ever-presence of the Victorians in Britain as another possible reason for our contemporary obsession with them. A great number of buildings and institutions from the Victorian era still prevail, as well as archival documents and information preserved about our Victorian ancestors (Hadley 7). All these material ‘Victoriana’ bring the nineteenth century back into the present, creating a sense of proximity that might account for our contemporary fascination with the period.

However, our temporal distance with the Victorians might also be nostalgically appropriated by contemporary writers and directors, who exoticise and even fetishise the nineteenth century. These productions exploit an aesthetic appeal of Victorianism, offering “a visual feast in their sumptuous display of Britain’s cultural heritage as encoded in both its landscapes and properties, particularly the country house estates, and the furnishings and costumes” (Hadley 10). By merely replicating Victorian clichéd styles and aesthetics –rather than contesting its broader cultural and socio-political elements– this type of historical fiction does contribute to the weakening of history that Jameson criticised. These productions include the recent BBC adaptations of Victorian novels, which are a continuation of the Merchant-Ivory productions of the 1980s, films and TV series belonging to the so-called ‘heritage’ industry (Hadley 10), as well as the abovementioned adaptations of Jane Austen’s novels. Owing to the mainstream success that these productions usually achieve, contemporary creators tend to capitalise on these frivolous and nostalgic imitations of the Victorian. Hence, I contend that this kind of fiction should be considered a cultural commodity at the service of the film industry, as opposed to the self-reflexive and subversive novels and screen adaptations that form part

of the neo-Victorian project. In this PhD thesis, I analyse neo-Victorian screen works that distance themselves from these commercial adaptations of Victorian literature, as they actively engage with the nineteenth century by resurrecting the stories of characters marginalised by history –i.e., women, queer, ethnic or lower-class individuals, among others. In the next section, I offer the theoretical background to analyse these neo-Victorian visual works from the perspective of adaptation studies.

Finally, it is also worth noting that there is a recent interest in neo-Victorianism related to the field of Disability Studies. Although this framework was first overlooked in neo-Victorian studies –as it emphasised the role of mental disorders over that of physical disability in (neo-)Victorian narratives–, there have been a number of fictional texts and academic publications intersecting neo-Victorianism and Disability Studies in the last decade. For instance, in John Harwood’s *The Ghost Writer* (2004) and Belinda Starling’s *The Journal of Dora Damage* (2006), the disabled individual and family represent the nation through the house-of-England genre (Arias, “(In)Visible Disability”).

Likewise, it is also worth mentioning novels like Jane Sullivan’s *Little People: A Novel* (2011), Stacy Carlson’s *Among the Wonderful* (2011) or Rosie Garland’s *A Palace of Curiosities* (2013). They explore the theme of the nineteenth-century freak show in order to reflect concern for disabled people who “suffered dehumanizing practices and exploitation in the past”. Nonetheless, they also to raise awareness about “the reader’s own implication in the process of commodification and objectification of people with deviant corporeality” (Pettersson 184). The trope of deviant corporeality through the freak show is also explored in *Penny Dreadful*, where Caliban/John Clare is rejected by his own creator – and by society at large– due to his uncommon features. As a result, it is difficult for him to find a job, and ends up in a wax museum, where the owner intends to show him around as a rare curiosity. Through his story, the audience is asked to establish empathy towards this marginalised character and to denounce the dehumanizing practices that people like him suffered in the nineteenth century.

### 2.2. Neo-Victorianism on Screen

Over the last decade, critical resistance towards popular culture seems to have experienced a decline in the field of neo-Victorianism (Cox, “Canonization” 104), so that contemporary media forms, such as films, TV series or video games are now being included in the neo-Victorian canon (Griggs 16). Due to the popular acclaim of neo-Victorian screen adaptations, visual representations of the long nineteenth century have

thrived and increased both in the big and small screens (Louttit and Louttit 1), finding their way in digital networks and streaming platforms, including Netflix, HBO, Amazon Video or Hulu.<sup>7</sup> Primorac argues that in the last two decades popular neo-Victorianism has been gaining momentum, which is reflected not only in screen adaptations of Victorian literature and culture, but also in the numerous “fiction and graphic novels” as well as in “fashion, art and interior design” (*Neo-Victorianism on Screen 2*).

Primorac further suggests that what all these Victorian appropriations have in common is a need to recover and reinterpret the past by transporting it into a new medium where it can be recreated via a vocabulary and style that might be appealing and understandable for contemporary audiences (*Neo-Victorianism on Screen 1*). Likewise, Yvonne Griggs contends that neo-Victorianism on screen currently caters to the audience’s expectations of a “more playful, less reverential adaptive treatment of canonical literature from the long nineteenth century” (13). In other words, screen adaptations of the Victorian remain self-consciously engaged with their literary precursors, but are not defined by them. They endure an updating process through which neo-Victorian creators and filmmakers reinterpret the nineteenth century for the consumption of a contemporary audience.

Primorac has reflected on the umbrella term ‘neo-Victorianism on screen’, which seems to encompass:

adaptations of Victorian texts that offer a critical re-visioning of Victorian narratives; screen adaptations of neo-Victorian texts; contemporary biopics of Victorians; and meta-adaptations of Victorians (mash-ups and appropriations of more than one text, as well as original screenplays set in the Victorian era that play with and adapt received ideas about the period) (*Neo-Victorianism on Screen 2*).

Adaptation has been central to both the creation and pleasure of literary works ever since ancient times. According to Julie Sanders, this adaptive process is fundamental to the enjoyment and development of literature (1), since any given text contains references to both previous and surrounding texts (2). Before Sanders, Gerard Genette

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<sup>7</sup> This is especially the case of TV series –e.g., *Ripper Street* (2012-2016), *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016), *Frankenstein’s Chronicles* (2015-2017), *Victoria* (2016-), *Taboo* (2017-), *Carnival Row* (2019-), *Dracula* (2020), *The Irregulars* (2021) or *The Nevers* (2021)–, but also films –such as Guy Ritchie’s *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011), Cary Fukunaga’s *Jane Eyre* (2011), Guillermo del Toro’s *Crimson Peak* (2015), or *Enola Holmes* (2020).

explored this dialogical relationship that a fictional work might have to previous ones, claiming that any text should be considered as a ‘palimpsest’: “a written document, usually on vellum or parchment, that has been written upon several times, often with remnants of erased writing still visible” (1). Along the same lines, Hutcheon and Siobhan O’Flynn contend that adaptations are “inherently ‘palimpsestuous’ works, always haunted by their adapted texts”. Hence, if the audience is familiarised with the prior text, they always feel its haunting presence while reading or viewing its adaptation (O’Flynn and Hutcheon 6). Primorac considers film adaptations as a particular “kind of celluloid palimpsest” in that the surface level does not substitute previous inscriptions, but rather engages with them in a dialogical relationship (*Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 11). In other words, film adaptations are not only ‘conversing’ with their source text(s), but also with other previous and surrounding adaptations of said text(s), as well as with images and adaptations that portray their historical periods, “extending into the future towards new adaptations” (Primorac, *Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 11).

Julian Wolfreys also claims that all texts are somewhat haunted by the spectral traces of previous narratives, and that literary ‘ghosts’ always come back through narratives and texts “again and again, across centuries, every time a tale is unfolded” (*Victorian Hauntings*, 3). The screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis are all haunted by Victorian canonical and popular texts –e.g., *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Turn of the Screw*, “The Fall of the House of Usher”, Romantic and Victorian poetry, Victorian popular theatre and penny dreadfuls, among others. Although they do not offer a straightforward and traditional adaptation of these nineteenth-century texts, they establish an ongoing dialogue both with them and their previous adaptations.

Primorac builds on this idea of spectral haunting in neo-Victorianism and claims that any given adaptation is haunted, not only by the ghosts of the text that is being adapted or its prior adaptations, but also by other recreations of the period it is set in (*Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 11). These referential –or spectral networks– are commonly known as intertextualities, a term coined by Julia Kristeva in her essay “The Bounded Text” (1969). She defined *intertextualité* as a process by which any given text was a “permutation of texts” (36), although it has now come to signify “how texts encompass and respond to other texts both during the process of their creation and composition and in terms of the individual reader’s or spectator’s response” (Sanders 2).

Adaptation could therefore be considered as a sort of intertextuality, but only if the audience is already familiar with the source text. Hence, it becomes a dialogical

process where we compare the original to its reworking. As a consequence, the enjoyment experienced in consuming neo-Victorian novels and screen adaptations often requires a vast knowledge of the Victorian source texts on the part of the audience. Then, spectators can compare both texts and take pleasure in finding the similarities and differences between them. However, Kohlke contends that even those audiences that are not acquainted with the source text might still enjoy the adaptation. This is so because they still experience “a visceral immersion in the vividly re-imagined world, a renewed faith in the power of stories, their moral purpose and poetic justice –none of which require palimpsestic double-vision or knowledge” (“Mining the Neo-Victorian Vein” 25).

Furthermore, it has long been accepted that fidelity should not be the main criterion of analysis when approaching an adaptation (Harold 91), as they are not mere imitations of the source text. Instead, we should rather focus on the adapter’s intention and political agenda(s) when adapting a particular work. According to Hutcheon and O’Flynn, an adaptation is a process that entails “repetition with variation” (4). Likewise, Sanders states that the pleasure of experiencing an adaptation lies in the strain between what is known and what is new, and in “the recognition both of similarity and difference” (14). As a result, adaptations may vary in how explicitly they display their intertextual references. They may require “a cultural relocation or updating of some form”, as well as a change of “generic mode or context” (Sanders 2), but there is always a political or ethical purpose that drives a writer or a director to re-write the source text.

Similarly, an adaptation might be driven by a wish to preserve valuable narratives that are no longer appealing or understandable for contemporary audiences. This is applicable to canonical Victorian novels that, in spite of their literary value, might need to be updated and culturally relocated in order to be enjoyed by contemporary audiences.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, Sander states that adaptations of Victorian literature usually respond to their source texts by taking a new political and cultural perspective stressing “troubling gaps, absences, and silences within the canonical texts to which they refer” (98). This might

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<sup>8</sup> This is especially the case with the so-called fan phenomenon in the golden age of social media and networking. More than ever, fans play a prominent role in creating the discourse surrounding any artistic work, especially TV series and films. Their engagement with the artistic product is not only shown through fansites, reviews on blogs and websites or discussions on Twitter threads, but also via “self-generated reworkings of existing texts destined for online fan consumption” (Griggs 54), also known as fanfiction. The latter could be considered a form of adaptation, which can either be set in the location and period from the original work or in a totally alternative universe. Fanfictions based on both literature and culture of the long nineteenth century are arguably the most popular among fans, especially in the case of Jane Austen’s novels, with the notable example of the YouTube webseries *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (2012). Fanfiction is usually uploaded to fansites or platforms on a chapter-by-chapter basis, echoing the serialised narratives that were published in nineteenth-century magazines (McCracken 170).

include giving voice to marginalised characters that were silenced or ignored in the original text in an attempt to excavate their stories of hidden trauma and repression, as in the case of the neo-Victorian screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis. These neo-Victorian works both resurrect and foreground ex-centric female characters, most notably the madwoman in the attic, the Victorian prostitute, the battered wife or the ethnic Other.

One of the reasons behind this ongoing fascination with Victorianism is arguably its canonicity, given that, as stated above, one of the pleasures experienced in adaptations is to find similarities and differences with their original texts. For Sanders, a literary canon could be defined as a number of well-known and valued literary works that are constantly read and referred to by both contemporary and future generations (8). Given that canonical texts are usually widely known, it is more likely that the audience will enjoy their adaptations, so that they have a financial appeal –especially in the film industry. As a result, British adapters usually “turn to safe bets”, such as eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels that are more likely to attract broader audiences (Hutcheon and O’Flynn 5). In fact, not only spectators familiarised with the canonical texts will be interested in these adaptations, but new ones will be able to experience the adapted text as an original story. What is more, Llewellyn sees neo-Victorian fiction as a “mediator” into reading its nineteenth-century predecessors, since “neo-Victorian texts are [...] processes of writing that act out the results of reading the Victorians and their literary productions” (“What is Neo-Victorian Studies?” 168). As stated above, the neo-Victorian works analysed in this PhD thesis are based on a collage of Victorian canonical texts from the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, they are more concerned with excavating the repressed stories of marginalised characters than with faithfully adapting the original texts.

Even though adaptations appropriate literary works of the past in order to create new fiction, they can also call for a radical rupture of established canonical hierarchies (Sanders 9). In fact, adaptations are not only influenced by the literary canon, but also by the contemporary socio-political movements and intellectual readings at the moment they are produced. As Hutcheon and O’Flynn state, “[s]tories do get retold in different ways in new material and cultural environments; like genes, they adapt to those new environments by virtue of mutation –in their ‘offspring’ or their adaptations. And the fittest do more than survive; they flourish” (32). As a result, many neo-Victorian screen texts have been influenced by feminist theory, postcolonialism or queer studies, as in the case of the works that make up my corpus of analysis. Likewise, Kirchknopf notes that neo-Victorian fiction might also impact the literary canon, as it preserves it by getting

people interested in rereading Victorian novels, while simultaneously “(re)discovering, revaluing and transforming” them. Furthermore, the current serialisation of fiction –as in the case of TV series in streaming platforms– seems to be reintroducing the Victorian concept of serialised novels, which points to both the destabilisation and reinforcement of Victorian conventions and canonisation (Kirchknopf 73).

On a different note, Tammy Lai-Ming Ho asserts that neo-Victorian fiction shares an “ambivalent relationship” with the nineteenth-century past, which could be defined in metaphorical terms as “aggressive eating, even cannibalism” (1). This forceful eating should be understood in terms of appropriation and adaptation of Victorian texts on the part of contemporary writers and directors. According to Ho, neo-Victorian cannibalism has two main purposes: to “commune” with its Victorian referents and consume their “literary styles, plots and techniques” (3); or to create a new identity by absorbing and critiquing Victorian styles and ideologies (2). The neo-Victorian screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis follow this second trend, as they do not merely reproduce the literary plots and ideologies of their Victorian forefathers, but they rather introduce contemporary anxieties in order to establish a creative dialogue with the nineteenth-century text – especially in terms of gender, ethnic and sexual politics. Ho contends that if Victorian creators merely imitate their Victorian predecessors, their work would be nothing more than a mere “pastiche”, but if they embrace contemporary tropes and ideologies too closely, the adaptation will not fit the stylistic and ethical requirements of the neo-Victorian genre (2). This is not the case of the screen texts analysed in this thesis, as they do not simply imitate their source texts.

As stated above, it was during the 1990s that Victorian adaptations on screen started to achieve commercial success. This period was characterised by fidelity-driven costume dramas in the British context of TV production. Adaptations from this era were created by UK production companies and targeted a British audience. They were ideologically conservative and “generically formulaic, conforming to a set of prescribed conventions readily associated with the heritage fare of cinema” (Griggs 17). Both heritage films and TV costume dramas from the period were more concerned about fidelity to the source text(s) and displaying the aesthetic details of the Victorian era than about exploring its “textual politics”. Consequently, both visual genres have come to be associated with traditional British values that reflect a culturally hegemonic sense of “Britishness” (Griggs 17).

However, the 1990s also became the period when the so-called heritage cinema started to shift from its nostalgic traces and gave way to more critical views of the past. According to Primorac, these subversive cinematic alternatives came to be known as “post-heritage” and “anti-heritage” (*Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 4). Indeed, Iris Kleinecke-Bates asserts that the period from the 1990s until the early 2000s was characterised by “a more self-conscious negotiation of historical representations” in screen Victoriana (9). Louttit and Louttit also contend that in the last decades the genre has come to be more informed in its reflexions and representations of the Victorian era (4). Likewise, Jonathan Cranfield suggests that visual neo-Victorianism is moving away from a “traditional heritage vision of crinolines and starched-collars”, and now relies “on a more nuanced and diverse popular perception of the Victorian period” (3). This change appears to be grounded on a proliferation of historical revisionism in popular and mainstream neo-Victorianism.

By contrast, American TV costume dramas set in the nineteenth century have traditionally focused on frontier narratives. These conservative Western TV series include *Bonanza* (1959-1973), *High Chaparral* (1967-1971), *The Little House on the Prairie* (1974-1983), or *Dr Quinn, Medicine Woman* (1993-1998). In recent years, however, they have been replaced by more violent and thought-provoking TV shows, such as *Deadwood* (2004-2006), *Godless* (2017-) and *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018). The latter have been produced by cable and streaming platforms like HBO –*Deadwood*– and Netflix –*The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*– so that they “operate outside the constraints of mainstream broadcasting protocols” (Griggs 18). They have also moved away both from the conservative and gracious tone of British costume dramas and the earlier American Western TV narratives, despite sharing with them a “temporal, geographical and historical framework” (Griggs 18). Another recent and arguably neo-frontier TV series worth mentioning is *Westworld* (2016-present), which combines posthuman and feminist concerns in a universe set in a Wild-West-themed amusement park whose population is made up of technologically advanced androids named ‘hosts’. One of the TV series analysed in this PhD thesis, *Penny Dreadful*, arguably adopts tropes and plots from these neo-frontier narratives, as part of the third season of the series takes place in the American Wild West.

Just as visual Western narratives produced in America have endured a profound change in the last decades, there has also been a distinct evolution in post-1990s British costume dramas to a “more self-consciously artistic treatment of narrative within screen



space” (Griggs 19). Contemporary TV series set in the long nineteenth century and the early twentieth century are not merely “a nostalgic nod to an earlier historical period”, but they rather break with the fidelity treatment of canonical fiction (Griggs 19). These screen texts include *Desperate Romantics* (2006), *Ripper Street* (2012-2016), *Peaky Blinders* (2013-), *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016), *The Frankenstein’s Chronicles* (2015-2017), *Dickensian* (2015), *Taboo* (2017-), *Carnival Row* or *Dracula* (2020). What all these TV series have in common is that they continue to function within the generic rules and tropes of costume dramas, but simultaneously manage to destabilise the audience’s expectations on every level. Moreover, contemporary neo-Victorian TV series have a tendency to include “intertextually dense meta-fictions” that shift away from traditionally “fidelity-driven” nineteenth-century adaptations (Griggs 20). Griggs refers to these neo-Victorian meta-fictions as ‘multiplicities’ (20), a concept that evokes Sanders’s ‘bricolage’, since it refers to “a collage or collection of different allusions, quotations, and references in the context of a new creative work” (Sanders 161). This way, questions of originality and authenticity –which normally obscure single-source adaptation– are left out of the equation, producing a variety of original and thought-provoking perspectives on the adapted texts. For instance, neo-Victorian TV shows like *Dickensian*, *Penny Dreadful* or *The Frankenstein’s Chronicles* bring together characters and narrative plots from a wide range of canonical works from the long nineteenth century. However, whilst *Dickensian* portrays an idealised aesthetic London, the others depict a London with a more subversive style and a darker atmosphere.

It is also worth noting that neo-Victorian TV series have attained mainstream success over the last decade, in detriment to filmic adaptations of the same genre. According to Griggs, the proliferation of such productions appears to be grounded on the fact that television “lends itself to an inherently malleable and proactive approach to the adaptation of stories that continue to fascinate us, leading to a creative interplay between genres, existing texts, new storylines and the body of ideas that circulate both old and new” (23). Along the same lines, Cranfield claims that TV shows have traditionally moulded and reshaped our popular beliefs of the Victorian age since the 1950s, “the mythos of the medium blending with that of the period” (1). Thus, it is not surprising that neo-Victorian TV series have now become a culturally and commercially successful phenomenon.

However, screen Victoriana did not always enjoy such prestige in the field. At a scholarly level, it endured a “marginal status” during its early stages, especially when

compared to its dominant literary counterpart (Primorac, *Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 2). ‘Popular’ Victoriana that appeal to a mass market have traditionally been deemed inferior to literature, in terms of their narrative cohesion, aesthetics, ideology and presentist agendas (Louttit & Louttit 6). In fact, in discussing the differences between literary and screen neo-Victorian works, Kohlke remarks that the latter are produced for the “mass market” and, as a result, their main aim is to “maximise entertainment value”, even if it was at the expense of “liberal politics”. On the contrary, the former tend to be made up of more serious and critical artistic creations. She further contends that there has traditionally been a clear-cut distinction between literary and TV audiences. Whilst the former is considered to have “a comparatively high degree of historical knowledge and readerly/critical sophistication” (“The Lures of Neo-Victorianism Presentism” 6), the latter is believed to have neither. However, I contend that, while it is true that neo-Victorian TV series tend to reproduce a set of stereotypes about the period, as well as exploit a sense of escapism, idealised nostalgia, shock value and other commercial elements to appeal to a mass audience, they also require educated spectators that are well-versed in Victorianism to recognise the intertextual web that they so craftily create. This is especially the case of series like *Penny Dreadful*, which could be considered a collage of nineteenth-century appropriations –from Romantic and Victorian poetry, through Victorian Gothic prose to nineteenth-century horror and melodramatic theatre.

Primorac also points to this hierarchical structure of the neo-Victorian project and deems it “vexing”, given that neo-Victorian literature is by definition an adaptation of nineteenth-century texts itself (*Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 3). The reason behind this subordinate status of screen Victoriana appears to be a result of “[v]isual neo-Victorianism’s complex web of textual visual and filmic references which does not link an adaptation clearly to one or more identifiable adapted texts” (Primorac, *Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 9). However, Louttit and Louttit contend that current Victorian representations on screen mirror their literary counterparts in that they both respond to the period in a number of ways, from giving voice to marginalised and oppressed characters to challenging preconceived ideas about gender and sexual politics (7). Consequently, neo-Victorianism on screen does not merely perpetuate contemporary stereotypes or nostalgic imaginations of the Victorian era, as some heritage film and costume dramas tend to do.

Furthermore, screen Victoriana have seldom been addressed independently, but rather treated as mere adaptations of Victorian works. Indeed, studies on visual neo-

Victorianism have usually focused on “filmic adaptations of Victorian literature that critically interpret the lacunae of Victorians’ attitudes to gender, race, class and empire” (Primorac, *Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 2). However, over the last decade, research on screen neo-Victorianism is proliferating, including publications such as Dianne F. Sadoff’s *Victorian Vogue: British Novels on Screen* (2010), Iris Kleinecke-Bates’s *Victorians on Screen: The Nineteenth Century on British Television, 1994-2005* (2014), the Special Issue of the *Neo-Victorian Studies* journal, titled *Screening the Victorians in the Twenty-First Century* (2018, vol. 11, no. 1), or Primorac’s monograph, *Neo-Victorianism on Screen: Postfeminism and Contemporary Adaptations of Victorian Women* (2018), among others.

Sadoff’s volume was one of the first studies on screen Victoriana and it focused on popular filmic adaptations of nineteenth-century novels. She examined twentieth-century productions, including James Whale’s *Frankenstein* (1931), Robert Stevenson’s *Jane Eyre* (1944), Francis Ford Coppola’s *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992), Douglas McGrath’s *Emma* (1996), and Ian Softley’s *The Wings of the Dove* (1997). Sadoff pointed out that these films portrayed the socio-political concerns of both the period in which they were produced and that of the original Victorian texts, which arguably connects with neo-Victorianism’s purpose of establishing chronological dialogues between the nineteenth century and our present. She further argued that critics should take into consideration not only the original novel’s influence in a filmic adaptation, but also the latter’s “commentary on its cinematic precursors” (xi-xii). Finally, Sadoff pinpointed that these adaptations were not only aimed at a British audience, but rather targeted an international niche market (xv).

Kleinecke-Bates’s contribution explored neo-Victorian TV productions in Britain from 1994 to 2005, as she considered TV as the medium that had traditionally favoured and exploited the Victorian period (3). She also stressed the defined visual aspects of TV representations of the Victorian, and claimed that they displayed a certain “look”, especially with regard to the “use of colour, camerawork and even setting”, which moved away from a nostalgic yearning for the past (4). Kleinecke-Bates further argued that visual representations of the nineteenth century created an “anxious dislocatedness” due to our historical and cultural proximity with the period, and, as a consequence, did “not offer the same kind of certainty and stability” that other bygone eras usually provide (5).

Primorac’s monograph also offers a very detailed account of the cultural phenomenon of neo-Victorianism on screen. She builds on Sadoff’s idea that Victorian

adaptations are not only related to their hypotexts, but to other filmic adaptations of the period as well, so that they build a “complex web of textual, visual and filmic references” (*Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 9). Primorac describes screen Victoriana as a “fantasy of the past”, which has a great impact on the “audiences’ expectations”. However, said expectations seem to be inspired less by a scholar knowledge of the nineteenth century, and “more by the images generated by other, preceding, films and TV series set in the same period” (*Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 12).

Nevertheless, I contend that the key contribution of this monograph to the field of neo-Victorianism is its focus on the screen (mis)representation of the Victorian heroine in the current postfeminist context of production. Primorac argues that the mid-1990s marked the beginning of postfeminist undercurrents in cultural manifestations in the West (*Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 4). She defines postfeminist cultural representations as those in which key aspects of female empowerment and women’s right to choose are appropriated by neo-liberal structures of power that attempt to encourage women to “perceive their agency as that of active, self-monitoring, heterosexually desiring consumers who are now encouraged to choose traditional gender roles as a way of tackling the social imperative to ‘have it all’ (marriage, children and a career)” (5). A great deal of neo-Victorian adaptations on screen appear to have fallen prey to these postfeminist manipulations through the dubious representation of female characters. Primorac maintains that in these narratives, heterosexual white women achieve “the fulfilment of postfeminism’s impossible goals” in a repressive Victorian setting (*Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 7).

In a similar vein, Kohlke maintains that screen neo-Victorianism features female characters with contemporary feminist ideologies in a Victorian setting to fight the Victorian “full range of gender codes, roles, and stereotypes, from the dutiful daughter, selfless mother and ‘Angel in the House’ to the fallen woman, madwoman, female monster, and *femme fatale*” (“The Lures of Neo-Victorianism Presentism” 7). This is also the case of the neo-Victorian screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis. In these works, all the female protagonists and antagonists conform to one of these Victorian female types that they attempt to challenge or overcome with a rather anachronistic feminist empowerment. Primorac also contends that screen representations of an idealised Victorian past grant the pleasure of experiencing a nostalgic return to a period of “perceived gender certainties” for a generation of spectators who take feminism for granted and no longer see a need for feminist activism and advocacy.

Likewise, most neo-Victorian screen narratives display naked and sexualised women's bodies as a representation of female empowerment and liberation in a blatantly repressed Victorian context (Primorac, *Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 14). Kohlke builds on this hedonistic portrayal of female characters and complains that these narratives usually omit that a great deal of Victorian feminists advocated for female equality in quite the opposite fashion. They called for "purity, temperance (not just as regards alcohol), and public duty (as opposed to the satisfaction of personal desire)" ("The Lures of Neo-Victorianism Presentism" 7). The screen texts that make up my corpus of analysis also oversexualise female characters, wrongly equating sexual liberation to women's emancipation and catering to a contemporary audience that craves sexuality on screen. However, as I argue in this PhD thesis, heteronormative sexuality does not necessarily grant female characters' agency, but rather the opposite, as they depend on a male character for their sexual emancipation.

Moreover, in order for these narratives to become a financial success, certain stereotypes and presumptions about the period must be shared and believed by the audience, becoming what Kate Mitchell defines as "cultural memories" (7). Mitchell argues that the purpose of neo-Victorian texts is not recapturing the past as it really was, but to offer "it as a cultural memory, to be re-membered, and imaginatively re-created, not revised or understood" (7). As a result, cultural memories become part of the bigger picture, and are moulded by history, historiographic metafiction, screen adaptations, memory and material history that contribute to the way we see ourselves from a historical perspective (Mitchell 31). Likewise, Primorac stresses the importance of sharing a common Anglophone past, so that remembering and returning to the nineteenth century allows us to see "the role 'they' play for 'us' and 'our' own feeling of history" (*Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 8). Thus, screen Victoriana contributes to represent an idealised shared past that shapes our contemporary identities as "post-imperial, contemporary, [and] Anglophone" (Primorac, *Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 8).

Furthermore, film and TV shows are cultural phenomena that play a pivotal role in the representation and re-imagining of the Victorian past, especially at a popular level. They contribute to the creation and distribution of images of the past which eventually become examples of Mitchell's 'cultural memories'. These images are responsible for an increasing sense of nostalgia for a nineteenth-century past that never was, "challenging some of their ideas about the past while reinforcing others" (Primorac, *Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 12). Some of the most common tropes and stereotypes that screen neo-

Victorianism relies on are women's clothes –such as the overexploited corset and crinolines– and their struggle for female agency; oppressive gender roles; the heteronormative nuclear family; the colonial space and repressive attitudes towards sexuality. However, Primorac asserts that these preconceived ideas or 'cultural memories' of the Victorian period are sometimes subverted in screen Victoriana through the inclusion of the supernatural “to implicitly debate the notion of the queer family and the family of choice”, as well as the representation of the Victorian heroine for contemporary discussions on female agency (*Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 13).<sup>9</sup>

All in all, this newfound academic interest in visual Victoriana confirms the crucial role that it plays in the field of neo-Victorian studies as a whole, especially in terms of the current debate regarding the genre's definition and scope. Louttit and Louttit assert that screen neo-Victorianism might help address the question of whether the neo-Victorian canon should be expanded to include forms of popular culture that go beyond literature (2). Moreover, we are currently living in what Cranfield calls the “Golden Age of television”: a digital environment with pay-per-view cable channels and streaming services that produce serialised TV shows, whose complexity and weekly distribution are reminiscent of “the nineteenth-century serialised novel rather more than the cinema” (Cranfield 2).

Primorac also points to neo-Victorianism's transnational popularity and dissemination, which are made possible thanks to the limitless possibilities that media consumption currently offers. These include digitalised content that can be shared through social media and streaming platforms, DVD and Blue-Ray set boxes that can be purchased online; or the option to download the material illegally through torrents with fan-produced subtitles (Primorac, *Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 9). The emergence of this new media production and consumption has also impacted the reception of adaptations and historical fiction, generating an “increasingly plural, democratised adaptation culture” that favours self-reflexive neo-Victorian works of fiction (Louttit & Louttit 5). Taking all this into consideration, neo-Victorianism on screen has become a socio-cultural phenomenon that has shaped the conception and understanding that

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<sup>9</sup> The concept of 'family of choice' has traditionally been a central aspect in LGBTIQ+'s support networks. It does not refer to an individual's biological family –who might discriminate them on account of their sexuality. Rather, it encompasses a community made up of same-gender “partners, LGBT friends and like-minded others” (Hughes and Kentlyn 437) that would care for and support them. In this PhD thesis, I extend this concept to other minorities –such as ethnic individuals– and women.

contemporary audiences have of the nineteenth-century period. As a consequence, it is necessary to study its impact and influence at an academic level.

### 2.3. Neo-Victorian Gothic Fiction: Definition and Scope

Gothic fiction is pervasive in popular culture, and it currently has a prominent presence in all kinds of artistic representations: literature, the film industry, Television, music, (video) games, fashion and subcultures. Indeed, the Gothic has insidiously haunted “the twentieth and twenty-first century collective imagination” due to its on-going popularity and appeal (Sottilotta 1). This haunting nature could be accounted for the fact that the term ‘Gothic’ entails a return to our past, which insidiously permeates and influences our present. As a result, Gothic literature is arguably self-reflexive, as it reflects on the ghostly traces of the past. Thus, the neo-Gothic should, in turn, be considered as doubly self-reflexive, given that “it reflects on the reflections of the past” in the present (Maier and Ayres 1). In fact, one of the reasons why the Gothic has retained a central position in our cultural milieu ever since the eighteenth century is its ability to tackle the deepest anxieties of every period (Sottilotta 4).

Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1764) has long been established as the novel that inaugurated the Gothic genre. Nineteenth-century Gothic drew on those first Gothic novels from the eighteenth century, enriching them with social, economic and political concerns of the period. These included technological and scientific advances, turn-of-the-century psychoanalytical theories, occultism and criminology, among others (Sottilotta 4). Just like our nineteenth-century predecessors looked back to the past, seeking answers to the anxieties of the Industrial Revolution and scientific advances, we now look back to the Victorian Age to reflect on our contemporary concerns. On this note, Kohlke and Gutleben argue that neo-Victorianism and neo-Gothic fiction are two hegemonic cultural phenomena that were destined to intersect and combine their efforts, given their “common revivalist premises” (“Neo-Victorian Gothic” 2). Nevertheless, despite the fact that neo-Gothic fiction conveys current anxieties, it does not always provide answers for the “harried modern” (Maiers and Ayres 3). As a result, neo-Gothicism could be defined as a genre that

mobilizes what is accepted as the Gothic in order to deal with a postpostmodern, sometimes posthuman, world to expose the ambivalence and banality that now greets questions of evil, to address questions of memory, violence and traumatic

experience, to investigate non-linear identities as well as spectral selves and to give voice to multifaceted cultural, scientific and artistic complexities in a time of complexity (Maiers and Ayres 4).

Gothicism has traditionally found its way into the very core of popular, mainstream and consumerist cultures (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Gothic” 1-2). Nonetheless, the prevalence of Gothic fiction is not merely a cultural trend, but it is actually embedded in our capitalist societies, which have turned this genre into a valuable cultural commodity. Kohlke and Gutleben assert that this commercial aspect of the Gothic might actually pose a threat to its peripheral and other-oriented nature, given that it is increasingly becoming fashionable, and to some extent, even the norm (“Neo-Victorian Gothic” 2). Fred Botting reflects on this commercial corruption of the Gothic –that he defines as “candygothic”– and concludes that “it no longer contain[s] the intensity of a desire for something that satisfyingly disturbs and defines social and moral boundaries” (*Limits of Gothic* 134). In fact, neo-Gothic fiction now converges with the social norms that it once challenged, so that subversion and otherness are absorbed into mainstream culture and transformed into a plain and frivolous form of monstrosity (Botting, *Limits of Gothic* 10).

As a result, one might wonder whether this type of fiction should still be labelled ‘Gothic’, given that it does not seem to represent abjection and marginality anymore. Kohlke and Gutleben suggest that one way to address this question would be analysing neo-Gothic fiction in tandem with neo-Victorianism by focusing on their common nineteenth-century background. This combination might revive an interest in defying social norms and redefining boundaries –two of the main goals that Gothic fiction has traditionally had (“Neo-Victorian Gothic” 2). Similarly, Maiers and Ayres claim that neo-Gothic narratives that prominently feature the ‘ex-centric’ Other tend to revisit their Gothic predecessors, most notably Romantic and Victorian Gothic in order to bring to the fore the characters’ “situational displacement” in fragmented narratives that explore extreme topics such as excess, subversion or contamination, among others (5). Hence, neo-Victorian Gothicism would be the perfect choice to recuperate the disruptive, Othering and challenging nature of traditional Gothic narratives.

Neo-Victorianism originated in the 1960s, predating the rise of the neo-Gothic as a mainstream success. Thus, neo-Victorianism should by no means be considered as derivative of the neo-Gothic, but rather as “the *purveyor* of said culture”, given that it



reproduces some key features of the Gothic and, thus, substantially contributes to its constant presence in cultural media (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Gothic” 3, emphasis in original). In fact, Bowler and Cox actually consider the neo-Gothic as a subgenre of neo-Victorianism, and not the way around (6). Neo-Victorian and neo-Gothic fiction share a great number of characteristics, such as their adaptability, which allows them to go beyond the boundaries of literature, thanks to their “intertextual and intermedial” qualities (Sottilotta 2). Moreover, both genres exploit the trope of haunting and spectrality, as they resurrect the ghosts of the nineteenth-century past in order to come to terms with those traumas at present, which is part of neo-Victorianism’s ethical drive (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Gothic” 4). They also strive to portray different versions of history, while at the same time establishing connections between the past and contemporary socio-political contexts, as opposed to merely exploiting the audience’s desire for historical escapism (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Gothic 3).

However, Maiers and Ayres stress that neo-Gothicism differs from neo-Victorianism in that it represents a contagious Other that can neither be controlled nor logically contained (4), especially when it comes to the supernatural Other. Likewise, neo-Victorianism also explores the Victorian double standards that allowed opposite extremes of high morality and viciousness, great wealth and miserable poverty or philanthropy and human exploitation –i.e., slavery, prostitution and female oppression, among others. Hence, neo-Victorian Gothic fiction indirectly criticises both contemporary and nineteenth-century discourses of social progress and civilisation by featuring these opposing tropes, just like their Victorian precursors did.

Likewise, the configuration of the past as a Gothic ‘Other’ in the present also has an impact on themes of deviance and aberration that are frequently explored in both Victorian and neo-Victorian Gothic. However, in the case of the latter, it is actually the Victorian period that is constructed as a deviance. According to Saverio Tomaiuolo, neo-Victorian Gothic both approaches and reproduces the Victorian past by concentrating on its most subversive and even contemporary traits, transforming the nineteenth century into our historical doppelgänger. Thus, “[t]he Victorian age thereby turns into our cultural *unheimlich*, a familiar and yet disquieting presence” (Tomaiuolo 3).

However, for Kohlke and Gutleben, the Victorian period is portrayed in neo-Victorianism as an abnormal Other that we seek to oppose and exclude from our post-postmodern normalcy (“Neo-Victorian Gothic” 11). This way, we can resurface from the neo-Victorian narrative cleansed of all the historical guilt associated with the period, but

also reaffirmed in our supposed ethical post-postmodern superiority. This does not necessarily mean that neo-Victorianism rejects its nineteenth-century legacy, but it rather legitimises the period because it is now 'dead' and constructed as an 'Other' to our present. This could be the case of two of the TV series analysed in this PhD thesis, *Penny Dreadful* and *Taboo*, which explore the collective traumas of colonialism and imperial conquest on the part of the British Empire. They construct the Victorian period as an aberrant Other and criticise its expansionist policies, so that our contemporary period can emerge as ethically superior.

Another common development of Victorian Gothic was arguably the shift from an external form of evil to a more psychological and internalised version of monstrosity. The inclusion of this corruptive Otherness in the individual's psyche cancelled out the binary opposition of good versus evil (Kohlke and Gutleben, "Neo-Victorian Gothic" 7). After this shift in the ontological nature of the Gothic, Victorians seemed to fully embrace the genre, which produced an inexorable closeness to the marginal and evil Other, as it could no longer be externalised and consigned to a distant space. This correlates with what Julian Wolfreys calls the nineteenth-century Gothic's "sense of the alterity of subjectivity" that set free "any sense of the subject's own comprehension of coherence, presence or meaning" of uncanny manifestations coming from "the other within that identity we name as Victorian" (*Victorian Hauntings*, xvii-xx).

Likewise, Kohlke and Gutleben argue that the rise of Gothic fiction during the nineteenth century encapsulated the growing anxieties of social collapse among the middle and upper classes ("Neo-Victorian Gothic" 8), which could arguably be likened to our contemporary ones. For instance, the threat of international and local terrorism, racism and xenophobia can be found in both periods. As a consequence, neo-Victorian Gothic fiction could be considered a means to negotiate our modern anxieties, and the monsters portrayed in neo-Victorian Gothic narratives could actually represent those contemporary concerns that we are trying to come to terms with. On that note, Maiers and Ayres argue that monsters play a key role in neo-Gothic narratives, as our present obsession with zombies, monsters, vampires or cyborgs have proliferated, marking the boundaries between the familiar and the unknown. These monsters have come to represent in neo-Gothicism a metaphor to define "tolerance, inclusion and the positive recognition of difference" (Maiers and Ayres 9), rather than Otherness and subversion. This is particularly the case in *Penny Dreadful*, where the protagonists have to learn to

accept their inner monsters –which represent their own abjection and alterity– in an exercise that asks its audience to acknowledge and embrace diversity.

On a different note, the Gothic has traditionally been concerned with the readers' expectations and with establishing an affective relationship with them (Sottilotta 3). According to Kohlke and Gutleben, one of the most common ways to exploit affect in Gothic fiction is through the evocation of the Romantic sublime, which usually occurs “in contemplations of nature in the midst of existential extremity”, where a wronged and threatened character seeks comfort from the threat of a greater power (“Neo-Victorian Gothic” 16-7). Neo-Victorian fiction seems to have created its own version of sublime horror, placing it in the context of technological and scientific advances, as in the case of steampunk fiction, a genre that predates the appearance of neo-Victorian Gothic, but that is intimately related to it.

Steampunk emerged in the 1980s to reflect the rise of scientific progress in the British empire. It presents aspects of fantastical fiction and is set in an alternative, technologically advanced Victorian world “that run[s] on steam power” (Jagoda 47). Rachel A. Bowser and Brian Croxall contend that steampunk contributes to neo-Victorianism's ethical purposes, by intersecting our conceptualisations of the Victorian period with the tropes of science fiction (1). Moreover, steampunk exploits “hybridisation, pastiche, and strategic anachronism” in order to “defamiliarise both the Victorian past and the globalising present, isolating facets of both eras to make them more susceptible to analysis” (Jagoda 48). This way, it can positively contribute to the exploration of history, especially in terms of its socio-political and technological aspects. In doing so, steampunk fiction allows us to analyse the complex relationship between our past, present and future.

Furthermore, steampunk arguably portrays modern technologies as a contemporary sublime, since they conjure up both wonder and horror on the grounds of their industrial magnificence and immeasurable power to do both good and evil. In fact, steampunk's criticism against the abuse of political and scientific power reflects both current neo-imperialist operations and a reimagined Victorian era with modern and dangerous technologies that are increasingly becoming possible at present (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Gothic” 25). One of the screen works analysed in this PhD thesis, *Carnival Row*, appropriates elements of steampunk, as the series portrays an alternative and technologically advanced imperial London called The Burgue. This seemingly open-minded and progressive society actually uses its technological power to

conquer and exploit other less advanced societies, which takes us to a sub-genre of neo-Victorian Gothic: neo-imperial Gothic.

Neo-imperial Gothic might be understood as a way to denounce Western invasion and Orientalism in Britain's former colonies. As Elizabeth Ho contends, the nineteenth century is usually considered a symbol of imperialism in neo-Victorian fiction (*Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of Empire* 4). In fact, Anglo-American culture established itself through the British empire and has continued its expansion through the neo-imperialist policies of the United States. As a result, neo-Victorian texts with a neo-imperial approach "are concerned however ambivalently, with the aftermath of the empire and its reappearance in processes of globalization" (Ho, *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of Empire* 5). These fictions have arguably emerged as a reaction against imperial Gothic, which was in vogue from 1875 to 1914, during the "New Imperialism" period (Mousoutzanis 2). The term "imperial Gothic" was coined by Patrick Brantlinger, who defined it as a fiction expressing late Victorian anxieties about the potential decay of both religion and Western civilisation. Imperial Gothic explored three main tropes: (1) the concept of going native, (2) a potential 'barbaric' invasion of Western civilisations and (3) a decrease in opportunities for adventure and heroism (Brantlinger, "Rule of Darkness" 130). Imperial Gothic fiction was characterised by both a sense of heroic adventure and horror, so that it was simultaneously "self-divided and symptomatic of the anxieties that attended the climax of the British Empire" (Arata, "Fictions of Loss" 111). Thus, imperial Gothic narratives displayed contradictory readings of the empire, and could contain critiques of its expansionist ideology.

This ambivalent portrayal of imperial ideologies is also a defining characteristic of neo-imperial Gothic fiction. As Ho contends, by bringing back the nineteenth century into the present, neo-Victorianism allows us to work through our contradictory feelings towards the empire and its legacies by addressing contemporary anxieties derived from imperial conquest and colonisation. These might include racism and xenophobia in Western countries. However, they do so in a conflicting manner, as they "simultaneously give voice to feelings of regression and return that manifest themselves in often noncontestatory, even celebratory evocations of the nineteenth century" (Ho, *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of Empire* 9).

According to Aris Mousoutzanis, there is a current trend of imperial nostalgia in popular culture, which can be seen in the way both films TV series are appropriating imperial Gothic motifs and revisiting the empire in order to create a sense of patriotic

pride and global Britain in the present context of Brexit (10).<sup>10</sup> For Mousoutzanis, the TV series *Taboo* would be an example of this imperial nostalgia, due to the male protagonist's contradictory relationship with the British Empire, as both its enemy and its provider (14), and to the series' ambivalent critique of imperial ideologies and stereotypes. This could also be said of *Carnival Row*, as it attempts to represent current anxieties about immigration, xenophobia and the refugee crisis, and to denounce the empire's colonisation and exploitation of non-European nations during the long nineteenth century. However, its perpetuation of Orientalist portrayals of the ethnic Other and its unequivocal whitewashing obliterate any possible critique of the British Empire in the series.

Another important subgenre of neo-Victorian Gothic is the postcolonial one, connected to neo-imperial Gothic fiction in that they are both concerned with the concept of racial Otherness, as well as with imperial and colonial representations of the nineteenth century. In Victorian Gothic fiction, the Other –here understood as something frightening because of its unfamiliarity and unintelligibility– was never explored from the perspective of the colonised (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Gothic” 33). It is precisely this disregard for aboriginal and native narratives that postcolonial neo-Victorian fiction strives to revise. Indeed, Heilmann and Llewellyn contend that one of the main characteristics of this genre is its “creative challenge to the critical theory concepts of hybridity and the silence of the subaltern” (69). Thus, the main aim of postcolonial neo-Victorian fiction is arguably to grant a voice to the ‘subaltern’ and to enable the colonised individual to speak for themselves, rather than being spoken for by their colonisers or imperial authorities.

For H. D. J. van Dam, the representation of racial Otherness in postcolonial neo-Victorianism through Victorian stereotypes bears witness to the influence that the British Empire has had, and still has, over us (30-1). Indeed, the prevalence of these stereotypes are key in the process of identity construction in neo-Victorian fiction, “pointing to a present-day insecurity with regard to people's social, (multi)cultural or ‘racial’ identity” (van Dam 31). One of the most central characters in Victorian Gothic fiction is Bertha Mason from Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*. She is a colonial subject constructed as a monstrous and violent Other, so it is no surprise that this character has been reimaged in numerous neo-Victorian rewritings of Brontë's novel. One of its most famous

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<sup>10</sup> Some of these films and TV series would include *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2011), *The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2015), *Victoria and Abdul* (2017), the BBC's series *Real Marigold Hotel* (2016-present), or ITV's *The Good Karma Hospital* (2017-present).

adaptation is Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a postcolonial rewriting of the madwoman in the attic, where the colonial female subject is granted a voice. Regarding the corpus of analysis of this PhD thesis, *Taboo* and *Carnival Row* could be considered postcolonial neo-Victorian Gothic texts, given that they place the racial Other at the centre of the narrative and seemingly denounce the Orientalist discourse of nineteenth-century Britain.

It is also worth noting that the abovementioned neo-Victorian subgenres –imperial and steampunk Gothic– often cross paths with urban Gothic and crime or detective fiction. According to Griggs, these genres were deemed to be morally questionable and deviant by the upper classes in the Victorian era (21), and yet attained mainstream success. Kohlke and Gutleben claim that many of these fictional works are often labelled “Dickensian”, since it was Dickens who created an urban sensibility that established a new kind of Victorian Gothic that facilitated a “focus on criminality and degeneration in urban settings” (“Neo-Victorian Gothic” 25). It is not surprising then that Dickens himself and his novels are often rewritten and reimagined in neo-Victorian urban fiction, from Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith* (2002), Louis Bayard's *Mr. Timothy* (2003), Matthew Pearl's *The Last Dickens* (2009) to Dan Simmon's *Drood* (2009). At a televisual level, the BBC TV series *Dickensian* (2015-2016) brings together several characters from different novels by Dickens in a Victorian neighbourhood in London, where a police inspector investigates a murder case.

Just like Victorian Urban Gothic, its neo-Victorian counterpart exploits the city landscape and its underbellies to create sublime terror and character alienation. In these narratives, the killer often becomes the antagonistic character, merging anonymously with the city masses. The frequent reprising of the notorious figure of Jack the Ripper and his Whitechapel killings serve as an example of the ungraspability of the past, but also turns evil into less of an individual pathology and more of a societal concern. This is the case of *Penny Dreadful* and *Carnival Row*, as they both create their own version of Jack the Ripper –Ethan Chandler and Unseelie Jack, respectively. Whereas the Victorian city functioned as a symbolic space for acts of Gothic malevolence –such as Dracula's or Mr Hyde's vicious attacks and their eventual detention– the neo-Victorian city is a stage for the villains themselves and their chasers who even “engage with the psychology of evil and otherness within –even as they hold it at bay” (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Gothic” 27). In other words, the Gothic appeal that surrounded the crimes in Victorian urban fiction has now been transferred to the villains themselves in neo-Victorianism.

It is also worth mentioning that the obsession with gore spectacles of violence in neo-Victorianism on screen should be understood as an attempt to appeal to a contemporary audience that is used to graphic violence being displayed on television, cinema screens and other forms of mass media, but also as a connection to Victorian sensation fiction (Kohlke and Gutleben, "Neo-Victorian Gothic" 27-8). The screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis display this graphic violence, bringing together a contemporary and a Victorian thirst for sensationalism. Victorian sensationalist novels catered to the readers' thirst for affect and excess and partly derived from female Gothic, as it appropriated a wide range of its tropes, including "women's victimisation and domestic entrapment, false imprisonment, madness, transgressive (female) sexual desire, seduction and abuse" (Kohlke and Gutleben, "Neo-Victorian Gothic" 28).

In fact, the stories portrayed in neo-Victorian urban TV series are usually located in a fragmented and developing London where contemporary concerns in terms of identity and gender politics are the main focus of attention (Griggs 21). Owing to this ever-growing focus on gender anxieties in neo-Victorianism, crime and urban fiction explore patriarchal and social violence against both women, including incest, gender-based violence or sexual exploitation, which still prevail in contemporary societies. All these tropes frequently appear in neo-Victorian Urban Gothic and crime novels, including Sarah Waters's *Affinity* (1999) and *Fingersmith* (2002), Valerie Martin's *Mary Reilly* (1990), and Carina Burman's *The Streets of Babylon: A London Mystery* (2008). They are also explored in screen Victoriana, most notably in the fictional works that are analysed in this PhD thesis.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning that there is a constant foregrounding of sexuality in neo-Victorian Gothic fiction. Although the Gothic has traditionally focused on the perverse, the deviant and the grotesque, academic and critical attention is currently being drawn to non-heteronormative sexualities, thanks to the work of feminist and queer scholars. Examples of this might include neo-Victorian Gothic portrayals of sex crimes and fetishes, incestuous practices, as well as queer and interracial relationships, among others. However, non-normative forms of sexuality have a tendency to over-exhibition in neo-Victorian fiction that could be explained by a contemporary thirst for spectacle and sensationalism (Kohlke and Gutleben, "Neo-Victorian Gothic" 41). Luckily, this overt display of sexuality in neo-Victorian Gothic does not compromise its main objective: to challenge the binary distinctions between marginality and what is considered to be normal. As a result, neo-Victorian Gothic is a contradictory and paradoxical genre, given

that it explores both contemporary and Victorian ethical concerns, while at the same time capitalises on the commercial and sensational expectations of modern audiences (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Gothic 41). This is the case of *Penny Dreadful*, which exploits the characters’ overt sexuality and seems to equate it, at times, with female liberation and emancipation. I argue that this portrayal of female sexuality might be reductionist and problematic, as it limits their sense of agency to sex, while ignoring other aspects of female oppression.

As stated above, the Gothic tropes, motives, themes and agendas discussed in this section are also widely explored in screen Victoriana, most notably in the four neo-Victorian works studied in this PhD thesis. In the next section, I explore the current rise of neo-Victorian Gothic on screen, from its origins in the 1930s cycle of Universal horror cinema to contemporary Gothic and horror works in both the big and small screens.

### 2.4. Neo-Victorian Gothic on Screen

As discussed in the previous section, the Gothic has adopted different shapes and fashions in the postmodern era, fast becoming a multidisciplinary phenomenon. Although it once exclusively belonged to the literary sphere, the Gothic has found its way into other media formats, including music, (video) games, TV series or the digital humanities, very often finding a “global audience” (Piatti-Farnell and Brien 2). Gothic fiction is part and parcel of contemporary popular culture, manifesting itself in obscure and oblique ways that can either perpetuate or challenge fundamental conceptions of our socio-cultural systems. Given that this PhD thesis focuses on neo-Victorian Gothic on screen, I henceforth discuss the pivotal role that these visual narratives have played in shaping our conceptions of the Victorians since the early decades of the twentieth century.

In film studies, the term ‘horror’ is usually preferred over ‘Gothic’, since it is regarded as a genre that seeks to provoke a “particular emotional reaction rather than to the specifics of a film’s setting, design, or theme” (Aldana-Reyes 2). Misha Kavka speculates that one of the reasons for this terminological preference is that the emergence of the film industry in the twentieth century is considered to be a blatant “plagiarizer” of the earlier literary Gothic. As a consequence, cinema would not be able to produce any authentic Gothic material, and instead “must content itself with providing a home for that catch-all category of terror and spookiness, the horror genre” (Kavka 209). Nevertheless, the Gothic still seems to be well suited to cinema, as it produces images that emotionally affect the audience, at least in culturally embedded terms. This seems to be, paradoxically,



both the weakness and the strength of horror cinema: its capacity to reproduce all the spectacular traits of the Gothic and to transform them into “all too recognizable– forms” (Kavka 209).

The labels ‘horror’ and ‘Gothic’ are sometimes interchangeably employed by film scholars, given that the differences between the two are not clear-cut. Aldana-Reyes contends that this might simply mean that “the various components of the Gothic (its monsters, its formulas) are beginning to overtake old genre demarcations” (2). Furthermore, it is arguably thanks to ‘horror cinema’ that the Gothic has come to be perceived as an “aesthetic experience” (Aldana-Reyes 8) through its visualisation and reconfiguration in twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Along the same lines, Kavka contends that visual codes or styles that we tend to associate to horror cinema stem from the twenty-century cinematic adaptations of Gothic literature. Said visual codes or signs are also detectable in the neo-Victorian texts analysed in this PhD thesis, including:

The ruined castle or abandoned house on a hill made hazy by fog; the dark cemetery dotted with crosses and gnarled, bare branches; the heavy-built wooden doors that close without human aid; the high, arched or leaded windows that cast imprisoning shadows; the closeups of mad, staring eyes (often above a cape drawn across the lower face); the towering, square body of a leaden-footed galvanic creation; even the passing of a black cloud across a full moon: these are the elements by which the historically mutable Gothic has become Gothic film (Kavka 210).

It is worth noting that the new technical devices that were being exploited in early cinema were perfect for the adaptation of Gothic narratives, particularly those of haunted houses, thanks to the use of “[s]top frame, superimposition, over- and underexposure, negatives and experiments with accelerating and slowing the succession of images” (Curtis 80). Moreover, the voyeuristic nature of cinema perfectly intersected with Gothic tales “of exploration and the porosity of perspectively arranged set designs” (Curtis 80). This visual representation of the Gothic was first developed in the Expressionist cinema of Weimar Germany –after WW1– in films such as *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920; Dir. Robert Wiene; *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* in the original German), *Dr Mabuse the Gambler* (1922; Dir. Fritz Lang; *Dr. Mabuse der Spieler* in the original German) and *Nosferatu* (1922; Dir. Friedrich W. Murnau). Expressionist noir films of the Weimar

Republic have traditionally been interpreted as being “indicative of a national psychosis” (Curtis 164) and created an iconic style of “[s]upernatural scenes of chiaroscuro and distortion produced an iconography that was widely adopted by horror films” (Curtis 70). These films arguably paved the way for later Anglo-American horror films, most notably the ones produced by Universal and Hammer studios.

Filmic adaptations of Victorian Gothic classics have arguably shaped our collective considerations of what the Gothic really is (Aldana-Reyes 9). Although Gothic cinema was originally considered to be a Romantic phenomenon, the popular acclaim of the so-called horror cycles produced by Universal in the United States and Hammer in the United Kingdom deviated the audience’s attention from the eighteenth-century Gothic texts of Walpole, Radcliffe, Lewis, or Maturin, and focused more on nineteenth-century canonical authors, such as Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker, Robert Louis Stevenson and Sheridan Le Fanu. Universal Studios was actually considered to be “a factory of horror” (Aldana-Reyes 9) that created productions based on Victorian and early twentieth-century Gothic texts, including Wallace Worsley’s *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923), Rupert Julian’s *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925), Tod Browning’s *Dracula* (1931), James Whale’s *Frankenstein* (1931), *The Invisible Man* (1933) and Karl Freund’s *The Mummy* (1932). This Victorian influence on the Gothic on screen is further evidenced by the emergence of recent neo-Victorian TV series, including *Penny Dreadful*, *Frankenstein’s Chronicles*, *Ripper Street*, *Dracula* or *The Irregulars*, which revisit and reinvent the abovementioned Victorian Gothic classics for a contemporary audience. Kavka defines this early period of the twentieth century as “the era of ‘classic horror’”, which stretched from the 1920s to the mid-1940s (212), although its popular acclaim experienced a decline in the early 1940s.

Universal horror films addressed American anxieties of aggression from the outside, which dramatically increased throughout the 1930s until after the Second World War (Kavka 212). Carol Margaret Davison further contends that these early adaptations of Victorian Gothic literature were also bearing witness to a more insidious and domestic sort of anxiety: female oppression. For Davison, these films associated women with the supernatural and transformed their minds and bodies into a space of struggle between dark forces and patriarchal figures –often embodied by fiancés, scientists, doctors, parental figures or men of faith. Therefore, this cycle of Universal horror films reflected “anxieties about the control of women’s bodies” at a crucial time in history where females were joining the workforce (Davison 218).

As a consequence, there was a growing demand for horror films targeting a female audience, especially “with the entry of more female screenwriters into Hollywood” (Davison 218). As a result, female Gothic emerged in filmic adaptations of Victorian classics, most notably David O. Selznick’s *Jane Eyre* (1943) and Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rebecca* (1940). Both films reflected the increasing anxieties regarding women’s recently found economic and sexual freedom, and they both appropriated female psychological traits from the film noir, including “seductive femmes fatales”, haunted and haunting heroines and villains and “the darker side and motives of human ‘monsters’/killers” (Davison 218). Likewise, these films also addressed growing changes in the domestic sphere, “particularly the social shifts and manifestations of desire related to postwar sexual politics” (Kavka 213).

When Hammer strived to produce a successful form of Gothic horror on screen in the 1950s and 1960s, he revisited Universal’s monsters, particularly the two cinematic masterpieces, *Dracula* (1931) –directed by Tod Browning– and *Frankenstein* (1931) –by James Whale. This further crystallised the reputation of Victorian villains and strengthened the association between Gothic horror and monsters. However, Stephen Carver claims that Hammer films were different from the ones produced by Universal in that they were in colour and revisited traditionally Gothic anxieties, such as sexuality, taboos and violence, which had been left out by Universal. Moreover, Hammer films were arguably more theatrical and had a clear “influence of the Victorian stage” (242). Carver further contends that “Hammer resurrected all the major Gothic archetypes” in traditional Victorian Gothic fiction, as it produced six *Frankenstein* and eight *Dracula* sequels, as well as other relevant adaptations from the nineteenth-century (242).<sup>11</sup>

Likewise, Carver points to another successful visual adaptation from nineteenth-century Gothic literature: the filmic versions of Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories directed by Roger Corman in the early 1960s, and starring Vincent Price “as the psychopathological hero of low-budget but highly effective horror films”. These films were inspired by the international success achieved by Hammer horror cycle, and started with a colour version of Poe’s of “The Fall of the House of Usher” (Carver 243).<sup>12</sup> For

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<sup>11</sup> Some of these adaptations include four “Mummy” films, especially one based on Stoker’s *The Jewel of the Seven Stars* (1903), as well as the remakes of *The Two Faces of Dr. Jekyll* (1960), *The Curse of the Werewolf* (1961) and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1962), among others.

<sup>12</sup> *House of Usher* (1960) was followed by *The Pit and The Pendulum* (1961), *Tales of Terror* (1962), *Premature Burial* (1962), *The Raven* (1963), *The Haunted Palace* (1963), *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964), *Tomb of Ligeia* (1964).

Kavka, this cycle of films is the work of an independent and isolated director rather than the product of the period's cultural anxieties and changes. However, "this new psychopathological Gothic hero" appears to embody "postwar anxieties about sexual politics" (213), which from the 1960s onwards started to have a rather "destabilizing influence on the moral, psychical, and sexual certainty of earlier film representations of masculinity" (Kavka 213-4). Both Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" and Corman's adaptation have influenced and shaped later Gothic narratives that revolve around a haunted, crumbling house, most notably Guillermo del Toro's *Crimson Peak*, one of the screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis.

It seems that one of the appeals of Victorian Gothic for these early filmmakers was its modernity and temporal closeness, which "made these myths easier and cheaper to shoot, more relevant, and more immediate" (Aldana-Reyes 9) than prior Gothic novels with more remote settings, such as Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) or Lewis's *The Monk* (1796). As discussed above, since the cinematic term that came to be identified with this dreadful sensation was horror, the Gothic was initially relegated to be a mere "qualifier of a type of horrific experience: one usually set in the (often Victorian) past or else in ruinously daunting buildings and including any of the monsters associated with the Gothic, from vampires and doppelgängers to ghosts, mummies, werewolves, and (increasingly) zombies" (Aldana-Reyes 9-10).

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is arguably the most well-known and identifiable of Victorian Gothic texts, especially thanks to its relentless adaptations and appropriations across media, from advertising –as in the case of Count Chocula breakfast cereal– to television –most recently, BBC's *Dracula* (2020). For Kavka, Béla Lugosi's representation of Dracula has come to be "absorbed into our own culture" and has become an icon of Gothic fiction, so that he now generates more visual pleasure than terror (212). However, it was not until Calvin Floyd's documentary *In Search of Dracula* (1975), and especially thanks to Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), that the Count became one of the most iconic Gothic villains for contemporary audiences. Indeed, Coppola's *Dracula* embodies the anxieties from its 1990s context of production, most notably the fear of contracting HIV and AIDS through blood (Kavka 212), a concern that this adaptation shares with other vampire films from the period, most notably Del Toro's first feature movie, *Cronos* (1993). Moreover, *Dracula* has also been reimagined as one of the central villains in *Penny Dreadful*, where he is portrayed by the Latino actor

Christian Camargo, perhaps in an attempt to make the traditional Gothic narrative more racially inclusive.

Contemporary Gothic on screen has invariably approached prior novels and myths with a revisionist perspective, “often connected to the rise of identity politics in social activism and literary criticism, especially from the 1960s onward” (Aldana-Reyes 11). Indeed, the Gothic has had multiple ways to manifest itself in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, thanks to the emergence of new digital and streaming platforms, as well as the increasing number of TV channels. Moreover, it has always displayed a desire to rewrite or reimagine well-known narrative forms and styles, “especially across the range of literary genres and subgenres”, while simultaneously reflecting the social concerns of its historical context and its multiple changes (Jowett and Abbott 3). Consequently, cinematic horror, Gothic fiction and the monsters related to them thrive in all kinds of popular genres and media, most notably in the film and television industries.

Indeed, Lorna Jowett and Stacey Abbott claim that the relationship between television and Gothic horror is “fraught with tension and potential” (xiii). There has been a re-emergence of horror aesthetics and tropes across different modes of cultural representation, especially in the case of films, “where re-imaginings of monstrosity and fear—from zombies to vampires, deformed creatures, serial killers, and hauntings—have brought attention to multiple ways of living, dying, and being in our contemporary context” (Piatti-Farnell and Brien 3). In fact, it is arguably watching horror films and TV series that has shaped the creators’ and critics’ understanding of the Gothic horror genre (Jowett and Abbott xiv).

Likewise, the relationship between the horror genre and the American television and film industries has always been commercially successful. These productions have been characterised by a technological progress that “has served to intensify graphic realism aimed to thrill and repulse, as well as an increasing reflexivity and capacity for socio-political and cultural critique” (Davison 215). Ever since the television boom in the 1950s, Gothic horror has occupied a central position in our culture, with the broadcasting of classic films and original shows including *Quatermass Experiment* (1953) or *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964). Other subgenres of Gothic TV were also successful, including comedy horror and soap operas, like *The Addams Family* (1964-1966), *The Munsters* (1964-1966) or *Dark Shadows* (1966-1971). These Gothic TV shows explored the concerns of middle-class American families, presenting “the suburbs as hyperconformist, even anti-American locale given its xenophobia and threat to

individualism” (Davison 221). In the case of *Dark Shadows*, it could actually be considered a collage of neo-Victorian appropriations on the small screen, as Harry M. Benshoff claims that most of its plots and sub-plots were actually based on famous Victorian Gothic sources, including *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Rebecca*, *Jane Eyre*, or *Wuthering Heights* (2).

Furthermore, Davison offers two major concerns that inspired Gothic fiction on the small and big screens during the 1960s and the 1970s: the ghost of slavery and the tense race relations with Britain’s former colonies and gendered anxieties that included “the Equal Rights Amendment (1972), Second Wave Feminism and such medical breakthroughs as the birth control pill” (223). The latter generated a heated social debate, as established gendered power relations were being challenged by allowing women to have more control over their own bodies. Racial tensions have traditionally played a pivotal role in US literature, especially in the case of Southern Gothic, where the Africanised presence had been underrepresented and even demonised. This tendency as tried to be subverted in horror cinema from the 1970s onwards, as in the case of John Carpenter’s *Halloween* (1978), where despite the “all-white suburban setting”, the villain, Michael Myers, arguably embodies the racially motivated violence that Carpenter witnessed growing up in Kentucky (Davison 223). It is worth noting that these racial and gender anxieties are still prevalent in today’s Western societies, as well as represented in contemporary Gothic fiction. The TV series *True Blood* bears witness to the racially-divided American South, and the vampires featured in the show encapsulate the racial Other that has been marginalised and alienated by the white majority. Likewise, the neo-Victorian screen works that are analysed in this PhD thesis also address these polytemporal concerns from postcolonial and feminist perspectives, both in their Victorian setting and their contemporary context of production.

On a different note, it is also worth commenting that the graphic and gore violence that has characterised Horror TV ever since the 1970s seems to be evocative of nineteenth-century freak shows and *grand guignol* spectacles. According to Amanda K. Leblanc, “horror TV situates its graphic violence and grotesque presentations of monstrosity literally back on to stages” (45). The *Grand Guignol* (1897-1962) was also known as the ‘The Theatre of Horror’. It was a theatre at the Pigalle district of Paris that specialised in horror shows that could be described as showing “explicit violence” and “blood-curling terror” (Hand and Wilson 266). The *Grand Guignol* had a great influence

on both drama and cinema, especially in the way it consolidated nineteenth-century melodrama, reinventing it for the twentieth century. The *Grand Guignol* is of utter importance in the series *Penny Dreadful*. Dr Frankenstein's first creature, Caliban/John Clare, spends the first months of his new life working at a *Grand Guignol*, the only place where he is not rejected for his horrendous physical traits. This could also be understood as a metanarrative homage to the theatrical precursor of Horror TV, to which *Penny Dreadful* is also a direct heir.

Davison also points to the influence that Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) had on later "slasher" films such as *Friday the Thirteenth* (Sean S. Cunningham, 1980) or *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Wes Craven, 1984), also paved the way for "subsequent gruesome graphic splatter film and 'torture porn' films like *Saw* (James Wen, 2004) that sought to unsettle the viewer by any means necessary" (224). Hooper's film depicts a dysfunctional and cannibalistic family of serial killers that are deprived of strong female figures. This, together with the American fascination with serial killers seem to have a strong influence on Gothic films and TV series produced from the 2010s onwards. This is most evident in the on-going obsession with Jack the Ripper's murderers or the fascination with detective stories, as well as in the constant exploitation of the Victorian haunted house as the locus of family trauma and dysfunctionality.

According to Davison, the house serves as the space where we can channel "fears around control of the self and the family in the form of an anthropomorphized locale capable of monstrously possessing its inhabitants" and a place for spectral encounters of an intergenerational, personal and historical traumas (225). One of the most notable examples of this trope is the Spanish Gothic film *The Others* (2001), directed by Alejandro Amenábar, in which a widow and her children have to live in an apparently haunted and remote mansion at the beginning of the twentieth century. All these elements are widely explored in the neo-Victorian screen works analysed in this PhD thesis, most notably in *Crimson Peak* and *Taboo*, where the family houses are haunted by the presence of the deceased matriarchs.

From the 1990s onwards, both the big and small screens have also been deeply transformed by technological advances, such as special effects like CGI that improved the representation of the supernatural and paved the way for twenty-first century horror TV series and films. This technological progress contributed to a change in the portrayal of evil characters in TV productions, particularly in terms of "the origins and nature of the serial killer, and the social proliferation of violence" (Davison 226). Finally, it is also

worth noting that twenty-first century viewers might be currently experiencing ‘the golden age’ of the Gothic in TV series. These televisual texts are multifaceted in style and ideologically charged, especially in the way they capitalise on human fears. TV horror has currently become more prominent across a wide range of channels, networks and streaming platforms in the UK and the US, with new series, such as *Hannibal* (2013-15), *Hemlock Grove* (2013-present) or *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018).

Abbot contends that one reason for this current proliferation of horror TV series might be a “relaxation of censorship” that has enabled “more mainstream genres to adopt many of the graphic, corporeal conventions associated with horror, particularly focusing upon the body in disarray” (1). Two of the most well-known Gothic TV series of the last two decades are *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005) and the abovementioned *True Blood*, both created by Allan Ball, which reflect on “ontological and metaphysical” meditations of the “American and human condition” (Davison 226).

The neo-Victorian screen texts that I analyse in this PhD thesis exploit the Gothic tropes discussed in this section, particularly the return to the Victorian era in order to reflect on both our past and present anxieties, the representation of the haunted house as the locus of family traumas and the reimagining of Victorian Gothic narratives and villains, as in the case of *Dracula* and *Dr Frankenstein*.



### 3. TRAUMA STUDIES

As discussed in the previous chapter, neo-Victorian Gothic narratives explore polytemporal gendered, racial and social issues affecting marginalised individuals, whose traumatic stories had been silenced by both historical and literary records. The nineteenth century has traditionally been revisited as the period that brought about socio-economic, technological and scientific changes, which had a decisive impact on the lives of women, colonial subjects and minorities. Thus, neo-Victorian narratives of trauma attempt to excavate those traumatic experiences, so that contemporary audiences can bear (after) witness to them. The screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis focus on the representation of family and gendered traumas, as well as the ghost of slavery and colonial practices in both Britain and its former colonies.

This chapter offers an exhaustive review of the theoretical approach implemented in this PhD thesis: trauma studies. In Section 3.1. I provide a contextualisation of this field and its theoretical tenets. I also enumerate previous scholarly works that apply this critical approach to the disciplines of literary and film studies. In Section 3.2. I address the synergy between neo-Victorian and trauma studies, with an especial emphasis on the concepts of trauma narratives, bearing after-witness and gendered traumas. In Section 3.3. I focus on the trope of haunting and spectrality, one of the main themes explored both in neo-Victorian Gothic fiction and trauma narratives, including the screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis. Finally, in Section 3.4. I explore neo-Victorian family traumas, focusing on the dysfunctional and fragmented nuclear family, the ancestral house as the locus of that trauma, and the concept of ‘family of choice’, which is exploited in my corpus of analysis.

#### 3.1. Definition and Contextualisation of Trauma Studies

Trauma fiction brings to the fore a number of challenging questions for both authors and their audience, most notably the potential ethical value of literature and the visual arts. Moreover, trauma narratives help us rethink our established conceptions of identity, our relationship to others and our ethical responsibility. They also allow us to reflect on what eventualities define how or whether trauma victims can survive the pain and consequences of trauma experience. Laurie Vickroy defines trauma as “a response to events so overwhelmingly intense that they impair normal emotional or cognitive responses and bring lasting psychological disruption” (ix). Consequently, trauma scholars

in cultural studies currently focus their research on the audience's position and how the character's traumatic experiences impact them. In this PhD thesis, I contend that the neo-Victorian films and TV series that make up my corpus of analysis should also be studied from this perspective, given that they do not merely exploit the sensational aspects of family and gendered traumas, but also engage the audience in an empathic viewing, making them reflect on the tragedies and suffering represented in them.

The practical application of trauma studies in the field of literary criticism came about in the 1980s, coinciding with a renewed interest in approaching literary texts from an ethical perspective (Ganteau and Onega, "Introduction" 7). There were two main opposite trends that emerged within the field. On the one hand, there was a normative and deontic trend concerned with morality and "generally associated with the stable ego of the character as present in classic realist text based on linguistic transparency". On the other hand, there was a "Levinasian and post-Levinasian ethics, of a non-deontic, non-foundational, non-cognitive, and above all non-ontological type" (Ganteau and Onega, "Introduction" 8). Trauma theory, as it is applied in this PhD thesis, belongs to the post-Levinasian trend, whose origins date back to the pioneering work of a group of scholars associated with the Yale School of Deconstruction, including Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Geoffrey H. Hartman and Dominick LaCapra. They implemented the founding texts of trauma studies –by authors such as Pierre Janet, Sandor Ferenczi, Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud– to the analysis of Holocaust narratives and survivors' testimonies (Ganteau and Onega, "Introduction" 8). Their work drew on several critical schools, including psychoanalysis, feminism or New Historicism. E. Ann Kaplan asserts that trauma studies originated in this context of research about the Holocaust, as it was a historical catastrophe of such magnitude that gave the term "trauma" its classic implications ("Introduction" 1).

However, the basic features of trauma were originally discovered by nineteenth- and twentieth-century psychiatrists, such as J. M. Charcot and his disciple Pierre Janet, who are considered to be the forerunners of trauma studies in the medical field. They were contemporaries of Sigmund Freud and their research focused on hysteria and its potential cure through hypnosis (Kaplan, "Introduction" 25),<sup>13</sup> although it is actually

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<sup>13</sup> Hysteria derives from the Greek term 'hysteron' (womb). It is a psychiatric disorder that has traditionally been associated with femininity, given that it was thought to be derived from an irritation in the uterine system, which affected the nervous system (Arias, "Between Spiritualism and Hysteria" 169). Its main symptoms included "fits, fainting, vomiting, choking, sobbing, laughing, paralysis –and the rapid passage

Freud who is considered to be the founding father of psychoanalysis. Freud's career moved from an early influence of French psychiatry and his work with Joseph Breuer to an interest in war neurosis at the end of World War I, and concluded with a final revision of all his theories in his last work, *Moses and Monoteism* (1939).

As stated above, trauma is closely related to modernity, particularly to the industrial revolution and the establishment of the bourgeois nuclear family at the end of the nineteenth century. The former brought about train and machine accidents, as well as great wars, whereas the latter provided the locus for female hysteria (Kaplan and Bang 3). All these events drew attention to the traumatic responses experienced by trauma survivors. According to Vickroy, the first diagnosed cases of psychological trauma came from studies on hysteria performed by Janet, Breuer and Freud, although they were questioned because this disorder was widely associated with female patients, who "were considered constitutionally overemotional" (15). Freud and Breuer started to treat their hysterical patients through hypnosis, although soon after Freud experimented with his 'talking cure', a practice whereby the therapist encourages their patients to verbalise their symptoms and personal experiences. This became a pioneering medical innovation, since, until that moment, medical patients had been unsuccessfully treated with "resting cures, physical procedures, and hypnosis" (Rizzuto 729). Dori Laub later drew on this practice to develop his theory of the survivor's imperative need to tell their traumatic experiences. Freud and Breuer explained the talking cure practice as follows:

Each individual hysterical symptom immediately and permanently disappeared when we had succeeded in bringing clearly to light the memory of the event by which it was provoked and in arousing its accompanying affect, and when the patient had described that event in the greatest possible detail and put the affect into words. Recollection without affect almost invariably produces no result. The physical process which originally took place must be repeated as vividly as possible; it must be brought back to its status nascendi and then given verbal utterance (6).

In *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud and Breuer defined psychological trauma as "something that enters the psyche that is so unprecedented or overwhelming that it cannot be

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from one to another suggested the liability and capriciousness traditionally associated with the feminine nature" (Showalter 130).

processed or assimilated by usual mental processes” (499). In this volume they also coined the concept of ‘traumatic hysteria’, and concluded that the symptoms of this disorder derived from personal traumas, most notably sexual ones. Kaplan asserts that Freud and Breuer gendered trauma according to the way the European nuclear family was organised at the time: male trauma was thought to derive from accidents, whereas women’s traumatic episodes were considered to be caused by sexual repression (26).

Hysteria features prominently as a disorder affecting women in neo-Victorian Gothic fiction, most notably in *Penny Dreadful*, where the female protagonist is confined in an asylum after being diagnosed with this affliction. In the case of *Taboo*, however, this illness is also extended to male characters, James Delaney and his father, who are deemed mad by the rest of society and, as a result, become social outcasts. Freud and Breuer provided three early case studies in their essay, Anna O., Emily von N., and Miss Luc, which were still highly influenced by Charcot’s work regarding treatments –i.e., hydrotherapy, massages or electrotherapy. Some of these treatments for hysteria are graphically portrayed in the series *Penny Dreadful*, where it is also implied that they were largely unsuccessful. Freud hinted at the sexual origins of hysteria in these cases, but it was not until the ‘Dora case’ that he provided an in-depth examination of female hysteria and its symptoms “as occasioned by sexual incidents in an environment of rigid sexual repression” (Kaplan 27).

In a later paper, “Heredity and the Aetiology of the Neuroses” (1896), Freud boldly claimed that sexual abuse was the actual cause of female hysteria, whereby the patient has an unconscious memory of “*a precocious experience of sexual relations with actual excitement of the genitals, resulting from sexual abuse committed by another person*” (qtd. in Kaplan 27, emphasis in original). Freud was aware that this assertion would not be well received by his audience, who harshly criticised and questioned it, so that he was eventually forced to admit that traumatic hysteria could be triggered not only by sexual abuse, but also by forbidden sexual fantasies.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the interest in trauma shifted towards “shellshocked” soldiers in World War I,<sup>14</sup> who presented similar symptoms to the ones

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<sup>14</sup> Shellshock (a.k.a. war neurosis or combat fatigue) referred to a clinical spectrum of neuropsychiatric conditions first diagnosed in WWI soldiers. Dr William Aldren Turner described shellshock as follows: “a form of temporary “nervous breakdown” [...] ascribed to a sudden or alarming psychological cause such as witnessing a ghastly sight or a harassing experience [...] the patient becomes “nervy”, unduly emotional and shaky, and most typical of all his sleep is disturbed by bad dreams . . . of experiences through which he has passed. Even the waking hours may be distressful from acute recollections of these events” (883).

sustained by hysterics, most notably “trance states, violent mood swings, amnesia, [or] partial paralysis of the body” (Freud and Breuer 498). At that time, traumatised soldiers who refused to go back to the front were considered to be deserters, even though they were actually suffering from what has now come to be defined by the American Psychiatric Association (hereafter APA) as PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). According to Freud and Breuer, these patients suffered from “memory gaps, but also repeatedly re-experienced extreme events in flashbacks, nightmares, and hallucinations months or even years afterwards” (500).

The increasing number of shellshocked soldiers during the Great War compelled society to question a set of preconceived views on masculinity, which maintained that mental disorders were actually signs of male cowardice (Vickroy 16). This shift in thinking paved the way for trauma theories and treatments to be developed. According to Kaplan, British doctors started to apply theories and treatments of female hysteria associated with sexual traumas to war neurotics (28), which validated Freudian theory. In later years, Freud also strived to find a connection between war and peace-time neuroses, and claimed that repression might trigger traumatic symptoms. This assertion challenged his previous theory that female hysteria could only be based on sexual memories, given that if it were to be caused by imaginations, then it could not be equated to war neurosis –which was only caused by real-life, external “overwhelming event[s] that they had been unable to cognitively register at the time it happened” (Kaplan 30).

Freud explored trauma in a number of later essays, most notably “Thoughts for the time on War and Death” (1915), “The Uncanny” (1919) and “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920) –which played a pivotal role in the differentiation of psychic and physical trauma. In these texts, Freud describes trauma as an obsessive return to the traumatic event, which can be translated into a compulsion to repeat and to relive the past. This, in turn, might blur the distinction between past and present, breaking chronological temporality. According to Anne Whitehead, for Freud, the patient’s compulsive repetition entailed “an attempt to achieve a retrospective mastery over the shocking or unexpected event that has breached the defensive walls surrounding the psyche” (140).

However, his most significant and ground-breaking contribution to psychoanalysis is arguably *Moses and Monoteism* (1939), which he wrote when he was forced to exile to England. In this publication, Freud argues that trauma is not processed instantly, but there is a “latency” period that might last years before the patient starts showing symptoms (117). Freud had used the term “belatedness” to refer to this later

processing in an earlier work: “Project for a Scientific Psychology” (1895). Here, he contended that the difference in how survivors react to similar traumas depends on to what extent that event triggered previous traumatic events. In other words, an early and similar episode shapes how the current shock is perceived by the victim. Thus, during the adult stage, survivors are likely to experience a second event that might allow them to make sense of their traumatic memories. From that moment on, the traumatic symptoms could present themselves as nightmares or flashbacks (Ganteau and Onega, “Introduction” 11).

Freud’s notions of “belatedness” and “repetition compulsion” were later applied and developed by a number of psychoanalysts, such as Pierre Janet, Carl C. Jung and Sandor Ferenczi (Ganteau and Onega 11). In the case of Janet, his main contribution to the field was his assertion that the neurotic can only be cured after they manage to integrate and order the fragmentary episodes of nightmares and flashbacks chronologically, placing them in their past (Ganteau and Onega, “Introduction” 11). Carl C. Jung drew on this idea to determine that trauma victims have a secret story, which is key to their treatment and recovery. According to Ganteau and Onega, this narrative component of trauma is precisely what “makes the findings of trauma studies so relevant for creative writers and critics alike” (“Introduction” 12).

The pioneering work on war neurosis conducted by Freud, Jung and Janet continued during the first half of the twentieth century, although not without obstacles. According to Vickroy, military authorities in World War II started to discredit psychiatric reports of war trauma once again (16). Consequently, it was not until 1980 that PTSD was included in the catalogue of psychiatric and medical diagnoses, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual III*, thanks to the tenacious political activism of Vietnam veterans (Ganteau and Onega, “Introduction” 12). The state of political turmoil in the 1970s prompted veterans to demand more medical attention to traumatic stress derived from their experiences in Vietnam. Vickroy asserts that this was the first time since Freud that psychological conditions were analysed based on the patients’ “experiences and emotions” (17). Likewise, Whitehead contends that for the first time, the APA recognised that a mental disorder could be environmentally induced and that a traumatic experience that happened to an adult person could have life-long consequences at a psychological level (4).

PTSD was first described as a predominantly male disorder, but this definition was contested by feminist psychologists, like Judith Herman and Laura S. Brown. They

found this arbitrary diagnosis ironic, given that hysteria had been originally associated with women. The APA had not yet established a connection between symptoms of female hysteria and PTSD, probably because the medical community had long stopped using ‘hysteria’ as a medical term. Kaplan asserts that psychiatrists then started to turn their attention to female survivors of sexual and gender-based violence thanks to the feminist movement (33). Indeed, feminist activism managed to raise public awareness about a number of cases of women and children being abused in the domestic sphere (Vickroy 17-8). They also drew attention to the fact that such abuse was perpetrated within the confines of patriarchal hegemony, as it “contributed to or coincided with women’s gendered socialisation and subordination through physical terror” (Vickroy 18).

Hence, the rise of traumatic experiences of varying nature forced professionals to include responses to different kinds of personal and collective shocks under the umbrella term of PTSD, including “rape, child abuse, auto and industrial accidents, and so on, that are now often understood in terms of the effects of *post-traumatic stress disorder*” (Caruth, “Unclaimed Experience” 11, emphasis in original). Likewise, Lindy et al. claim that the comparison between a number of psychosomatic conditions triggered a reconfiguration of traumatic stress between the 1980s and the 1990s so as to develop a “unified theory of the psychosocial consequences of traumatic stress” (qtd. in Vickroy 18), since up to that moment psychiatric studies had focused on individual victims and situations. This shift helped to acknowledge trauma as a social, rather than a private phenomenon, which offered the possibility of overcoming prejudices against trauma survivors and to establish “cooperative means of prevention” (Vickroy 18). In fact, it was precisely at this moment that Holocaust survivors, who had been trying to cope with their symptoms alone and without medical attention, were finally granted a voice in the Fortunoff Video Archive Project, led by Dori Laub and Geoffrey Hartman at the University of Yale.

It was also around this time that the concept of trauma moved from psychiatric discourse to literary criticism, as a way “to elaborate on the cultural and ethical implications of trauma” (Ganteau and Onega, “Introduction” 12). The earliest publications that addressed this shift were two issues of *American Imago* (1991) that included a series of essays reprinted in 1995 in a volume edited by Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Caruth’s definition of trauma in this volume stresses dissociation as a key characteristic of trauma: “a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or set of events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive

hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event” (4). The goal of this publication was to account for the interdisciplinarity of trauma studies, as not only psychiatrists, but also literary critics, sociologists and writers took part in it. Kaplan contends that this rise of trauma studies in the 1990s could have been due to the fact that critical theory had become more abstract as a result of the influence of Lacanian theory and poststructuralism, as well as to a renewed interest in World War II and its collective and personal traumas (35).

One of the most relevant theories of the Yale School was put forward by Laub, who emphasised the survivors’ need to define themselves by getting to know their own traumatic story in his and Shoshana Felman’s pioneering publication, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992). Through his experience as a psychoanalyst and testimony researcher, he worked with Holocaust survivors and concluded that the only way they could deal with their traumas was by telling their traumatic experience to an empathic audience that would bear witness to it. As stated above, Laub drew on Freud and Breuer’s talking cure and stressed the importance of verbalisation in overcoming trauma. He claimed that traumatised patients had “an imperative need to tell and thus to come to know one’s story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one’s buried truth in order to be able to live one’s life”. However, he also noticed that trauma survivors are usually haunted by silence or an “impossibility to tell”, which prevents them to tell their stories (“Event Without Witness” 78). In fact, this concern with what cannot or should not be spoken has come to be known in trauma studies as ‘unspeakability’, which is also a major theme in both fiction and scholarship on trauma, history and memory. The need to verbalise one’s traumatic experience and the difficulties it entails for survivors are explored in the screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis. At first, the traumatised characters are haunted by a past experience that they have repressed, and it is only after they externalise it through words that they can start the healing process.

Laub also stresses the importance of witnessing as a key element to help the survivor work through their trauma, and claims that if the survivor does not have an empathic listener, they might resort to silence so as not to suffer public discredit. Trauma victims who do not tell their experience might develop a “distorted memory” and “delusion”, so that their experiences become more blurred “in their silent retention and pervasively invade and contaminate the survivor’s daily life”, to the point where they might even doubt the reality of the event itself. Silence could then be defined as a “self-



inflicted emotional imprisonment” (Laub, “Event Without Witness” 79) that survivors impose on themselves in order to avoid the pain of reliving the traumatic experience. As Laub asserts, “if one talks about trauma without being truly heard or truly listened to, the telling might itself be lived as a return of the trauma –*a re-experiencing of the event itself*” (“Bearing Witness” 67, emphasis in original). Survivors need a relatable other that helps them reconstruct and externalise their traumatic story, otherwise the absence of a sympathetic listener who can assert and confirm the veracity of the survivor’s experience might actually destroy their story (“Bearing Witness” 68). Finally, Laub contends that in order to avoid this emotional entrapment and cyclical repetition,

a therapeutic process –a process of constructing a narrative, of reconstructing a history and essentially, of re-externalizing the event– has to be set in motion. This re-externalization of the event can occur and take effect when one can articulate and transmit the story, literally transfer it to another outside oneself and then take it back again, inside. Telling thus entails a reassertion of the hegemony of reality and a re-externalization of the evil that affected and contaminated the trauma victim (“Bearing Witness” 69).

The role of trauma narratives would arguably be granting trauma victims and survivors a stage where they can effectively externalise and convey their experience to a potential sympathetic audience, who would be bearing witness to it. Thus, I argue that consumers of trauma narratives are far from being passive spectators, as they need to actively engage with the traumatic event represented on screen and take an active stance towards it. The neo-Victorian screen adaptations analysed in this PhD thesis encourage their audience to align themselves with the victims on screen and sympathise with their traumatic experiences, contributing to the survivors’ healing process.

Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that trauma studies in the humanities have traditionally focused on the trauma of the victims in order to contribute to their healing process by bringing to the forefront their traumatic experiences. That way, society can empathise with their pain and take action to prevent similar atrocities from happening again in the future. However, there has recently been a shift in attention from victims to perpetrators “in psychoanalysis and trauma literatures (and in cinema trauma scholarship)” (Morag, “On the Definition of the Perpetrator” 16), on to what is known as ‘perpetrator trauma’. This term was coined by Rachel M. MacNair in her book

*Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress: The Psychological Consequences of Killing* (2002), which examined individuals who had committed atrocities. She also coined the term Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress (PITS), a form of PTSD triggered by being an active participant in causing trauma. The idea behind these concept is that perpetrators can be traumatised by their very own crimes against other people (Mohamed 1162). Despite the fact that perpetrators have been represented in films and TV series for many years, we did not have the tools to “further interrogate the depiction of such traumata” (Karam 84). However, with this new framework in trauma studies, we can acknowledge the perpetrator’s trauma and society’s responsibility in their atrocities against humanity.

Despite the fact that perpetrator trauma is mentioned by Caruth at the end of *Unclaimed Experience*, this concept has not been as carefully theorised as the trauma of victims (Morag, *Waltzing with Bashir* 4). In fact, trauma is usually studied in “individuals or communities viewed as legitimate and worthy of attention” –i.e., victims and survivors– and trauma studies have usually stressed the link between trauma and the recovery of the victim’s voice (Mohamed 1177). As a result, the trauma of the perpetrator tends to be disregarded at an academic level. In fact, perpetrators are only considered to be traumatised if they are also victims, “such as child soldiers and individuals who commit crimes under duress” (Mohamed 1167). Furthermore, most perpetrators are thought to have had a traumatic past that triggered their violent tendencies, particularly in their childhood. These traumas might include “abuse by a family member, a parent’s addiction, extreme deprivation or loss– that contributed to his criminal wrongdoing later in life” (Mohamed 1176).

Perpetrator trauma has found its way into films and TV series, and has been particularly studied in Israeli documentary films and South African cinema.<sup>15</sup> Neo-Victorianism on screen also brings to the forefront historical and postcolonial atrocities against women and minorities, such as LGBTIQ+ or racialised characters. In fact, Kleinecke-Bates states that neo-Victorian fiction shares “preoccupations with authenticity, fidelity and immediacy” with factual genres, such as documentary films (11). Consequently, perpetrator trauma is also being explored in neo-Victorian on screen, especially in TV series such as *The Irregulars* (2021), *The Nevers* (2021-), or the texts

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<sup>15</sup> These Israeli films include *To See if I’m Smiling* (Tamar Yarom 2007), *Waltz with Bashir* (Ar Folman 2008) and *Z32* (Avi Mograbi 2008), whose purpose was to explore the perpetrator trauma and unresolved guilt of Israeli soldiers in the second intifada in order to raise awareness about their level of responsibility for the atrocities perpetrated against the ethnic Other (Morag “Waltzing with Bashir”).

analysed in this PhD thesis. Perpetrator trauma usually entails offenders who have committed atrocious crimes that trigger a sense of unresolved guilt and make them take responsibility for their actions (Morag, “Perpetrator Trauma” 95) –even though this is not always the case, since the willingness to take responsibility for one’s actions may vary.

According to Morag, the ‘new war’ in the twenty-first century context brings to the fore the need to propose new paradigms for “trauma as well as cinema trauma studies: the trauma of the perpetrator”. That way, we acknowledge the current shift in focus from the victim’s trauma, “mostly a psychological trauma” to the perpetrator’s trauma, “which is first and foremost an ethical trauma”. For Morag, this new understanding of the subject positions involved in traumatic events would put an end to “over one hundred years of repression of the abhorrent figure of the perpetrator in psychoanalysis and trauma literatures (and in cinema trauma scholarship)” (Morag, “On the Definition of the Perpetrator” 17). Trauma studies have been influenced by Post-Holocaust studies, as well as postcolonial, gender and genocide studies from their inception, leading to the establishment of the “triangulation of perpetrator, victim and bystander at the heart off their discussion” (Morag, “On the Definition of the Perpetrator” 13).

Even though this opposition between subject position and action has contributed to our current understandings of the figure of the perpetrator, Morag argues that we should reconsider these taken-for-granted views and reassess them in the light of the twenty-first-century new context of wars. She suggests that we “should define the perpetrator according to the context”, so that we can evaluate “the ethical dimensions in human action” in the context of “new war’s dynamics”. This way, we can acknowledge society’s responsibility in sending “the soldiers-who-became-perpetrators into these atrocious situations”, and demand it to be held accountable for its crimes by proxy (Morag, “On the Definition of the Perpetrator” 17).

In the case of James Delaney in *Taboo*, his guilty conscience is reflected through nightmares, flashbacks and a commitment to make reparations to enslaved Black individuals. However, his remorse and atonement are depicted in an ambivalent fashion, since he also plans to replicate the very same colonial atrocities that he was trying to expose. Moreover, the patriarchal perpetrators of Del Toro’s *Crimson Peak*, Lucille and Thomas Sharpe, were originally the victims of child abuse and domestic violence before becoming murderous partners. Likewise, *Penny Dreadful* includes a number of victims-perpetrators, such as the resurrected radical misandrist, Lily Frankenstein –who had been

the victim of gender-based violence and sexual abuse before being reborn— or the mass perpetrator and werewolf Ethan Chandler—who grew up next to a cruel and absent father.

However, the objective of examining the trauma of the perpetrator is in no way to underestimate the importance of the victim's trauma and voice or "society's imperative to bear witness" (Morag, "On the Definition of the Perpetrator" 5). In fact, the purpose of focusing on the perpetrator's trauma is not to establish empathy for perpetrators, nor to forgive them. Unlike the victim's need to share their experiences with an empathic listener to acknowledge and overcome past traumas, perpetrators actually need to empathise with their victims, which will lead them to self-denouncement and to take action in policies that might prevent similar crimes from happening in the future (Morag, *Waltzing with Bashir* 23). Even though most of the chapters in this PhD thesis are devoted to the study of victim trauma within the confines of the nuclear family, Chapter 7 focuses on perpetrator trauma, particularly on how characters that are former victims of domestic and gendered violence eventually become (domestic, imperial or mass) abusers in the screen texts analysed here.

On a different note, trauma scholars have long put into question how trauma should be represented in fiction, as well as our ethical right to do it in the first place. Kaplan and Wang argue that a number of critics dismiss any attempt at representing trauma, either through narrative or image, given that they seem to have a "seductive power to gloss over the horrendous fact and to distort the literal truth of trauma". Due to the fact that trauma is a disruptive phenomenon that destabilises a culture's "meaning-making" and its modes of representation, these critics consider that it is "beyond representation" (8). In fact, Ruth Leys claims that it was thanks to Caruth's research and theories on trauma that we have come to accept traumatic experience as essentially "unspeakable and unrepresentable" (304). Scholars including Theodor Adorno, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-François Lyotard or the Holocaust Survivor Primo Levi have also focused their interest in the impossibility to represent the Holocaust, which is a major concern for writers and trauma theorists alike. Lyotard directly addressed this ethical problem of representation by claiming that:

Representing "Auschwitz" in images and words is a way of making us forget this. I am not thinking here only of bad movies and widely distributed TV series, of bad novels or "eyewitness accounts." I am thinking of those very cases that, by their exactitude, their severity, are, or should be, best qualified not to let us forget. But

even they represent what, in order not to be forgotten as that which is the forgotten itself, must remain unrepresentable (26).

However, Lyotard later acknowledged that art could be a valuable tool in conveying the suffering and silence that define traumatic experience, as it could bear witness to pain and suffering. Art could not speak the unspeakable, but it could say “that it cannot say it” (47). Likewise, Adorno initially rejected the idea that trauma could be represented through literature, and even claimed that it would be barbaric to write about it after the Holocaust. However, he later accepted that it would be even more barbaric to deny and condemn trauma representation in literature (34).

There might be two legitimate concerns regarding the representation of trauma: the “aestheticization of history and trivializing media representations”, which arguably arise from worries about a potential “closure of meaning” in trauma representation (Kaplan and Wang 11). The capitalist culture of commodity and consumption often attempts to manipulate and even obliterate cultural memory. This is the case of popular television, such as soap operas, costume dramas, talk shows or disaster stories, which trivialise traumatic experiences of oppression and violence. Kaplan and Wang claim that in these scenarios, our consumerist culture transforms history in its new glamorous consumer product, so that traumatic memory becomes a spectacle, “a form of numbing through small doses of daily-ritualized violence” (11).

Kaplan and Wang further argue that focusing on the “abysmal, unrepresentable quality of trauma” is not the best manner to pay homage to the victims/survivors, or to avoid a sense of “ideological closure”, since this view seems to ignore the crucial question of why we need to remember historical trauma in the present context of modernity. The issue at stake seems to be “whether a culture is able to understand trauma as an episode in a longer chain of the structural mutations in modern systems that have accumulated a record of violence, suffering, and misery” (12). Trauma narratives are often dismissed on the grounds of being inadequate or unfaithful, but they are necessary responses to those tragic events, rather than an attempt at realistically recording them. In order to cope with traumatic memory and to properly critique the structures that allow them to occur, we need to make a choice “between inadequate telling and relegating of trauma to a mystified silence” (Kaplan and Wang 12).

Furthermore, accepting trauma experience as intrinsically unspeakable and unrepresentable might end up becoming “a get out clause to witnessing” for bystanders

(Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Trauma” 16). In other words, if one decides that an event or catastrophe is so horrendous to the point that it is indescribable and cannot be put into words, one might believe themselves excused from speaking about or even inquiring after what actually happened. In those cases, they might become “a meaningless non-witness”, not different from trauma victims in an early stage, when they had not yet assimilated the traumatic experience (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Trauma” 16). Similarly, Levi points out that silence is an ambiguous signal that “generates anxiety and suspicion” rather than honesty to trauma, and stresses out that “[t]o say that it is impossible to communicate is false; one always can” (83). Moreover, banning trauma representations would imply silencing current or even historical traumas –such as the ones presented in neo-Victorian fiction– which would, in a way, mimic the actions of perpetrators (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Trauma” 18). This would run counter to the main objective of trauma narratives, which is bearing witness to suffering and oppose the violent source that produced it in the first place.

Nonetheless, Geoffrey H. Hartman asserts that contemporary societies have become unable to process and convey their suffering, due to the recent collective traumas that we have experienced –i.e., World War I and II, the 9/11 attacks, etc.– and to being emotionally numbed by constant exposure to media violence. As examples of these cultural suppressors of trauma expression, Hartman mentions “the impact of the Holocaust and other genocides, but also the impact of electronic media on the feelings of viewers, especially the transmission of what Luc Boltanski has named ‘distance suffering’ (*souffrance à distance*)” (258). It is also worth commenting on the current health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic –and the subsequent social distancing, stay-at-home policies and mandatory confinement– which has taken a toll on people’s mental health all over the world, owing to the isolation, economic crisis and fears derived from it. This world crisis will, no doubt, have an impact on future accounts of trauma fiction. Hartman also addresses the issue of silence in trauma victims and how it might hinder their healing process, especially at a linguistic level –when they cannot find the right words to express the shock they have suffered. Literature can, then, become a tool to express and deal with trauma, since “[l]iterary verbalization [...] still remains a basis for making the wound perceivable and the silence audible” (259, emphasis in original).

Indeed, Vickroy points to the pivotal role of trauma narratives – “fictional narratives that help readers to access traumatic experience” (1)– in bearing witness to unprecedented personal and collective shocks in the last two centuries, including socio-

economic transformations, colonisation, wars, and gender-based violence, among others. Trauma narratives thrived in the 1980s and the 1990s, coinciding with the rise of trauma studies in academia. Vickroy names Toni Morrison, Marguerite Duras, Jamaica Kincaid, Pat Barker, or Edwidge Danticat as some of the main contemporary writers of trauma fiction (2). They produced narratives informed by trauma research and testimonies of private and collective traumas so as to provide readers with a symbolic space where they can reflect on them (Vickroy 2). The neo-Victorian screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis can therefore be considered as trauma narratives, given that they are informed texts that allow the audience to access traumatic events and offer a space for them to reflect on those traumatic experiences.

Trauma fiction reproduces the main features of traumatic experience, including rhythms, fears and concerns, but also the main obstacles to express and represent it, such as “silence, simultaneous knowledge and denial, dissociation, resistance and repression, among others” (Vickroy 3). Popular culture has often exploited the sensational aspects of trauma, especially horror stories, but the goal of trauma narratives is to allow readers and viewers to empathise with instances of extreme human pain. Furthermore, Vickroy claims that trauma narratives demonstrate the current relevance and frequency of trauma as a “multicontextual social issue”, which stems from capitalist and misogynist structures of power, despite the traditional tendency to consider trauma as a personal and individual problem (2). Trauma would then be a sign of social oppression brought about by coercive socio-political establishments (Vickroy x).

Consequently, both authors and scholars of trauma fiction arguably attempt to persuade readers “of the need for social action” (10). I argue that the films and TV series that make up my corpus of analysis fit the definition of trauma narratives provided by Vickroy, since they do not merely exploit the dramatic components of trauma, as popular fiction often does. These works allow the audience to access trauma experience, so that they can establish an emphatic bond with the traumatised characters on screen, and reflect on the tragic issues they experience. Furthermore, they portray trauma as a socially generated phenomenon, rather than an individual tragedy, challenging both the Victorian and current structures of power that allow both family, gendered and colonial violence to occur in the first place.

Dominick LaCapra also stresses the importance of not treating trauma as an individual condition, so as not to overlook other collective and historical catastrophes. He claims that we need to approach trauma in a way that makes us question other relevant

issues, namely the relationship “between the individual and society, the political implications of a research orientation, and the limitations and possibilities of an emphasis on melancholia, the sublime, the transhistorical, mourning, acting out, and working through problems that bear on social and political issues” (ix). LaCapra also discusses the synergy between history and trauma theory and argues that the goal of historiography might not be to heal, but to help work through the wounds of the past (42). Similarly, Stef Craps considers the socio-cultural and historical contexts as key features in analysing collective traumas, namely the Holocaust, terrorist attacks, postcolonialism, or natural catastrophes. This entails a “rethinking of political and ethical values” and one of the main components in his rethinking is a keen interest in the concept of “Otherness” –a defining characteristic of trauma studies after colonialism (Onega and Gutleben 16). Thus, trauma scholars are now acknowledging marginalised and disenfranchised historical characters, most notably in both neo-Victorian fiction and scholarship.

Going back to Laub’s contention that trauma survivors need an empathic listener who can help them externalise their story, Vickroy asserts that for traumatic recollections to be fully integrated into memory, “a reconstruction or reexternalization” needs to take place (3). Trauma fiction would then direct an inner and silent crisis outside, to other witnesses –both characters within the story and readers– and this would encourage them to reflect on individual and collective shock, as well as on “communal healing in relation to trauma” (Vickroy 3). Moreover, trauma fiction sheds light on how hegemonic forces condone and ignore trauma by perpetuating private and collective forms of abuse, and the pivotal role that imagination plays in bearing witness to potential tragic events by fictionalizing them (Vickroy 9). Therefore, the ethical responsibility of trauma narratives would be to criticise this socio-political oppressiveness and negligence and to question the efficiency of the victims’ coping mechanisms, which usually act in detriment to their psychological wellbeing.

Along the same lines, Caruth explores the connection between trauma victims and survivors and how they can establish a sense of community by sharing their traumatic experiences. She stresses the importance of “the way in which our own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another’s word” (“Unclaimed Experience” 8). This is the basis of her trauma-based and other-oriented conception of history, which examines how we are involved in each other’s traumas (“Unclaimed Experience” 24). Based on the relation that Caruth makes between trauma



and history, Onega and Gutleben consider the repetitive and haunting nature of trauma which “implies an inherent connection to another place and another time” (18) as a key feature of trauma experience. Consequently, trauma fiction and criticism have an ethical value in faithfully representing trauma experience and challenging pre-established conceptions of identity and certainties (Onega and Gutleben 19).

This ethical value of trauma literature is reflected in the literary field through a number of subgenres, such as the Holocaust novel, the World War I novel –e.g., Pat Barker’s trilogy–, postcolonial narratives, women and queer studies –e.g., what is considered to be Sarah Waters’s lesbian trilogy–, and postmodern slave narratives –e.g., Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) and *A Mercy* (2008)– among many others. However, Onega and Gutleben consider “testimony” as the most emblematic genre of trauma narratives, on the grounds of its interdisciplinarity, as it combines “the poetical, the historical, the clinical and the ethical”, but also because it discards “all vision of totality to promote openness and the refusal to reduce and stabilize meaning” (18).

At a stylistic level, Luckhurst and Whitehead have identified what they call “traumatic realism”, which is characterised by a predominance of intertextuality, fragmentation and uncanny effects including compulsive repetition and the double that reflect both affect and anxiety (Onega and Gutleben 17). Another defining feature of trauma narratives appears to be “intensification” that is usually achieved “through hyperbolic soliciting of affects”, which is one of the more effective ways to represent PTSD (Onega and Gutleben 17). Vickroy also points to Marguerite Duras’s and Toni Morrison’s use of dissociative symptoms and memory as formal literary techniques to represent the characters’ traumas (x). These contemporary trauma writers base their techniques on the work of modernist forerunners, such as Virginia Woolf, who employed “interior monologues and surrealism, and the fragmentation of narratives and identity common to the postmodern period” to convey the characters’ experiences (Vickroy xi).

Authors of trauma narratives also engage the audience in what LaCapra’s names “empathic unsettlement”, which could be defined as empathy that requires affect on the part of the observer without fully identifying with or appropriating the trauma survivor’s experience, lest they might be traumatised by it (40).<sup>16</sup> Thus, the observer should show

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<sup>16</sup>According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology, affect is one of the three components of the mind, together with “cognition” and “conation”. It could be defined as “any experience of feeling or emotion, ranging from suffering to elation, from the simplest to the most complex sensations of feeling, and from the most normal to the most pathological emotional reactions [...] both mood and emotion are considered affective states” (“Affect”).

an emotional response to the other's traumatic experience and relive it "with the realization that the experience of the other is not one's own" (40). For empathic unsettlement to occur, the historian –or the reader– could use numbing, or "the splitting of object from subject" as a barrier against a potential overidentification with alien traumas (LaCapra 40). Empathy should not be mistaken with "unchecked identification,<sup>17</sup> vicarious experience, and surrogate victimage", but understood as a key feature to comprehend trauma and to prevent (self-)victimisation. Hence, readers must empathetically experience an unsettlement –rather than a secondary trauma– that should not be glorified or sentimentalised, but rather addressed in an "ethically responsible" way to work through it (42). For LaCapra, a working through of the traumatic experience would involve "the effort to articulate or rearticulate affect and representation in a manner that may never transcend, but may to some viable extent counteract, a reenactment, or acting out, of that disabling dissociation" (42). In a nutshell, once the survivors can verbalise their experience and express their emotional response to it, they might be able to come to terms with it and so be able to break the cycle of compulsive repetition.

LaCapra includes mourning and critical thought as examples of working through, which grant survivors the possibility of making distinctions or articulations that become potential resistances to "undecidability", especially when it equals confusion and "the blurring of all distinctions" that usually occurs in trauma or in PTSD (22). However, those traumatised by extreme events, as well as their empathic listeners, may refuse to come to terms with them because of what LaCapra terms "fidelity to trauma". This is a belief that, if one works through their past experience, "one is betraying those who were overwhelmed and consumed by that traumatic past", so that reliving the trauma becomes a painful but necessary recollection (22). This is arguably the case of the villains in *Crismon Peak*, as they refuse to face and work through the abuse they suffered during their childhood, because this traumatic experience is part and parcel of their identity. These events have shaped them into what they are now, so that acknowledging that suffering and try to overcome it would imply renouncing to a vital part of themselves. Indeed, the impossibility or refusal of the victim's working through prevents any form of conceptual or narrative closure, and it may also hinder any possible "counterforces" –as

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<sup>17</sup> For LaCapra, "unchecked identification" implies a confusion of oneself with another which results in an appropriation of the survivor's traumatic experience, voice and acting out. LaCapra contends that when one is haunted by the past –even by the experiences of others– they may not be able to behave in an ethical way when it comes to "consideration for others as others" (28).

in the case of a collective rather than a private mourning that might allow traumatised survivors to resume social life (LaCapra 23).

Regarding the potential responses of victims and survivors to trauma representation in the visual arts, Kaplan claims that it depends on various social, environmental and personal factors, namely one's "individual psychic history, on memories inevitably mixed with fantasies of prior catastrophes, and on the particular cultural and political context within which a catastrophe takes place" ("Introduction" 1). Furthermore, there is also a need to determine one's specific positioning in relation to a traumatic event. First, there is the "direct trauma victim", who experiences the trauma first hand. Second, a person who is geographically far away. In this latter case, people can encounter trauma by living near to where a tragedy has taken place, by hearing about a personal crisis from a friend or relative, or, most commonly, by seeing it on the news.

In fact, Kaplan claims that in most cases people encounter trauma through mass media, which is why exploring what she terms "mediatized trauma" is so important, as we come across the complexity of distinguishing between direct trauma and vicarious trauma. This is so because "one can see the way that symptoms of prior traumatic events are triggered by new ones or glimpse how the political-ideological shaping of [the traumatic event through] media emerges in [being conditioned] by dominant images and discourses" ("Introduction" 2). The phenomenon of vicarious trauma has been recently acknowledged by clinicians, like Martin Hoffman, who argues that therapists might be negatively influenced by their patients suffering, since they might even experience traumatic symptoms themselves. These symptoms might include "social withdrawal, increased sensitivity to violence, cynicism, generalized despair and hopelessness, and nightmares. Also changes in identity, world view, or spirituality; intrusive imagery, dissociation, and depersonalization" (qtd. in Kaplan, "Introduction" 20). Vicarious trauma has been extensively discussed in psychology, but it has not been adequately explored in literary and film studies.

Scholars have studied numerous films in relation to trauma, starting with those featuring the Holocaust, but also motion pictures portraying wars, horror films, or female biopics, as well as independent cinema by female filmmakers that tackle themes like loss or abandonment. However, it seems that scholars do not define or label films as belonging to "trauma cinema", as they are less concerned about creating a new cinematic genre than about addressing what actually matters in defining and representing trauma on screen: the

viewer (9). Kaplan and Wang offer four potential positions of viewers of trauma films, which would vary depending on the different cinematic strategies (Kaplan and Wang 9).

In the first one, the viewer is introduced to a trauma that, in the end, has a “comforting cure”. This is the case of mainstream, Hollywood melodramas that portray a past event that is locatable, representable and curable. Hollywood melodrama seems to be symptomatic of society’s need to forget past traumatic experiences while simultaneously representing them in an “oblique form”. According to Kaplan and Wang, the task of critics and scholars in this case would be to look for deeper layers of traumatic symptoms and “latent processes”, rather than merely diminish them as “sheer mindless sensationalism” (9).

Second, a viewer can be “vicariously traumatized”. This would be a negative effect of trauma cinema, although it might also be used at times to “shock’ audiences” (Kaplan and Wang 9), as in some films dealing with the Holocaust. If the viewer is so shocked that they turn away from the images, instead of learning from them, vicarious trauma then has a negative effect. Nonetheless, sometimes that shock might be appealing to the point that the viewer wants to find out more about the traumatic experience that is being displayed (Kaplan and Wang 10).

Thirdly, there is the possibility of becoming a “voyeur” through the systematic watching of daily news featuring collective and personal horrors, such as plane crashes, wars and conflicts in different parts of the world, or people starving around the globe. Voyeurism is a dangerous and negative witness position, as it entails the victims’/survivors’ exploitation and covertly provides a morbid pleasure in horror that should not be encouraged (Kaplan and Wang 10).

Finally, there is the position that is arguably the most empathically useful of the four: bearing witness. Some films that actively allow their viewers to assume this position include Resnais’s *Night and Fog* (1956), Duras and Resnais’s *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959), Deren’s *Meshes of an Afternoon* (1943) and Tracey Moffatt’s *Night Cries* (1959). According to Kaplan and Wang, bearing witness might grant the viewer a process of transformation through “empathic identification without vicarious traumatization”, where the viewer emotionally experiences the victim’s situation through the film’s narration (10). Kaplan and Wang define this witnessing process as a “triangular structure”, made up of the traumatic event, the victim and the audience, which may contribute to an “inter-cultural compassion and understanding” (10). Although the neo-Victorian screen texts analysed here could encourage –to a certain extent– the audience to adopt a “voyeur”

position –due to the sensationalist and gore elements they display–, I argue that they ask their audience to bear witness to the characters’ traumatic experiences, establishing a mutual compassion and understanding without fully identifying with their traumas.

In this PhD thesis, I apply the theoretical framework of trauma studies to the analysis of four neo-Victorian trauma narratives on screen –*Crimson Peak*, *Penny Dreadful*, *Taboo* and *Carnival Row*. I argue that they help viewers access trauma experience –mainly family and gendered traumas– through their fictionalisation. In turn, the audience is encouraged to position themselves as witnesses that can empathise with the characters’ experiences and reflect on the socio-political structures that allow them to occur in the first place. In the next section, I explore the synergy between trauma and neo-Victorian studies and how they can be combined to analyse my corpus of screen texts.

#### 3.2. Neo-Victorianism and Trauma Studies

The nineteenth century has increasingly become a focal area of research on historical trauma, both in terms of the study of its actual catastrophes and their long-term consequences, but also at a fictional level in their re-imagined and belated “working-through” via neo-Victorianism (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Trauma” 1). Indeed, Gruss contends that although trauma theory was established during the 1980s as an academic field, trauma is actually “rooted in the late nineteenth century” (123), as it was the time when treatments of hysteria started to develop and when “the drift of trauma from the physical to the mental realm” took place (Luckhurst 2-3).

Neo-Victorian fiction allows us to explore nineteenth-century traumas from a contemporary perspective, as it mirrors “the double temporality of traumatic consciousness”, whereby the survivor re-enacts the traumatic event that cannot be buried in the past, while living in the post-traumatic present (Kohlke and Gutleben “Neo-Victorian Trauma” 2). Neo-Victorian fiction could, therefore, be understood as a delayed catharsis of both Victorian and contemporary traumas, given that it “highlights interconnections between acts of aggravated historical violence and their long-term cultural and political aftershocks still resonating well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries” (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Trauma” 3). Likewise, Heilmann and Llewellyn also reflect on the concept of “belatedness” and how neo-Victorianism exploits it in order to dwell “into cultural memorials of nostalgic desire, postmodernism’s intertextual playfulness, or postcolonial ‘rememory’” (34). Nonetheless, neo-Victorianism not only deals with historical and collective traumas, but also explores more

personal and insidious situations that echo contemporary crises –i.e., domestic violence, incest, or sexual abuse, as in the case of the screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis. Hence, neo-Victorianism both reproduces and contributes to the currently dominant trauma discourse, functioning “at individual and collective, national and global levels” (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Trauma” 3).

On a similar note, Gutleben and Wolfreys consider postmodernism as intrinsically traumatic, due to its fragmented, destructive and relativistic nature. Indeed, postmodernism has come to be regarded as a moment of “crisis and depravation, moral, emotional, and spiritual” (Gutleben and Wolfreys 54). Thus, neo-Victorian creators return to the nineteenth century to seek comfort from our postmodern suffering, since it is perceived as the period that came before the (post)modern sense of loss and fragmentation of both the novel and the self (37-8). However, a return to the nineteenth century might bring about an idealised sense of solace, but it also resurrects the Victorian Other, “a traumatic return of what might be described as a ‘familial repressed’, a family romance of spectral indebtedness” (Gutleben and Wolfreys 59). This is precisely the case of the neo-Victorian screen adaptations that conform my corpus of analysis, as they bring back the Victorian racial, sexual and gendered Other, as well as traumatic events and dysfunctionalities happening within the confines of the nuclear Victorian family.

One of the most prominent motifs in neo-Victorian narratives of trauma is sexual violence. Cox contends that these narratives attempt to raise awareness about this type of gendered abuse, which was ignored in Victorian fiction and culture at large. However, neo-Victorian narratives of sexual trauma also display problems of articulation in representing sexual abuse, as well as a contradictory agenda in portraying them. On the one hand, they appear to bring to light and attempt to right past injustices, but on the other hand, they reflect a current “prevailing cultural fascination with sexual trauma” (“Narratives of Sexual Trauma” 138). Some of the screen texts analysed in this thesis (mis)represent sexual trauma and abuse, most notably *Penny Dreadful*, where the prostitute Brona Croft, later resurrected as Lily Frankenstein, relates her history of rapes, abuse and gender-based violence. Her experience as a victim of sexual trauma will condition her later life as a resurrected immortal, as she will then become a radical feminist that intends to enslave all men with the help of her army of prostitutes. This misandrist portrayal of the feminist movement runs counter to the series’ seemingly progressive agenda, as it presents feminist activists as vengeful and men-hating women.

As discussed in the previous section, trauma victims and survivors have an imperative need to tell their stories in order to overcome their traumas (Laub). This would also apply to Victorian trauma victims, but since there are no living survivors that can provide us with a first-hand testimony, we have to reconstruct or reimagine those events through intermediary texts and images. These complex tasks are carried out by neo-Victorian writers and creators, who sometimes cannot prevent (un)ethical appropriations in their after-shock representations, which might include a presentist drive or an overt and graphic sensationalism when representing the victims' traumatic experience, especially in the case of screen Victoriana. This applies to some of the texts analysed in the present PhD thesis, particularly *Crimson Peak*, *Penny Dreadful* and *Taboo*. In these texts, the vivid and sensationalist representations of violence might sometimes distract the audience from engaging in an empathic reading of the victims' traumatic experience.

Moreover, the reconstruction of one's traumatic experience and history through reading and (re)writing is also key in neo-Victorian fiction. According to Heilmann and Llewellyn, this reconstructive technique allows the hero or heroine of the story to get to know themselves at a much deeper level "through and in the story s/he records, and through which s/he confronts the demons in her or his own life: a metaphoric re-enactment of the neo-Victorian novel's self-constitution through its Victorian referents" (36). This connects, once again, with Laub's idea of the need to verbalise one's trauma in order to overcome it. By writing and reconstructing their own history, the characters in neo-Victorian narratives of trauma are externalising and shaping their experience, so that they can face it and overcome it. In doing so, they are arguably mimicking the neo-Victorian creators' task of recreating and rewriting our Victorian past through the material remnants and references from the period. In fact, a common technique of neo-Victorian fiction is to include narrative voices and testimonies where both Victorian and contemporary identities, "narrators, voices, letters, diary entries, recollections, reflections, dreams, and documentary sources all blend together, mimicking the narrative devices, structures, and collage techniques of nineteenth-century and Victorian realist and Gothic literature" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 34). The screen texts analysed here make use of material relics, documents and recordings to both reconstruct and discover the traumatic past, which allows them to rewrite and make sense of their past history.

As discussed in the previous section, there are various witnessing positions in trauma fiction. Kohlke and Gutleben establish a difference between the concepts "secondary suffering" and "after-witness" in that the former would entail bearing witness

to a survivor's actual account of trauma through an act of empathic listening or reading, whereas the latter is considered to be a "fictional re-creation of trauma that both testifies to and stands in for inadequate, missing, or impossible acts of primary witness-bearing to historical trauma" ("Neo-Victorian Trauma" 7).

It is precisely in this latter case that the 'after-witness' might appropriate other people's trauma to some extent. This is so because the critical distance that LaCapra's empathic unsettlement requires –to participate in the survivor's trauma without fully assuming it as one's own– must be replaced with a "vicarious identification" on the part of the writer or director in neo-Victorian fiction. This would allow them to relive the victim's pain "by assuming the *discursively empty or unfilled place* of the sufferer" (Kohlke and Gutleben, "Neo-Victorian Trauma" 7, emphasis in original). However, trauma appropriation and vicarious identification would be more ethically acceptable in this case, given that neo-Victorian after-witnesses would be filling a historical void of traumatic articulation, rather than usurping the place of historical traumatised subjects. In fact, both the represented trauma and the words or visual techniques to describe it are a fictional creation –not a historical appropriation– to allow the audience to better comprehend the nature of traumatised subjects. Furthermore, neo-Victorian fiction does not present itself as a real historical account, or even as a secondary witness testimony, but draws attention to its nature as a fictional re-imagining of the nineteenth-century past.

Likewise, although neo-Victorian fiction allows creative and innovative re-imaginings of the nineteenth century, Kohlke and Gutleben warn us that the temporal distance that separates us from our Victorian forefathers prevents contemporary "witnesses" from taking action against those historical catastrophes. As a result, the ethical act of witnessing others' traumas might become disconnected from its "subsequent political engagement", rendering contemporary readers and viewers "complacent". Thus, political activism might be replaced by "narrative identification" or "involvement", although its prospective effects on the readers' present and future are impossible to determine (Kohlke and Gutleben, "Neo-Victorian Trauma" 8).

However, given that neo-Victorian representations of nineteenth-century traumas are not completely alienated from our present as it might seem at first, I contend that it is possible for contemporary audiences to both empathise with and take an active stance regarding the traumas represented in neo-Victorian fiction. Although most neo-Victorian texts do not directly deal with the major traumas of our contemporary era –e.g., World Wars, terrorist attacks or natural catastrophes– they are intended to make the audience



establish a connection between the Victorian and the present periods. A clear example of this would be the constant depiction of British imperial dominance and cruelty over its colonies in neo-Victorian fiction, which echoes the continuous disregard of Western countries for the difference of religion, culture, language and race in postcolonial countries at present. This can be seen in the screen adaptations analysed in this PhD thesis, particularly *Taboo* and *Carnival Row*, which directly tackle the horrors of imperialism and colonialism and their present legacies, namely immigration from developing countries due to wars and poor economic conditions, refugee crises, racism and xenophobia. Consequently, contemporary audiences can establish a connection with (post)colonial subjects and take an active stance against current politics that attempt to perpetuate imperialist, expansionist and xenophobic policies.

Neo-Victorian fiction also tends to exploit the sensational aspects of pain, mirroring our contemporary morbid obsession with trauma, which is constantly displayed on all kinds of media. Wars, natural catastrophes, domestic violence or accidents are incessantly circulated in films, TV series, video games, newspapers or social media. Kohlke and Gutleben assert that this trauma saturation “produces any number of potential secondary trauma victims, traumatized not by their experience of extreme events but by their witnessing of them at second hand” (“Neo-Victorian Trauma” 9). In fact, our society could be described as being dominated by a ‘culture of trauma’: a commodity market where narratives of suffering thrive and make an economic profit.

However, neo-Victorian fiction does not represent the nineteenth-century past as a source of nostalgic relief, but rather portrays historical traumas as a reflection of our contemporary ones, blurring the chronological distinction between our Victorian forefathers and us, and emphasising the transgenerational nature of traumatic experiences. As Nancy Miller and Jason Tougaw contend, “trauma often unfolds intergenerationally; its aftermath lives on the family –but no less pervasively in the culture at large” (9). In the same vein, Gruss underlines the importance of transgenerational haunting in neo-Victorian fiction, where the traumatic silence of a parent is transmitted to the next generation and personified in the form of a phantom (126).<sup>18</sup> Thus, neo-Victorian fiction could be considered a fictional representation of how we have inherited some of our Victorian forefathers’ traumas, be them collective –such as wars, imperialism, natural

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<sup>18</sup> The concept of the phantom and its relation to intergenerational trauma was put forward by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, and is further discussed in the next section.

catastrophes, etc.— or personal ones —e.g., gender or sexual violence or child abuse within the traditional nuclear family.

Kohlke and Gutleben stress the capacity of neo-Victorian fiction to establish an empathic connection with historical subjects, so that we see “ourselves in (rather than in place of) the suffering victim and reciprocally encounter the self-as-other and the other-as-self by acknowledging our own vulnerability to traumatisation” (“Neo-Victorian Trauma” 18). Thus, the main goal of neo-Victorian fiction would be to reconstruct and recuperate the silenced experiences of marginalised agents of history and, in doing so, it would show a capacity “to speak-for-the-other”, which Kohlke and Gutleben associate to Levinas’s conceptualisation of ethics “as an *ethics of alterity*”, whereby the contemporary subject would be morally improved by the historical Other (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Trauma” 20).

This ethics of alterity is arguably connected to an ethics of justice, thanks to which we can acknowledge and right past wrongs that were perpetrated against historical subjects, and which were intensified when they were silenced and consigned to a historical oblivion. As a result, authors of neo-Victorian fiction directly address Paul Ricoeur’s call for “a parallel history of [...] victimisation, which would counter the history of success and victory. To memorise the victims of history – the sufferers, the humiliated, the forgotten — should be a task for all of us” (10-11). The interest in historical traumas might be perceived by some as insufficient, as it might entail turning our attention to past tragedies in order to ignore and not take responsibility for present horrors. However, Ricoeur claims that a parallel history of trauma might, in fact, be projected towards both our present and future, since our responsibility to remember not only entails knowing past events, but also conveying the importance of said events to future generations. Therefore, neo-Victorian fiction does not merely look nostalgically back into the nineteenth-century past, but is rather oriented to both our present and future.

Nonetheless, it is also worth noting that not all neo-Victorian fiction shows an ethical commitment to Victorian and contemporary tragedies. In fact, in some cases neo-Victorian creators could be said to display a “fashion consciousness”, by using historical traumas for personal gain, since trauma and Otherness have increasingly become “a profitable market” (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Trauma” 22). Likewise, the constant repetition and appropriation of trauma narratives have transformed suffering in a common occurrence, rather than an exception. Thus, while it remains our ethical duty to voice the trauma and horrors endured by muted past subjects, we must also

acknowledge that certain Victorian Others, including the Victorian madwoman, the medium, the prostitute, the battered wife or homosexual characters “have become rather over-used, tired, and hackneyed, to the point where it becomes difficult to view them any longer as embodiments of an ethics of alterity” (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Trauma” 23). Hence, due to the ceaseless reiteration of these character archetypes, one might wonder whether they can still contribute in an original way to the ethical endeavour of neo-Victorian fiction. These characters occupy a central position in the neo-Victorian screen texts analysed in this present thesis, but they bring about new perspectives such as the notion of family of choice in *Penny Dreadful* and *Carnival Row*, the focus on a madman instead of a madwoman in *Taboo*, the exploration of alternative modes of sexuality beyond the binary of hetero/homosexuality in *Penny Dreadful* or the abused wife reclaiming her agency in *Crimson Peak*.

Neo-Victorian fiction shares several rhetorical and fictional strategies that conform the typical features of narratives of trauma. One of those strategies would be the “encapsulation of the referential trauma in an object or –work within the novel itself, functioning as a sort of *mise en abyme*”, whereby the imperative need to tell the traumatic event can be fulfilled (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Trauma” 25). Examples of this encapsulation would include the use of diaries –both of victims/survivors and perpetrators–, legal documents describing past atrocities or letters confessing unspeakable crimes. *Crimson Peak*, *Penny Dreadful* and *Taboo* make use of this encapsulation of trauma in written documents where the characters relate their traumatic experiences or express their guilt. In *Crimson Peak*, Edith finds some wax cylinders in her husbands’ basement that had been recorded by one of his previous wives, where she tells her traumatic experience of domestic violence and warns future wives. In *Penny Dreadful*, Vanessa writes letters to her missing friend Mina, where she tries to come to terms with the guilt she feels for all the pain she caused her. In *Taboo*, James testifies in a written document against the East India Company by recognising all the imperialist crimes and atrocities he committed while being at their service. All these examples are presented as “archival texts” available for “decoding and analysis”.

Another common mode of representing trauma in neo-Victorian fiction would be the frequent depictions of acts of narrating or writing, as well as of reading or listening to a story. Through this strategy, the metanarrative in itself becomes a trope, given that “the *mise en abyme* of written or oral testimonies highlights the verbalisation of trauma as the central act of the novelistic apparatus” (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Trauma”

27, emphasis in original). Consequently, the metanarrative embedded in the main story replicates the practice of re-imagining the past through reading, which could be compared to the paradoxical nature of historiographic metafiction, whereby the past can only be accessed through textual traces at present (Hutcheon and O’Flynn 5). Hence, neo-Victorian narratives of trauma take us back to history, which is accepted “as a narrative and linguistic construct [...] moulded from archival ‘textual traces’ of concrete (but inaccessible) ‘evens’”, so that the possibility of knowing the actual past is severely compromised, while at the same time the reality of historical traumas and the need to bring them to light is emphasised (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Trauma” 28).

There is yet another narrative strategy to trope trauma, which is closely related to the previous one: “a self-generated healing” through narration. Kohlke and Gutleben point out that recounting trauma is a performative process, as it only comes into being through its verbalisation and witnessing. Thus, the trauma metanarrative “constitutes an act of generation, begetting the [...] understanding, transmission, and healing of trauma” (“Neo-Victorian Trauma” 28). Furthermore, by representing the witnesses’ responses to trauma and, thus, creating a fictional sympathetic community around the traumatised characters, neo-Victorian fiction is encouraging its audience to “create an analogous community of feeling” outside the narrative itself, in the real world.

As a result, these narratives turn trauma experience into a possibility to establish empathic collaborations and solidarity among survivors and witnesses, but also to allow a secure continuity between Victorian traumas and “contemporary experience” (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Trauma” 28). Thanks to both the fan phenomenon and the current trend of social media, I argue that it is easier now to establish empathetic collaborations between the traumatised characters in a fictional work and the audiences. Contemporary spectators can now instantly share their views on the TV series and films they watch through Twitter, where they can establish a community of feeling through the use of hashtags and threads. Moreover, as mentioned in Chapter 2, fans can write their own version of their favourite novel, film or TV series through the practice of fanfiction. This cultural phenomenon might be key in exploring the spectators’ response to trauma, in both neo-Victorian films, TV series and other forms of fiction.

Moreover, neo-Victorianism also appears to follow a “metonymic principle”, given that –instead of generalising trauma to a community of people– it “particularise[s] trauma by depicting specific victims”, so that an individual represents a whole collective across history (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Trauma” 29). According to Diane

Sadoff, that particularised trauma represents “a metonymy for a repressed/repressive, national, historical, imperial project” (180), as well the pain it exerts, which is always experienced at an individual level, even in the case of collective tragedies. This tendency appears to contradict Miller’s and Tougaw’s view of trauma studies as universalising “suffering with little attention paid to the singularity of the experience” (6). This is the case of *Penny Dreadful*, which presents a myriad of trauma micro-narratives that eventually intersect in an interconnected macro-narrative. Each character has their own past history of suffering and they try to come to terms with it by fighting their (literal and figurative) demons, and helping other characters fight theirs.

To conclude, although neo-Victorian fiction is actually a contemporary fictional creation, its main goal is voicing the silenced and marginalised by both historical and nineteenth-century fictional accounts. Moreover, by acknowledging and giving voice to these muted characters, as well as having their suffering recognised, neo-Victorianism is not repeating stories already known to us, but bringing to the fore what has never been told. In doing so, neo-Victorian fiction is granting forgotten historical subjects a future by recording their traumas to cultural memory. Likewise, by bringing these previously ignored past stories to light, neo-Victorian fiction is conducting an ethical and stylistic regeneration in historical and trauma fiction, which constitutes one of its main innovative achievements. The neo-Victorian visual works analysed in this PhD thesis also fulfil this purpose, as they bring the stories of traditionally marginalised characters to the fore, including prostitutes, fallen women, queer characters, ‘madwomen’, racial minorities or disabled characters. By presenting their traumatic experiences, these texts allow the audience to establish a connection between Victorian systems of oppression and contemporary ones.

#### 3.3. Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Trauma Narratives

As discussed above, trauma theory has traditionally been linked to the trope of haunting and spectrality, especially in the case of neo-Victorian trauma fiction. The ghostly presence of the Victorian era is ubiquitous in our contemporary societies, as its influence can be found in popular culture, fashion, screen adaptations, educational systems, or even in the main buildings in our major cities (Arias and Pulham xi). Ganteau and Onega also note that the spectral presence of trauma and its ungraspability are constantly haunting neo-Victorian literature, “in the same way as a spectre haunts an individual or a

community, through its intermittent though endlessly reproducible visibility” (“Traumatic Realism” 3).

Furthermore, the Victorians were also fascinated by their past and exploited the trope of haunting and spectrality. Hazel Hutchison contends that Henry James’s literary work explores the relationship between the living and the dead and his characters are both “haunted and haunting” (60). She describes haunting as something present that should be absent, “the sensory experience of something that should be only a memory; it is the awareness of something visible, audible, or tangible that should be confined to thought or to the past” (73). However, Arias and Pulham argue that this Victorian fascination for their past was also accompanied by a concern for the future. This is reflected in neo-Victorian literature, where nineteenth-century subjects are not merely ghosts from the past, but also “agents of the future”, which is evidenced by our contemporary “deciphering of encoded political, sexual, and racial messages in Victorian literature” (Arias and Pulham xiv). According to Arias, objects from the past are to be understood as “material traces” oriented towards the future, which makes them “multilinear”, especially from a feminist historical point of view (“Sensoriality and Hair Jewellery” 87). To refer to this multiple temporality of the trace, Victoria Browne has suggested the term “polytemporality”, which can be useful to describe time as nonlinear (28) and to reject rigid interpretations of history.

Neo-Victorianism’s engagement with the nineteenth-century past produces a sense of “*déjà vu*” on readers, in a way that can be interpreted as an example of Freud’s notion of the uncanny, since our nostalgic regression to the nineteenth century could be equated to an uncanny return to the maternal womb (Arias and Pulham xv). Other uncanny events include the double, repetition compulsion, the animation of seemingly inanimate things, or the inanimation of living beings, the return of the dead through spectres and the familiar made strange. Arias and Pulham contend that neo-Victorian fiction displays a number of these phenomena. First, neo-Victorianism represents a double of Victorian literature, as it imitates its styles and plots. Second, it appropriates and repeats tropes, characters, historical and cultural events, and resuscitates Victorian genres, such as the Gothic novel. It also “defamiliarizes our preconceptions of Victorian society” by portraying the stories of marginalised and forgotten characters. Finally, neo-Victorian fiction could be interpreted as a spectre visiting from the Victorian past that manifests itself in our present. It is precisely this latter form of the uncanny that is most pervasive in neo-Victorian fiction and has come to occupy a central space in literary

criticism: the all-pervading and haunting presence of the Victorians through their “textual/spectral traces in popular culture” (Arias and Pulham xv-xvi). All these uncanny phenomena feature prominently in the screen texts analysed in the present PhD thesis, particularly the concept of the Gothic double, repetition compulsion as an external sign of traumatic repression and the return of the ghost as a metaphor for the past that never truly leaves us.

As discussed by Arias and Pulham (xcvii), Colin Davies identifies two related critical sources that discuss the trope of haunting and spectrality, from a deconstructive and a psychoanalytic perspective, respectively: Derrida’s *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (1994), and Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok’s *The Wolf’s Magic Word: A Cryptonymy* (1976) and *The Shell and the Kernel* (1987). For Derrida, ‘hauntology’ stems from the concept of haunting represented by the ghost of Marxism in Europe. This spectre is actually a ghostly apparition that comes back and disturbs our linear temporality, challenging in the process “all historicisms that are grounded in a rigid sense of chronology” (11).

The Derridean spectre and Abraham and Torok’s phantom have some aspects in common –such as their capacity to return and their penetrable temporal boundaries–, but differ in how they are defined and explored. Whereas Derrida’s spectre encourages readers to speak with the dead and opens up possibilities for an unknown future, Abraham and Torok’s phantom derives from their interpretation of Freud’s case “The Wolf Man”, which consists in an unspeakable secret that is repressed by the patient, who is, in turn, haunted by the silences of others. Such silences and secrets are transmitted unknowingly from generation to generation and are known as “transgenerational haunting”, where “the phantom which returns to haunt bears witness to the existence of the dead buried within the other” (Abraham and Torok 175).

Transgenerational trauma within the dysfunctional Victorian family is a common element in my corpus of analysis, and it is key to understand the traumatic events described in them, including incest, domestic violence, child abuse or parental abandonment. Another key difference between these two approaches is that, whilst Derrida stresses the importance of staying open to what the ghost has to reveal for the future, Abraham and Torok’s concept of the phantom is concerned with a “traumatized past”. In this latter case, we need to “exorcise” the ghost by forcing it to verbalise its “unspeakable secrets”, so that we can bring it “back to the order of knowledge” (Arias and Pulham xvi-xviii). Another vital concept from Abraham and Torok’s hauntology is

that of the crypt. The relevance of this theory arguably lies in underlying how environmental factors –such as outside stimuli and events– which are transferred from one generation to the next, have an impact not only on the individual, but also on the society and culture at large (Abraham and Torok 159).

A copious number of critical theories and studies have stemmed from these two distinct approaches to the trope of haunting and spectrality, and they have actively contributed to the spread of ideas about the uncanny in literary and cultural studies. In fact, Arias and Pulham claim that the ghost is still a central figure in late twentieth- and the twenty-first-century criticism. Some pioneering publications that explore the tropes of haunting and the uncanny include two special issues of *Mosaic* (2001; 2002), followed by Nicholas Royle's *The Uncanny* (2003), and the 2006 spring issue of *The University of Toronto Quarterly*, which explored the possibility of how the trope of haunting and spectrality might be a good tool to analyse Canadian cultural artefacts. More recent publications include *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory* (2013), edited by María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, *Cinematic Ghosts: Haunting and Spectrality from Silent Cinema to the Digital Era* (2015), edited by Murray Leeder, Tony M. Vinci's article "Shirley Jackson's Posthumanist Ghosts: Revisiting Spectrality and Trauma in *The Haunting of Hill House*" (2019).

Even though a great number of critics and scholars have approached cultural texts from this perspective, it is actually Julian Wolfreys's studies on the ghostly traces of the nineteenth-century past that have had the greatest impact on the Neo-Victorian project. In his volume, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (2002), he both contributed to spread Derrida's theories on spectrality and proved the importance of the trope of haunting as a powerful metaphor for the return of the repressed in literature. As discussed in Chapter 1, Wolfreys argues that texts are always haunted by previous texts, creating an intertextual web of literary and ghostly traces that readers are expected to identify (3). Wolfreys draws on the idea that the Gothic, although it seems to be dead as a literary genre, is evoked in a number of ghostly traces in both nineteenth-century and contemporary narratives. Gruss builds on this concept and claims that the prominence of the ghost in contemporary fiction can be understood as a metaphor for the persistence of the past and our current engagement to it (125). Indeed, the current predominance of Gothic literature and ghost stories in neo-Victorian fiction proves that the trope of haunting and spectrality is not merely part of the texts themselves, but Victorian intertexts rather act like ghosts, haunting neo-Victorian works (Gruss 123).



Before Gruss, Arias and Pulham had also argued that the nineteenth century is also “spectralized” and returns as a ghost in neo-Victorian fiction to open up “multiple possibilities for re-enactment, reimagining, and reinterpretation” (Arias and Pulham xix). The spectral trope is also relevant in portraying the Victorian interest in the supernatural and the occult, which has increasingly become a recurrent theme in neo-Victorianism.<sup>19</sup> As Arias and Pulham point out, the importance of these studies lie in the titanic project of “resurrecting the Victorian dead, thus disclosing the gaps and silences left by the encrypted stories of women who did not comply with Victorian constructions of femininity, namely, the criminal, the hysteric and the spiritualist medium” (xix). Likewise, Gruss contends that neo-Victorian authors attempt to revisit the nineteenth century in order to heal some of the present traumas that might have originated in the Victorian era. Nonetheless, neo-Victorian fiction cannot act as ‘recuperative’ literature, but rather as traumatic remembrance, since instead of blindly accepting the power of literature to “‘heal’ the wounds of the past”, neo-Victorian fiction bears witness to a prevalence of “traumatic memory that cannot (and should not) be over-written by (at least) pseudo-consoling neo-narratives” (Gruss 134).

Despite the Victorians’ belief in the supernatural and the occult, they also showed a keen interest in technology and scientific progress from the Romantic period onwards. Clear examples of this interest are reflected in both Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) and its theatre adaptation *Presumption or the Fate of Frankenstein* (1823) by Richard Brinsley Peake. Both literary works contributed to the heated scientific debates that were taking place at the time, and helped “shape and regulate public scepticism about potentially threatening new advances in the life sciences” (Robbins 186). Likewise, the invention of photography was one of the most celebrated ones in the nineteenth century, as it brought about “an unprecedented sense of accuracy and detail to realist re-presentation” (Potter 148). Photography produced an uncanny feeling in the Victorians and was thought to have a “ghostly nature” (Potter 164). Indeed, it sometimes intersected with the practice of Spiritualism, as in the case of spirit or ghost photography from the 1860s onwards, due

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<sup>19</sup> Important works in this academic field include Alex Owen’s *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian* (1989) and *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (2004); Janet Oppenheim’s *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (1984); Alison Winter’s *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (2000); Diana Barsham’s *The Trial of Woman: Feminism and the Occult Sciences in Victorian Literature and Society* (1992); and *Altered States: Sex, Nation, Drugs, and Self-Transformation in Victorian Spiritualism* (2012), and Tromp and Daniel Bivona’s *Culture and Money in the Nineteenth Century: Abstracting Economics* (2016), among others. These scholars focus on the nineteenth-century spiritualist movement and recovered the Victorian obsession with Spiritualism and the occult.

to the Victorians' obsession with the return of the dead. According to John Harvey, this practice combined supernatural beliefs with new technological developments, and allied "apparatus to apparitions, reconciling reason to religion and thereby confirming conviction. They also united two expressions of faith: one in the existence of invisible realities, the other in the camera's indifferent eye and unerring ability to arrest the truth" (7). This ambivalent response to technological advances was also extensive to other fields of science, including the emergence of Darwinism and the ensuing crisis in religious faith (Arias and Pulham xix). Similarly, Llewellyn asserts that owing to the religious crises brought about by scientific advancements, religious beliefs were replaced by faith in supernatural beings like ghosts (Llewellyn, "Spectrality, S(p)ecularity and Textuality" 24).

The volume *The Victorian Supernatural* (2004), edited by Nicola Brown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell, explores the central position that the supernatural occupied in the long nineteenth century, not only in terms of cultural manifestations such as Gothic literature, but also in relation to Victorian scientific discourses. Neo-Victorian fiction frequently exploits the trope of haunting and spectrality by placing female characters associated with Spiritualism and the occult at the centre of the narrative. These characters include mediums, guardian spirits or supernatural beings that are victims of séances and possessions. They are usually depicted alongside "the paraphernalia of accompanying trickery and possible misrepresentation, perhaps glossing the inherent malleability, unreliability, and performativity of memory and its easy cooption for personal and/or communal agendas and political profit" (Kohlke, "Introduction: Speculations" 9). Hence, the trope of haunting and spectrality is featured in neo-Victorian fiction in order to grant historically marginalised women a voice, but it can also be exploited by neo-Victorian writers for personal and political gains.

Heilmann and Llewellyn also highlight the tensions that might appear in "the relationship between the spectral, the scriptural (in both religious and authorial senses) and the spiritual" in neo-Victorian Gothic fiction that features the return of the dead. What neo-Victorian readers and viewers have in common is that they long to connect with the Victorian past via contemporary fiction, so that "the sense of being haunted is frequently re-enacted at a textual level" (168). Likewise, Llewellyn underlines the pivotal role that the figure of the ghost plays in neo-Victorian fiction, as well as the sense of "ghostliness" of the nineteenth-century past, which can be employed as "a useful corollary to the contemporary author's awareness of the 'haunting' presence of the Victorian period even into the twenty-first century" ("Spectrality, S(p)ecularity, and Textuality" 24). This is the

case of the film *Crimson Peak*, where the ghosts that haunt Allerdale Hall are arguably metaphors for the persistence of the Victorian past in our present.

Llewellyn further considers the Victorian ghost as a contemporary re-imagining of the Victorian's own obsession with séances, revenants and the Gothic that neo-Victorian writers employ in order to "exorcise" our Victorian ghosts at present ("Spectrality, S(p)ecularity, and Textuality" 24). *Penny Dreadful* is riddled with supernatural beings that manifest themselves in séances and even possess Vanessa Ives, the female protagonist, in an attempt to mimic the Victorians' obsession with the supernatural. Llewellyn also points out that even though neo-Victorian texts frequently expose the fallaciousness of Victorian séances and mediumship, they also show a keen desire for a contemporary "version of the Victorian afterlife". That way, neo-Victorian fiction can really tackle the nineteenth-century religious crisis "given our own post-Christian contexts" (Llewellyn, "Spectrality, S(p)ecularity, and Textuality" 25). This can also be seen in *Penny Dreadful*, where the religious crisis is central to Vanessa's fight against the supernatural creatures that want to possess her. Thus, Vanessa's struggle would arguably represent the Victorian tension between Christian faith and superstition.

Agnieszka Golda-Derejczyk approaches the neo-Victorian trope of haunting and spectrality by focusing on how it tackles the sociocultural politics of gender issues, but also to question the role of women "as subjects *in* and *of* history". She further argues that Spiritualism can help bring to light the experiences of abuse, marginalisation and "self-writing" of both Victorian and contemporary women (46). The works analysed in this PhD thesis raise awareness about the systematic marginalisation of the Victorian woman through Spectrality and Spiritualism, particularly in the case of *Crimson Peak* and *Penny Dreadful*, where the female protagonists are sensitive to supernatural forces, a circumstance that might allow them to have a voice in the paternalistic society of the nineteenth century. In fact, this neo-Victorian trope might work together with the notion of "writing as self-inscription" to present women's history as myriad of common experiences, "a dialectic across time and space" in which a "failure of communication cannot of course be avoided" (47). This is the case of *Crimson Peak*, where Edith Cushing shares her traumatic experience of domestic violence through a ghost story that can be shared with a sympathetic feminist audience that would bear witness to it.

Likewise, Esther Saxey explores the question of femininity and self-inscription in neo-Victorian Gothic fiction and contends that they have a common supernatural element—the double—that allows the female protagonists to unleash their repressed desires in order

to achieve social and/or sexual emancipation. This idea is exploited in both *Penny Dreadful* and *Taboo*, where the female protagonists have an uncanny double that allows them to transgress social and sexual impositions. Moreover, Saxey claims that neo-Victorian Gothic texts use what she terms the plots of repression and liberation, which consist in exaggerating Victorian social and sexual rigidity, so that we can see ourselves as more modern and open-minded by contrast. Saxey also warns about the tendency in neo-Victorian works to see sexual liberation as a way out for female characters who are trapped in oppressive situations (81). She concludes that these neo-Gothic narratives often feature a supernatural double to play with the possibility of female emancipation, only to curtail it in the end (80). As I argue in this PhD thesis, this is both the case of *Penny Dreadful* and *Taboo*, as they seemingly allow the female protagonists to overcome social oppression and sexual repression at first, only to later punish them for such transgressions.

Finally, Arias also explores the spectral traces of the nineteenth-century past in two novels set in London in the mid-nineteenth century: Matthew Kneale's *Sweet Thames* (1992) and Clare Clark's *The Great Stink* (2005). Arias analyses the haunting presence of the city of London in neo-Victorian fiction through the recurrence of the River Thames and the nineteenth-century sanitation movement, given that this city "maintains a fluid dialogue with the dead through the traces of past times in haunted places and spaces" ("Haunted Places, Haunted Spaces" 133). The river also features prominently in Victorian literature, most notably in Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* (1864), where it "flows through the novel, linking together the lives of almost all the characters as if they were tributary streams" (Patterson 252). This connects with the TV series *Taboo*, where the presence of the river Thames is central to the story, as it acts as both a material and metaphorical space where the dead and the living meet. It contains both the physical traces of the dead –i.e., their bodies– but also the spiritual ones –i.e., their spirits. Drawing on Derrida's 'hauntology', as well as Abraham and Torok's theories on the 'phantom' and the crypt, Arias analyses the polluted and contaminated city of London as a metaphorical representation of "illness and moral degeneration" ("Haunted Places, Haunted Spaces" 141). With the exception of *Crimson Peak*, the other screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis revisit and reinterpret imperial London as the central stage of their haunting traumas, as I discuss in Chapter 4, section 4.2.1.

Taking all this into consideration, the Victorian period acts as haunting presence in our contemporary society and culture, and the liminal figure of the ghost encapsulates the fluid relationship between Victorianism and neo-Victorianism. Furthermore, this

relationship can be deemed as a sort of doubling that entails revisiting the nineteenth century while also exploring and reflecting on the present, which provides new interpretations and understandings of both the Victorian and our contemporary periods. The trope of haunting and spectrality is also central to the neo-Victorian works studied in this PhD thesis, as they all contain literal and figurative ghostly presences from the nineteenth-century past that allow us to bridge the gap between these two historical periods. Moreover, female character archetypes such as the medium or possessed women also enable us to address the current political debate on gender issues, and the role of women as agents of history. In the next section I discuss the importance of neo-Victorian narratives of family traumas for both Victorian and contemporary identity politics.

#### 3.4. Neo-Victorian Family Traumas

Family holds a central position in neo-Victorian fiction. It is often portrayed in a negative light –as both dysfunctional and fragmented–, but also as a representation of our connection with the Victorian past. Kohlke and Gutleben argue that the revisited neo-Victorian family also allows us to reflect on contemporary anxieties regarding a potential collapse associated with shifting family values, challenging the “institution’s presumed stabilising and civilising function” (“Neo-Victorian Families” 1). Furthermore, alternative portrayals of the nuclear family in neo-Victorian fiction –especially queer reconfigurations of the heteropatriarchal Victorian household– encourage an empathetic and tolerant engagement on the part of the audience, who can become more open to seemingly unconventional ways of conceiving family life.

The Victorian ideal of the nuclear family followed the concept of the separate spheres, which consisted in a husband working in the public sphere and a wife taking care of the private one. This Victorian conception of domesticity was defined by John Ruskin as follows: “[t]he man’s power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender [...]. But the woman’s power is for rule, not for battle, – and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement and decision” (146-7). Hence, a subversion of these traditional understandings of the Victorian family in contemporary fiction might challenge its traditional conceptualisations and offer new alternatives –including queer perspectives and the concept of family of choice– in both present and past periods. This is the case of the neo-Victorian screen texts examined here, as *Crimson Peak* and *Taboo*, where the ideal Victorian nuclear family is contested through the tropes of incest, domestic violence,

monstrous motherhood and paternal abandonment. Likewise, *Penny Dreadful* offers alternative family conceptualisations through the notion of family of choice, whereas *Carnival Row* explores maternal abandonment and orphanhood.

It is also worth noting that domestic violence was a phenomenon that ran counter to the nineteenth-century gendered convention of the separate spheres, which “stressed the home as a woman’s sphere, as the place of her security and her rule” (Lawson and Shakinovsky 2). Moreover, Victorian literary works that focused on a female victim of gender-based violence did not “urgently explore the violence visited upon these bodies as pressing social, political, or moral problems, and even in those that focus on these questions [...] the implications of these questions finally tend to be evaded, or set aside” (Lawson and Shakinovsky 1). Hence, the screen texts that make up my corpus of analysis arguably subvert this Victorian convention, as they recuperate the ignored domestic reality of many nineteenth-century women by graphically portraying and criticising gender-based violence. Finally, despite the fact that the use of the terms “domestic” or “gendered” violence might seem anachronistic when they are applied to nineteenth-century texts –since the terms used at the time were “marital cruelty”, for legal jargon, or “wife beating”, at a colloquial level (Lawson and Shakinovsky 2012, 1)–, this should not be the case when discussing neo-Victorian works. As discussed in the previous chapter, neo-Victorian fiction revisits the nineteenth century to help us reflect on both present and past concerns. Since gender-based violence is, sadly, still a reality at present, neo-Victorian texts exploring this phenomenon allow us to both reflect on and denounce it in both Victorian and current societies. This is the case of the screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis, particularly in *Crimson Peak* and *Taboo*.

Furthermore, Hila Shachar notes the pivotal role that women played in defining the notion of the Victorian family, along with the connection between the concept of domesticity and the emergence of “Victorian values of privacy and family life” (225). The Victorian family also reflected the broader cultural, economic and political contexts of the period, as well as its social anxieties and fears, in what Charlotte Boyce and Elodie Rousselot define as a “microcosmal relationship between family and nation” (9). Indeed, this institution came to encapsulate the standards and principles of Victorian society, as it preserved “its political structures, social and economic organisation, and individuals’ duties and obligations not only to those closest but also towards the wider community” (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Families” 2). Thus, the fissures within the seemingly perfect nuclear family in (neo-)Victorian literary and screen texts would also

reflect the inner conflicts of the British empire and the sense of patriotism derived from it. This is especially the case in *Taboo* and *Penny Dreadful*, where the collapse of the nuclear Victorian family is arguably a reflection of the violence, corruption and immorality of the British empire and its expansionist policies in its colonies.

It is also worth stressing that neo-Victorian narratives centred around the nuclear family seem to have received a simplified and stereotyped conception of the Victorian family, especially in terms of gender and sexuality through the contested notion of the Victorian separate spheres.<sup>20</sup> Some of these inherited ideas include a conflicted conceptualisation of motherhood, as it “was sanctified as women’s ordained destiny”, while they enjoyed very limited legal rights over their infants –both while being married and in the event of a divorce– even after the passing of the 1839 Custody of Infants Act (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Families” 3).<sup>21</sup> Victorian society encouraged women to live up to unattainable precepts of female purity before and during marriage, while images of fallen women and adulteresses circulated in art, literature and culture. The latter seemed to be triggered by the upgrading of the divorce law in the Matrimonial Cause Act of 1857, whilst marriage was still considered to be the basis of family stability (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Families” 4). By contrast, the sexual double standards of the Victorian Age allowed husbands to have sexual intercourse with “(child) prostitutes”, “servants” and “mistresses”, who would frequently pass on to them sexually transmitted diseases that could infect the husbands’ family (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Families 4). In fact, a great number of neo-Victorian screen texts focus on revealing the dark underbelly of Victorian society, which most often applies to the nuclear family. This is the case of *Penny Dreadful*, which exposes the Victorian double standards that allowed adulterous relationships. *Crimson Peak*, *Carnival Row* and *Taboo* explore the notion of monstrous and abusing mothers and how they have an impact in their children’s dysfunctional behaviour.

Indeed, the mother is a central figure in neo-Victorian narratives of family trauma. On the one hand, Barbara Braid contends that Victorian domesticity is usually seen as

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<sup>20</sup> The separation of spheres in Victorian England was first employed to account for women’s subordination and to legitimise the need to investigate the particularities of female experience. However, this notion has increasingly been regarded as “an obstacle to understanding the past rather than a tool for exploring it”, particularly after the rise of a different model of gender construction based on “the implications of gender as a relationship” (Lasser 116).

<sup>21</sup> The Custody of Infants Act of 1839 allowed mothers to “petition the courts for custody of her children up to the age of seven, and for access in respect of older children” (“Custody rights and domestic violence”). Up to that moment, mothers had no rights whatsoever over their children after a divorce.

prison for women and, curiously enough, the wardens of said prison are not only fathers and husbands, but also female figures of authority (“Mother against Daughter” 92). These female authorities are what Braid defines as “Demetrian mothers”, who exert power over their daughters and do not accept that they might leave them to start their own lives (“Mother against Daughter” 93). On the other hand, neo-Victorian fiction might also serve as a tool to construct a “female genealogy” that has been silenced and ignored in patriarchal culture (Braid, “Mother against Daughter” 96). This notion of female genealogy arguably plays a pivotal role in feminist narratives, as the mother-daughter relationship helps define and reconfigure women’s relationships with other women. Conflicting mother-daughter relationships are explored in both *Penny Dreadful* and *Crimson Peak*, where maternal abandonment has an impact on the daughter’s future relationships with both men and women. Along the same lines, *Taboo* and *Carnival Row* explore the relationship between monstrous mothers and their sons, and how the latter try to come to terms with trauma in their adult life.

Regarding the concept of family houses, Anthony S. Wohl describes Victorian homes as being perceived simultaneously as a shelter from the dangers and corruption of the outside world, and the space where poor families were crammed together in deplorable conditions (204-7). Likewise, Kohlke and Gutleben contend that working-class children were often forced into prostitution or long working hours in very poor conditions to contribute to the family economy, even after the passing of the 1833 and later Factory Acts (“Neo-Victorian Families 3”).<sup>22</sup> Heilmann and Llewellyn also assert that the central locus of family trauma and dysfunctionality in neo-Victorian fiction is the ancestral family home, since it is usually a space haunted by past tragedy and a female presence (35). In fact, “it is the domestic location of the family home that serves as an important link to the generational past of the protagonists, and this in itself marks out the potential for a core sense of the matrilineal nature of the inheritances at risk” (41).

The ancestral family home and the mother figure could paradoxically be defined as “sites of both alienation and ultimate reconciliation” (Heilmann and Llewellyn 36), particularly in texts where trauma is rooted in the family, like the ones examined in this

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<sup>22</sup> The 1833 Factory Act was passed by the UK Government to improve the labour conditions of children that were working in factories. Little children were working very long hours and under deplorable conditions, so that the act introduced some basic improvements for them, such as the limitation of working hours, or the fact that children under the age of nine were not allowed to work. However, the passing of this act did not entirely stop the mistreatment of children in the workplace (“1833 Factory Act. Did it solve the problems of children in factories?”).



PhD thesis. The family house is simultaneously the embodiment of “womb and tomb”, given that these domestic spaces are, “a maternal legacy”, passed on from generations, but also, a crumbling place that is abandoned or demolished at the end of the narrative (36). This idea is particularly explored in *Crimson Peak*, where the ancestral family home is haunted not only by the mother’s ghost, but also by other female spectres that conform the female legacy of the Sharpe family. The house in *Taboo* is also haunted by the mother’s presence, a colonised character that represents both female entrapment and imperial imposition. Indeed, the trope of female entrapment is also common in neo-Victorian narratives of family trauma, which usually leads to female hysteria, as in the case of the screen texts analysed here.

The family became in the Victorian era a “primary cultural ideal” mainly shaped by the maternal image of Queen Victoria and the British royal family, which brought about unachievable expectations, mostly due to class and race restrictions (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Families” 5). These great inconsistencies between Victorian ideals of marriage and family and the harsh reality of working class households are a central topic of both Victorian and neo-Victorian fiction. In fact, as Kohlke and Gutleben point out, the inherent contradictions of the Victorian family serve to the present “cultural project of critically re-visioning the nineteenth century from latter-day perspectives that complicate simplistic notions of the period” (“Neo-Victorian Families” 5), such as the promotion of a more conservative social order and the perpetuation of family values. Therefore, neo-Victorian fiction offers a much more plural and multifaceted version of families and their intricacies that evoke our own complex family issues in contemporary societies, such as childless and queer marriages, single-parent households, frequent divorces, or fragmented parent-child relationships. This is the case of the screen narratives analysed here, as *Penny Dreadful* –that not only explores the concept of family of choice as a result of parental abandonment, but also fragmented parent-child relationships, a trope that is also tackled in *Crimson Peak*, *Taboo* and *Carnival Row*.

At a political level, Kohlke and Gutleben point out that neo-Victorian fiction appears to exhibit two contradictory ideological trends which might co-exist in the same work of fiction. On the one hand, it “re-mythologises the traditional self-policing family through structures of reconciliation and normalisation” (“Neo-Victorian Families” 10), which usually crushes any individual efforts to challenge the Victorian monogamous and heteropatriarchal order. This trend also romanticises the nineteenth-century family as our historical point of departure and continuity, an idea that has increasingly been questioned

by postmodernism. On the other hand, there is an opposite trend that demystifies the idealised patriarchal, nuclear family –i.e., heterosexual couples with children– and critiques the perpetuation of marginalising gender politics and unequal distributions of power and rights in the Victorian era. The latter allows writers to propose an alternative reconfiguration of the institution through the portrayal of non-heteronormative models, which are more flexible to switching perceptions of family life as experienced and understood both in the Victorian era and at present (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Families” 10). This is particularly the case of *Penny Dreadful*, where heteronormative models of family fall apart –due to adultery, fragmented parent-child relationships and parental neglect– and are eventually replaced by families of choice.

The trope of families of choice reflects a desire for belonging and a place where relatives are chosen “and imaginatively made and re-made rather than ‘naturally’ given” (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Families” 14). This reconfiguration of the Victorian family is a central theme in the screen texts analysed in the present thesis, where characters make a “conscious choice to create a family that elides traditional and essentialist patriarchal concerns, such as legitimacy, heteronormativity, or racial purity” (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Families” 15). These neo-Victorian texts present characters that are rejected by their biological families due to their ‘Othering’ tendencies –i.e., sexual deviance, ethnic or queer traits–, so that they are forced to form alternative families of their own. Their desire to belong leads them to construct a ‘community’ of choice based on a non-heteropatriarchal and plural model of family.

This portrayal of alternative family structures echoes contemporary social changes that directly affect the reconfiguration and reconsideration of the traditional nuclear family, such as same sex marriages, interracial couples or child adoption. This way, they encourage society to accept new and unconventional family structures at present, while denouncing the dysfunctionality and artificiality of the nuclear family. Moreover, I argue that the fragmentation of these families serves as a metaphor for the collapse of Victorian and imperial England, which could also apply to the disintegration of the system of values in contemporary societies. Kohlke and Gutleben claim that moving these contemporary legal and social debates to the reimagined nineteenth century might offer these families of choice a historical precedent that might facilitate their social and political acceptance. These fictional representations of alternative families in the reimagined nineteenth century underline their naturalness and validity throughout history (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Families” 16).

It is also worth mentioning that most of the fissures and dysfunctionalities portrayed in neo-Victorian families were already being identified and exploited by Victorian writers, as in the case of one of the most productive nineteenth-century novelists: Charles Dickens. He provided copious examples of fragmented and damaged families, in novels such as *Oliver Twist* (1838) –which focuses on a criminal family of pickpockets–, *Hard Times* (1854) – which warns about the nefarious effects of a bad education on children– and *Great Expectations* (1860-61) –that portrays the horrors of child abuse. The constant failure of the Victorian nuclear family to guide and protect was eagerly “exploited by Victorian artists and writers for shock value and affective appeal, as well as social criticism”, particularly in the case of writers of sensation fiction, such as Wilkie Collins, Ellen Price or Mary Elizabeth Braddon, who “recycled and further heightened the sense of family disturbance” (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Families” 17).

In fact, the rise of sensation fiction in the 1860s served to underline the Victorian nuclear family as an institution that not only silenced, but also actively enabled deviant desires and crimes to take place in the domestic sphere, such as bigamy, gender and child abuse, incest, infanticide and uxoricide. Other Victorian authors that explored family dysfunctionality in their novels include the Brontë sisters, as in the case of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, which tackled the trope of the madwoman in the attic, bigamy and illegitimate children in extramarital relationships; Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, where the dysfunctional family relations and domestic environment are arguably reflected through the characters’ dysfunctional state of mind and disabilities (Baldys 59); or Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. This latter novel first received controversial reviews as it brought to the fore contentious social topics, such as alcoholism, activism for women’s rights, and, especially, “hard-hitting criticism of domestic abuse” (Talley 9). Thomas Hardy also examined Victorian family dysfunctionality in his novels, criticising “depopulation, unemployment, loss of residences, neglect, even horrible, tragic endings”, that the rural working classes were suffering (Schoenfeld 1).

Likewise, Victorian novels often portray characters that are located on the ‘periphery’ of the nuclear family, or even far beyond its margins. These include fallen women, orphan and abandoned children, mad relatives –either confined in the attic or in an asylum–, absent fathers, husbands, suspicious widows, marginalised spinsters, adulteresses, or governesses that raise other people’s children. These ‘ex-centric’ characters outside the traditional Victorian family configuration were used to balance and

preserve “the norm via a process of othering” (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Families” 20). Neo-Victorian fiction –which has a tendency to portray nineteenth-century families on the verge of collapsing– arguably presents Victorian households as its “self-affirming ‘other’” whereby we reassert or retain “some sense of familial identity in spite of the present-day’s own comparable emergencies of family” (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Families” 20). The screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis are a clear example of this, as they all present models of families in crisis that include ‘ex-centric’ characters, most notably Medean mothers, absent fathers, the madwoman in the attic, adulteresses or sexually deviant characters.

Likewise, the tragedies of these characters also echo a number of contemporary anxieties and contradictions, such as a seemingly inclusive and progressive society in the current context of social fragmentation; an increasingly fissured sense of national identity as a result of immigration and multiculturalism; or the growing socio-economic equalities among families across the globe. Moreover, over a century after the Victorian period, gender and child abuse, sexual exploitation and abductions, as well as infanticides and uxoricides continue to be widespread both in Western and developing countries. Hence, it could be argued that little has changed in terms of family dysfunctions, apart from the fact that crimes and violence within the domestic sphere “are being more widely reported and prosecuted” (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Families” 21).

Taken all this into consideration, the neo-Victorian family is arguably a fictional construction, which can either stand for an idealised representation of Victorian lost values or be vilified as the site of family crimes and dark secrets. Despite the fictional nature of the genre, Heilmann and Llewellyn assert that the most recurrent concerns in neo-Victorian fiction are loss and mourning on the one hand, and historical reconfiguration, on the other,

which often revolves around the re(dis)covery of a personal and/or collective history and the restitution of a family inheritance through the reconstruction of fragmented, fabricated, or repressed memories: a retracing and piecing together of the protagonist’s roots which reflects, metafictionally, on the literary ‘origins’ of the neo-Victorian genre and the narratological traditions it seeks to reshape (34).

It is also worth noting the prominence that endangered childhoods have in neo-Victorian fiction, and how this trope is frequently exploited through the systematic

portrayal of nineteenth-century children as abused, killed or sexually assaulted. This way, neo-Victorian fiction is morally elevated as the fictional saviour and punisher of the historical wrongs done to them (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Families” 24). The representation of child trauma in neo-Victorianism crosses paths with neo-Gothic fiction, given that both genres are replete with child perpetrators and victims/survivors –most notably in incest and child murder narratives– which reflect on both present and past tragedies within the family nexus. All the screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis explore child trauma, particularly in the case of *Crimson Peak* and *Taboo*, where absent fathers and monstrous mothers lead the children to engage in incestuous relationships in order to cope with domestic abuse and parental negligence. Although these traumas are not explicitly portrayed in these narratives, they are the origin of the protagonists’ adult anxieties and the main reason why they eventually become perpetrators themselves –as in the case of Lucille and Thomas Sharpe in *Crimson Peak*, who end up murdering their own mother and other women after that.

Furthermore, as discussed in previous sections, trauma is an overwhelming event that triggers a delayed reaction on the victim, so that it might develop transgenerationally and live on in the family, but also in societies and cultures at large. This transgenerational or intergenerational haunting echoes Abraham and Torok’s theory of the phantom – already discussed in the previous section– whereby the secret or repressed trauma of a parent haunts their children and distorts their adult life. Therefore, the phantom would represent the parent’s traumatic silence that haunts a younger generation, who would merely be a receptacle containing past traumas that are out of their control and chronological frame (Gruss 126). The traumas depicted in neo-Victorian fiction arguably have an intergenerational nature, given that they display a temporal duality –representing past issues that evoke current deviances, crimes or immoralities. Since these traumas are systematically perpetuated and inherited, either through history or genealogy, they cannot be deemed to be exclusive of the Victorian era. Indeed, it is the very structure of the nuclear family and of the family as nation that engenders these traumas. As a consequence, in advocating for alternative family models, neo-Victorian fiction is actually attempting to break this seemingly perpetual cycle of transgenerational trauma.

Finally, Arias argues that the fragmentation of the ideal nuclear family and its corresponding myth of national concord can also be analysed from the perspective of Disability Studies, as there appears to be a link between disabled bodies and disabled nations in neo-Victorianism. Arias also asserts that there are two opposite trends in neo-

Victorian fiction dealing with disabled characters. On the one hand, there is a type of “normalising novel” that depicts a “literary lineage (house/family)” and appropriates the Victorian ghost story and the Gothic novel, where the supernatural or flawed Other had to be “exorcised”. On the other hand, there is a second one that promotes “de-normalising” narratives that depict “a ‘new’ literary lineage (house/family) that looks forward to future orientations of the neo-Victorian novel”. This latter trend is much more inclusive, as it incorporates the voice of the disabled Other (“(In)Visible Disability” 362). Moreover, as discussed above, contemporary writers take into consideration both the Victorian and contemporary contexts. Therefore, neo-Victorian novels that represent the disabled family as a metaphor for the feeble body of the nation look back –to see how disability was portrayed in Victorian culture– but also forwards –to find out how contemporary and future considerations and the field of Disability Studies can influence and transform neo-Victorian fiction (“(In)Visible Disability” 363). As mentioned in previous sections, Disability Studies has been gathering momentum in the field of neo-Victorianism in recent years, particularly through the trope of the Victorian freak show – as in the case of Dr Frankenstein’s creature in *Penny Dreadful*, Caliban/John Clare.

The screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis are centred around the Victorian dysfunctional family and examine a number of traumas that take place within the family home. These include child abuse, domestic violence, female entrapment or parental abandonment. Moreover, these texts also exploit and the mechanisms that the traumatised victims employ to cope with them. The most salient of these mechanisms are incestuous relationships, assuming the perpetrator’s identity by compulsively repeating and perpetuating the cycle of violence, repressing and silencing the trauma until it eventually comes back in the form of a ghost or verbalising it with an empathetic audience that might bear witness to it so as to finally work through it. In the following chapters, I analyse the four screen texts that make up my corpus of analysis from the perspective of trauma studies, particularly the gendered and colonial traumas that take place within the confines of the Victorian nuclear family.

#### 4. HAUNTED AND HAUNTING SPACES: NEO-VICTORIAN HETEROTOPIAS ON SCREEN

In neo-Victorian trauma narratives on screen, space has more symbolical layers of meaning than it might seem at first sight. There are a number of cultural, private, public and institutional spaces that are constructed as sites of Otherness and alienation. Foucault coined the term ‘heterotopias’ to describe these spaces, which could be defined as real places that function as “counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which [...] all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (“Des Espaces Autres” 3). Foucault first explored this concept in the 1966 radio show “Les heterotopias” for Radio France. Nonetheless, it was not until 1984 that the term heterotopia gained more academic attention, thanks to the transcription of a lecture he delivered to the *Cercle d’études architecturales* in 1967, titled “Des espaces autres”. There are a number of common traits between neo-Victorianism and the concept of Foucauldian heterotopias that evidence the synergy between these two concepts. Indeed, the link between them is so recurrent that a special issue exploring it and co-edited by Marie-Luise Kohlke, Elizabeth Ho and Akira Suwa was recently published in the journal *Humanities* (2022).

Likewise, both disciplines have expanded their original contexts of application. The term ‘heterotopia’ was first conceived for the fields of architecture and literature, but it has also been used in “social and cultural geography, sociology and urban studies” (Johnson 790). The same could be said about neo-Victorian studies. It was originally concerned with literature, but in recent years it has also been applied to other disciplines in the field of cultural studies, such as fashion, gender studies, film studies, musicology, trauma studies or even architecture. As a result, we should consider “heterotopia and neo-Victorianism in tandem, namely as cultural phenomena that facilitates new ways of thinking about the Long Nineteenth Century as defined by social spaces and their counter-structures or counter-emplacements” (Kohlke, Ho and Suwa 2).

Moreover, both neo-Victorianism and heterotopias are characterised by their time disruptions. Whilst the former spans several centuries –not just the Victorian era, but also the twentieth and twenty-first centuries–, in the case of heterotopias of time –or heterochronies– they change over time and serve different functions depending on the period (Foucault “Des Espaces Autres” 7). As a result, neo-Victorian heterotopias disrupt the time line, which is no longer perceived as “linear, progressive”, but they rather mirror “the present in the re-presented nineteenth century and invit[e] audiences to

simultaneously locate the lingering past at work within present-day social spaces, institutions, and government policy” (Kohlke, Ho and Suwa 3).

Finally, it is worth noting that neo-Victorian heterotopias can also represent spaces to escape or fight against authoritarianism and repression. Indeed, they reflect “real and fictional counter-sites to nineteenth-century hegemonic cultural structures, systems, and symbolic orders embedded/located in the contemporary re-purposings and re-imaginings of period settings” (Kohlke, Ho and Suwa 5). Thus, given that neo-Victorianism’s focuses on Othered characters, and that Foucault’s heterotopias highlight “society’s heterogeneity through its spatial organization”, they are both “potentially ‘catalytic’ of social change, by exposing and reconfiguring the cultural imagery that underpins society’s structures and institutions” (Kohlke, Ho and Suwa 6). Moreover, the main heterotopian spaces defined by Foucault, “including prisons, asylums, brothels, ships, and colonies, tend to feature prominently” in neo-Victorian fiction (Kohlke, Ho and Suwa 1). As a consequence, in this chapter I analyse neo-Victorian spaces as Foucauldian heterotopias through which we can reimagine the nineteenth century and grant Victorian marginalised subjects poetic justice.

Heterotopias can be divided into six distinct categories that exhibit dual and opposed meanings. These include heterotopias of crisis –e.g., boarding schools or a motel room– and heterotopias of deviation –asylums, prisons or the Victorian attic. There are also heterotopias that might change their social function depending on the cultural shifts and needs of its citizens over time – like cemeteries. There are heterotopias that are a single real place enclosing different places –such as cinemas and gardens– and heterotopias of ritual or purification, which are isolated and penetrable, yet not fully accessible. Examples of this latter heterotopia would include a prison, whose entry is compulsory, or a sauna, that requires a special ritual or gesture in order to enter it. Finally, Foucault also described heterotopias that “have a function in relation to all the space that remains”, such as the ship (Foucault, “Des Espaces Autres” 8-9). In this chapter, I focus on the representations of heterotopias in the neo-Victorian screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis, particularly heterotopias of crisis and deviation –such as the family house, the attic, the asylum and the orphanage–, heterochronies or heterotopias of time –neo-Victorian representations of the city of London– and heterotopias that have a function in relation to the other spaces: ships that transport the racial Other to slavery across an ocean.

Section 4.1. focuses on how family and gendered traumas are portrayed in both the family home and public spaces of confinement –such as orphanages and asylums– in



the neo-Victorian screen texts analysed here. Likewise, some rooms in the Victorian family house are particularly prone to harbouring and constraining Otherness. This is the case of the attic, which has traditionally hold the madwoman, as I contend in subsection 4.1.1. Outside the family home, both the asylum and the orphanage functioned as substitutes for the domestic space, becoming heterotopias of crisis and deviation inhabited by alienated and marginalised characters. Thus, subsection 4.1.2. analyses how these heterotopias stage trauma in the neo-Victorian screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis. It first examines how domestic interiors are portrayed as the loci of patriarchal entrapment and then focuses on how some public buildings –e.g., the asylum and the orphanage– function as the sites of family trauma outside the family home.

Likewise, spaces outside the confines of the private family home or its public counterparts also feature prominently in neo-Victorian narratives of trauma on screen, as I explore in section 4.2. First, the reworking of nineteenth-century cities as sites of memory and heritage, but also as the centre of Gothic horror, are foregrounded in contemporary adaptations of the Victorian period. This is arguably so because nineteenth-century cities continue to haunt contemporary metropolises and “cityscapes” (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Cities” 1). In subsection 4.2.1, I determine how nineteenth-century London –and its fantastical reimagination through the city of *The Burgue in Carnival Row*– takes centre stage as the spectral space where marginalised characters and supernatural outcasts meet their tragic fate.

Finally, the nineteenth century has come to be understood as synonymous with the British empire in our collective imagination (Ho, *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of Empire* 1). Indeed, the massive deaths experienced by ethnic characters as a result of slavery, colonisation and forced migration are encapsulated in the trope of the “coffin ship” in both *Carnival Row* and *Taboo*. The coffin ship is considered “a heterotopic site traversing a liminal space between home and an uncertain future” (O’Malley 150), particularly in relation to the massive transatlantic migration during Ireland’s Great Famine (1845-1852), but also to the horrors of slavery and the middle passage. However, this trope might also have a presentist drive in neo-Victorian fiction. This is so because it echoes contemporary diasporas, experienced by individuals forced to leave their homelands and who seek refuge in Western countries, where they are not always welcomed.

*Taboo* and *Carnival Row* tackle the topics of racism, immigration and slavery, which are embodied in the maritime heterotopia of the ship, both as a place of death and

as the passage from freedom to (indentured) slavery. On the one hand, *Taboo* examines these topics in a more ‘traditional’ fashion, as it denounces imperialism and racism against Black and Native American colonised subjects. On the other hand, *Carnival Row* is a fantastical TV series that reimagines imperial London in an alternative universe called The Burgue, a colour-blind society where racism is not based on skin-colour difference or ethnicity. Instead, discrimination is aimed at mythological creatures –like fairies, centaurs and pucks– who represent The Burgue’s fantastical racial Other. Thus, in subsection 4.2.2. I analyse the neo-Victorian trope of the coffin ship and its reconfiguration of the Black and Green Atlantics in *Taboo* and *Carnival Row*.

##### 4.1. The neo-Victorian House of Horrors: Staging Family Traumas on Screen

The haunted house has traditionally been the site of Gothic horror, ever since the publication of Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). This trope was later developed in Victorian Gothic literature, which defined “the vernacular house” with a “profoundly haunted style” (Curtis 85). As a result, the central locus of family trauma and dysfunctionality in both neo-Victorian Gothic literature and screen texts is the family house, a place haunted by a past tragedy and a female presence (Heilmann and Llewellyn 35). Indeed, Freud’s definition of the uncanny as a negation of the word ‘home’ (*unheimlich*, in the original German), presents the house as a place that “arouses dread and horror” (219). This is the case of the four screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis, where the family house is the place that holds the family secrets and the very structure where their traumas take place. In these screen texts, the house and some of its rooms act as a living agent, working as an outer projection of its residents’ inner traumas and as the site of alienation and dysfunctionality, especially in the case of (fe)male hysteria.

This is the case of the attic in *Taboo* and *Crimson Peak*; the maze in *Penny Dreadful*; or the walls as both a symbol of female entrapment and hidden secrets in all of the above. Likewise, public spaces that function as heterotopias of deviation and as substitutes for the domestic space of the home, such as the asylum or the orphanage, also harbour family secrets and mental disorders. The infamous Victorian mental institution commonly known as Bedlam Asylum plays a central role in both *Taboo* and *Penny Dreadful* as the site of female oppression, especially through the exploitation of the pseudo-medical condition of hysteria. Finally, the orphanage in *Carnival Row* represents the childhood trauma of parental abandonment and neglect, but also symbolises the fragmentation of the idealised Victorian institution of the nuclear family.

### 4.1.1. The House as the Locus of Family Traumas

Films and TV series presenting the family house as the site of trauma have proliferated in the last decades, especially in the case of ghost stories, where they function as “powerful metaphors for persistent themes of loss, memory, retribution and confrontation with unacknowledged and unresolved stories” (Curtis 10). Some recent horror TV series staging haunted houses and spaces include *American Horror Story* (2011-present), *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018) or *The Haunting of Bly Manor* (2020) –loosely based on the Victorian novella by Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). The popularity of the ghost in contemporary cinema and television can be accounted for the need to face what has been repressed in the construction of our everyday culture and way of life. Ghosts could be defined as “supernatural revenants which have passed between the worlds of the living and the dead” (Curtis 10). This is the case of *Crimson Peak* and *Penny Dreadful*, whereas in other instances ‘ghostliness’ actually stands for the repressed and marginalised presence of a social group, as in the case of James Delaney’s mother in *Taboo*, who embodies both the female and colonised Other.

The family house in horror films usually stages a “generational conflict”, where children play a pivotal role “in mediating between the worlds of the dead and the living”, and in some cases reflect the children’s refusal to accept “how people can suddenly stop existing” (Curtis 15). This is what happens to Edith Cushing, the female protagonist in *Crimson Peak*, whose mother died of black cholera when she was just a child. Soon after, her mother came back from the dead as a ghost to warn Edith about the potential dangers that she would face in the future. This ghost arguably reflects the child’s incapacity to fully understand the event of her mother’s passing and the fact that she will no longer be able to protect her. Thus, the ghost could be understood as a way to compensate for the lack of maternal love and guidance that Edith experienced as a child. As she explains in the following fragment, her mother’s death was so sudden that she could not even say goodbye to her, until she returned as a ghost:

Ghosts are real. This much I know. The first time I saw one I was 10 years old. It was my mother's. Black cholera had taken her. So Father ordered a closed casket, asked me not to look. There were to be no parting kisses. No goodbyes. No last words. That is, until the night she came back (Del Toro, 00:01:02-00:01:48)

#### 4. Neo-Victorian Heterotopias on Screen

Edith's mother appears twice in the film, but as opposed to the traditional role that ghosts usually serve in haunted house narratives –as metaphors for concealed past tragedies and crimes that need to be brought to light– her function in the narrative is to warn Edith about the dangers that await her in another haunted house: her future husband's family estate called Allerdale Hall, and colloquially known as “Crimson Peak”. The ghost tells her: “My child, when the time comes, beware of Crimson Peak” (Del Toro, 00:03:02-00:03:10). Despite her mother's warning, Edith will eventually become a victim of patriarchal violence in *Crimson Peak*, where she will also meet a sorority of female ghosts that will try to help her solve the mysteries of the house.

Haunted houses tend to be explored by young female characters, who then become responsible for solving the hidden family secrets that the building holds. According to Curtis, young women have traditionally been associated with the Gothic tropes of haunting and spectrality, and their duty in the narrative is to “understand and ‘lay’ the ghost” (16). This idea of investigating and detecting the family's secrets is intimately related to detective fiction. Indeed, the transfer of Gothic plots and devices from the far-away castle to the British private home was first developed through Gothic Romance –as in the case of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*– and Sensation Fiction, “a genre best thought of as a kind of ‘suburban Gothic’” (Killeen 20), which eventually derived to the emerging genre of detective fiction. The growing popularity of sensation and detective fiction in the Victorian era coincided with “an increasing interest in crime and sexual and family scandals in the Victorian press” (Killeen 20), that Del Toro replicates in his neo-Victorian film, *Crimson Peak*.

In this film, Edith, the female protagonist, finds herself in a web of family crimes that she has to solve. Hence, the film follows the traditional pattern of Del Toro's films, where he usually places the female protagonist at the centre of a “bildungsroman narrative” (McDonald and Clark 15), as in the case of *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) and *The Shape of Water* (2017). The heroines of these films are young women or children whose tragic experiences enable them to confront their inner and outer demons. After she marries Sir Thomas Sharpe and moves with him to his family state in northern England, Edith soon realises that the ancestral home is haunted by several female presences that were abused and murdered by the Sharpe siblings: their mother and Sir Thomas's previous wealthy wives. However, the villains of the film are not plain monsters, but rather traumatised victims of an unspeakable family tragedy –domestic violence– that forced them to commit despicable acts in order to survive. This is yet another common feature

of Del Toro's films, where he presents his villains as morally ambiguous rather than uncontestedly evil (McDonald and Clark 3).

Gender-based violence is a topic both explored in *Crimson Peak* and *Taboo*, albeit in an implicit manner. In both screen texts, a pair of siblings – Lucille and Thomas Sharpe and James and Zilpha Delaney, respectively – witnessed how their respective fathers abused their mothers – both physically and psychologically – in the family house. This violence was repressed by both families until the abused mothers died, but they later returned in the form of ghosts: a supernatural revenant in *Crimson Peak* and a haunting, lingering presence in the case of *Taboo*.

In *Crimson Peak*, Lucille verbalises this traumatic past when she tells Edith about how her father once got so violent with her mother that he almost rendered her disabled: “I tended Mother in this bed. Father was a brute. He hated Mother. Broke her leg. Snapped it in two under his boot. She never quite healed. She was bedridden for a long time. But I cared for her. Fed her. Bathed her. Combed her hair. Rubbed liniment on her scars. I made her better” (Del Toro, 01:24:04-01:25:08). Similarly, James resents his father's coercive behaviour towards his mother, a native American woman from the Nootka tribe that Mr Delaney bought along with a piece of land in exchange “for gunpowder” (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 1, 00:24:33-00:24:42). James suspects that his father drove his mother into madness and then confined her in the attic, depriving her of her agency and cultural identity: “In the latter days, when she wasn't allowed to walk the streets, nor show her face in public, nor speak in English, nor her savage tongue because she was a mad woman” (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 3, 00:23:22-00:23:34).

However, the abused mothers in both *Taboo* and *Crimson Peak* eventually became perpetrators themselves. Lady Sharpe abused her own children by systematically beating and confining them in the attic. Lucille hints at her mother's maternal neglect when she explains to Edith that she and Thomas could not play around the house and were mostly ignored by their mother: “We were not allowed in here [the drawing room] as children. We were confined to the nursery in the attic. Mother played the piano sometimes. We'd hear her through the floor. That's how we knew she was back in the country” (Del Toro, 00:50:10-00:50:27). This traumatic confinement alienated the two siblings, who only had each other's company. As a result, they eventually engaged in an incestuous relationship that continued until their adult life. In order to protect this “monstrous love” (Del Toro, 00:38:45-00:38:46), Lucille killed their own mother, after she found out about their incestuous relationship.

#### 4. Neo-Victorian Heterotopias on Screen

Likewise, James's mother in *Taboo*, Salish, also became a perpetrator against her own son, since she tried to drown him in the river as a baby. As Marlena Tronicke contends, the Victorian house usually "functions as a quasi-prison" for female characters. Thus, this "coercive space" is re-imagined in neo-Victorian fiction as a space "of resistance against the hegemonic structures that govern them" (1). Tronicke defines the Victorian domestic sphere as a "heterotopia of deviation", as it contains female characters that are "outside the norm" and "considered a threat to the social order" (2), as in the case of Salish. Even though Foucault did not explicitly define heterotopias as platforms of resistance, Tronicke argues that "the potential for transformation and subversion is nevertheless inherent" in them (2). Given that Salish is a colonised woman imprisoned in the domestic sphere, her attempt to murder James –who is also her jailer's son– could be interpreted as an act of resistance against the patriarchal authority.

However, she fails to free herself from that gendered oppression and is later sent to another heterotopia of crisis: the Victorian asylum. When James comes back to London after spending twelve years in Africa, he is haunted by the fragmented and blurry memories of his mother, covered in Native American body paint, laughing and contorting in the river. As a consequence, the audience only gets to know Salish through James's and his servant's points of view. They appropriate her voice –as she does not have any lines in the show– and reconstruct her story through their memories and the material remnants she left behind. Indeed, Salish could be considered a revenant that haunts Delaney and encapsulates the patriarchal and colonial violence that she suffered at the hands of her husband. Therefore, even after death, Salish seems to be tied to the coercive heterotopia –or patriarchal prison– where her husband had forced her to stay when she was alive. This appears to suggest that the family house in *Taboo* continues to be a restrictive space for women –despite the potential for resistance and transformation of this domestic heterotopia.

Spectres haunt the living to share their traumatic experiences and seek reparations for the injustices they endured (Herman 1). Hence, it could be argued that Salish haunts her son, an imperial coloniser like his father, to make him reflect on and take responsibility for his past atrocities. Consequently, *Taboo* subverts the abovementioned trope of the young female character exploring the haunted house and laying the ghost in order to excavate and right past wrongs. In this case, it is actually a man who is sensitive to supernatural forces and is responsible for giving voice to marginalised and silenced characters. However, James's contradictory morality –that of a former slave trader who

simultaneously criticises and resents his father for buying her Native American mother and imposing his culture on her—hinders any possible reparation to the racial ‘Other’ in the series.

On a different note, a young woman is also responsible for ‘excavating’ family secrets in *Penny Dreadful*. This series is particularly interesting to examine from the perspective of the house as a locus of family trauma, given that there are several haunted houses in the show that hold a number of repressed family secrets. First, there are the countryside cottages where the female protagonist of the series, Vanessa Ives, and her best friend, Mina Murray, grew up. One of the most striking features of these buildings is that they are connected through an intricate labyrinth that represents the strong union between the two families. The labyrinth is depicted as highly symbolical, embodying the main characters’ sexual explorations and transgressions. Vanessa used to play hide and seek with her childhood friends, Mina and Peter Murray, in this labyrinth. This game could actually be considered as a metaphor for the maze’s symbolical function in Gothic fiction, as a “search for the hidden identity of what is haunting” (Curtis 174).

As an adolescent, Vanessa found her mother having sexual intercourse with Mina and Peter’s father, Sir Malcolm Murray, and the discovery of this sin—that also connected both families—changed their lives forever. This socially inappropriate act awakened a sexual desire in Vanessa that she later confessed to her friend Mina: “My mother, your father. More than the shock, the sinfulness, the forbidden act, there was this: I enjoyed it. Something whispered, I listened. Perhaps it has always been there, this thing, this demon inside me. Or behind my back, waiting for me to turn around” (Logan, Season 1, Episode 5, 00:11:13-00:11:49). Hence, the maze here represents the space where Vanessa lays the secret that had been haunting both her and her friends’ families, but also the place where she experiences her own self-discovery. According to Curtis, “[t]he maze is a metaphor for all haunted places—involving a quest for what lies at its heart, and a need to negotiate its complexity and learn how to return” (174). Thus, this labyrinth could arguably symbolise Vanessa’s loss of innocence and her quest for maturity and adulthood. Nonetheless, it could also be interpreted as a rural counterpart to the city of London, which in late Victorian Gothic narratives was considered as a chaotic maze, “from which there is no escape” (Tomaiuolo 156). Whilst the labyrinth that connected the Murray’s and the Ives’s households would stand for the gentrified idyll of rural Englishness that holds these families’ secrets, the chaotic metropolis harbours other monstrous evils and anxieties that cannot be contained, as I explain in section 4.2 of this chapter.

Sir Malcolm Murray's London house also plays a pivotal role in *Penny Dreadful*, as a place that functions as a shelter for his 'family of choice' –a community made up of social outcasts, who have been rejected by their own families– but that is also the target of supernatural dark forces. As Primorac contends, *Penny Dreadful* explores the “deconstruction of the biological nuclear family” (*Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 151), as the main protagonists of the series either come from fragmented, dysfunctional households, or have been rejected by their families for being 'different' or deviant. In Season 1 of the series, Sir Malcolm and Vanessa recruit a team of supernaturally sensitive and amateur 'detectives' made up of Dr Victor Frankenstein, werewolf and gunman Mr Ethan Chandler, Sir Malcolm's African manservant Sembene and the Egyptologist Ferdinand Lyle. They are hired to find Sir Malcolm's missing daughter, Miss Mina Murray –an appropriation of Stoker's character from *Dracula*– who has been kidnapped by a vampire master. Throughout the series, this team of outcasts find a shelter in Sir Malcolm's London house, where they can function as an alternative to the traditional Victorian nuclear family.

However, houses in *Penny Dreadful* are ambivalent spaces, as they act as shelters for marginalised characters but also as places of confrontation. Sir Malcolm's house is a clear example of how “the haunted house is the place where trauma occurred, but also, and subsequently, the projection of the traumatized and haunted psyche itself” (Michlin par 6). At the end of Season 1, Vanessa is possessed by the Devil, and she tries to resist him and to expel him, both physically and psychologically. She contorts her body and scratches herself until she bleeds, tears the walls and bed sheets of her bedroom and smashes the furniture around her (Logan, Season 1, Episode 7). As a consequence, her inner struggle against the Devil is reflected in the house itself, which arguably functions as an external projection of her traumatised psyche. Likewise, the evil creatures that feature prominently in *Penny Dreadful*'s Season 2, the Nightcomers or satanic witches, also infiltrate Sir Malcolm's home, camouflaging themselves with the house's wallpaper in order to spy Vanessa and her protectors (Logan, Season 2, Episode 4).

This scene arguably echoes Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892). In this short story, a mad-woman in the attic that is obsessed with what she believes is a woman trapped in the yellow wallpaper of the nursery where her husband keeps her confined. In the same way as the female protagonist of this story continuously marks the room as her own by tearing the wallpaper and repeatedly claims that “she now wants to reside in” it (Golden 26), the female witches in *Penny Dreadful* mark Sir



Malcolm's domestic territory as their own through its wallpaper. This seems to point once again to the feminisation of Victorian domestic spaces, and the patriarchal ideology that the witches –despite their apparent freedom– continue to reflect. Indeed, these domestic heterotopias in *Penny Dreadful* represent “[f]emale oppression and its representation via physical structures of incarceration” –such as the asylum, the attic or the prison–, which are “well-established neo-Victorian themes” (Tronicke 2). Even though these neo-Victorian heterotopias have the potential of subverting and transforming patriarchal oppression, in this case they actually perpetuate it. After a horrendous attack, where they ransack the house, the witches manage to steal a lock of Vanessa's hair, which they will later use for a voodoo-like ritual against her. This seems to prove that, despite the fact that the Sir Malcolm's house is constructed as a shelter for the outcasts, it cannot keep the evil outside. Consequently, the series here challenges the Victorian ideal of the house as a shelter from the dangers of the outside world (Wohl 204-7), which I discussed in Chapter 3.

The Nightcomers are the main villains in Season 2 of *Penny Dreadful*, servants of Satan whose main goal is to convince Vanessa to submit to their master.<sup>23</sup> However, they have a powerful opponent: a witch named Joan Clayton, also known as the Cut-Wife of Ballantrae Moor. Clayton's house is located in the fringes of Ballantrae town, and it could be considered a shelter for women from the village who need to get an abortion, remedies for various diseases and other potions. She follows the stereotypical image of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century witches, as she “keeps her hair short, is old, lives alone, is a healer, and provides contraception and abortion. The locals come to her, yet are terrified of her” (Marino 70). The nickname “Cut-Wife” is a modification of the term “midwife”, which refers to “a person who assists women in childbirth” (“Midwife”, def. 1). As Clayton herself explains to Vanessa, she was given that name “[b]ecause when the girls need a little baby killed inside them, they come to me. I cut it out. Cut-Wife” (Logan, Season 2, Episode 3, 00:10:30-00:10:36). However, Clayton is not only a Cut-Wife, but also a ‘hedge witch’<sup>24</sup> that left the coven led by her sister, Evelyn Poole –Vanessa's

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<sup>23</sup> ‘Nightcomers’ are the counterparts of ‘Daywalkers’ in *Penny Dreadful*. The latter term appears to derive from the notion of the ‘white witch’, a “benign type of witch who spent most of her time as a folk healer” (“Daywalker” par. 17), whereas the former would be synonymous with a ‘black’ or satanic witch.

<sup>24</sup> The term ‘hedge witch’ usually refers to women who “lived along the fringes of a village, behind the hedgerows”, far from civilisation and into the wilderness (“What is a Hedge Witch?” par. 2). These hedge witches usually had a twofold purpose: they were healers and cunning women, as in the case of the Cut-Wife of Ballantrae Moor. Their practices were commonly known as “green craft”, because they involved gathering herbs and plants in the woods and were “highly influenced by folk customs” (“What is a Hedge

nemesis and Lucifer's pawn throughout Season 2 of the show—, after they made a pact with Satan and became Nightcomers.

*Penny Dreadful* establishes a clear-cut distinction between good witches—such as Clayton and Vanessa herself— and bad ones—Mrs. Poole and her satanic coven. Nonetheless, they all confirm the common belief spread during the Middle Ages through the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1487),<sup>25</sup> whereby being a witch is intrinsically “a gendered identity”, given that women were considered to be “the weaker sex”, and so they were more vulnerable to the Devil's influence (Carroll par. 1). Thus, women were perceived as a threat to the social order, so it was believed that they had to be domesticated and controlled by patriarchy for their own good. According to Chloe Carroll, the portrayal of the witch on screen “has [traditionally] reiterated social constructs surrounding gender and often reinforced witchcraft as a signifier of the femme fatale” (par. 3). However, current screen texts are more progressive and even display a feminist agenda by addressing both contemporary and past sexism and granting women more agency, as in the case of the Netflix TV series *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018-2020).

Nonetheless, *Penny Dreadful* does not appear to follow this progressive trend, since it portrays Vanessa as a *femme fatale* when she gives in to her sexual impulses and to the Devil's influence over her soul. Likewise, Nightcomers have scars on their backs in the shape of pentagrams that mark them as Satan's property, so that they have to do his bidding. As a result, although it might appear that Mrs. Poole's coven is a matrilineal family of choice that defies the Victorian ideal of the nuclear family, they actually serve a patriarchal authority, the Devil. As Primorac contends, whilst witches in *Penny Dreadful* seem to challenge “conventional family structures with their coven of self-proclaimed sisters, the marks on their bodies remind the viewers of the submission of their wills and agency to their ‘master’” (*Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 154).

The Cut-Wife's house is the place where Vanessa goes after her friend Mina disappears, since she hopes to learn how to use her supernatural abilities there. Clayton soon becomes Vanessa's mentor and a mother figure to her. Her birth mother had not help her when she was struggling with her new-found supernatural abilities and, instead, had supported her father's decision to have her committed in a psychiatric institution. As a

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Witch par. 2). Hedge women learned their craft from older family members or mentors or by reading and were usually solitary practitioners that did not have the support of a coven, as in the case of the Cut-Wife.  
<sup>25</sup> The *Malleus Maleficarum* was a treatise of witchcraft written by the agents of the Catholic Church Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, who associated witchcraft with women because “since they are feebler both in mind and body, it is not surprising that they should come under the spell of witchcraft” (44).

result, Clayton also becomes Vanessa's family of choice. However, the witch's house is not only a refuge for Vanessa, but also a place of death and confrontation, as Clayton is later burned alive by the villagers in its front yard.

This takes us to another Freudian conceptualisation of the family house, as the embodiment of "womb and tomb in one: a maternal legacy for both male and female heirs, an heirloom [...] passed from one generation to the next" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 36). In "The Uncanny", Freud argues that one of our more primitive fears is that of being buried alive (14), although this dread is actually a transformation from a quasi "lustful" fantasy of "intra-uterine existence" ("Civilization and its Discontents" 15). Freud here equates the tomb and the womb as the places where "bodies were subject to forces beyond their control as they underwent formative transformations" (Schroeder). Moreover, Freud conflates the concepts of house, tomb and womb and contends that "the dwelling-house was a substitute for the mother's womb, the first lodging, for which in all likelihood man still longs, and in which he was safe and felt at ease" (90). Clayton's house could be considered as Vanessa's place of origin or womb, given that she was reborn there as a witch, but also a tomb, as her female mentor is murdered and buried there. As a result, from the perspective of Foucauldian heterotopias, Clayton's house is arguably a space that allows Vanessa to subvert her constrained Victorian femininity by becoming a witch –well-versed in rituals and potions that can help other women escape the limitations of the patriarchal system. Nonetheless, it is also a space of repression, since it contains the very possibility of female liberation within its confines, as Vanessa and *The Cut-Wife* are not allowed to perform their magic outside their home.

Finally, the question of ownership is also central to haunted house narratives, as the building is usually an heirloom that is inherited by future generations. However, this "heirloom is also a curse –an obstacle to achieving a viable modern existence and a haunting presence that can only be put to rest by a heroic and ultimately doomed quest for knowledge of the past" (Curtis 69). Given that Clayton acts as Vanessa's mother of choice, she bequeaths the house and all her possessions –i.e., her witchcraft books and tools– to her, so that she can take over the work of *Cut-Wife*. However, Vanessa refuses to take on that responsibility, as she is not interested in continuing that matrilineal legacy and only wants to use her supernatural abilities to save her friend Mina. In other words: she does not want to keep herself confined in that heterotopia of deviation, where her witchcraft is contained in order to help other women escape the regulations of the patriarchal system.

Likewise, the Nightcomers' house in *Penny Dreadful* could also be considered a shelter for female outcasts, as it harbours Evelyn Poole's coven, which is made up exclusively of young women. However, as mentioned above, the idea that this magical sorority acts as a subversion of the Victorian nuclear family is obliterated in the end, as these witches are not free agents, but rather servants of the Devil, a patriarchal authority that rules over them in exchange for eternal beauty and supernatural abilities. Evelyn Poole's mansion is located in an isolated area and only shown at night in the series, presumably to further contribute to the building's eerie and spooky atmosphere.

This majestic Victorian construction was built from scratch for the series and has a circular design, owing to the very limited amount of stage space. According to production designer Jonathan McKinstry, "the corridors sort of start to hide themselves and disappear around corners" ("*Penny Dreadful* | First Look: Evelyn Poole's Mansion | Season 2", 00:00:47-00:00:51), creating a very dynamic space that facilitates the camera movements that allow the audience to explore Mrs. Poole's mansion. This is particularly interesting in the first episode of Season 2, where viewers are introduced to the witches' house through a track shot that shows the mansion from the outside and then moves inside, from the bottom of the stairs to the bathroom. Here, Mrs. Poole is bathing in the blood of a recently murdered young woman, while she sings the English folk song "The Unquiet Grave" (Logan, Season 2, Episode 1, 00:39:15-00:40:31). This scene echoes Countess Elizabeth Báthory's alleged vampiric tendencies, according to which she bathed in the blood of female virgins to retain her youth.<sup>26</sup>

In the series, the Nightcomers also use the blood and organs of babies and female virgins for their satanic rituals, which is reflected in the mansion's decoration. Indeed, the parlour was designed by McKinstry as a "slightly cold place but at the same time with a blood-red warmth" ("*Penny Dreadful* | First Look: Evelyn Poole's Mansion | Season 2", 00:01:20-00:01:23), and there are skeletons decorating the walls, some even holding spears and swords. McKinstry claims that he drew inspiration from the churches outside of Prague to create the parlour's ornaments, which is filled with "chandeliers and decorations and garlands" ("*Penny Dreadful* | First Look: Evelyn Poole's Mansion | Season 2", 00:01:36-00:01:39) made up of skeletons and bones. Hence, this mansion is portrayed as a Freudian "intra-uterine" space ("The Uncanny" 15) –a damp, red-blood and feminised place– that will entomb its inhabitants under its very foundations.

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<sup>26</sup> The story of this female aristocrat inspired Sheridan Le Fanu to create the novella *Carmilla* (1872).

#### 4. Neo-Victorian Heterotopias on Screen

In episodes 9 and 10 of Season 2, the male protagonists follow Vanessa to the witches' lair, where she plans to confront and vanquish them. However, Dr Frankenstein and Sir Malcolm end up trapped in the mansion's haunted parlour, where they have to face the ghosts of their close relatives –Sir Malcolm's wife, Gladys, and children, Mina and Peter Murray, and Dr Frankenstein's creatures, John Clare, Lily and Proteus– who demand their deaths to atone for their crimes. The ghosts try to tempt Sir Malcolm and Dr Frankenstein with the promise of an afterlife with their respective families, a future where they will no longer be alone:

Peter [to Sir Malcolm]: Join your family.

Mina: A final tombstone on the hill.

Lily [to Dr Frankenstein]: The slip of poison from the amber bottle.

Gladys [to Sir Malcolm]: A single bullet under the chin.

John Clare [to Dr Frankenstein]: There is no other peace for thee, Frankenstein.

Proteus: Walk into the river... let it bring you quiet.

John Clare: Enjoy our company.

Gladys [to Sir Malcolm]: One of us again.

Peter: Father.

Gladys: Husband.

Proteus [to Dr Frankenstein]: Father.

Lily: Lover.

John Clare: Brother.

Gladys: [handing Sir Malcolm a gun] Come home, please (Logan, Season 2, Episode 10, 00:09:41-00:10:23).

While Sir Malcolm and Dr Frankenstein are facing the ghosts of their past in the parlour, Vanessa finds a room in the mansion's basement that is filled with voodoo-like dolls. One of them is an uncanny representation of Vanessa herself, created with the lock of her hair that the witches stole when they infiltrated Sir Malcolm's house. Dolls feature prominently in Freud's uncanny phenomena, particularly if the person "doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate" (5). Freud claims that this uncanny fear of dolls might be rooted in our childhood, given that children are not yet able to differentiate living and inanimate objects (8). As a child, Vanessa was afraid that her dolls would come to life, but played

with them in front of her parents so that they would not get worried: “I played with them. You had to, or they thought you were deviant in some dreadful way, but I never liked them”. However, every night before she went to bed, she “ran around [her] room and knocked them over” (Logan, Season 2, Episode 7, 00:16:05-00:16:22). In this example, we can see how the family house functions as a prison-like heterotopia (Tronicke 3), containing any possible deviation of the gender acts enforced by the patriarchal system in Victorian society. It is not until Vanessa moves out of her family house into her mentor’s that she can experience a form of gender subversion.

As opposite to her childhood toys, the voodoo doll that the witches have created is an animate double of Vanessa. It channels the Devil, who wants her to give him her soul in exchange for love and a normal life, two things that Vanessa has always longed for: “There is an old dream in you. A deep longing [...] Let me show you what I can give you. To be free of pain. To be loved, simply for who you are. Is that not the engine of all human creatures? To be normal” (Logan, Season 2, Episode 10, 00:10:50-00:11:17). Then, he shows her a potential future where she is happily married to her beloved, Ethan Chandler, and they have two children. Although she is deeply tempted to give in to the tantalizing vision, Vanessa is finally able to resist the Devil by reciting the *Verbis Diablo*,<sup>27</sup> which destroys the doll as scorpions –Vanessa’s symbol of protection– start to climb down from its head. Mrs. Poole begins to age drastically, as her master has been vanquished, and is finally killed by Ethan, transformed into a werewolf. Upon Mrs. Poole’s death, her spell on Dr Frankenstein and Sir Malcolm is broken, so that they are released from the ghosts. The witches’ house therefore represents a symbolical site where the main protagonists confront their family traumas and where they attempt to bury them.

Moreover, the witches are vanquished and killed there, trapped in the very structure of the mansion that once sheltered them, which again points to the Gothic trope of the house as tomb/womb. Barbara Creed contends that contemporary horror and its representation of female characters is inherently misogynistic, especially in the way the house as a womb is portrayed “literally in relation to the female body. In many films the monster commits her or his dreadful acts in a location which resembles the womb. These intra-uterine settings consist of dark, narrow, winding passages leading to a central room,

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<sup>27</sup> *Verbis Diablo* (roughly translated as “Words of the Devil” in Latin) is an ancient language that holds a great power when spoken by either Daywalkers or Nightcomers. The *Verbis Diablo* is said to be a corrupted version of the language spoken in the Garden of Eden before humans were banished by God. Its use corrupts the hearts of those who speak it, until their thoughts and words will be totally owned by the Devil (“*Verbis Diablo*”, par 1).

cellar, or other symbolical place of birth” (51). As mentioned above, this is the case of Mrs. Poole’s mansion, portrayed as a feminised, bloody and intra-uterine space where the witches carry out their satanic rituals and where they are finally murdered and entombed. Consequently, the witches’ house could also be defined as a heterotopia of deviation, which acts as a prison for subverted femininity: a representation of their “domestic confinement” (Tronicke 3).

On a similar note, *Crimson Peak* also exploits the Gothic trope of the house as a tomb/womb. As Emilia Musap contends, Allerdale Hall is a place of death that is bound to collapse, but also the siblings’ place of origin, “who eventually become unborn and fuse permanently with the very structure of the mansion” (Musap 11). Haunted houses are depicted as intra-uterine spaces, reflecting the salient Gothic trope of the monstrous mother –a plotline that is present in the four neo-Victorian screen texts examined in this PhD thesis. Thomas and Lucille are bound to this family heirloom, attached to a house they cannot leave behind, since it is the last remnant of their family’s past glory, as Thomas tells Edith: “it’s a privilege we were born into and one we can never relinquish” (Del Toro, 00:41:31-00:41:37).

Hence, the Sharpe siblings attempt to save and modernise the family mines –that are attached to the family’s mansion– with foreign capital. In order to do so, Sir Thomas has married several wealthy heiresses that Lucille has later killed to keep all their money and possessions. These women are buried in the basement of the mansion and later return as ghosts, haunting the family estate to warn future wives about the siblings’ perfidious plans. According to Curtis, the trope of the “vengeful female ghost” is particularly salient in haunted house narratives, and it “has been interpreted as an aspect of the traditional subjection of women and the anxieties and guilt aroused by their suffering” (209-10). The Victorian ghost is generally “angry or jealous” and unfolds the revelation of hidden secrets, speaking the unspeakable in order to “stabilise family relations through inheritance and diffuse concerns about property and propriety” (Young 32).

However, the female ghosts in *Crimson Peak* do not seek vengeance against the Sharpe siblings, but conform, instead, a spectral sorority that joins forces to guide Edith in her quest to unveil the Sharpe family’s secrets. Since classical times, revenants have returned in order to right past wrongs, solve crimes and persecute morally devious characters. In the case of the female ghosts in *Crimson Peak*, they are the embodiment of women who have historically been –and still continue to be– lost to patriarchal violence. As Marine Galiné asserts, these ghosts “uphold the Victorian conventions of staging

spectralized women to expose the societal and patriarchal ‘burying alive’ which they are the victims of’ (9). These female ghosts haunt Edith to urge her to flee from the house. Indeed, the ghost of the siblings’ mother tells her, “leave here now” (Del Toro, 01:05:41-01:05:43), while the others give her clues that enable her to discover the siblings’ incestuous relationship.

Curtis contends that one of the key themes explored in haunted house films is how the past –in the form of ghosts– has the power to disrupt our present, and how “[i]n order to lay the ghost and exorcize the place is necessary to resurrect and re-memorialize by finding living witnesses to the trauma that initiated the haunting, or by delving in archives, discovering newspaper reports or documentary or photographic evidence which is metaphorically ‘buried’ somewhere” (84). Before she was murdered, Thomas’s Italian wife, Enola Sciotti, recorded her traumatic experience as a warning for his future brides in a wax cylinder. Edith finds it hidden in a linen closet, along with marriage documents, newspaper reports and some photographs of Thomas and Lucille with his wives. In the following excerpt, Sciotti claims that the siblings are poisoning her tea because they are after her money and asks whoever listens to her story to seek justice (Del Toro, 01:21:55-01:22:46):

I wish I had the strength to leave, but I can’t. All they want is my money to work on that infernal machine of his. That’s all they care about. I will hide these cylinders away in the linen closet. Should anyone find them, let it be known that they did this. I must stop recording now. I can hear them coming. To whoever finds this, know that they are killing me. I’m dying. The poison is in the tea. Find my body, take it home. I don’t want to die this far from home.

Along the same lines, the Delaney household in *Taboo* could also be considered both a tomb and womb where the siblings try to reconstruct their family’s history. After their father abruptly dies, James and his half-sister, Zilpha, fight over their legitimate rights to the house, the place where they started their incestuous relationship when they were children. The house would then act as a womb –since it is the space where the children were born– but also as a tomb that buries their shameful secret. As Zilpha begs James: “Whatever happens with this business of inheritance, and no matter if it results in dispute, I hope I can trust you to keep the secrets of the past buried. Buried in a deeper grave” (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 1, 00:54:07-00:54:24). In his case,



the house would be the grave where they entomb the secret of incest. Indeed, haunted houses seem to be made up of a number of multitemporal and multipersonal layers that are inscribed over one another and experienced by the new inhabitants of the house. According to Curtis, “[o]ld, familiar houses offer an interface with fascinating pasts, and are textured palimpsests of previous lives, capable of enriching the status of those who inherit or obtain them” (216-17).<sup>28</sup>

This idea is intimately related to Hutcheon’s theory of adaptation, according to which any adaptation would be a palimpsest,<sup>29</sup> a term coined by Genette, which –as discussed in Chapter 2– is a text written upon the remnants of previous texts (1). Hutcheon and O’Flynn build on Genette’s ideas on the palimpsest and further contend that an adaptation is always haunted by the original work it is based on, as “it is created and then received in relation to a prior text” (6). Hence, haunted houses in neo-Victorian literary and screen texts would work as a metaphor for neo-Victorian adaptation themselves, which are re-textualisations –or palimpsests– of nineteenth-century literature through which contemporary audiences can experience an enriched version of the original text.

On a different note, horror films that explore the trope of the haunted house are usually located in towns or villages that are “frozen in time” and characterised by “economic neglect and obsolete institutions” (Curtis 79). As a consequence, haunted houses are the antithesis of Foucauldian heterochronies, which experience “important changes” through time and serve different social functions, depending on the period (Foucault 7). In *Crimson Peak*, Del Toro draws a stark contrast between the modern, urban and technologically developed “New World” –represented by the city of Buffalo in New York– and the rural, impoverished and archaic family estate that the Sharpe siblings own in England, Allerdale Hall. *Crimson Peak* starts with a tracking shot whereby the camera follows Edith as she walks around the city of Buffalo (Del Toro, 00:03:53-00:04:18). Here, the elements of the *mise-en-scène* underline the characteristics typically associated with the industrial and technological advances of America, along with the frenetic commercial activity of a modern and urban city. As a result, the time contrast between these two spaces represents the temporal disruption and asymmetry that is so characteristic of both neo-Victorianism and Foucauldian heterotopias. In this case,

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<sup>28</sup> The notion of the palimpsest can also be applied to the space of the city (Arias “Haunted Places, Haunted Spaces”, Kohlke and Gutleben “Neo-Victorian Cities”), particularly in the case of spectral London and its re-textualisation through imperial metropolises in neo-Victorianism on screen, as I discuss in Section 4.2.1.

<sup>29</sup> See section 2.2. for an expanded definition of the notion of the “palimpsest” in adaptation studies.

“neo-Victorianism’s self-production as a heterochronic relational space for artists and audiences to inhabit –and thereby virtually ‘(re-)experience –the Long Nineteenth Century in the present (and the present in the past) renders the neo-Victorian text itself a kind of heterotopia” (Kohlke, Ho and Suwa 3). Del Toro himself acknowledged this stark difference between turn-of-the-century America and northern England and explained that it was meant to establish a clear-cut distinction between the past and the future:

1901 Buffalo, New York, and America in general were practically futuristic. In 1901 Buffalo was the most electrified city in the world. Edith is using a typewriter, we see cars on the streets, we can hear the constant trains in the distance, there’s a telegraph, we hear phones ringing everywhere [...]. Then she travels to a world that is frozen in time. In fact, we made that point in the design of Thomas and Lucille’s clothes –they are 10 or 15 years older than anybody else’s because they are their parents’ clothes. So the idea was: can I pose Edith as the future, trying to break with the past and the guilt and the horror of that family? (“Ghost Hunter Interview” 24).

It is also worth noting that one of the main characteristics of the haunted house is the uncanny animation of its façade, interiors and objects. The house is depicted as a living agent in neo-Victorian fiction, or rather as an outer reflection of its residents’ inner demons. The family building in *Crimson Peak* echoes its counterpart in Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839), considered the epitome of the haunted house trope in the American Gothic tradition (Bailey 17). According to Curtis, a haunted house is usually a “lonely house, withdrawn from everyday life with clearly set boundaries marked by thresholds that have to be decisively traversed”, and completely isolated from the busy modern city by “a spatial, as well as temporal barrier” (51). Both houses in *Crimson Peak* and “The Fall of the House of Usher” are located in remote, cold and rural areas and are in a very poor state, as they are both run-down and on the verge of collapsing. In a similar vein, the Cut-Wife’s house in *Penny Dreadful* is located in the fringes of Ballantrae town, in an isolated area in the woods, away from civilisation. While humans are free to enter that enchanted space, the house is protected by a spell against supernatural beings –particularly other witches– that need the Cut-Wife’s permission to come inside. As a consequence, the houses in both *Crimson Peak* and *Penny Dreadful* are arguably a Foucauldian and “neo-Victorian reworking of the (gothic) trope of female

imprisonment in domestic space” (Tronicke 3), especially in the case of Lucille Sharpe in Del Toro’s film.

Furthermore, the very structure of the haunted house is arguably an outer reflection of the family’s concealed secrets that need to be excavated and acknowledged. Just like the house of Usher has a fissure in its façade that eventually makes it fall apart –arguably reflecting the exposure of the siblings’ family secrets–, Weeber argues that in *Crimson Peak* “the crack is coming from below ground, from where the secrets are hidden from sight” (Weeber 120). As Sir Thomas explains to Edith, the family house is collapsing despite his and Lucille’s efforts to maintain it in the best possible shape, given that “with the cold and the rain it’s impossible to stop the damp and erosion. And with the mines right below, well, the wood is rotting, and the house is sinking” (Del Toro, 00:41:10-00:41:24). These secrets are, in fact, the corpses of the siblings’ female victims –their mother and Sir Thomas’s previous wives – that are buried in the basement of the family house.

As a result, the Sharpe state should be considered a Foucauldian heterotopia of deviation, which functions as a patriarchal prison for women (Tronicke 3). Both the siblings’ mother and Sir Thomas’s wives are trapped within the confines of the family house, where they are subjected to poisoning, manipulation and, eventually, murder. The fact that their bodies are buried in the basement and that their spirits haunt the mansion demonstrates that these women are confined and contained in this domestic space, even after their deaths. Their solidarity in helping Edith discover the siblings’ secrets and in protecting her from their violence further proves that the house is a heterotopia of deviation, since it contains and constraints female transgressions, but also allows its “female protagonists subvert oppressive power structures and thus defy containment” (Tronicke 2).

Likewise, in neo-Victorian Gothic texts, there seem to be “isomorphic correspondences between the house and its inhabitants [...] Verisimilitude is sacrificed for the benefit of odd and uncanny effects” (Heilmann and Llewellyn 45). Thus, the ruinous state of the family house in *Crimson Peak* reflects the siblings’ inner corruption and, as Weeber claims, it acts as a mirror of its inhabitants’ sins (120). Throughout the years, the house has been absorbing the family traumas and violence, eventually becoming a character in itself that is “anthropomorphised by being on several occasions identified as the active subject holding the characters as puppets or mannequins in its grip” (Heilmann and Llewellyn 45). In fact, Sir Thomas himself highlights these

anthropomorphised characteristics of the mansion: “That's the East wind. When it picks up, the chimneys form a vacuum and with the windows all shuttered up, the house... Well, the house breathes” (Del Toro, 00:48:34-00:48:46). Moreover, problems in the energy powers of the house, such as “flickering off lights [...] and leakage of water” are to be interpreted as “repressed memories or denied forces seeking to claim authority” (Curtis 187). The leakage of blood-red liquid clay in the mansion’s hardwood floors could actually be pointing to the corpses of Thomas’s murdered wives, who are buried in the basement of the house. Likewise, the water in the bathtub runs red and dirty, signalling the brutality and violence that the siblings’ mother experienced there, when Lucille murdered her by splitting her head in half with a machete.

In conclusion, the houses that appear in the neo-Victorian screen texts analysed here reproduce the traditional Gothic tropes associated with the haunted house. These include the house as the locus of family traumas and dysfunctionalities (Heilmann and Llewellyn), the house as both tomb and womb (Freud, “Civilization and its Discontents”), and as a feminised space where the female protagonist must lay the ghost and solve the mysteries buried in the polytemporal layers of the domestic building (Curtis). However, some of these screen texts seemingly attempt to subvert these rather clichéd tropes. This is the case of *Taboo*, where it is actually the male protagonist the one that excavates the family secrets hidden in the house, or *Penny Dreadful*, where houses appear to function as shelters for social outcasts that have been rejected by their birth and heteronormative families. However, in the case of the latter, the concept of family of choice does not always succeed. For example, Mrs. Poole’s female coven is not really a sorority liberated from the patriarchal order, but they are rather servants to a male authority. In fact, they are eventually vanquished and punished for their allegiance to Lucifer. In the next section, I further explore how these neo-Victorian screen texts attempt to challenge the ideal of the Victorian nuclear family through the (neo-)Victorian tropes of domestic patriarchal entrapment, (fe)male hysteria within and without the family house and the space of the orphanage as an alternative home for orphan children.

##### 4.1.2. Heterotopias of Crisis and Deviation in neo-Victorianism on Screen:

###### The Attic, the Asylum and the Orphanage

Rest homes, psychiatric hospitals, asylums and prisons fall under the category of Foucauldian heterotopias of deviation, as they are places inhabited by “individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed” (Foucault, “Des

Espaces Autres” 5). In the case of (neo-)Victorian fiction, where the domestic sphere is the site of female entrapment, and the attic is the room that contains the madwoman, the family house and its Gothic interiors could also be considered constraining heterotopias of deviation that (fe)male characters need to escape from.

The neo-Victorian screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis follow this pattern, as they reflect the female characters’ domestic oppression through the traditional character of the Angel of the House and its subversive transformation into a fallen or mad woman. These subversive female characters are usually punished for their rebellion and confined in heterotopias of deviation, such as the attic or the asylum, where they are (mis)diagnosed and (mis)treated for female hysteria. Finally, the orphanage is on the border between heterotopias of crisis –as it is a place that holds individuals in a state of crisis in relation to the rest of society, such as children and adolescents–, but also of deviation –as orphans are seen as subjects that deviate from the ideal nuclear family, which is accepted as the social norm. This is the case of Rycroft “Philo” Philostrate in *Carnival Row*, a biracial individual –half-human and half-fairy– whose mother abandoned him in an orphanage when he was a baby.

Family homes in neo-Victorian narratives of family trauma have traditionally been represented as the sites of female hysteria and entrapment. As discussed in Chapter 3, hysteria was linked to femininity during the nineteenth century, as it was believed to be caused by an irritation in the uterine system that affected the nervous system (Arias, “Between Spiritualism and Hysteria” 169). Statistically, records show that ever since the seventeenth century there have been almost twice as many female patients suffering from mental disorders as male ones (Showalter 3). The reasons behind this fact seem to be the social conditions that women have had to endure throughout history, namely “their confining roles as daughters, wives, and mothers and their mistreatment by a male-dominated and possibly misogynistic psychiatric profession” (Showalter 3). Hence, female patients usually complained more about their unhappy marriages, as well as the anxiety and depression derived from them than their male counterparts.

Furthermore, madness has traditionally been the term used by heteropatriarchal authorities to refer to female rebellion (Showalter 5). Hysteria could be considered in the Victorian context as “an unconscious form of feminist protest, the counterpart of the attack on patriarchal values carried out by the women’s movement of the time” (Showalter 5). Likewise, Arias contends that Victorian doctors regarded supernatural

practices, like spiritualist trances or mesmerism,<sup>30</sup> as a threat to their scientific effort. These practices were replacing religion as an “antidote to the pessimism of the scientific materialism of the time”, and so offered the possibility of an afterlife that contradicted scientific rationalism (Arias, “Between Spiritualism and Hysteria” 164). Spiritualist activities were mostly conducted by women since, “according to Victorian concepts of womanhood, they were prone to passivity, weakness and mental instability” (Arias, “Between Spiritualism and Hysteria” 165).

Spiritualist trances had several traits in common with female hysteria, even though “[s]ensitive nerves –the privilege of women and effeminate men– were not a sign of fragility but psychical tools with which to access the minds of the living and the dead” (Kontou, “Women and the Victorian Occult” 276). In fact, female mediums gained prominence in Victorian England thanks to their spiritual sensitivity. They eventually became “the darlings of the spiritualist circuit”, managing to enchant “audiences of sitters with riveting displays of materialized spirits complete with costume, voice, and message” (Owen, *The Place of Enchantment* 19). Furthermore, the spiritualist idea that there were more than five senses, and that the one that we have not developed is actually the most important one, brought science and Spiritualism together in Victorian England (Smajić 8-9). Indeed, spiritualists believed that supernatural phenomena could be scientifically proven, so that “occultism in general allied itself with the idea of scientific validation” (Owen, *The Place of Enchantment* 8). Despite the fact that Spiritualism was a popular practice that empowered women, given that their spiritual superiority was used as an argument for gender equality (Owen, *The Darkened Room* 28), the supernatural female characters in my corpus of analysis are Othered because of their paranormal abilities.

This is arguably so because the ideal prototype of Victorian woman that male authors strived to disseminate was that of an angel (Gilbert and Gubar 20). The romanticised image of the angel of the house arguably originated in the Middle Ages, when the figure of the Virgin Mary was the epitome of female selflessness and mercy. Gilbert and Gubar argue that “there is a clear line of literary descent from divine Virgin to domestic angel, passing through (among many others) Dante, Milton, and Goethe”

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<sup>30</sup> In the case of mesmerism, scientific and medical debates took place across Great Britain in the Victorian era. Even though it was considered a “pseudo-science” in the twentieth century (Winter 4), mesmerism “was not only ubiquitous but challenging within Victorian intellectual culture, as experiments became catalysts for competing assertions about the nature and seat of intellectual authority. For historians these experiments can show just how malleable scientific, medical and intellectual cultures were during this time” (Winter 5-6).

(20). However, the term was actually coined by Coventry Patmore in his poem “The Angel in the House” (1854), and came to define the ideal middle-class housewife as modest, chaste and whose duty was to look after the household. As Carol Christ contends, this poem became culturally significant for two main reasons. On the one hand, it defined the ideal Victorian woman and, on the other hand, it stated the male concerns that inspired that ideal (Christ 147).

However, as opposed to the angel of the house there was a rebellious woman that defied these conventions and was labelled a “madwoman, a male epithet that was used “to possess them more thoroughly” (Gilbert and Gubar 17). There were other female archetypes in Victorian literature and culture, such as the strong-minded woman, the *femme fatale* or the New woman, which will be defined and commented on in the forthcoming sections. As a result, the motif of female madness was used in nineteenth-century literature to reflect how these women resisted social oppression and patriarchal domination. Madwomen were usually committed to asylums or, as in some examples in (neo-)Victorian literature, confined in the attic. The term “madwoman in the attic” reflects this literary trope and was coined by Gilbert and Gubar (1979), with Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* being one its most emblematic examples.

In the screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis the Victorian trope of the madwoman in the attic is exploited in order to bring to the fore the silenced stories of abused and oppressed female –and ethnic– subjects in the domestic sphere, especially in the case of *Taboo*. From a Foucauldian point of view, the Victorian attic should be considered as a heterotopia of deviation that has traditionally contained the madwoman, but also as a potential space for female rebellion (Tronicke 2). Nonetheless, the madwomen that feature in my corpus of analysis are not granted female empowerment in the end, but quite the opposite: they are punished for their attempts at gender subversion. Just like Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* (1847) –who is considered to be the epitome of the Victorian madwoman in the attic– Salish, Delaney’s Native American mother, was brought to England and forced to renounce her language, culture and rituals. Later on, when she decided to rebel, she was “locked up in the attic of her husband” (Nygren 117) to tame her and transform her into an angel of the house. Hence, like Bertha, Salish is “a casualty of patriarchal, colonialist, and ableist hegemony” (Nygren 117). *Taboo* conflates these two Othering traits –female madness and ethnicity– to portray Salish as an exotic and dangerous Native American woman. In doing so, the series is arguably replicating – rather than challenging– the colonial discourse present in *Jane Eyre*.

Even though hysteria was traditionally associated with women, this idea is partially contested in *Taboo*, as the attic of the family house also holds the madman of the story: James Delaney, whose “room is in the attic, the one looking out to the river” (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 8, 00:51:56-00:52:02). Delaney’s alleged madness and familiarity with witchcraft challenge Victorian gender stereotypes and ideologies, which constructed them as a dangerous ‘Other’. Delaney performs magical African rituals, such as chanting prayers and incantations in a tribal language at his father’s funeral (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 1), and has the ability to communicate with the dead. However, other characters in the series imply that Delaney actually inherited his mental disorder from his Native American mother –as they claim that “[m]adness comes out through the umbilical cord” (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 1, 00:08:51-00:08:55). They also claimed that he acquired his supernatural abilities during his time in Africa, so that the series ultimately perpetuates both sexist and racist Victorian stereotypes about mental health and spectralism.

Spiritualism granted women an active and powerful role in Victorian England (Owen x), allowing them to develop a confidence and female agency that was sometimes feared by society. This is the case of Vanessa Ives in *Penny Dreadful*, a ‘fallen woman’ who is sensitive to supernatural forces and can communicate with the dead. Vanessa believes that there is a dark force inside of her that compels her to commit unspeakable acts. This dark force could be considered as Vanessa’s uncanny double, which Saxey defines as a splitting of the heroine, and whereas one part of herself “remains socially respectable, the other commits (or urges) terrible acts” (67), especially sexual transgressions. This uncanny double was presumably triggered when she discovered that her mother was having an affair with Sir Malcolm Murray, a close family friend.

Tomaiuolo defines this turning point in Vanessa’s life as a “rite of passage” (156), since the dark force that was lying dormant inside her was then awakened. From that moment on, she is ‘haunted’ by two fallen angels: Lucifer and his brother, Dracula, who pursue her relentlessly in order to make her their Queen of Evil. In order to protect humanity from this terrible fate, she rejects them and tries to abstain from sex. As Primorac contends, Vanessa’s “agency is defined first and foremost through her attempts to maintain self-control via abstinence. The fact that her ‘possession’ is always brought on by attempts at heterosexual coupling is not accidental: the show suggests that by rejecting heterosexual physical contact she maintains a sense of self” (*Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 154). In the very few moments when she actually succumbs to her desires and



has sexual intercourse with a male character, she loses control over herself and the dark force inside her takes over.

Vanessa's depiction as a powerful medium replicates the Victorian Gothic trope of the dangerous and magical female 'Other' that cannot be controlled. Women that carried out supernatural practices were usually labelled mad or hysterical so as to isolate and exert a forced domestication upon them. Female mediums subverted traditional conventions of Victorian femininity and challenged established views of class and sexuality, as well as the role of women in both the private and public spheres (Kontou, *Women and the Victorian Occult* 275). Nonetheless, spiritualist activities were considered to be contradictory practices in terms of gender conventions. On the one hand, they perpetuated Victorian conventions of proper womanhood, given that séances required "passivity, weakness and mental instability" (Arias, "Between Spiritualism and Hysteria" 165). On the other hand, they offered women the possibility of subverting them (Kontou, *Women and the Victorian Occult* 276). Vanessa is eventually diagnosed with female hysteria, although she is actually haunted by the Devil. She is first sent to a mental institution, where she undergoes several tortuous treatments. Afterwards, she returns to her parents' home and is confined to her bedroom, where the Devil frequently tantalises her, disguised as a relative or a friend.

Domestic entrapment is also explored in *Crimson Peak*, as the attic was the place where the Sharpe siblings were confined by their own mother as children. However, after Lucille murdered her, the siblings were no longer confined, but free to roam the house as they pleased. From that moment on, Lucille adopted the authoritative role of her mother, as she was the one that planned her brother's marriages to wealthy heiresses and their subsequent murders, while Sir Thomas obediently did her bidding. As Emilia Musap contends, "the absence of a mothering structure reveals Allerdale Hall to be a fallen house, run by a monstrous mother, a *madwoman outside of the attic*, unconstrained by the mechanisms of domestic order" (11, emphasis added).

Nonetheless, Sir Thomas still feels attached to the attic, where he keeps a workshop to work on the machines he designs to modernise the family mines. There, he also keeps the toys that he used to carve for Lucille when they were children (Del Toro, 00:53:58-00:54:54). The attic seems to be a shelter for Thomas, a place where he can hide from his sister's cruelty and excel at a manual activity that she cannot control. This idea of the artist's—or, as in Thomas's case, the artisan's—self-confinement as a condition *sine qua non* to produce art echoes Romantic and Victorian poems, most notably, Tennyson's

“The Lady of Shalott” (1833). According to Alan Grob, in Tennyson’s poems, “[t]he creative process was restricted by its nature to the very few, and the artist, almost by definition, was alienated in his vocation from the ordinary activities of men” (118).

Moreover, in Tennyson's early poems, this dilemma is often represented through a contrast between a “landscape where the isolated artist resides” and “reminders of the possibility of another more purposeful and morally committed form of human activity”, which results in “the embodiment of a social ideal opposed to the solitary life of art” (Grob 120). According to Flavia M. Ayala, the fact that the Lady is placed alone on a boat in the last part of the poem seems to prove that “an essential loneliness is the one element of the artistic condition that cannot be revoked, even by love” (285). Consequently, *Crimson Peak* subverts the trope of the madwoman in the attic, as the female antagonist, Lucille, is an authoritative and monstrous madwoman outside of the attic, whilst Thomas, a male submissive character, feels safe in a traditionally feminised and constraining space such as the attic. However, it recuperates the nineteenth-century trope of the self-isolated artist, who needs loneliness as the essential condition to successfully enjoy an artistic life.

Likewise, the trope of female entrapment in the domestic sphere is also explored in *Carnival Row*, both in the case of Sophie Longerbane and Imogen Spurnrose. Mr Longerbane, the leader of the conservative opposition in *The Burgue*, kept his daughter confined in the family house until she was an adult woman. There were rumours that he did so because she had an intellectual disability, as Jonah Breakspear, the Chancellor’s son and Sophie’s future lover, tells her: “the reason your father's kept you sequestered away all these years is because you had a difficult birth, and came into this world a simpleton” (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 6, 00:14:39-00:14:46). As a result, the Longerbane household could also be considered a neo-Victorian heterotopia of deviation, which contains Sophie’s attempts at liberating herself from her father’s strict patriarchal control.

Despite her rigid education, Sophie is portrayed as an adventurous and ambitious character: a woman that longs to see the world, go to university, and enjoy the same opportunities and privileges as men do outside the domestic sphere (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 4, 00:32:00-00:32:29). Mr Longerbane, on the contrary, regards the family house as the safest and most suitable place for a woman, echoing one of the defining features of the heterotopias of deviation, that of providing “the mere illusion of having freed society from all forms of aberrant behaviour” (Tronicke 5). When Sophie attempts to rebel against her father’s authority, his tone becomes threatening and

violent towards her, and both her and her dog's body language in this scene hint at the possibility that he has physically harmed her before:

Sophie: I wasn't asking your permission.

Mr Longerbane [looking at her intently before rising up from his chair and approaching her. Sophie's dog growls at him and shows his teeth menacingly, while she grabs her knife in anticipation. He then pulls her hair and threatens her]: Then go and see how far you can get without it (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 4, 00:32:30-00:33:11).

However, this threat proves to be unfounded in the end, since Sophie assumes his role as the leader of the Hardtackers party—a conservative political party that advocates for segregationist laws against the racial Other—after Mr Longerbane is murdered. At first, Sophie pretends to be in mourning and deeply affected by her father's passing, but she actually feels relieved and content about it, to the point where she even mocks him while she is left alone with his dead body during his wake. With her newfound independence, Sophie starts to “appropriate the previously conflicting domestic space” (Tronicke 5), which now might unleash its full potential as a heterotopia of rebellion and gender transgression.

However, Sophie's transformation from an abused daughter into a powerful, independent woman is depicted in a rather negative light in the series. While her father's political stance on immigration had been conservative, as the new leader of the opposition, Sophie's demands border on right-wing extremism, as in one of the speeches that she delivers in Parliament against fairy refugees. She first explains that, in spite of her non-white heritage on her mother's side, she is still a Burguish citizen because she is human. A few decades earlier, her ancestors fled the Pharaonic Coast due to a war, seeking refuge in The Burgue, where they were discriminated because of the colour of their skin. Nevertheless, they eventually overcame this racial discrimination and became full citizens of The Burgue. In the following fragment, however, she claims that human Burguismen should not ignore their differences with mythological creatures as well, because they are not human:

Today, the chaos of war in the lands of the Fae has brought a new wave of refugees to these shores. And they, too, are seen as outcasts. It is right to ask if our

suspicious of these newcomers will one day be seen as the benighted vestige of the past. It is right if we can overcome the differences between us and the Fae [...] I stand before you with my answer. We cannot. The Fae are nothing like us. Our differences are more than skin deep and our chancellor has turned a blind eye for far too long, but I will not. A great tide of anger is rising in this city. Its good people have had enough! [...] And I, Sophie Longerbane, stand with them (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 5, 00:33:09-00:34:46).

Despite her hate speech against The Burgue's racial Other, Sophie seems to have a special bond with her puck servant, and she even confesses to Jonah Breakspear that her speech in Parliament had only been "a performance" and that she actually hates the term "Critch"—a racial slur similar to the n-word in the US context that pejoratively refers to non-human creatures in The Burgue. However, as her father's daughter and the new leader of the opposition, she was expected to take that political stance so as not to lose her position and supports. In addition to being portrayed as an ambitious and hypocritical woman, Sophie is also depicted as a *femme fatale*,<sup>31</sup> as she seduces Jonah Breakspear, even though she knows that they are actually half-siblings—Jonah is actually the son of Mr Longerbane, with whom his mother had an affair before marrying the Chancellor, Mr Breakspear.<sup>32</sup>

Hence, despite the fact that Sophie was at first her father's prisoner and a victim of his violent outbursts, once he dies and she is free to be an independent woman, she becomes an ambitious mass perpetrator. She does not feel remorse for condemning millions of creatures to segregation, exclusion and discrimination, as implementing those far-right policies will secure her the power and position that she has always longed for. As a result, the series first displays an apparent feminist agenda by creating a female character that overcomes domestic entrapment and is given the possibility to prove her worth in the public sphere—especially in the political arena, that was, by definition, a male territory in the nineteenth century—. However, *Carnival Row*'s portrayal of Sophie as a ruthless social climber actually perpetuates the stereotypical image of ambitious women as emasculating and manipulating *femmes fatales* who influence feeble-minded

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<sup>31</sup> According to the *OED*, a *femme fatale* is a term borrowed from French that was introduced in the English language in the 1800s and that refers to "[a]n attractive and seductive woman, esp. one who is likely to cause risk to or the downfall of anyone who becomes involved with her".

<sup>32</sup> The incest trope and how it is exploited in the screen texts that make up my corpus of analysis is discussed in Chapter 6 of this PhD thesis.

men for their own gain. In other words, Sophie is depicted as a Lady Macbeth that manipulates Jonah into taking political actions that will grant them power and security.

Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth has previously been appropriated by other neo-Victorian screen productions, most notably William Oldroyd's *Lady Macbeth* (2016) – an adaptation of Nikolai Leskov's novella *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (1865) –, where the female protagonist acts as a “neo-Victorian double” of both Catherine Earnshaw from Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth (Bernabéu 198). As Primorac contends, the term ‘Lady Macbeth’ has for centuries carried a recognisable number of semantic meanings, “both among those who have read or seen the play and those for whom the conventionally gendered, stereotypical meaning of the character was mediated through popular culture: power-hungry woman; ‘unsexed’ (and hence ‘un-womanly’) woman; woman as manipulator of men” (“Three Lady Macbeths” 149). Sophie is depicted in *Carnival Row* as a master manipulator that seduces her half-brother in order to quench her thirst for political power and to transcend the oppression and social obstacles imposed on her as a ‘Victorian woman’. However, in doing so, the series actually runs counter to neo-Victorianism's revisionist drive, since it perpetuates Lady Macbeth's stereotypical and sexist depiction as a *femme fatale*, so typical of “clichéd costume dramas” where the “white, female protagonist's struggle for agency [is] dependent on the erasure of the voice, agency and rights of the people of colour” (“Three Lady Macbeths” 146).

Another case of female entrapment in the domestic sphere in *Carnival Row* is that of Imogen Spurnrose, an upper-class woman that is on the verge of bankruptcy due to her brother's careless mismanagement of the family's fortune. In the first episodes of the series, Imogen is the embodiment of the Victorian angel of the house, where she is under her brother's tutelage until she finds a husband. Once again, the house functions as a heterotopia of confinement that cages the female character, while the male authority is free to “cross the threshold and move in and out of” (Tronicke 3) the domestic space. Thus, male and female characters “are segregated into different spaces, their positionality constantly being compartmentalised and tied to that particular space” (Tronicke 3) in neo-Victorianism on screen. When Imogen discovers her family's ordeal and that they might lose the family house she reproaches her brother, who asks her to have faith in him. However, she refuses to leave their family legacy in his hands, and this is one of the first moments in the series where she abandons her role as a meek and obedient angel of the house and starts acting as a strong, independent woman. In other words, this is the first

time she tries to claim the domestic space as her own, exploring the subversive potential of this heterotopia of deviation. However, her brother does not allow her to appropriate the domestic space, reminding her of his patriarchal authority:

Imogen: Oh, faith be damned. It is my fate too, and I will have a say in it.

Ezra: And what do you know of anything? Apart to what to wear to which function? Who's been seen with whom? Now, I am the master here. I will make the decisions! (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 2, 00:40:36-00:40:54).

As a high-class lady in a Victorian-inspired society, Imogen is not allowed to work in the public sphere to save the only heirloom that her family has left: the house. Thus, she decides to help Agreus Astrayon –a manumitted and newly rich puck that has moved next door to the Spurnroses– to access the high-class social circles of The Burgue in exchange for his financial help. At first, Imogen feels repelled by him on account of his non-human nature and she even tries to have him evicted on the grounds that he is “[n]ot someone. A puck. All puffed up in silken finery. He carries a ridiculous walking stick and has a human manservant” (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 2, 00:11:38-00:11:46). It is worth noting that Agreus is only discriminated because he is not human but a mythological creature, despite the fact that he is also a Black man.

However, Agreus and Imogen eventually fall in love and engage in a clandestine relationship that challenges the social precepts and expectations that Burguish human women are supposed to live up to. Until that moment, Imogen encapsulated the main tenets of the Victorian angel of the house, a female archetype that defined the ideal high- and middle-class housewife as chaste, modest and obedient, and whose duty was to look after the household, while the male authority worked in the public sphere. Being twenty-three and with no marriage prospects, her main concern is to find a wealthy suitor that will be able to support her economically. To that end, she even buys a bottle of pheromones that she thinks will help her attract human males (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 1). However, when she starts having an affair with Agreus, she becomes a ‘fallen woman’,<sup>33</sup> a female who loses her respectability a sexual transgression.

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<sup>33</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary (*OED*) defines ‘fallen woman’ as “*n.* a woman who has lost her chastity, honour, or standing, or who has become morally degenerate; (sometimes) a prostitute”. The first instance of its usage dates back to 1659, in a quote referring to Eve in Robert Gell’s *An essay towards the amendment*

This is a turning point for her in the series, as she becomes an empowered woman that is not afraid of exploring her sexuality and defying the conservative social impositions of *The Burgue*, even to the point of defying her own brother. At the end of Season 1, she runs away with Agreus to find a place where they will not have to hide their relationship (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 8).

Nevertheless, the development of Imogen's female agency is arguably constructed "in detriment to Agreus's racial uplift" (Pedro, "Immigration, Passing and the Racial Other" 254). According to Primorac, when neo-Victorian screen adaptations reimagine Victorian gender roles and expectations, they portray the female protagonist's self-discovery—especially in terms of her sexuality—in a way that "what is gained on the level of gender politics [...] is invariably lost on the level of colonial discourse analysis" (*Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 58). In *Carnival Row*, the exotic racial Other, Agreus, is merely used as an instrument that enables Imogen to regain her female agency by actively exploring her sexuality. In doing so, the show is reproducing Victorian Orientalizing representations, where "the liberation and fulfilment of Victorian novels' white, First World heroines [...] depended on the subjugation and/or loss of voice of their Third World counterparts" (Primorac, *Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 58). Moreover, it also perpetuates the Orientalizing drive of neo-Victorian screen texts that replicate stereotypes of non-white characters as erotic and libidinous (Primorac, *Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 60). Agreus, one of the few Black characters in the series, is not granted any form of personal growth or advancement and is "simply used for a White woman's sexual fulfilment" (Pedro, "Immigration, Passing and the Racial Other" 253). Hence, *Carnival Row*'s apparent progressive politics of racial representation prove to be lacking in the end, as they actually favour the white female character's personal growth over that of the ethnic character's.

Thus, the four screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis explore the (neo-)Victorian trope of female entrapment in the domestic sphere and how female characters who rebel against Victorian conventions of female propriety are labelled as fallen or mad women. Although in some cases, as in *Carnival Row*, the female protagonists seemingly defy the patriarchal impositions associated with women, they are actually portrayed in a negative light, as morally deviant *femme fatales* that emasculate the helpless and innocent male characters, or as independent white women whose sexual fulfilment is upheld in detriment

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of the last English translation of the Bible: "What else can be the seed of the fallen woman but disobedience unto God, and consequently obedience unto the Serpent?"

to the Black male character's agency. As a result, in spite of the critical and subversive potential of these screen texts, they end up perpetuating Victorian misogynistic stereotypes of women who attempt to challenge the gender roles imposed on them.

Even though deviant women were confined in the domestic sphere, some public buildings outside of the family home also functioned as the loci of female hysteria and trauma during the nineteenth century. According to Kohlke, Ho and Suwa, "the asylum, of course, belongs to the class of 'heterotopias of deviation', alongside more modern 'psychiatric hospitals' which, according to Foucault, progressively replaced earlier 'heterotopias of crisis'" (5), such as the attic of the family home. The beginning of the Victorian period coincided with a shift in the social conceptions of both insanity and femininity. During the first half of the nineteenth century (1815-1849), there was a doubling of the number of private asylums in Britain (Torrey and Miller 70). Afterwards, the Lunatics Act of 1845 made public asylums "the primary institution for the treatment of the insane" (Showalter 17). This act also mandated the construction of county asylums from 1845 onwards, which—as in the case of private asylums—were overcrowded (Torrey and Miller 70). Indeed, by 1850, the population of these institutions had exponentially increased, particularly in the case of women, who made up the majority of patients in these "lunatic asylums" (Showalter 3).

Consequently, this public space became the locus of female madness—eventually replacing the attic of the family house. This was arguably so because "[i]n line with their celebration of women's domestic role, the Victorians hoped that homelike mental institutions would tame and domesticate madness and bring it into the sphere of rationality" (Showalter 17). The purpose of these public institutions was to "cure" women through paternalistic and patriarchal techniques, which included forced feeding to treat anorexic patients (van Deth and Vandereycken 2) or the use of physical restraints to "control anti-social behaviour such as tearing clothes and exhibiting lewd or sexual behaviour" and stop patients from hurting themselves or others ("The Origins of the Asylum" par. 8). These restraints included straitjackets or strait waistcoats, restraint harnesses and chains that strapped the inmates to their beds and restraint chairs. Hydrotherapy was also commonly used in Victorian asylums to keep patients under control and was carried out through baths, packs, or sprays. At the beginning of the twentieth century, other practices—that would be considered torture at present—were used to treat schizophrenia, a mental condition that, according to Showalter, was also strongly associated with women: "insulin shock, electroshock, and lobotomy" (Showalter 203).



Some female characters from the screen texts that make up my corpus of analysis are committed to public asylums, where they experience the abovementioned patriarchal and tortuous treatments, most notably in *Taboo* and *Penny Dreadful*. In fact, both Delaney's mother, Salish, in *Taboo* and Vanessa Ives and Lily Frankenstein in *Penny Dreadful* are taken by force to the infamous Bedlam asylum in order to be 'cured' by patriarchal authorities from a supposed mental disorder—that is actually female rebellion against male violence and oppression. The female antagonist of *Crimson Peak*, Lucille Sharpe, was also committed to a mental institution after she brutally murdered her mother. However, this experience is only hinted at by Dr Alan McMichael, who read about the siblings' story on a newspaper: "Sir Thomas, you were only 12 at the time. After questioning by the police, you were sent to boarding school. As for Lucille, at 14, her story is less clear. A convent education in Switzerland, the news account says, but I think a different kind of institution" (Del Toro, 01:33:20-01:34:16).

Bedlam Asylum's famous history of horror and tortuous treatments has inspired a number of books, TV series and films, most notably Mark Robson's film *Bedlam* (1946). The institution was founded in 1247 as the Priory of St Mary of Bethlehem, devoted to the healing of paupers. Later, it came to be known as Bethlehem Hospital and then abbreviated to 'Bethlem', often pronounced 'Bedlam' ("From Bethlehem to Bedlam" par. 2). During the Victorian era, the reputation of Bedlam Asylum was compromised due to a series of scandals, including patients being chained, starved to death, physically punished or "hosed down with freezing water" (Arnold 6). Some of these treatments are graphically depicted in the fourth episode of Season 3 of *Penny Dreadful* when Vanessa is hypnotised by her therapist and she remembers the time when she was sectioned in Bedlam.<sup>34</sup> There, she was subjected to a number of brutal treatments, such as narcotics, hydrotherapy, different types of restraints and, finally, a primitive lobotomy.

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<sup>34</sup> Hypnotism was a practice that was consolidated in the medical sciences by French neurologist and physician Jean-Martin Charcot between 1878 and 1882. This practice had previously been the subject of a popular debate and rejected in the medical circles, until Charcot's serious studies catapulted it "as a legitimate area of scientific research" (Leighton 104). Detractors of hypnotism, most notably editor Ernest Hart in the *British Medical Journal* (BMJ), "associated it with a dangerous popular culture phenomenon as mesmerism had been" (Parssinen 117). Indeed, the history of hypnotism is linked to controversial Victorian pseudo-sciences, not only animal magnetism or mesmerism, but also "phrenology, homeopathy, and spiritualism" (Leighton 106). Surgeon James Braid coined the term 'hypnotic' in the 1840s, which had been previously used to designate a soporific, shifting its meaning to the sleeping state that the drug induced. Hypnotism differed from mesmerism in that it was not associated with magnetic fluids and it entailed neither the sexual connotations nor the suggestion mesmerists imposed on their subjects (Leighton 106). By the late Victorian period, psychotherapy and psychology became widely accepted by medical community, and this "gradual acceptance" was partly "attributable to the hypnotic movement" (Leighton 108).

#### 4. Neo-Victorian Heterotopias on Screen

As stated above, madness and daemonic possessions might enable female characters in (neo-)Victorian fiction to speak up and take action against the patriarchal system and gender inequality. However, their criticism tends to be discarded as “the ramblings of a madwoman” (Pedro, “We’re Going to Make you into a Proper Woman” 202). According to Saxey, neo-Victorian Gothic literature exploits the trope of madness so as to allow female characters to gain “female agency but cannot embrace it and ultimately demonizes it” (Saxey 78). When the orderly at the asylum tries to convince Vanessa that the tortuous treatments are meant to make her better, she realises that they are actually intended to turn her into what was considered to be a Victorian proper woman: passive, docile and modest (Kühl 173). She tells him that they are “meant to make me normal. Like all the other women you know. Compliant, obedient. A cog in an intricate social machine and no more” (Logan, Season 3, Episode 4, 00:16:06-00:16:14). However, the male authority dismisses Vanessa’s criticism as female hysteria and insists that she has to take the treatments to be a sane woman again.

On the contrary, these forms of mental and physical punishment are only hinted at in *Taboo*, when James goes to visit the asylum where his mother, Salish, was committed. It is implied that James’s father declared her mad and kept her in the attic of the family house –the neo-Victorian heterotopia of deviation *par excellence*– when she refused to renounce her Native American identity and pass as South European, as James himself admits: “When his wife would not play the Spanish princess, or Italian countess or whatever it was, when she refused to play, he had her sent to Bedlam Insane asylum” (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 5, 00:33:15-00:33:44). Salish was committed to Bedlam after she tried to drown James when he was just a baby, and shortly after she died in the asylum, due to some of the treatments that she was forced to undergo.

Thus, here we can see how (neo-)Victorian heterotopias of deviation outside the family house eventually replace those heterotopias of crisis and deviation in the domestic sphere (Kohlke, Ho and Suwa 5). James finds out about the treatments her mother was subjected to when he visits the institution, which is furnished with chains, ropes and restraint harnesses that were used to keep the inmates strapped to their beds. These torturous methods –as well as hydrotherapy, the use of psychotropic drugs, purges and lobotomies were used by psychiatric doctors well into the twentieth century (Slack, par. 5). James also hears the moans and lamentations of the patients’ ghosts that were kept there (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 6, 00:04:44-00:05:15), since –as Vanessa in *Penny Dreadful*– he can communicate with the dead. When he learns about

his mother's story, he blames his father –a coloniser that had bought a Native American woman and then imposed his culture, language and way of life on her– for causing her alleged madness: “[m]y father cast my mother into madness, then jumped straight after” (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 6, 00:02:38-00:02:42). As a result, despite the potential of heterotopias of contesting “the very possibility of confining Otherness to Other spaces, separate from society, instead locating Otherness at its very heart” (Kohlke, Ho and Suwa), *Taboo* fails to do so in the end. Salish is confined and tortured in Bedlam asylum until she dies, so that she is denied the possibility of embracing her much longed freedom by vanquishing patriarchal authorities.

Finally, Lily Frankenstein is also subjected to a patriarchal treatment at Bedlam in *Penny Dreadful*. Lily is the most recent of Dr Frankenstein's creatures. He originally resurrected her at the request of his first creature, John Clare, who desperately wanted a bride that would put an end to his solitude. However, the doctor eventually falls in love with her and they engage in a father-daughter incestuous relationship, as I discuss in Chapter 6. Before her resurrection, she was Brona Croft, a tuberculous Irish prostitute working in London. Brona had been systematically raped and mistreated by abusive men from a very early age, but she had had to endure it because prostitution was her only source of income. Although in the first days of her new life she pretends to be coy and obedient –a perfect angel of the house–, she plans on seeking revenge against the men that wronged her and other women like her. In the next excerpt, Lily rejects Dr Frankenstein's creature, John Clare, and resists his advances when he tries to force himself on her. Here, she remembers her past experiences of sexual trauma and how they have shaped her identity and misandry. Moreover, it lays the foundation for her radical feminist fight against patriarchal violence:

We flatter our men with our pain. We bow before them. We make ourselves dolls for their amusement. We lose our dignity in corsets and high shoes and gossip and the slavery of marriage! And our reward for this service? The back of the hand... The face turned to the pillow... [...] You drag us into the alleys, my lad, and cram yourselves into our mouths for two bob. When you're not beaten us senseless! [...] Never again will I kneel to any man. Now they shall kneel to me. As you do, monster (Logan, Season 2, Episode 8, 00:41:39-00:44:50).

Now that she is a powerful immortal, Lily refuses to play the submissive role that society –and Dr Frankenstein– tries to impose on her, and assumes a subversive and violent stance against patriarchy. She recruits an army of prostitutes and uses her supernatural strength to subjugate and kill all abusive men. The radicalisation of Lily’s feminism is first reflected in the way she deems the suffragettes’ fight for equality insufficient, arguing that what women should aspire to is “mastery” over men through violence. She considers the suffragettes “so awfully clamorous”, as they are always “marching around in public and waving placards”. Lily believes that the way women should overthrow patriarchy is “[b]y craft. By stealth. By poison. By the throat quietly slit in the dead of the night. By the careful and silent accumulation of power” (Logan, Season 3, Episode 3, 00:14:00-00:14:47).

According to Tomaiuolo, Lily becomes “an evolved species of ‘deviant’ New Woman who –in her case– uses violence to claim her power” (149). Thus, Lily abandons her father and lover, Dr Frankenstein, and joins forces with the also immortal Dorian Gray to recruit an army made up of abused prostitutes. As Kohlke contends, this radical depiction of Lily and her army of fallen women opposes *Penny Dreadful*’s apparent feminist drive (“The Lures of Neo-Victorian Presentism” 8). Indeed, the series actually depicts Lily’s soldiers as violent misandrists who do not seek equal rights, but to enslave men. Hence, instead of challenging established stereotypes of feminist activists, *Penny Dreadful* presents them as “monstrous rather than promoting the public good and a more liberal, equal, and safer society –a fitting 21st-century misogynistic tribute to (and replay of) the 19th-century backlash against the New Woman” (Kohlke, “The Lures of Neo-Victorian Presentism” 9).

At the end of Season 3, Dr Frankenstein and his colleague, Dr Jekyll, capture Lily and take her to Bedlam asylum, where they plan to inject her with a serum that the latter has developed to tame her and “split off her monstrous self, restoring the docile ‘Angel of the House’ to perfect obeisance” (Kohlke, “The Lures of Neo-Victorian Presentism” 10). The doctors seek to subdue Lily’s rebellious ‘double’, the one that enables her to speak up and take action against the patriarchal system that controls women. These male authorities see Lily’s rebellion as a symptom of female hysteria, so they think that she needs to be treated in order to go back to being a docile and meek woman. Thus, as in the case of Vanessa and Salish, Lily is diagnosed with an illness that can only be treated by patriarchal medicine, which establishes “the concepts of normality and deviance that women perforce must accept” (Showalter 20). In fact, Dr Frankenstein

believes that they are actually going to cure her: “Lily, we are going to try to make you healthy. Take away all your anger and pain and replace them with something much better [...] Calm, poise, serenity. We’re going to make you into a proper woman” (Logan, Season 3, Episode 7, 00:45:52-00:46:14).

However, Dr Frankenstein is not capable of erasing Lily’s memories in the end, after she confesses that she feels responsible for her daughter’s death. She had to leave her baby alone one freezing night because she had to work the streets in order to support her. She begs the doctor not to erase her memories and guilt, as they are part of her identity as a woman: “[s]he was cold when I lifted her. Cold as ice. She died alone. Her name was Sarah. Please, don’t take her from me. Please” (Logan, Season 3, Episode 8, 00:34:33-00:35:07). As I contend elsewhere, “Lily’s memories and identity are spared in the end only because she abandons her radical feminism and presents herself as a mourning mother begging for empathy” (“We’re Going to Make you into a Proper Woman” 209).

Along the same lines, Kohlke asserts that Lily cannot convince Dr Frankenstein not to harm her through her radical feminism, and he only frees her after she adopts a more submissive role, that of a “suffering mother” (“The Lures of Neo-Victorianism Presentism” 11). Once she presents herself as a more socially acceptable version of Victorian femininity, Dr Frankenstein no longer needs to turn her into a proper woman. Lily has atoned her gender transgressions by taking a maternal and altruistic stance, “more in line with the Victorian moral precepts imposed on women” (Pedro, “We’re Going to Make you into a Proper Woman” 209). Nonetheless, Lily is still punished for attempting to subvert the patriarchal status quo, since her army of prostitutes is dismantled in the end and she is condemned to spend eternity alone, after she leaves Dorian Gray and Dr Frankenstein for betraying her.

As a consequence, the Victorian asylum functions, once again, as a heterotopia of deviation that only constrains its female inmates, rather than allowing them to rebel against the system. Not unlike other neo-Victorian female characters, “[a]s a woman, she remains imprisoned in a heterotopian domestic space that she may temporarily invert, yet not escape from” (Tronicke 7). Moreover, taking all this into consideration, I conclude that the neo-Victorian heterotopias described so far in this PhD thesis do not meet the criteria to be defined as a feminist heterotopia, which is described by Aviva Dove-Viebahn as “a site where juxtaposition of contrasting or opposing elements is necessary for survival and proves to be a source of strength” (599). In fact, these spaces seem to be more in line with the definition of “pseudo-heterotopias”, a term coined by Sonya Sawyer

Fritz and Sara K. Day. Pseudo-heterotopias encompass spaces that do not work as counter-sites to the patriarchal “nineteenth-century cultural sites they mirror. [...] they do not disrupt Victorian ideologies; instead, they simply provide the [...] female protagonists private places in which to pursue exceptional vocations that are generally disconnected from the rest of their Victorian cultural reality” (Fritz and Day 2-3). Therefore, since the Victorian domestic and public spaces described thus far seemingly counter the cultural patriarchal sites they represent at first, only to eventually perpetuate gender oppression and punish female characters for their transgressions, I argue that they should be considered pseudo-heterotopias.

Finally, the other Victorian public space that replicates the trope of domestic confinement outside the family home is the orphanage in *Carnival Row*. According to Foucault, orphanages and boarding schools could be considered as heterotopias of crisis, which are “privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc.” (4). However, these so-called heterotopias of crisis seem to be increasingly disappearing and being replaced by heterotopias of deviation: “those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed” (Foucault 4). Given that orphan children are arguably both in a state of crisis in relation to society and deviant individuals –since they are raised outside the Victorian nuclear family–, orphanages are liminal spaces, somewhere in between the heterotopias of crisis and deviation.

In the 1800s Anglo-American context, “the cult of domesticity” was upheld by middle-class families, along with the Victorian bourgeois notion of the separate spheres. According to Judith A. Dulberger, this cult of domesticity was “the nineteenth-century culmination of the ideology of the companionate family that first emerged in the latter half of the eighteenth century” (23). Some changes began to take place within the family circle, as they became more “child-oriented” and the relationships between husbands and wives were affected by the new means of production. Dulberger contends that “[a]s fathers spent more and more time as wage earners away from home, child rearing increasingly became the province of motherhood, a role now infused with a high moral, even political, purpose” (24). However, in order for this ideal household to be successful, families needed to retreat into a “world of quiet, seclusion, and privacy”: the family house, which became a shelter from the dangers and temptations of the outside world (Dulberger 24-5). This was the ideal prototype that nineteenth-century Anglo-American middle-class

families aspired to follow, but poor parents could not afford such privileges. As a result, sometimes their only plausible alternative became the orphanage, where their children “at least would be safe, protected, nurtured, even loved” (Dulberger 25).

The Victorian cult of domesticity is explored in *Carnival Row*, where Philo, the male protagonist, is taken as a child to The Light of the Martyr Foundling Home, a religious institution for orphan human children in the working-class neighbourhood of Rigmire, in The Burgue. Philo is a biracial individual, whose fairy mother, a famous singer called Aisling Querelle, abandoned him after clipping his wings to help him pass as human. She made that difficult decision to protect him from the racial discrimination that biracial creatures are subjected to in The Burgue, but also from the family of his biological father, a rich and influential Burguishman that would later become the Chancellor of The Burgue: Absalom Breakspear. Philo grew up alone in this orphanage –with the only company of his friend, Darius Prowell–, afraid that someone would discover his true nature, even though he never suspected his parents’ true identities.

A few years later, Philo –now a war veteran and police inspector– returns to this religious institution in order to conduct the murder investigation of its Principal, who has been brutally murdered. In a scene similar to the one where James visits her mother’s room in Bedlam Asylum in *Taboo*, Philo walks around the orphanage, relieving the memories from his childhood days (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 5, 00:15:33-00:20:10). Hanging on the austere and grey walls of the institution there are statues of the Martyr Hosea –The Burgue’s version of Jesus Christ–, who, unlike the Christian Messiah, was hanged rather than crucified. This religion –followed by human Burguismen– is known as The Martyrite Faith, and is more conservative than the Faeries’ religion, which is more accepting of homosexuality and gender equality.

The orphanage is a largely dark place, with small and high windows that do not allow the children to enjoy the light of day. The walls are chipped and old, painted in a faded greyish blue that seems to be an external reflection of the children’s deep sadness and solitude. The room where the children sleep has several makeshift beds, piled up against each other, and bring back childhood memories for Philo. He remembers when he used to play with his friend Darius in that room, but also a sweet female voice that sang to him at night. When he goes back home, he plays Aisling Querelle’s songs in his gramophone and has an epiphany: Aisling was the one that used to visit him at the orphanage. She would fly above his bed and sing to him until he fell asleep (Echevarria

and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 5, 00:50:03-00:52:19). He then realises that Aisling was his mysterious mother.

Hence, the orphanage arguably symbolises Philo's maternal abandonment and his need for acceptance and companionship, but also the fact that he had to renounce to an essential part of his identity –i.e., his fairy self– to be accepted in the human society of *The Burgue*. As part of his strict education, Philo learnt to conceal his fairy traits and to act as a human male. However, he never actually felt part of the human community, and it was not until his travel to Tirnanoc, the faeries' land, that he started to feel at home. As a consequence, the orphanage fails to function as a counter-site to subvert familial normativity, given that Philo is forced to repress his true identity and reject his biological mother's legacy. Thus, this pseudo-heterotopia does not allow Philo to transgress the Victorian conventions that establish the nuclear family as the normative institution that society should aspire to. Just like James learnt to use his supernatural abilities –allegedly inherited from his Native American mother– and felt more at home in Africa than he had ever felt in England, Philo feels a sense of belonging and community in Tirnanoc that he had never experienced in *The Burgue*. As he tells his fairy beloved, Vignette: "It never felt so much like home. Not like this. Not like you" (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 3, 00:46:46-00:46:56). Hence, Philo find his family of choice in Tirnanoc and starts to embrace his fairy self, although he later rejects it again when the Burguishmen are forced out of the fairyland by another colonising power: *The Pact*.

All in all, the neo-Victorian screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis stage gendered and family traumas in heterotopias of crises and deviation both within and outside the domestic sphere and, in doing so, they replicate the Victorian tropes of female hysteria and the orphan child as a deviation of the nuclear family. *Penny Dreadful* seems to present two empowered and independent female protagonists, Lily and Vanessa, that challenge the patriarchal system. However, they are eventually punished for their rebellion and deemed hysterical or possessed –two Victorian gendered stereotypes associated with women that refuse to conform to the "Angel of the House" female archetype. *Carnival Row* offers a more sustained critique of the Victorian nuclear family, as Philo eventually comes to accept his fairy self and embraces the fairy community by the end of Season 1 of the series, although the orphanage functions as a pseudo-heterotopia that further oppresses him and alienates him for being an orphan and half-fairy. Thus, the pseudo-heterotopias that have been described in this section fail to be actually transgressive –



either in terms of gender or family dynamics– and “yield no socio-cultural critique” (Fritz and Day 3).

### 4.2. External Spaces Harboring Inner Traumas

As discussed in the previous section, heterotopias of crisis and deviation in both private and public spheres take centre stage in neo-Victorian narratives of family trauma. Nonetheless, external spaces –such as Victorian metropolises or liquid spaces like the sea or the ocean– can also harbour both private and collective traumas. The Victorian metropolis par excellence, London, and its never-ending rearticulations in fantastical accounts might be understood as heterochronies that still haunt contemporary cities. They also contain the palimpsestuous Gothic horrors embodied by the (neo-)Victorian monsters and perpetrators portrayed in the screen texts analysed here, as I discuss in section 4.2.1. Likewise, the ethnic Other and their transgenerational traumas caused by (forced) migration, (indentured) slavery and racial discrimination are represented through the maritime heterotopia of the coffin ship, as I explain in section 4.2.2.

#### 4.2.1. The Neo-Victorian Spectral Metropolis

Cityscapes are arguably the urban stages that bear witness to the continuously changing and repeating patterns of human behaviour in different societies across history. Owing to the many technological, architectural, infrastructural and social changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution, Victorian cities are considered to be the forerunners of contemporary forms of urban living. Walter Benjamin traced back the origins of our “new forms of behaviour”, as well as the economic and technological advances of civilisation, to the nineteenth century urban landscape (Benjamin 14). As a result, “the nineteenth century continues to actively shape our experience of postmodern city spaces and configurations” (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Cities” 2).

Indeed, no city is ever perceived directly or in isolation, but they are rather filtered and shadowed –or *haunted*– by previous ones. As Benjamin claims, everything that is considered new is actually a reality that has always been there. As a result, new fashions or trends can neither bring about a “liberating solution”, nor can they renovate society (Benjamin 15). Thus, I argue that neo-Victorian cities should be defined as Foucauldian heterochronies, or heterotopias of “indefinitely accumulating time”, given that they are partially built on the idea of one place enclosing “all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes,

the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages” (Foucault, “Des Espaces Autres” 7). London would be the epitome of this Foucauldian heterochrony, as it works as a “repository of continuous culture and national heritage” (Walkowitz 17).

Nineteenth-century London is one of the most salient spectral cityscapes that both haunts and mediates our perception of contemporary metropolises. Ever since the twentieth century, neo-Victorian reimaginings of 1800s London have been circulating in literature and popular culture, so that we can either perpetuate or challenge its imperial ideologies and legacies. As Ho asserts, “the return to the Victorian in the present offers a highly visible, highly aestheticised code for confronting empire again and anew; it is a site within which the memory of empire and its surrounding discourses and strategies of representation can be replayed and played out” (*Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of Empire* 5). This need to confront and decolonise imperial legacies could account for the current plethora of neo-Victorian screen productions that revisit and reimagine Victorian London as the centre stage of their stories, as in the case of the TV series analysed in this PhD thesis, *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016), *Taboo* (2017-present) and *Carnival Row* (2019-present), but also other recent Netflix and HBO originals, namely *The Irregulars* and *The Nevers*. Likewise, these TV series also stage the “overworld/underworld” dichotomy described by Judith R. Walkowitz, which enables contemporary authors and directors to display a nostalgic longing for the supposedly secure world of our Victorian forefathers, but also a voyeuristic desire to expose their “perverse sexual jungle” (4).

Neo-Victorian metropolises usually respond to Gothic representations of London by either appropriating or subverting the most salient Victorian literary tropes of the city. For instance, they attempt to recapture the overwhelming and intimidating power of the nineteenth-century city through “nationalistic dreams of imperial or postcolonial romance and struggle”, as in the case of *Carnival Row*, or “blood-soaked horror chambers and places of death”, as in *Penny Dreadful* (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Cities” 8). The neo-Victorian metropolis continuously shifts its appearance, becoming a double and an Other that underlines its “*quintessentially Gothic* nature” (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Gothic” 4, emphasis in original), cancelling out any possible temporal boundary between the nineteenth century and the present. As a consequence, they become each other’s *Doppelgänger*, “both haunting and haunted by one another”, which results in a conflation between Victorian and present-day temporalities (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Cities” 8), as in the case of *Carnival Row*. According to Kohlke and Gutleben,

the most prominent urban tropes that feature in neo-Victorian adaptations are the city as a palimpsest and a labyrinth—two notions that are also exploited in neo-Victorian haunted house narratives, as discussed in the previous section—, but also the Whore of Babylon (“Neo-Victorian Cities” 1).

The notion of the palimpsest is not only used in the field of adaptation studies, but also in architecture and archaeology to refer to the accumulation of changes and sedimentations that a building or location has undergone through time. In the same way as haunted houses functioned as textual palimpsests owing to the different temporal layers they were made up of, contemporary cities are ‘written’ over past ones and are, therefore, tied to bygone eras, as they bear the spectral traces of past cityscapes. As Kohlke and Gutleben contend, while “we read the past city through the overlaid present [...] we also read the present city backwards through the underlying and resurfacing past” (“Neo-Victorian Cities” 11). Thus, neo-Victorian cities could arguably be considered a Gothic double of Victorian metropolises, most notably of the city of London, but also of present ones, since they incorporate temporal layers of meaning belonging to both eras, becoming urban palimpsests. In fact, Arias states that in rewriting and reimagining the topography of Victorian London, and in recovering its buried and encrypted secrets, neo-Victorian writers are reinterpreting this city and the Victorian urban scenery at large (“Haunted Places, Haunted Spaces” 155).

This is arguably the case in *Carnival Row*, where the city of The Burgue is a fictional urban palimpsest made up of a number of temporal layers of meaning from both imperial and contemporary ‘Londons’. Jaine Chemmachery contends that neo-Victorianism on screen Orientalises the city of London because in our contemporary global world, there is not an East that encapsulates exoticism (par. 21). In fact, Kohlke claims that this domestic Orientalisation of London also happened in Victorian literature, where “Gothicized inner-city London became a quasi-home-grown British Orient and ‘Heart of Darkness’ inviting penetration and colonisation, lending itself to all manner of ideological projections and social as well as sexual experimentation” (“Neo-Victorian Slumming” 184). From the 1840s onwards, the so-called “urban explorers” applied imperial discourse to describe features of their own cities, turning the uncharted territory of the London poor into an exotic and potentially dangerous space (Walkowitz 18).

*Carnival Row*’s pilot episode first presents the fantastical city of The Burgue through the point of view of the male protagonist, detective Rycroft Philostrate (Philo). There are a number of similarities between the capital of The Burgue and imperial

London. First of all, the former is constructed as a modern and urban society that is dominated by a river, and is highly populated, particularly when compared to rural Tirnanoc, the fairy's land. Likewise, The Burgue's booming commercial and industrial activity, as well as its ever-growing population –owing to the constant migration of mythological creatures– echoes Victorian London's swift development and growth derived from rural migration and a declining death rate (Leventhal 487). Moreover, the capital of The Burgue has managed to establish an unparalleled technological industry, “which has secured them imperialist campaigns and conquests, as well as a very efficient railway system run on steam that connects all the main cities of the republic” (Pedro “Immigration, Passing and the Racial Other” 250). This industrial development also echoes Britain's expansionist policies throughout the nineteenth century, along with the new means of transport that were introduced thanks to the Industrial Revolution.

Furthermore, there are sharp differences in terms of living and social conditions between high and working classes in both London and The Burgue, echoing the geographical separation between London's East and West (Walkowitz 17). According to F. M. Leventhal, despite the fact that statistics on “population growth, industrial output, railway facilities, [and] mileage of sewers underscored the Victorian faith in material progress”, others proved “the proliferation of slums and the frightening mortality from epidemics” (487). As for The Burgue, its architectural, technological and industrial affluence is challenged by poverty, crime and racial discrimination. As I pointed out elsewhere, this dual nature of The Burgue –as a city split into two irreconcilable aspects: a more respectable, privileged and sophisticated part and a darker, or ‘Othered’, one– is the most evident Orientalizing characteristics of the capital. Similar to the cityscape of Victorian London, The Burgue's sophisticated and respectable public buildings coexist “with overcrowded suburbs and racial ghettos that threaten the social security of affluent neighbourhoods” (Pedro, “Immigration, Passing and the Racial Other” 251).

Mythological creatures are forced to live in ghettoised districts like the Row, which are characterised by the high levels of criminality –particularly prostitution, and drug trafficking– whilst rich human families usually live in fashionable high-class neighbourhoods like Finistere Crossing. The fact that mythological creatures are portrayed as poor and marginal also evokes the discourse of Victorian urban explorers, who constructed the poor as “a race apart, outside the national community” (Walkowitz

19).<sup>35</sup> According to Chemmachery, such a dual representation of 1800s London should be interpreted as Orientalizing, given that it replicates imperial discourse that constructed the uncharted and most impoverished areas of London as unfamiliar and even dangerous places (par. 24).

Finally, it is also worth noting that *The Burgue* has its own recreation of Jack the Ripper, the infamous serial killer who murdered female prostitutes in poor areas of Victorian London. In *Carnival Row*, this serial killer targets, mutilates and then butchers female fairies. For this reason, the faery community has come to know him as ‘Unseelie Jack’, which means hateful in the faeries’ tongue (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 1). As I contend elsewhere, this excess of visual violence further Orientalises the city of *The Burgue*, as the series forces its spectators to confront what repels us in a familiar and domestic setting (“Immigration, Passing and the Racial Other” 251).

Nonetheless, although these Orientalizing strategies seemingly ‘Other’ the city of London through its fantastical reimagining, they actually end up disrupting “otherness after constructing it” (Chemmachery par. 26), given that the audience is still able to recognise London in *The Burgue*. Moreover, the metropolis in *Carnival Row* does not seem to present any radical Otherness, since “its Victorian inhabitants remain to a global audience Western neighbours, in terms of geography and temporality” (Chemmachery par. 26). The cast of the series is mainly made up of white actors, and the few Black characters in the show have “very limited agency” (Pedro, “Immigration, Passing and the Racial Other” 251). There are only three Black characters that feature prominently in the series: Vignette’s prostitute friend and former lover, Tourmaline (Karla Crome), Philo’s best friend and werewolf, Darius (Ariyon Bakare), and the wealthy puck Agreus Astrayon (David Gyasi). This is arguably so because domestic Otherness satisfies a white audience’s desire for exoticism and Orientalism, but, at the same time, needs to be familiar, “tamed and made knowable” (Chemmachery par. 26) so as to remain a safe entertainment. As a consequence, despite its seemingly progressive agenda, “*Carnival Row* adopts conservative strategies to adapt the nineteenth century, since it reproduces an Orientalist discourse whereby Otherness is to be domesticated and familiar, and the exotic

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<sup>35</sup> Mid-Victorian investigator Henry Mayhew described the difference between the working classes from East and West London as follows: “In passing from the skilled operative of the West-end, to the unskilled workman of the Eastern quarter, the moral and intellectual change is so great, that it seems as if we were in a new land, and among another race” (qtd. in Jones 30).

elements of neo-Victorian London are to be consumed and assimilated by a Western audience” (Pedro, “Immigration, Passing and the Racial Other” 251).

In a similar vein, *Taboo* also juxtaposes the underbelly of imperial London to another geographical location, in this case, colonial Africa. According to Mousoutzanis, this contrast is typical of imperial Gothic, where there is a movement outside the margins of the British empire –in this case, Africa, which is depicted as “the area of the occult, the monstrous and the supernatural” (12). However, there is also a movement inwards to study the “domestic ‘savages’ which resided in the very heart of the civilised world: the homeless, poor, sailors, homosexuals, prostitutes of London’s East End” (Mousoutzanis 12). These social outcasts were seen as threatening by the upper classes, and Othered in a similar manner as non-white individuals from the colonies.

Delaney, however, works alongside these marginal characters in the series, namely his criminal friend Atticus (Stephen Graham), the brothel madam Helga von Hinten (Franka Potente) or the queer character Michael Godfrey (Edward Hogg). According to Mousoutzanis, social outcasts “were associated with cannibalism in the domestic sphere by nineteenth-century sensationalist popular press accounts” as “either victimisers or victimised” (13). James’s friends inhabit the East End of London, which – similarly to The Row district in *Carnival Row*– is depicted as “a bleak, dark and dirty place ridden with crime and disease [...] [to keep] with Gothic uses of space and locale for the evocation of terror and London (Mousoutzanis 13). Thus, just like *Carnival Row*, *Taboo* caters to the audience’s need for a familiar and domestic Otherness, so that the city of London is Gothicised in order to make it look like a thrilling –but safe– threat whereby a Western audience can still empathise with the –mostly– white characters on screen.

On a different note, the trope of the city as a labyrinth also features prominently in neo-Victorian Gothic on screen. As discussed in previous sections, in late Victorian Gothic fiction, urban cityscapes started to replace exotic and remote locations as the sites of sublime horror, and new monstrous villains took centre stage, such as “the murderous beast, savage criminal, vampire, cannibal o degenerate” (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Cities” 19). This is the case of Victorian classics like Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897). Likewise, urban legends around fearsome figures like Jack the Ripper, Springheeled Jack and Sweeny Todd began to circulate. Walkowitz connects this Victorian narrative tradition of “urban exploration and the dark labyrinthine city, found in media scandals like the Ripper or the ‘Maiden Tribute’, to contiguous

stories of sexual possibility and urban adventure” (5). Indeed, this recurrent depiction of London as a “dark, powerful and seductive labyrinth” became iconic among both Victorian authors and readers in the 1880s (Walkowitz 17). Both *Penny Dreadful* and *Carnival Row* revisit Victorian London and appropriate Gothic monsters –the former in a much more evident manner than the latter, as *Penny Dreadful* is actually a screen patchwork of nineteenth-century Gothic and Romantic intertextual references–, constituting “a form of Gothic repetition rather than innovation in figuring the metropolis” (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Cities” 19).

Screen adaptations and period dramas produced in the early 2000s and set in the long nineteenth century favoured an “authentic-seeming image” of the city of London, as in the case of Albert Hughes and Allen Hughes’s film *From Hell* (2003), whose production team created a realistic version of Whitechapel in a field outside of Prague (Louttit 2). However, since 2013, the filmmakers’ interest in authenticity when recreating Victorian London has given way to more popular and Gothic representations of the metropolis. This is the case of the TV series *Penny Dreadful*, which seems to “respond to the Victorian Gothic image of the city” and is more concerned with appropriating “the popular cultural archive of London representations”, recreating a world that some critics have defined as ‘Horror London’ (Louttit 3). According to Peter Hutchings, ‘Horror London’ screen productions are “extremely vague about the actual geography” of the metropolis (190), and usually exploit a number of urban tropes to trigger a particular mood in the audience, such as “a gas street lamp, a cobbled street, a horse-drawn carriage and a wisp of mist to be identified” (191). *Penny Dreadful* “historicizes Horror London” (Manea 43), drawing on the trauma and unresolved guilt of its marginalised characters and outcasts.

Indeed, the series “features a cast of monstrous characters whose lives intersect with one another in the metropolis of Victorian London” (Rocha 30), where the main protagonists of the show are searching for the missing Mina Murray. In a similar vein to *Carnival Row* and *Taboo*, two opposite “Londons” coexist in *Penny Dreadful*: a “respectable, Victorian London and its discourse of progress and reason” and a ‘demi-monde’, a darker version of the British metropolis that is “located in the well-named Underbelly London” (Chemmachery par. 20). The protagonists incessantly look for Mina in London’s demimonde, in locations such as the basement of an opium den –which is infested with dormant Nosferatu-like vampires (Logan, Season 1, Episode 1)– the London Zoo, and a plague ship in the London harbour. These are all urban spaces “associated with

disease and therefore with monstrous or abject bodies” (Rocha 34). This stark division between ‘high’ and ‘low’ life echoes a “Dickensian cityscape of dirty, crowded, disorganized clusters of urban villages, each with its own peculiar flavour and eccentricity, where the Great Unwashed lived in chaotic alleys, courts, and hovels just off the grand thoroughfares” (Walkowitz 19). Indeed, Stoker’s *Dracula* –the novel that Season 1 of *Penny Dreadful* largely adapts– has long been read as a text that reflects “anxieties of degeneration through metaphors of infection” (Forman 925). Given that the threat that the vampire represents in Stoker’s novel is mostly sexual, *Dracula* could have been a metaphor for syphilis<sup>36</sup> –a disease that some biographers attribute to Stoker himself– or to the continuous changes of the Contagious Diseases Act.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, Ross G. Forman also argues that the novel might have reflected “racialized fears of decline through blood and bloodlines” (295), or what Brantlinger argues is one of the defining characteristics of Victorian Imperial Gothic: a potential ‘barbaric’ invasion of the East and the subsequent decay of Western religion and civilisation (“Rule of Darkness” 130).

Lauren Rocha contends that in the case of *Penny Dreadful*, the fact that vampires hide in the dangerous underbelly of Victorian London seems to reflect “the infection-like nature of the threat the vampires pose to the city” (34). This threat is eventually contained at the end of Season 1, when Sir Malcolm shoots Mina to save Vanessa, his daughter of choice. However, the threat returns in Season 3, when Dracula –the master of all vampires in the series– reappears, posing as a zoologist named Dr Alexander Sweet, and seduces Vanessa. According to Rocha, the decision to harbour monsters in the city of London “emphasizes this failure to eliminate danger; the city, with its various layers and parts, cannot be fully contained” (36). At the end of Season 3, Vanessa submits to Dracula, fulfilling the prophecy that pronounced her as the ‘Mother of Evil’, which unleashes the Apocalypse. A pestilent fog covers the city of London and the creatures of the night now walk the earth, while humans are forced to submit to them.

Hence, the racialised fear of a potential barbaric invasion of the West is fulfilled in the last episode of the series –where vampires would represent the racial Other– whilst

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<sup>36</sup> In the same way as the original novel reflected Victorian fears of venereal disease, Francis Ford Coppola’s adaptation of *Dracula*, *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992), reflected a concern with Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), given that that the film was produced at the height of the AIDS crisis in the 1990s and that Coppola was simultaneously working on an AIDS documentary, entitled *Cure* (Archerd 1992) (Pheasant-Kelly 11).

<sup>37</sup> The Contagious Diseases Act was first passed in 1864 and extended in 1866 and 1869, before it was annulled in 1886. It was passed in order to regulate “common prostitutes” so as to reduce sexually transmitted diseases within the British army (“The Contagious Diseases Act”, par. 1-2).



humans would embody Western individuals, whose civilisation, culture, religion and bloodlines are now being threatened. This fear of the ethnic Other is represented in the series through the character of Dracula himself, played by a Latino actor, Christian Camargo, who is of Mexican origin. However, this racialised threat is eventually overcome, as Vanessa finally rejects Dracula and sacrifices herself to save humanity—or, in this case, the Western civilisation—when she asks Ethan to kill her. This moment marks the triumph of good over evil in the series, given that Vanessa abandons Dracula, the fallen angel, and is reunited with her God, as she tells Ethan: “Oh Ethan... I see... Our Lord” (Logan, Season 3, Episode 9, 00:42:51-00:43:02).

Likewise, the city of London harbours other anxieties in the series, most notably the monstrous and loose adaptation of the Victorian murderer Jack the Ripper: the character of Ethan Chandler. He is not entirely human, but a blood-thirsty werewolf that cannot control his animal impulses, so he brutally murders innocent people every time there is a full moon. He is a conflicting character, given that he struggles with his guilty conscience over the numerous deaths that both his human and wolf sides have caused. Ethan is a former American cavalry soldier from New Mexico territory. He fought in the American Indian Wars and took part in a massacre where American troops wiped out an entire Native American village. He was then turned into a werewolf by the surviving boss of the tribe, named Kaetenay, who became a mentor and surrogate father to him. After killing a senator's son, Ethan later fled America, and worked as a gunslinger in a travelling circus, until he joined Sir Malcolm's community of outcasts.

Ethan embodies the failure of Victorian masculinity, as he is incapable of controlling his monstrous side and of saving the woman he loves, Vanessa. In the Season 1 finale, he is drinking in the Mariner's Inn, which is located near the London docks that is frequented by sailors, prostitutes and stevedores. He is approached by two men hired by his father that plan to take him back to America. After he refuses to go, he changes into his wolf form, and wreaks havoc in the inn, leaving nearly no survivors (Logan, Season 1, Episode 8). Rocha contends that, as an American, Ethan's violent presence in Victorian London and the failure of the British police to connect him to the crimes at the Mariner's Inn exposes “the failing of masculine authority both on the part of Ethan in his lack of control over his beast and on the part of the male [British] authorities due to their inability to protect the city” (37).

Finally, the last trope of the neo-Victorian city is that of ‘the Great Whore of Babylon’. According to Kohlke and Gutleben, the term ‘metropolis’ is gendered and

related to a female matrix, as it derives from Greek and means “mother city” (“Neo-Victorian Cities” 26). Nonetheless, Victorian cities are also the embodiment of the public sphere, usually constructed as a male territory –as opposed to the domestic private sphere, which was the place associated with women.<sup>38</sup> Prostitutes were the exception, as they were ‘public’ women working on the streets. Just like the haunted family house is anthropomorphised, the space of the city in neo-Victorian fiction is also an external representation of the characters’ inner anxieties. Due to the prominent presence of prostitutes in neo-Victorian narratives set in urban contexts, the city has come to be defined as a prostitute itself: as the Whore of Babylon. The prostitute is deemed to be a symbol of the commoditisation of the city, but also “an immanent danger of romanticisation” (Clarke 88). As a result, by acknowledging the polytemporal nature of the corrupting and corrupted city –as a place of moral decay and compulsive consumerism– the Victorian metropolis could also be deemed a critique of contemporary “capitalist excess” (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Cities” 29).

London was already compared to Babylon in the Victorian era, particularly in terms of its wealth, power and splendour. Like its ancient predecessor, Victorian London had become the centre of international commerce, the capital of a powerful empire. An anonymous author in the Victorian magazine *Temple Bar* drew on this comparison with the ancient city as follows: “in trying to form an idea of London we should think of that great Assyrian capital, with her lofty walls, her hundred brazen gates, her magnificent palaces, and wonderful hanging gardens” (200). Paradoxically, however, London was also heir to Babylon’s apocalyptic fate. Just like Rome and Babylon had been symbols of seemingly unshakable empires –which had eventually fallen due to their excessive indulgence in luxury–, “Victorian Babylon” could look back at its ancient predecessors and find traces of its magnificence, but also of its inevitable destruction (Nead 1). One of these traces was arguably the urban figure of the prostitute, who sharply contrasted with more ‘respectable’ London citizens.

The prostitute was the epitome of femininity in the urban space, but also a central spectacle in the Victorian metropolis. Simultaneously rejected and desired, she also

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<sup>38</sup> The city was a space dominated by a male gaze, that of an urban explorer –or, in Baudelaire’s phrase, *flanneur* (*Fleurs du mal* 1857)– who wandered across the city, establishing a “nineteenth-century bourgeois subjectivity” (Walkowitz 16). Benjamin described the *flanneur* as a sort of anthropologist, who observed the crowd and accurately classified the people he saw, from their personality to their physical appearance. The flanneur sought refuge in the crowd, through which the city turned into a “phantasmagoria” (Benjamin 21). According to Walkowitz, this phantasmagoria refers to the *flanneur*’s tendency to fantasise and to experience the city and its components as commodities to be consumed (16).

became “the symbol of female vice”, in stark contrast to respectable women confined in the domestic sphere. According to Walkowitz, the prostitute “was the embodiment of the corporeal smells and animal passions that the rational bourgeois male had repudiated and that the virtuous woman, the spiritualized ‘angel in the house’, had suppressed” (21). As a result, prostitutes became an urban concern for respectable Victorians, who considered them as the recipients of moral corruption and physical disease. As a result, prostitution came to be regarded as a dangerous sexual activity and this led to the passage of the Contagious Diseases Act (1864), which allowed “medical and police inspection of prostitutes in garrison towns and ports” (Walkowitz 23).

Prostitutes feature prominently in the three screen works analysed in this section, *Penny Dreadful*, *Taboo* and *Carnival Row*, and are part and parcel of the intricate urban tapestry that conforms London's underbelly. In *Penny Dreadful*, the resurrected Lily Frankenstein and her army attempt to defy the capitalist and patriarchal exploitation of female prostitutes through misandrist violence. They move around the city of London capturing and murdering abusive men that treat women as mere commodities. However, their radical endeavour is eventually ruined by Dr Frankenstein and his friend Dr Jekyll, since they capture Lily and try to domesticate her rebellious self, as explained in the previous section. In the case of *Carnival Row*, there are fairy brothels where female fairies –such as Vignette's friend, Tourmaline– are forced into prostitution, since human men are attracted to their exoticism and beauty. While it seems that they are more independent than the female fairies that have to work as handmaidens and servants in Burguish households, these female fairies are actually victims of the capitalist system. They are stripped of their culture, language and sexual freedom and sold as a clichéd stereotypes of the delicate and exotic fairy in order to attract wealthy male human customers. Finally, in the case of *Taboo*, the brutal lifestyle prostitutes are forced to endure turns them into violent and greedy characters that would do anything in order to survive.

This critique of urban capitalism and corruption is sometimes juxtaposed to the more ‘primitive’ rural milieu, particularly in the case of nineteenth-century Ireland. Ireland was considered “‘pre-modern’, still largely composed as it was of landlords and peasants”, but also reflected “an oppositional capitalistic modernity, defining itself as Other from what already appeared ‘anachronistic’ within its nineteenth-century context” (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Cities” 30). *Carnival Row* adopts this urban/rural binary in its portrayal of the fairyland Tirnanoc –a primitive, pre-Industrial and highly rural society– as opposed to the technologically and industrialised Republic of The

Burgue. Indeed, the fact that the female protagonist, Vignette Stonemoss, has an Irish accent strengthens this connection between Tirnanoc and Ireland. Nonetheless, Cara Delevingne, the actress that plays Vignette, mentioned in an interview that it was actually her decision –and not the show’s creators– to give Vignette an Irish accent because “the word fae is Gaelic and I was always pretty sure the mythical thing of fairies was made in Ireland” (“Cara Delevingne Explains” par. 6).

To conclude, neo-Victorian screen texts prioritise “Gothic versions of the malfunctioning, hostile, and malefic city as a site of divisive inter-class and inter-cultural conflict, violence, and trauma” (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Cities” 36). In *Carnival Row*, *Penny Dreadful* and *Taboo*, the 1800s London underbelly is reimagined, particularly in its graphic depiction of prostitution, gratuitous violence, corruption and dirt. Moreover, in the same way as Victorian writers reimagined earlier cities, neo-Victorian creators that revisit nineteenth-century cityscapes portray urban forms that echo our present context. Some of the main “urban” concerns that Victorian writers explored have been maximised in today’s global and capitalist societies, namely poverty, prostitution, discrimination and corruption. Neo-Victorian fiction displays presentist undertones in its exploration of London’s underbelly, as our current anxieties about urban affairs are projected back into the nineteenth century. Thus, our contemporary cities haunt their Victorian predecessors as much as they haunt our present cityscapes.

#### 4.2.2. Maritime Heterotopias: Coffin Ships Representing the Black and Green Atlantics

The haunted space par excellence in postcolonial neo-Victorian fiction –both in literary and screen texts– is the ship, a moving heterotopia that functions as a metaphorical representation of the British Empire where racial Otherness is relegated and constrained. Elizabeth Ho’s coined term “the neo-Victorian-at-sea” refers to narratives that represent “the ocean, rather than Britain, as the liquid site of empire” (“The Neo-Victorian-at-Sea” 166), whereas the passengers on the ships would be the colonised Other. Juan José Martín-González highlights the conflicting nature of the ship in Western culture and colonial history, as it not only evokes “adventure, exploration, and knowledge, but also racial terror and slavery” (*Transoceanic Perspectives* 22).

A number of neo-Victorian works revolve around sea trips set in the Atlantic Ocean, rather than on more conventional British locales, including Kneale’s *English Passengers* (2000), Joseph O’Connor’s *Star of the Sea* (2002) or Amitav Ghosh’s *Sea of*

*Poppies* (2008). In these novels, the sea works as a historical archive or a “theatre of memory that tosses up detritus as the monuments and submerged histories of colonial atrocities” (Ho, “The Neo-Victorian-at-Sea” 166). Hence, the main objective of neo-Victorianism at sea is the restitution of the racial Other in the present and a reclamation of the Black –or African– and Green –or Irish– Atlantics. According to Foucault, heterotopias are sites where Otherness is created and can either prosper or be controlled, and the ship is the most representative of these sites:

the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens [...] the boat has not only been for our civilisation, from the sixteenth century until the present, the great instrument of economic development [...], but has been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination. The ship is the heterotopia par excellence (“Des Espaces Autres” 9).

Maritime heterotopias feature prominently in both *Taboo* and *Carnival Row*, where they encapsulate spaces of entrapment and death for the racial Other –i.e., enslaved Black individuals in the case of *Taboo* and mythological creatures in *Carnival Row*. *Taboo* explores the unresolved guilt of a former slave trader, James Delaney, that kidnapped, transported and sold slaves from Africa to America. The series touches upon the theme of the middle passage, or the forced trip of African individuals across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas, where they became slaves, usually forced to work in US plantations (Wallenfeldt 2020). In a similar vein, *Carnival Row* explores the concept of transatlantic diasporas but, as opposed to *Taboo*, the victims are supernatural creatures fleeing from a country at war that seek refuge in a first-world nation, The Burgue. There, they become indentured slaves to powerful humans that racially discriminate them. As a result, this transatlantic trip could arguably be compared to both the middle passage and the massive diaspora caused by the Irish Famine in the nineteenth century. In both *Taboo* and *Carnival Row* the boats that carry racialised individuals to a ‘New World’ are examples of coffin ships, as they trap their passengers in a certain death and then become the coffins that contain their passengers’ bodies, buried at the bottom of the ocean.

#### 4. Neo-Victorian Heterotopias on Screen

In *Carnival Row*, citizens from Tirnanoc –a rural and primitive fairy continent– are fleeing to The Republic of The Burgue –a human nation that seemingly supported them at the beginning of the war– due to their country’s extreme circumstances. Hundreds of fairies board ruinous ships owned by well-off Burguishmen, who see the fairies’ ordeal as a very profitable investment. This sea trip is arguably a neo-Victorian fantastical re-configuration of the horrors of slavery and the middle passage, and establishes a clear comparison between the Fae’s home country, Tirnanoc, and Africa, as well as between *Carnival Row*’s racial Other –embodied by fantastical beings, such as fairies– and enslaved African individuals. Therefore, in placing the “Fae’s foundational trauma” in a neo-Victorian context, the series is asking its audience to see the continuities between African slavery and today’s “Black post-slavery experience and Black resistance” (Espinoza Garrido 219).

As I contend elsewhere, this desperate sea trip is also inspired by the contemporary real-life experiences of refugees from Africa, Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan, who are currently forced to leave their homelands as a result of wars, political instability or drought economies to seek asylum in Western countries (“Immigration, Passing and the Racial Other” 252). These ‘illegal’ immigrants risk their lives in hazardous trips, where “shocking tales of women and children drowning in the Mediterranean Sea are repeated over and over” (Momodu par. 1). Indeed, Ho claims that in neo-Victorian narratives at sea “old diasporas” meet “new ones” (“The Neo-Victorian-at-Sea” 167) in order to make sense of current neo-imperialist policies. Even though the representation of these forms of racial oppression in a neo-Victorian setting has a clear ‘presentist’ agenda –as they echo contemporary anxieties–, it also reflects a temporal duality and continuity with the nineteenth century. In doing so, *Carnival Row* connects Victorian imperial policies and their contemporary legacies, reflected in “Britain’s dominant, post-imperial discourse of Blackness” (Espinoza Garrido 219) so as to uncover and work through them.

Vignette Stonemoss, the female protagonist of *Carnival Row*, is a ‘sparrowhawk’ –a fairy fighter that helps other fairies get safe passage to The Burgue. Once they arrive there, they are forced to become indentured slaves to the wealthy Burguish families that funded their trip, until their debt is paid. The Burgue’s policies echo those of “the British Empire [which] secured its economic interests by means of the Apprenticeship system and indentureship, whose workers led a living not very different from slaves before the emancipation” (Martín-González, “Black Neo-Victorianism and Transatlantic Radicalism” 197). However, they also resemble “contemporary racist institutional

practices against non-white individuals in Anglo-American contexts, including being forced to live in racialised ghettos located in a shady district named ‘The Row’, where drug trafficking, prostitution, and violent crimes run rampant” (Pedro “Immigration, Passing and the Racial Other” 253). As discussed in the previous section, female fairies that do not work as domestic servants are either forced into prostitution in fairy brothels in The Row or to deal drugs for a fairy secret society called The Black Raven. They also suffer police brutality and profiling, echoing the systemic and pervasive violence against Black individuals in the US.

As a result of Tirnanoc’s economic and political instability, Vignette eventually decides to flee to The Burgue and become a fairy refugee, but there is a huge storm at sea that causes her ship to wreck (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 1). Hundreds of dead fairy bodies are washed ashore in a scene “uncannily similar to the iconic image of Alan Kurdi” (Pedro, “Immigration, Passing and the Racial Other” 253).<sup>39</sup> Only Vignette manages to survive the wreckage, but becomes an indentured slave to Mr Ezra Spurnrose, the Burguishman that funded her trip, when she arrives in The Burgue. However, this apparently critical exposure of Britain’s imperialist practices against non-white individuals is actually more ambivalent than it seems. As I contend elsewhere, “[i]n presenting a scene resembling the picture of a deceased child –that has come to be part of our collective imagination–, *Carnival Row* is arguably trivializing a fairly recent collective trauma in order to satisfy the audience’s voyeuristic and morbid expectations” (“Immigration, Passing and the Racial Other” 253). Furthermore, another of the series’ big representational flaws is whitewashing, since the show appropriates “distinctly [non-white] experiences” and “presents them via the show’s diegetically racialised, yet extradiegetically White protagonists” (Espinoza Garrido 221). This is the case of Vignette’s transatlantic trip and indentured slavery, which are represented in the series through a white actress (Cara Delevingne).

On a different note, *Carnival Row* could also be understood as a fantastical representation of the Irish famine (1845-52), establishing “continuities between communities that share histories of anti-colonial struggle and trade” (Ho, “The Neo-Victorian-at-Sea” 176): The Irish and the Africans. There have been recent attempts in

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<sup>39</sup> Alan Kurdi was the Syrian boy from Kobane whose dead body was found on a Turkish beach in 2015. The photograph of his body washed ashore went viral and was seen by more 20 million people around the world (Devichand par. 3), becoming synonymous with the ordeal that war refugees have to endure in their sea trips seeking political asylum in our collective imagination.

neo-Victorian fiction to represent the traumatic experience of the Irish famine and its cultural aftermath in a number of interdisciplinary cultural forms. These include Joseph O'Connor *Star of the Sea* (2002), Paul Lynch's *Grace* (2017), Lance Daly's film *Black 47* (2018) and Sinéad O'Connor's song "Famine" (1994). Despite the fact that the famine is arguably the most important event in Ireland in the modern period, it remained unexplored in both fictional and academic accounts until the 1990s, "in a manner that reflected the shifting political landscape in Ireland and, to some extent, in Britain" (O'Malley 135). Due to the famine, the population of Ireland was decimated by a quarter, since "[o]f the roughly 8 million inhabitants of Ireland in the 1840s, about one million died of starvation and over one million emigrated" (Boehm-Schnitker 80) to the United States, Canada, Australia and Great Britain. Tirnanoc experiences a similar decimation due to the war conflict and precarious economic situation.

After the Union of 1800 that signalled the creation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, the Irish famine was tackled by the new state, so that "questions of sovereignty were part and parcel of the political reaction to the famine", as there was "a plethora of social and biopolitical interventions in Ireland" that transformed it into a colonial state at the service of England (Boehm-Schnitker 82). In a similar fashion, Tirnanoc becomes a colonial state after it is occupied by the human nation The Pact, which takes control over the fairy continent in order to exploit its natural resources. Likewise, the forced diaspora experienced by Ireland due to the famine resulted in many shipwrecks in the Atlantic, where thousands of people lost their lives. As a result, the boats that transported them became "coffin ships", which scattered "bodies and bones of famine victims in the (Green) Atlantic" (Boehm-Schnitker 89). Indeed, the Green Atlantic serves as a "transnational archive" of the famine and its history, which neo-Victorian fiction is trying to recuperate. Thus, the abovementioned scene in *Carnival Row*, where the ship that transported the fairies to The Burgue wrecks and its passengers' bodies are washed ashore (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 1) could also point to the bodily remains of famine victims that are still being found in the Green Atlantic, such as the ones retrieved in Québec in 2010 and 2016 (Boehm-Schnitker 112). O'Malley claims that the diaspora caused by the Irish famine was characterised by an "inability" on the part of the Irish society "to accommodate the deceased" which disintegrated "the frayed fabric that held this society together" (132).

Thus, neo-Victorian fiction tackling the Irish famine, as in the case of *Carnival Row*, has the ethical drive of accommodating or excavating "these dead in the present"



(O'Malley 133). This current excavation of the Irish dead is of crucial importance, owing to the fact that the famine has been enveloped by a “traumatic silence”, in contrast to the knowable Victorian past (O'Malley 136). Hence, neo-Victorian texts that attempt to represent the Irish famine must create an Irish traumatic past that has been muted and made unknowable. This would actually be one of the main differences between British and Irish neo-Victorian fiction. Whereas the former reworks and refashions its British Victorian predecessors, “there is not a substantial archive of nineteenth-century Irish novels to draw upon”, so that Irish neo-Victorian literature and screen texts must be created anew (O'Malley 146).

*Carnival Row* conflates the traumatic experiences of the Black and Green Atlantics, as in the case of O'Connor's *Star of the Sea*, where the ship that transports Irish passengers to America formerly transported enslaved African subjects. In both texts, forced migration is not represented as an “exclusive source of trauma”, but rather depicted as a repetition of traumatic experiences of diaspora (O'Malley 150). This also refers to contemporary (forced) migrations, given that neo-Victorian texts tend to represent at least two temporal realities at the same time –the Victorian and the contemporary one. As O'Malley points out, a great number of immigrants are now experiencing in contemporary Ireland the very same dilemmas as Irish-speaking immigrants did in the nineteenth century: that “of having to come to terms with a hegemonic Anglophone culture” (151).

Moreover, despite the fact that Ireland was once a country with a high emigration rate due to the famine, contemporary levels of racism and xenophobia are quite similar to the ones present in other European countries. O'Malley contends that this might be due to the fact that the Irish did not mourn their cultural trauma –and instead silenced it and made it unknowable– which has made them repeat it with contemporary immigrants (151). This connects with Laub's theories of the survivors' imperative need to tell their traumatic stories to an empathetic audience in order to work through them, as explained in section 3.1. Irish citizens seem to be haunted by a silence or an “impossibility to tell”, which prevents them to tell their stories (Laub, “Event Without Witness” 78).

Moreover, as explained in section 3.1., a traumatic and self-imposed silence might be transmitted from one generation to the next, both within the family and in society at large (Miller and Tougaw 9). Irish citizens have arguably been experiencing a form of transgenerational trauma, inherited from their ancestors that experienced it first-hand during the Great Famine. Thus, the only way to mourn the traumatic past and to reconcile

it with the present is to accommodate and show “hospitality to, in particular, contemporary immigrants might be a way of working through the trauma of the famine, mourning it, and finding places for its unburied dead” (O’Malley 152). This is arguably what *Carnival Row* attempts to do. It brings to the fore the silenced stories of the marginalised dead and denounce the racially-motivated discriminatory practices from both the past and the present that ethnic collectives have had to endure, so that we can properly mourn and pay homage to the unburied dead.

On a similar note, the TV series *Taboo* attempts to denounce the horrors of the middle passage and slavery from a postcolonial perspective. However, in this case, the experience of Black oppression is actually depicted from the point of view of the colonial perpetrator, James Delaney, rather than from that of the victims, as in *Carnival Row*. Delaney has vivid memories of his time as a slave trader in a EIC ship called the Cornwallis –later renamed the Influence. One of these memories is about a stormy night at sea when The Cornwallis wrecked and James was ordered to trap the slaves in the hold, so that they would sink with the ship. In this recurring memory, there are African individuals crying out, with their hands reaching out through the iron bars of the hold while they are drowning.

A clear parallelism can be drawn between this scene in *Taboo* and the abovementioned one in *Carnival Row*, when the ship that transports mythological creatures to The Burgue wrecks due to a monumental storm. In both cases, the boats become coffin ships that trap the racial Other in the deadly sea, leaving only one survivor, respectively: Vignette, one of the victims, in *Carnival Row*, and Delaney, the colonial perpetrator, in *Taboo*. As Espinoza Garrido claims, “[t]he murder of enslaved people serves as a symbolical original sin of Delaney, and, by implication, the EIC and Britain in the nineteenth century” (218-9). Thus, the series’ ambivalent portrayal of James, as both a repentant slave trader and a willing coloniser, arguably obliterates *Taboo*’s attempt at imperial critique of Britain’s colonial past.

Likewise, there is another liquid space in *Taboo* that symbolises death and colonial endeavours: the river Thames. According to Mousoutzanis, the river’s persistent presence in the show “relates to the recurring symbolism of water in Delaney’s phobias of drowning and sinking, it provides the area of murder and death, it is also the place where Delaney’s Trading Company is located” and it also represents “the entrance to and exit from the Empire” (13). According to one of the show’s creators, Steven Knight, *Taboo* is about “the ships and money and warehouses and docks that formed the engine

of the empire” (qtd. in Mousoutzanis 13). As discussed in section 3.3., London’s haunting presence in neo-Victorian fiction is usually depicted through the River Thames, which often embodies change and transformation, but also invites to re-examine the traces of London’s past (Arias, “Haunted Places, Haunted Spaces” 133).

The river Thames arguably stands for London’s fluidity, which blurs the established “notions of time and space and, to a certain extent, represents the haunting of Victorianism and, specifically, Victorian London in contemporary fiction” (Arias, “Haunted Places, Haunted Spaces” 154). However, the river in *Taboo* might also have a Freudian symbolism, as it is the place where James’s mother tried to drown him when he was just a baby. Ever since that moment, he claims that the dead sign to him in the river, so that he knows when someone close to him has passed away (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 8, 00:30:18-00:30:28). Arias contends that the river Thames in neo-Victorian fiction allows us to establish “a fluid dialogue with the dead” (“Haunted Places, Haunted Spaces” 133), bringing to the surface the buried and encrypted stories of marginalised Victorians. Consequently, James’s ability to communicate with the dead in the river would represent neo-Victorianism’s recuperative and restorative agendas.

Nonetheless, it is also worth noting that, as discussed in previous sections, supernatural abilities were traditionally associated with women in the nineteenth century. Hence, the fact that Delaney—a male character—has these skills points to *Taboo*’s attempts at gender subversion, which can also be seen in James’s affinity with water. He almost drowned in the river as a baby, a type of death that “has associations with the feminine and the irrational, since water is the organic symbol of woman's fluidity: blood, milk, tears” (Showalter 11). Indeed, there are notable examples in Anglo-American literature of female death by drowning, most notably Ophelia in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1611) or Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899). Despite the series’ attempts at gender subversion, Delaney still embodies an ideal of Victorian masculinity, as an authoritative and violent middle-class individual working outside the domestic sphere.

Furthermore, in the neo-Victorian-at-sea, the Victorian period embodies the memory of empire and colonialism so that the sea voyage is used as a recovery work from the imperial past to fulfil the expectations of postcolonial neo-Victorianism (Ho, “The Neo-Victorian-at-Sea” 173). These expectations, for Ho, would include a transnational understanding of neo-Victorian fiction—that would expand and move away from Britain as its centre of production and consumption—and to use the Victorian imperial past as a way to understand globalisation and current neo-imperial practices (Ho, “The Neo-

Victorian-at-Sea” 168). However, neither *Taboo* nor *Carnival Row* seem to achieve a sense of neo-Victorian transnationality, since the centre of their narratives is still the British metropolis. In the case of *Taboo*, India remains largely absent from the series’ depiction of early nineteenth-century London, despite the prominent role that the EIC plays in the show.

Likewise, although Delaney and his mother are of Native American ancestry, the Nootka land never appears in Season 1 of the series –although it will probably play a pivotal role in Season 2, as Delaney and his crew are bound to that territory for imperial purposes. Finally, the vague manner in which Africa is portrayed in the series –since it is only mentioned, but never directly displayed–, as a homogeneous and unified nation, further consolidates a traditional Eurocentric view of the continent. Indeed, James always talks about Africa in a generalizing manner, as if the continent and its people were all one and the same, rather than a number of different countries with their own languages, cultures and histories. James never specifies what countries he visited when he was in the continent, only that he spent twelve years in “Africa”. According to Sonia Saraiya, this “vagueness around Africa” only strengthens a stereotypical understanding of the continent that sharply contrasts with the way in which *Taboo* “excels at creating the texture and nuance of London at this time” (par. 6).

Saraiya emphasises *Taboo*’s exoticisation of Africa through Delaney’s character, as his time on the continent “is given a kind of hand-waving occult power” (par. 5). He performs African rituals, such as the chanting of incantations in a tribal language at his father’s funeral (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 1). He also projects himself in his sister’s dreams by reciting some words in the flames and painting his body with ashes (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 4, 00:19:53-00:21:13). He engages in cannibalism –for instance, when he is attacked by a EIC’s hired assassin and he bites his neck and eats his flesh until he bleeds out (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 2, 00:55:36-00:56:00). However, as Saraiya contends, “without the grounding specifics, these are lazily sketched signifiers about ‘dark magic’, which either capitalise on Delaney’s mixed-race heritage or his time with ‘savage’ tribes” (par. 5). Nonetheless, part of Delaney’s occult power appears to be ascribed to his mother’s Native American heritage, as he himself claims that he had those abilities before arriving in Africa, where he only perfected them: “[w]hen I left England I thought I was mad, but they taught me how to use it. Now it’s a gift” (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 4, 00:41:43-00:41:49).

#### 4. Neo-Victorian Heterotopias on Screen

As a result, both the African continent and the Pacific indigenous territory of North America are portrayed in an Othering fashion in *Taboo*, which obliterates any possible attempt at expanding or moving the geographical focus of the series away from the empire's metropolis. Thus, Ho's ideas on the need to understand neo-Victorianism from a transnational perspective does not seem to apply to *Taboo*. The series might seem to offer a postcolonial understanding of the "violent, ambivalent and moral origins of globalisation" in "a world in which jingoistic nationalism and imperial nostalgia are becoming increasingly potent forces" (Major par. 13), which has led to political scenarios such as Brexit. However, *Taboo*'s ambivalent critique of the empire and colonialism "is accompanied by a tendency to reproduce the motifs, tropes and images that served to legitimate the imperialist project in the first place" (Mousoutzanis 11). Finally, the series fails to grant postcolonial subjects true agency in the screen text through the whitewashing involved in choosing Tom Hardy –a white actor– to play a biracial character, a questionable casting decision that is also present in *Carnival Row*.

*Carnival Row* also attempts to address the contemporary issues of globalisation and neo-imperialism by looking back at the Victorian period as the symbol of our colonial and imperial past from a fantastical perspective. Even though the series manages to establish a connection between nineteenth-century forced diasporas –i.e., the middle passage and the Irish famine– and current refugee and migration crises, it ultimately fails to produce a solid critique of our colonial past due to the whitewashing involved in the casting of white actors Orlando Bloom –as the biracial male protagonist– and Cara Delevingne –as the female protagonist and colonised subject. This casting decision –as in *Taboo*– seems to arise from a need to domesticate and make familiar the racial Other, so that a white audience can satisfy their thirst for inclusivity and racial diversity, while simultaneously being able to identify themselves with the characters on screen.

Furthermore, *Carnival Row* also fails to offer a transnational understanding of the colonial past, given that it is mainly set in the city of The Burgue –a fantastical reimagining of imperial London. Tirnanoc –the colonised land of the fairies that is arguably a conflated representation of the British colonies and nineteenth-century Ireland– only appears in the third episode of Season 1, as a flashback to show how Vignette and Philo met and fell in love. Both in this episode and in the characters' descriptions, Tirnanoc is portrayed as a developing country that needs the help of more advanced human nations to survive and prosper. As a result, this screen text does not really move away from Britain as the main focus of interest, nor does it expand its margins

#### 4. Neo-Victorian Heterotopias on Screen

to include other colonial voices. Likewise, Tirnanoc and its fairy citizens are Othered and exoticised in the series, replicating the way colonised subjects were portrayed by hegemonic discourses during the Victorian period. As a result, both *Taboo* and *Carnival Row* end up reproducing imperial discourses and stereotypes of the ethnic Other that legitimated –and still do– (neo-)imperial endeavours, rather than challenging them.

## **5. PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS IN NEO-VICTORIANISM ON SCREEN: MONSTROUS MOTHERS AND ABSENT FATHERS**

Gender conventions were solidly defined in the Victorian era and established what behavioural and aesthetic traits had to be displayed in order to be considered a ‘real’ man or a ‘proper’ woman (Green and Perry 5). This gendered differentiation was the result of adopting a “separate spheres ideology” in England during the 1830s and 1840s that redefined gender identity, as it forced the duty to economically support the family on men and house chores on women (Lewis 33). This gender dichotomy was rooted in “the impact of industrialisation, institutional life in nineteenth-century western Anglophone nations” (Chambers 34), and transmitted as a biological and uncontested differentiation through the nuclear family (Danahay 1). It forced both males and females to visibly perform their respective sexes and established a “hierarchal relationship” where “the responsibility of being the worker and financial provider [was placed] onto men, and the role of homemaker, childraiser, and source of purity and redemption onto women” (Lewis 33).

As Deborah Chambers points out, the concept of family has been exploited since the nineteenth century to “domesticate the empire” and to establish a hierarchical system that negotiates questions of race, gender and class by epitomising white, middle-class, heteronormative and patriarchal models of family life. Both the institution of the family and the fixed gender roles it promotes have been transmitted and made natural through a number of discourses, including “biological, scientific, psychological and historical codes of knowledge” (Chambers 33). However, the need to teach people to perform these seemingly instinctive roles through education, history or politics seems to contradict their assumed naturalness and universality. Although the myth of the ‘natural’ nuclear family has been in place since the nineteenth century –as well as the gender roles it transmits–, it also has a disruptive and subversive counterpart, the dysfunctional one:

embedded within the sign of the privatised, consumerised, feminised and spectacularised ideal family lurks its ‘other’: the dysfunctional family form. The modern functional family cannot operate effectively as a regulatory ideal without inventing the idea of being under siege from deeply disruptive forces. The dysfunctional family, and its individual members, act as a counterfoil, as a permanent reminder of the need to fight for the preservation of the ideal as

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

something more than a myth, as something that once existed and that must be recovered (Chambers 66).

Victorian gender conventions were transmitted from parents to children within the nuclear family. Female characters that subvert these gender precepts in (neo-)Victorian literature are either labelled ‘fallen women’ or ‘adulteresses’, if their misbehaviours are of a sexual nature (Kühl 171), as in the case of Vanessa Ives in *Penny Dreadful* or Lucille Sharpe in *Crimson Peak*. They could also be pejoratively referred to as ‘strong-minded’, an adjective that frequently collocated with the noun ‘woman’ in the long nineteenth century. This resulted in a social archetype that became associated with a wide range of women that were masculinised due to their professions –e.g., governesses, artists or nurses–, but that also applied to intellectuals and feminist activists that opposed the impositions of the marriage institution (Monrós-Gaspar 123). This Victorian category predates the development of the ‘New woman’, a *fin-de-siècle* phenomenon that encompassed multiple female transgressive identities that broke moulds in the Victorian era: “a feminist activist, a social reformer, a popular novelist, a suffragette playwright, a woman poet; she was also often a fictional construct, a discursive response to the activities of the late nineteenth-century women’s movement” (Ledger 1). As discussed in previous chapters, subversive women could also be defined by Victorian society as madwomen and be confined in the infamous Victorian asylum or in the attic of the family house.

These subversive Victorian women are also constructed as ‘monstrous’ or deviant mothers that fragment the nuclear family by not submitting to the maternal and passive roles dictated by Victorian gender conventions. Indeed, the term “dysfunctional” was used to designate female individuals who did not conform to traditional understandings of femininity and motherhood to demonise and ostracise them. As Chamber claims, “[d]ysfunctionality is [...] used as a regulatory device, within tragedy for the exploration and condemnation of troubled figures picked out for moral scrutiny and who cause or come from profoundly troubled family relationships” (67). Likewise, as Marianne Hirsch contends, mothers who did not identify with conventional notions of femininity and motherhood became primary negative role models for their daughters (11).

There are plenty of examples of this trope in the screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis, most notably in *Crimson Peak*, where the Sharpe siblings’ mother was abusive and cruel to them while simultaneously being a victim of gender-based violence. *Penny Dreadful* also presents an adulterous or fallen woman, Vanessa’s mother, who arguably



## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

awakens the latter's sexual desires through her own adultery. *Carnival Row* explores two different types of monstrous motherhood. On the one hand, the murderous, possessive and overbearing mother and, on the other hand, the absent and abandoning one. Finally, *Taboo* portrays a colonised madwoman in the attic that was stripped of her language and culture and forced into a nuclear family. As a result, she went mad, attempted to murder her baby and was finally sent to a mental institution. In all these cases, mothers are forced to repent and conform to the gender conventions of proper motherhood, or are severely punished for their transgressions: they are trapped in the attic, sent to a mental institution or murdered.

Moreover, the female characters portrayed in these screen texts are arguably appropriations of mothers and daughters from both classical and biblical myths –such as Demeter and Persephone, Medea or the biblical Virgin Mary and her counterpart, Mary Magdalene–, who challenged the established gender conventions traditionally related to women. By relocating these classical characters to a neo-Victorian context, the creators of these screen texts are exploring the continuities and matrilineal connections between ancient, Victorian and contemporary women. In addition, they also examine how the depiction of subversive and rebellious female characters as ‘monstrous’ and unfeminine perpetuate patriarchal ideologies that had been in place since ancient times.

On a different note, even though male gender subversions have not been as thoroughly theorised and examined as in the case of their female counterparts, the screen texts analysed here explore the question of failed Victorian masculinities and offer new perspectives on how men can also challenge patriarchal expectations. TV series like *Taboo* or *Penny Dreadful* present absent fathers that could neither provide nor protect their children. They also subvert the female trope of the madwoman in the attic –a pseudo-mental condition perpetually associated with women and believed to be transmitted through a matrilineal line–, in that this madness is also experienced by men and passed from fathers to sons. Finally, *Crimson Peak* offers an insight into gender reversal, as it portrays ‘weak’ men that depend on strong-minded women in order for their families to survive.

It is also worth noting how these neo-Victorian screen texts depict a number of surrogate mothers and fathers who adopt orphan or abandoned children, therefore creating a family of choice. Despite the fact that non-birth mothers were “controversial figures” in the Victorian period (Harrison 106), they are portrayed in a very positive light in my corpus of analysis, especially in the case of the Cut-Wife –who acts as Vanessa's mentor

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

in *Penny Dreadful*– or the female ghosts in *Crimson Peak* –thanks to whom Edith can discover the siblings’ crimes. In compensating the lack of parental affection by offering abandoned adult children a family of choice, these neo-Victorian screen texts challenge the myth of the ideal nuclear family, bringing to the fore its flaws and inconsistencies.

In this chapter, I analyse the (neo-)Victorian tropes of the monstrous mother and the absent father in the screen texts that conform my corpus of analysis, and I argue that they are the result of the subversion of Victorian gender conventions within the nuclear family. The mothers and fathers depicted in these texts are blamed for the fragmentation and dysfunctionalities of their respective families. However, I contend that they are also victims of the patriarchal Victorian ‘separate spheres’ ideology, even though their failed attempts to break those established gender moulds have a direct psychological impact on their children. In section 5.1. I examine the prominent trope of ‘monstrous mothers’ in neo-Victorianism on screen and how the mother’s influence plays a pivotal role in shaping and developing their children’s personalities. Finally, section 5.2. deals with absent fathers –a rather frequent figure in both Victorian and neo-Victorian narratives–, but also surrogate fatherhood, which brings to the fore contemporary anxieties about the collapse of the traditional family with the rise of new family models, such as queer families or single mother/fatherhood, among others.

### 5.1. Adapting Mother Figures for a (Neo-)Victorian Context: Monstrous Motherhood and Subversive Femininity

The development of femininity and womanhood through motherhood is a prominent topic in neo-Victorian literary and screen texts, where it is clearly defined by the abovementioned separate spheres ideology. According to this ideology, “such gender roles are defined by the mother’s location within a defined domestic sphere that is separate from the outside world of work and experience” (Shachar 224). Indeed, Julia Kristeva contends that we live in a society where “the *consecrated* (religious or secular) representation of femininity is subsumed under maternity” (Kristeva, “Stabat Mater” 133). This definition of motherhood and femininity has been deemed “narrow” and the concept of the Victorian separate spheres has long been challenged, owing to the fact that is too simplistic and reductionist (Rosenberg, Davidson, Lasser). Nevertheless, the purpose of neo-Victorian studies is not to analyse the Victorian past itself, but rather to examine how contemporary rewritings of the long nineteenth century adapt this period.

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

As Shachar contends, neo-Victorian texts use the term ‘Victorian’ in “its most simplified form”, proving that we have inherited these narrow understandings of femininity and the nuclear family, “which find their way into popular culture through their assumed attachment to the Victorian age” (224). As a result, I follow the definition of motherhood based on what Nancy Armstrong labels “the domestic woman”, a female character who was granted a form of private power in Victorian England:

This power emerged with the rise of the domestic woman and established its hold over British culture through her dominance over all those objects and practices we associate with private life. To her went authority over the household, leisure time, courtship procedures, and kinship relations, and under her jurisdiction the most basic qualities of human identity were supposed to develop (3).

The Victorian era has long been considered to be the product of a patriarchal system, where women’s lives were dictated and controlled by a male authority. However, if we take a closer look at (neo-)Victorian narratives of family traumas we can discern a “female genealogy” in which mothers are not always mere victims, but also “the wardens of the patriarchal prison and perpetrators of ‘punishment,’ thus leading their daughters either to ‘matrophobia’ or engulfment by the mother” (Braid, “Mother against Daughter” 91). According to Nadine Muller, “matrilineal genealogies” have come to be a prominent motif in contemporary literature and popular culture, especially in the case of neo-Victorian fiction of the late twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century (110).

Lucille Sharpe, one of the villains in *Crimson Peak*, had a conflicting relationship with her mother, as the latter was simultaneously a victim of domestic violence and an abuser who severely punished, isolated and battered her two children. She used to confine them in the attic, where they engaged in a romantic and sexual relationship that she eventually discovered. Lucille then murdered her so that she would not try to separate her from Thomas, and then assumed that authoritative matriarchal role herself. As I contend elsewhere (“Fictionalising the Unspeakable” 225), Lucille is constructed as the patriarchal villain of the story. *Crimson Peak* exploits the trope of gender reversal, as the male characters in the film –most notably, Sir Thomas and Dr Alan McMichael– are passive and submissive, “existing in the background”, while the female characters –Edith and Lucille– are the ones that “hold the agency” (Lukancic, “Modifying the Gothic”). Thomas is portrayed as a failed Victorian man and husband from the beginning of the

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

film. When he first meets Edith's father, the latter despises him because he does not possess the physical strength ascribed to the ideal of Victorian masculinity, nor can he provide for a future wife or family: "The men at this table, all of us, came up through honest, hard work [...] I started as a steel worker raising buildings before I could own them. My hands. Feel them. Rough. The reflection of who I am. Now, you, sir, when I shook your hand... You've got the softest hands I've ever felt" (Del Toro, 00:08:56-00:09:29). Later on, after marrying Edith, Thomas still sees himself as a failed man, given that his efforts to modernise the family mines have not succeeded, and Edith is the one supporting the family economically: "My machine will never work. Never. Why do I keep deluding myself? Why did I bring you here? Who did you marry? A failure" (Del Toro, 01:00:05-01:00:18).

Nevertheless, gender reversal is particularly exploited through the character of Lucille in *Crimson Peak*. Even though she usurped her mother's role as the matriarch of the Sharpe family in order to exert her power over Thomas, I argue that her authority is actually of a patriarchal nature, given that she controls her brothers' vulnerable wives and their money. She keeps them trapped and isolated inside the family house, poisons them and eventually kills them to keep their money. She even exerts physical violence against Edith, when she pushes her down the stairs, after the latter finds out about her and Thomas's romantic involvement (Del Toro, 01:30:00-01:30:16). As discussed above, Lucille and Thomas's mother was a victim of gender-based violence, whose husband abandoned the family after dilapidating their fortune. However, she later assumed the role of perpetrator, abusing her own children and confining them in the nursery in the attic. It seems that Lucille has taken up her parents' role as a patriarchal perpetrator and administrator of the family's finances, whilst Thomas has assumed a more submissive one. According to Muller, in patriarchal societies "women usually serve as commodities within transactions between men (be it through marriage, prostitution, or other cultural customs); consequently, in such a structure, they are unable to act as autonomous transaction partners themselves" (116). However, femicide –both her mother's and Thomas's wives'– allows Lucille to gain a certain level of agency, whereas Thomas is the one that has to secure the family fortune through marriages of convenience. This gender reversal actually disrupts "the masculine system of exchange" (116), especially by portraying Thomas as the object –rather than the subject– of the transaction. However, as a woman, Lucille seems to still be attached to the domestic sphere, since she hardly ever leaves the place: she spends most of her time doing the domestic chores.

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

On a different note, the pillars of Western culture are not only built on the “symbolic death of the father”, but especially on the death of the mother and the rupture of the mother-daughter ties (Braid, “Mother against Daughter” 91). However, women can now reflect on this patriarchal and cultural transition and reassess the mother-daughter relationship through neo-Victorian fiction. Classical myths that revolve around the complex bond between mothers and daughters, such as Demeter and Persephone or Clytemnestra and Electra, are often used as categories for analysis of these matrilineal relationships (Hirsch 2). Whilst the former can be interpreted as a female union against patriarchal violence, it can also be seen as a possessive mother that refuses to let her child go and become an adult woman. On the other hand, in the case of Electra’s story we see

a daughter’s need to metaphorically ‘kill’ her mother to be able to mature into female sexuality and replace her mother. It seems that severing the ties with one’s mother is an important element of maturation into adult femininity; otherwise, a woman might be threatened by engulfment by the possessive mother who sees her daughter as an extension of her own body and identity (Braid, “Mother against Daughter” 92).

Lucille is not a working woman, and she actually earns the money Thomas and she need to renovate the family mines through patriarchal violence. Even though she transgresses Victorian gender conventions –given that she is not a chaste, passive or docile woman, but quite the opposite–, she only adopts negative behavioural traits that have traditionally been considered to be masculine. These are mainly violence, authority and possessiveness. Moreover, she subverts the conventional role of the angel of the house by becoming a mad-woman outside of the attic. Lucille is the mistress of the house, keeping the only set of keys and deciding what rooms Edith can set foot into. When the latter asks for a copy of those keys, she replies: “There are parts of the house that are unsafe. It will take you a few days to familiarize yourself. Then, should you still feel you need them, I’ll have copies made” (Del Toro, 00:43:24-00:43:30). Through this exchange, Lucille is asserting herself as the mistress of the house, the one who is familiarised with its surroundings and darkest secrets, whilst Edith is merely an intruder.

Lucille also holds a ferocious and possessive control over Thomas, who obeys his sister’s orders to the letter, as if he were still a child, and Lucille, his overbearing mother. Even though she believes that her “monstrous love” for her brother is reciprocated and

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

everlasting, he is actually trapped in that relationship, but feels guilty to leave his sister. Lucille herself claims that “[t]he only love Thomas and I ever knew was from one another” (Del Toro, 01:39:31-01:39:34). However, when Thomas marries Edith and falls in love with her, he realises that his relationship with his sister has been parasitical and co-dependent. Indeed, Bernice M. Murphy asserts that “the Sharp [*sic*] siblings are vampires of a sort – ‘Honeymoon Killer’ – financial leeches who travel the world targeting vulnerable but wealthy young women” (161). Lucille imposed this predatory and vampiric lifestyle on Thomas and forced him to marry these women –but forbid him to have sexual intercourse with them– in order to save their family’s legacy: the ancestral house and mines. She then exerted the same matriarchal power over those women, keeping them imprisoned so that they could not reach out for their families’ help.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Edith is an orphan woman whose mother died of black cholera when she was still a child. Shortly after, her mother’s ghost started to haunt her, acting as a guardian spirit that warned her about a place known as “Crimson Peak”. Thus, Edith grew up without a female role model, which left her with a need to fill a maternal and emotional void, making her an easy prey for the parasitical Sharpe siblings. The lack of maternal affection that Edith experienced throughout her life makes her accept Lucille as a female authority that governs and manipulates her. In this, Edith could be compared to Margaret, the female protagonist of Waters’s novel *Affinity*, who longs “for an ‘affinity’ with another woman who could replace her mother makes her naïve and an easy target for the impostors” (Braid, “Mother against Daughter” 94). Thus, both Edith and Thomas are oppressed by Lucille in the domestic sphere, where she rules over the family, as her late mother once did. Nonetheless, when she threatens to kill Edith by the end of the film, Thomas rebels against her authority for the first time: “Yes, she will live. You’re not to touch her” (Del Toro, 01:40:26-01:40:29). His newfound love for Edith seems to have given him a new purpose in life. He wants to escape his family house and form a new family with Edith: “We let the Sharpe name die with the mines. We let this edifice sink in the ground. All these years holding these walls together. We would be free. Free, Lucille. We can all be together” (Del Toro, 01:40:40-01:40:52).

However, Lucille is so absorbed by her mother and by the power and authority she holds in the house that she cannot bring herself to leave the only life she knows behind. Although haunted house narratives often cause “a rebirth in which the survivors escape from a house which is a metaphoric ‘bad mother’” (Curtis 16), Lucille’s ghost remains attached to Allerdale Hall after being murdered by Edith. According to Braid,

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

daughters who have had “a new chance outside the Victorian realm of angel/demon femininity” can finally “rebel against” their own mothers (“Mother against Daughter” 96). Then, they can embrace a more positive and emancipating form of motherhood, and even create a new family of their own—without the influence of their past family traumas and negative maternal bonds. Nonetheless, this is not the case of Lucille, who was not given the chance of experiencing family life outside of Allerdale Hall. Hence, she had no choice but to be engulfed by her mother’s authoritative figure and to compulsively repeat the vicious cycle she had initiated, believing that this way she would be perpetuating the Sharpe family’s legacy. Thus, Del Toro portrays the negative influence of a monstrous mother on the Sharpe family, but does not allow Lucille to overcome that trauma by experiencing a more positive understanding of motherhood outside domestic entrapment. Unlike Edith or Vanessa in *Penny Dreadful*, she is not offered the possibility of joining a family of choice. Instead, she is punished for following her mother’s negative model (Hirsch 11). Moreover, this could also be an example of LaCapra’s theory on the “fidelity to trauma”, which some traumatised patients seem to have. As explained in Chapter 3, this refers to a belief that if one works through their trauma, “one is betraying those who were overwhelmed and consumed by that traumatic past” (22). Following LaCapra’s reasoning, Lucille holds to her childhood trauma and the violence she has caused after that because she is loyal to that pain, and does not want to betray her past self, who was consumed and forever marked by it.

Muller argues that the mother’s influence is omnipresent in the daughter’s life, as the latter is bound to either perform a role that is very similar to the one her mother adopted or the complete opposite one (109-10). Even though at first it might seem that Lucille is imitating her mother’s behaviour through violence against other women, her criminal offenses could actually be interpreted as a way to “escape from the matrilineal identity defined by madness and oppression” (Muller 117). Lady Sharpe oppressed and abused her children so that Lucille murdered her in order to escape from her abuse – ironically perpetuating maternal violence. Consequently, Lady Sharpe’s “hereditary maternal identity” is doubly present in Lucille, as she has her mother’s blood in her hands as well as inside of her (Muller 115). Even if her first intention was to put an end to her mother’s violence and tyranny, her violent performances are actually influenced by her. In fact, she has, in a way, inherited her mother’s matrilineal identity, and been overcome by her. She has become a patriarchal perpetrator, using other women—her brother’s wives—as a product for economic exchange purposes. Lucille would then be an example

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

of what Muller describes as female perpetrators who “are willing to reinforce the status of women as commodities in masculine transactions by imitating the masculine role of the transaction partner who trades in women, hence not altering the status or nature of the commodity” (Muller 119-20).

One question, then, arises: how can Lucille, whose identity has been determined by her matrilineal inheritance, construct her own sense of self? The answer seems to be that she cannot. After being raised by abusive and absent parents, confined in a crumbling and putrid house with her brother Thomas as her only companion, Lucille is not capable of conceiving a life outside that cycle of violence and corruption. After brutally killing her brother, she is murdered by Edith in self-defence. Lucille then becomes the only remaining ghost in Allerdale Hall, as her identity is completely tied to that place and to the story of her family. As Edith claims at the end of the film, there are ghosts that remain tied to a place in the world of the living, holding to a strong emotion, such as love or revenge. This seems to be the case of Lucille:

Ghosts are real. This much I know. There are things that tie them to a place, very much like they do us. Some remain tethered to a patch of land. A time and date. The spilling of blood. A terrible crime. But there are others. Others that hold onto an emotion. A drive. Loss. Revenge. Or love. Those, they never go away (Del Toro, 01:50:04-01:51:20).

Another neo-Victorian daughter whose relationship with her mother is dysfunctional is Vanessa in *Penny Dreadful*. As discussed in the previous chapter, Vanessa’s sexual awakening was triggered by the discovery of her mother and Sir Malcolm having sexual intercourse when she was still an adolescent. When she becomes a young adult, she follows her mother’s pattern of sexual transgressions by seducing her friend’s Mina’s fiancé the night before their wedding, an event that unleashes a string of misfortunes for Vanessa. Although Mrs. Ives pretends to be shocked and ashamed of her daughter’s unladylike behaviour, Vanessa’s actions are arguably rooted in her mother’s own unfaithfulness. When Mrs. Ives reproaches Vanessa, “[h]ave you no shame? Get upstairs this instant!”, daughter replies, “[h]ow dare you speak to me of shame? Get upstairs yourself and make amends with my father! (Logan, Season 1, Episode 5, 00:23:16-00:23:27).



## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

However, it seems that Vanessa wants to fully develop her sexual potential and then replace her mother as an adult woman. This seems to be confirmed when Vanessa is confined in her bedroom after being released from the asylum, where she was treated for female hysteria. Both during her time as a patient in the asylum and in her domestic confinement, she was frequently visited by the Devil, who took many forms and disguised himself as Vanessa's friends and relatives. In one of his visits, he presented himself as Sir Malcolm, her mother's lover and Mina's father, and seduced her.<sup>40</sup> Startled by Vanessa's noises, her mother went up to her room and discovered that Vanessa was having sexual intercourse with an invisible and diabolical entity, which caused her to have a deathly stroke (Logan, Season 1, Episode 5, 00:43:50-45:11). Feeling guilty for her mother's death, and after discovering that Mina has been abducted, Vanessa decides to resist the Devil's advances and devote all her efforts to find and rescue her friend.

Throughout the series, Vanessa is referred to by Dracula's subjects and minions as "The Mother of Evil", an all-powerful creature that appears to be the reincarnation of the Egyptian goddess Amunet. She is described in satanic prophecies as being capable of freeing one of the fallen angels, Dracula or Lucifer, from their respective prisons and help them dethrone the Christian God. Vampires call her 'mother' and she rules over them when she finally submits to Dracula, bringing about a pestilent apocalypse. Given the religious imagery that surrounds this character, and the fact that she is described as a dark maternal figure and a giver of life for the creatures of the night, Vanessa could be compared to other mother figures from the Bible. In terms of power, Vanessa is arguably the counterpart of the Virgin Mary, the most powerful and venerated female figure in the Christian religion. As Kristeva points out:

It is interesting to observe that it is Mary, woman and mother, who takes it upon herself to represent the supreme terrestrial power. Christ is king, but it is neither Jesus nor his Father that one sees wearing crowns, diadems, sumptuous robes, and other external signs of abundant material wealth. The Virgin Mary became the center of this twisting of Christian idealism in the direction of opulence. When she later assumed the title of Our Lady, moreover, it was by analogy with the noble lady of the feudal court ("Stabat Mater" 140).

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<sup>40</sup> As I explain in the next section, this scene could actually be considered sexual assault, given that Vanessa's is being manipulated by the Devil. Therefore, her consent is dubious here, and interpreting this scene as one of her sexual transgressions would be a form of victim-blaming.

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

The Virgin Mary has for centuries been constructed by Christian societies as the epitome of motherhood and purity and the embodiment of proper womanhood. However, Vanessa would actually represent the opposite of this religious figure, given that she is the Mother of Evil, the one that nurtures and empowers vampires –who feast on human blood. Moreover, she is neither pure nor abnegated, given that she consummates her carnal union with Dracula through a blood exchange and sexual intercourse, sacrificing humanity’s safety and freedom in the process. Richard Logsdon contends that her transgressions, at least “from a traditional Christian perspective, are certainly many: on her road back to Christ, she becomes a witch, a clairvoyant, an adulteress, and a murderer” (18). As a result, her many sexual indiscretions and betrayal to her Catholic God separate from the Virgin Mary, who would be considered a positive female role model for both motherhood and proper femininity.

In fact, Vanessa’s gender transgressions and her portrayal as a monstrous mother –and the mother of monstrous creatures– evoke yet another female character from the Bible: Mary Magdalene. This religious figure has, for centuries, attracted the attention of priests and evangelists, but also musicians, playwrights, poets and other artists, who have offered conflicted representations of this faithful disciple.<sup>41</sup> She has been described as both “a great sinner and a great saint” (Jansen xv). Nonetheless, we usually picture Mary Magdalene as a “sexually experienced figure, often described as a prostitute, as a reformed prostitute, and as desirable object, occasionally depicted as waiting in the garden for her lover to appear” (Loewen and Vaugh 5): traits that Vanessa also displays.

Therefore, Vanessa could arguably be considered the evil antithesis of the Virgin Mary, a sexually active woman that only seeks to feel accepted for what she really is, given that she is tired of trying to fit in a society that rejects her unless she represses her natural impulses. At the same time, Vanessa remains –as Mary Magdalene– devoted to her Catholic God throughout the series, or, as Logsdon puts it, she is “God addicted” (20).

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<sup>41</sup> Mary Magdalene is considered as one of Jesus’s disciples, given that she followed him until he died and was buried: “[I]os evangelios sinópticos la mencionan como la primera de un grupo de mujeres que contemplaron de lejos la crucifixión de Jesús (Mc 15,40-41 y par.) y que se quedaron sentadas frente al sepulcro (Mt 27,61) mientras sepultaban a Jesús (Mc 15,47)” (“¿Quién fue María Magdalena?” par. 3)/ “The synoptic Gospels mention [Mary Magdalene] as the first of a group of women who watched Jesus’s crucifixion from afar (Mk 15,40-41 and par.) and who remained seated in front of the Holy Sepulchre (Mt 27,61) while Jesus was being buried (Mk 15.47)” (“¿Quién fue María Magdalena?” par. 3; my translation). Indeed, she is considered by the Eastern Catholic Church as “Isapostolos”, a word that equates the term “apostle”, and the Western Church calls her “Apostola Apostolorum” (Apostle of Apostles) (“¿Quién fue María Magdalena?” par. 4).

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

Nonetheless, God seems to have forsaken her, especially by the end of Season 3, when she finally submits to Dracula as his dark companion because he accepts her true nature and does not ask her to repress her true impulses: “I don’t want to make you good. I don’t want you to be normal. I don’t want you to be anything but who you truly are. You have tried for so long to be what everyone wants you to be. [...] Why not be who you are instead?” (Logan, Season 3, Episode 7, 00:54:00-00:54:47). Therefore, after a lifetime of repressing her sexual desires and fiercely fighting against that part of herself that wanted to be free, Vanessa finally “accepts” herself (Logan, Season 3, Episode 7, 00:55:09-00:55:13), condemning humanity to a perpetual night.

Nevertheless, in the last minute she repents and decides to sacrifice her individual happiness to save humanity –an altruistic stance that also saves her soul from eternal damnation. She asks Ethan Chandler, The Wolf of God and her supernatural beloved, to execute her in order to vanquish Dracula. Whilst Tomaiuolo claims that Vanessa’s sacrifice is an act of self-acceptance and liberation –since death will put an end to her never-ending battle against evil (172)– I contend that her death is actually a punishment for her lust and female emancipation –two traits that were deemed unladylike by Victorian society. Even though *Penny Dreadful* first presents Vanessa as an independent and powerful woman who does not follow Victorian gender conventions, at the end of the series she is forced to adopt a self-sacrificing role, renouncing her potential happiness, as a mother that gives up her dreams for the good of her children. In this case, then, Vanessa would not be acting as “the Mother of Evil”, but rather as the Mother of all living creatures. Thus, she transitions from being Evil’s source of power and a sexually active “Mary Magdalene” to a Victorian and Gothicised version of the Virgin Mary, who prioritises her children’s –i.e., humanity– safety and happiness over her own.

Moreover, she could also be compared to Mary’s son, Jesus Christ, as she decides to sacrifice herself for her sinner children. Therefore, it seems that the only way that Vanessa can atone for her sexual transgressions –both her union with Dracula and her past affairs– is by adopting a submissive and maternal role, more in line with Victorian and Christian precepts of Victorian womanhood. As Kristeva points out, the Virgin Mary “knows that she is destined to that eternity (of spirit or species) of which every mother is subconsciously aware, and in relation to which the devotion, or even the sacrifice, of motherhood is but a ridiculously small price to pay”, given that “compared with the love that binds mother to son, all other ‘human relationships’ stand revealed as flagrant imitation” (“Stabat Mater” 142). However, as Gina Wisker contends, constructing women

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

as characters that are on either side of an antithetic spectrum –as either saints or sinners, virgins or prostitutes, devoted or monstrous mothers– is the result of a patriarchal and misogynistic ideology that has long been adopted in Gothic narratives (154).

Consequently, despite the series' apparent effort to subvert Victorian conventions and advocate for an emancipating and liberating feminism, *Penny Dreadful* arguably ends up demonizing female sexuality and independence, celebrating, instead, traditional understandings of femininity attached to concepts such as motherhood, sacrifice and atonement. As Amy Montz points out in her comparison between *Penny Dreadful* and *Crimson Peak*:

Set in a time of few women's rights, both texts see a woman's role as Magdalene or Mary, whore or virgin, without the benefit of male dominance. Both texts, I argue, ultimately fail their main female characters' embrace of their own sexuality and exploration of their sexual desires. Both of these contemporary texts, true to the inheritance of the three centuries of the gothic genre before it, punish their female protagonists for their desire, their sexual triumphs and dominance, and their odd paranormal sight (57).

On a different note, literature and popular culture are riddled with murderous and monstrous mothers, who display an acute sense of hatred towards their own children, even during the time when they are still in their wombs. This appears to be the case of Salish, James Delaney's Native American mother in *Taboo*. As discussed in the previous chapter, she tried to drown James in the river when she was just a baby, covered in tribal paint, laughing and contorting her body in such a manner that she was deemed a madwoman. Monstrous mothers like her have traditionally been compared to Medea, a female character in Greek mythology that "inevitably comes to mind when we encounter a mother murdering her child in literature" (Foster 81).

Medea is the central character of the ancient Greek tragedy written by Euripedes, based on the myth of Jason and Medea, which was first performed in 431 BC. In the tragedy, Medea murders her own two children and her husband's mistress, a princess of Corinth. This violent act –which runs counter to traditional definitions and understandings of mothers as loving and protective of their children (Stern 321)– has long been interpreted as an act of vengeance against her husband, Jason, for being unfaithful and

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

abandoning her.<sup>42</sup> There has been a certain controversy as to whether it was actually Euripides's innovation to have Medea murder her two children, since in older versions they were killed by the Corinthians or suffered accidental deaths. However, his version of Medea is the one that has prevailed over the centuries, as it portrays a very complex figure. She "is a vulnerable female from a foreign land but she also talks and behaves in a way that is usually attributed to male characters, she is victim but also aggressor, desirable woman and undesirable witch" (Bartel 57).

Salish seems to follow this pattern, as she is a colonised subject, forcefully taken into a foreign country, where she has to adopt a rigid code of femininity that she does not understand. She is a victim of her husband, a patriarchal perpetrator, but also an aggressor, as she tries to take her own son's life. Thus, I argue that Salish is a racialized 'Medean' mother, who does not quite succeed in her attempt to take revenge against her husband by murdering her own son, and is punished by the Victorian patriarchal and racist system, instead. From a feminist perspective, Salish also fits the definition of a 'Medean' figure, as she embodies "the need to escape identity-constricting cultural, political and economic forces and to achieve personal liberty" (Bartel and Simon 4). Nonetheless, in the end, she is not allowed to do so, as her husband confines her in Bedlam asylum, where she eventually dies.

Unlike other Western European countries, Britain followed the canon law dictated by Rome regarding divorce, which did not allow married couples to separate, but for a few exceptions that favoured wealthy and privileged men in detriment to their wives. Surprisingly, there was little opposition against this restrictive legislation until the nineteenth century, when things started to change. Up to that moment, "fathers had uncontested rights to custody of children of a marriage under all circumstances, regardless of which spouse was at fault and regardless of the age of the children. Fathers could also ban all contact between children and their mothers" (Hall 52). In 1837 things started to change, since the Infant Custody Act was passed in Parliament, allowing women to get the children's custody until the age of seven and visitation rights after that. However, this did not prevent public fears that divorce would lead "to the impoverishment of an increasing number of abandoned wives and children" (Hall 53).

This social injustice is also reflected in *Taboo* through James's mother. As a colonised woman, Salish was doubly oppressed by her English husband, who had full

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<sup>42</sup> Edward S. Stern proposes the term "Medea complex" in clinical psychiatry to refer to "[t]he situation in which the mother harbours death wishes to her offspring, usually as a revenge against the father" (330).

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

control over her life and their son's. Even though she was not happy in her marriage, she could not divorce her husband, nor could she be granted James's custody. As an ethnic woman in nineteenth-century England, society favoured her husband's authority, whereas she was deprived of basic human rights, such as speaking her Native language or claiming her identity as a Nootka woman. As discussed in the previous chapter, Salish was not "allowed to walk the streets, nor show her face in public, nor speak in English, nor her savage tongue because she was a mad woman" (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 3, 00:23:24-00:23:34).

Against this socio-historical backdrop, where divorce legislation favoured the husband, whilst wives risked poverty and being separated from their children, Salish's murderous actions can be better understood. In the same way as Euripides' Medea sees killing her children as her "only means of asserting maternal possession and control and fulfilling [her] 'maternal contract'" (Bartel and Simon 5), Salish wanted to protect her biracial son from following in his father's footsteps, that is to say, from becoming a colonial perpetrator in the service of the British empire. This idea is arguably backed up by the fact that Salish's ghost haunts James as an adult man –right after his African expeditions–, as flashbacks during his time as a slave trader in the middle passage disrupt his present life in London. Salish's ghost arguably reminds James of his ethnic origins and forces him to reflect on both his and his father's imperial atrocities. However, James is a conflicted character, both repentant of his past crimes against humanity and avid of new colonizing adventures in Nootka Sound, her mother's Native land. Even though he resents his father for buying his mother "for beads and gunpowder" (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 1, 00:24:39-00:24:42), he is bound to perpetuate his imperial atrocities in the newly founded United States.

Likewise, some of the most prominent psychological traits of Medean mothers across history are their madness and violent anger, "which are tied to the fraught questions of home, nation, and the Other" (Hendrickson 1). As it has been previously discussed, Salish is portrayed across Season 1 as a madwoman, given that she was a Native American individual that refused to adopt the British language and costumes, and still practised the rituals of her Nootka tribe. However, the decisive factor in labelling her a madwoman was the fact that she tried to drown her own son in the river. As James's servant tells him, it was his mother's violence and murderous actions against him that forced his father to have her committed in an asylum:

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

Do you know she took you down to the river to drown you? Carried you across the foreshore. A tiny baby in her arms, innocent and sweet, she waded in. Held you under, until the bubbles stopped! She was deranged James! That's why your father had her committed to Bedlam. To protect you. To save your life, son. She was desperate for your death! It took three men to pull you apart. She was clawing and spitting. Dragged from the river – howling and screaming! (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 6, 00:07:10-00:03:41).

Despite *Taboo*'s seemingly postcolonial and feminist agenda, the racialized woman is constructed as an evil and monstrous mother by other characters in the show, while her white husband is depicted as the hero that saved his son's life and protected him from further danger. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, due to the separate spheres ideology, nineteenth-century women were responsible for looking after and raising their children. Those who did not conform to these gender conventions, as in the case of Salish, were considered dysfunctional, monstrous, or even mad. The fact that Salish is not given a voice in the text, and is depicted by others as a dangerous madwoman, perpetuates –instead of challenging– this misogynistic and patriarchal portrayal of Victorian motherhood.

As explained above, James appears to have inherited his mother's madness, which once again points to the idea that the children –in this case, the son– is influenced by the mother, even if she is absent from their life, as she can still haunt them as a ghost. According to Muller, this is particularly the case with “deviant and/or mad mothers, [who] despite their frequent absence, commonly have a threatening and dangerous presence in their daughters, who by heredity carry at least the potential for or tendency toward their mothers' behaviours or illnesses” (111). Salish haunts James's dreams and thoughts, forcing him to reflect on his past and future colonizing endeavours.

In a similar vein, Edith's mother in *Crimson Peak* died when the female protagonist was still a child, and her story is not explored in depth in the film. We only get to know her through her ghostly form –a flouting, black skeleton-like figure with a phantasmagoric and raspy voice– and her daughter, who claims that she died of black cholera. Although she has been absent from her daughter's adult life, she is still present, as a lingering ghost that warns and protects her from the Sharpe siblings. Despite the fact that Edith was raised by her father, and that she felt an especial connection with him, it is

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

not his ghost that haunts and guides her, but her mother's, which seems to prove that mothers have a defining impact in their daughters' lives in neo-Victorianism on screen.

Likewise, the ghosts haunting Allerdale Hall –i.e., Thomas's deceased wives and mother– are all women and victims of the siblings' patriarchal violence, who join forces to protect and guide Edith –or any possible future wife– to discover the Sharpe family's secrets. After her father's death, Edith becomes an orphan –without any close friends or relatives–, so that the female ghosts in Allerdale Hall could be considered as her surrogate family: a feminist sorority that unites in order to fight against domestic violence.

Going back to the concept of Medean mothers in neo-Victorianism on screen, there is another female character in the neo-Victorian screen texts analysed here that fits this pattern: Piety Breakspear, the wife of The Burgue's Chancellor, Absalom Breakspear, and Jonah's mother in *Carnival Row*. Unlike Salish, she is not an ethnic character according to the racial hierarchy presented in *Carnival Row*, which, as discussed in previous chapters, is not based on skin colour, but on whether an individual is human or a mythological creature. Piety is actually the epitome of an upper-class Burguishwoman, as she comes from a noble caste, but could not inherit her family's title and land because she was a woman. As a result, she moved to The Burgue, where she married Breakspear, a young man from a well-off family, as an oracle she consulted prophesied that he would become a very successful man, and his unborn child would even surpass his fame.

Nonetheless, Piety is a contradictory character. On the one hand, she is a respected member of The Burgue's human high society, but on the other hand, she is a cunning woman, trained in fairy witchcraft –i.e., divination and mind-controlling rituals– that she uses in order to take down her enemies and achieve her social-climbing goals. As Anne M. DeLong asserts, “the witch has long been identified with the Terrible Mother (Old Witch) and/or the demonic seductress (Young Witch), in either case a force to be feared and reviled” (1), as in the case of Medea. In *Carnival Row*, it is implied that young Piety seduced her high-class husband using fairy magic, so that he would marry her and she could bear his son. As an older witch, she is presented as a monstrous or terrible mother, since she kidnaps her own son, Jonah, to further her political agenda.

She is obsessed with her son's potential bright future, and is afraid that it might be compromised if Jonah does not stop partying and wasting his time and money on fairy brothels. Piety kidnaps him and frames the leader of the opposition, Mr Longerbane – who is actually Jonah's true father– for the crime, to scare her son and get him to focus on his studies and political future. In doing so, Piety follows a layered characterisation of



## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

“several versions of the Medea myth”, revealing “a figure who is at once mother, murderess, prophetess, and sorceress, a manifestation as much of the goddess as of the witch [...] [Thus,] the myth of Medea contains aspects of Healer, Destroyer, Knower, and Bewitcher, with most versions concentrating on Medea as Healer/Destroyer” (DeLong 16). Piety is a destroyer –murdering, framing or hurting– anyone who might get in her son’s path to political success–, but also a healer and a sorceress, as she uses her supernatural abilities to protect Jonah’s future.

Taking all this “excessive motherhood” (Chambers 69), Piety could also be considered as a ‘Demetrian mother’. This term has already been discussed in Chapter 3, to describe a mother that cannot accept that her daughter is leaving to start living her own life. Demetrian mothers tend to focus “on real or imagined illnesses of daughters” as a means to control them through drugs or doctor visits (Braid, “Mother against Daughter” 93). I argue that Piety is a Demetrian mother, given that she attempts to control her son by kidnapping him and then confining him in the family house in order for him to focus on his future. Maternal excess –i.e., being too close to their children and holding too much emotional power over them– is often portrayed in literary and screen texts as detrimental to the sons’ development. Indeed, Chambers claims that “excessive mothering is condemned as a threat to patriarchy and the family in the same way as promiscuous sexuality”. Motherhood is understood in such narratives as a dangerous space that questions paternal laws of differentiation and identity formation, given that it collapses the patriarchal distinctions of “the subject and object, between mother and child” (Chambers 69).<sup>43</sup>

The mother-son relationship between Piety and Jonah seems to follow this pattern, as she sees her son as a projection or extension of herself: the only means through which she can achieve her dream of power and greatness. This is the reason why she cannot

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<sup>43</sup> This idea seems to be based on Kristeva’s theory of the mother as an abject body, given that it represents the feminine in its most terrifying form: “that which does not respect borders, positions, rules” (“Powers of Horror” 4). According to Kristeva, the child would have an instinct of “primal repression”, which could be defined as “the ability of the speaking being, always already haunted by the Other [i.e., the mother], to divide, reject, repeat. Without *one* division, *one* separation, *one* subject/object having been constituted (not yet, or no longer yet)” (“Powers of Horror” 12, emphasis in original). In other words, the child (or object) will instinctively try to separate themselves from the mother (or subject), even though they are haunted by that abject body since before they are even born (during their intra-uterine existence). Moreover, Kristeva asserts that, despite the fact that the child might enable the mother to reassert or ‘authenticate’ herself, there is no reason for her to help the child become an autonomous and independent subject. As a result, “in such close combat, the symbolic light that a third party, eventually the father, can contribute helps the future subject [...] in pursuing a reluctant struggle against what, having been the mother, will turn into an abject. Repelling, rejecting; repelling itself, rejecting itself. Ab-jecting” (Kristeva, “Powers of Horror” 13).

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

understand why Jonah devotes his time to fruitless activities, rather than focusing on developing his political career. She cannot see that her son is an independent entity with his own dreams and goals. As a consequence, Piety's story in *Carnival Row* is constructed as "a narrative in which maternal love is signified as a form of female desire that is unachievable, that cannot be fulfilled, and in which the separation of mother and child is a permanent threat" (Chambers 69). In doing so, Piety replicates Demeter's journey with her daughter, Persephone, in that she tries to so hard to keep her son by her side and force him to follow the path she has traced for him that he feels suffocated and needing to break free from her tyrannical authority.

Furthermore, in the same way as Persephone can only be freed from her overbearing mother when she marries her uncle, Hades, God of the Underworld, Jonah can only become a seemingly independent agent when he meets his secret half-sister and future lover, Sophie. Jonah falls instantly in love with her, without knowing that they are actually related. She takes advantage of his infatuation and tries to appeal to Jonah's need for parental emancipation: "[We are] [t]he two sole heirs of the city's two most important families. Overprotected. Chronically underestimated. There's only one difference I can see [...] I am free of my parents" (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 6, 00:16:26-00:16:49). Like Demeter, Piety tries to prevent her son from seeing a woman that she thinks is dangerous for him and, more importantly, is his half-sister, but Jonah interprets his mother's advice as one of her many manipulations (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 8, 00:13:52-00:14:47).

After Piety tells him the truth about their family, Jonah tries to break up with Sophie, but she is a cunning and ambitious woman that wants to establish a powerful dynasty with him, so she manipulates him into believing that she feels an especial connection with him: "I grew up alone, locked up in this place. No friends, no siblings, no family, apart from a distant, bitter father. And then a stranger comes into my life, with whom I feel some shred of a connection. Why should that give me any pause at all?" (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 8, 00:19:32-00:19:54). As discussed in the previous chapter, Sophie is depicted as a politically ambitious character, as a Lady Macbeth that manipulates Jonah into building a 'dynasty' that will rule over the Republic of The Burgue for generations to come. As in the case of *Crimson Peak*, after the death of the 'monstrous mother' –the one that controlled and oppressed her children– the authoritarian and strong-minded sister assumes the maternal role and manipulates her brother into doing her bidding.

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

Therefore, there is also a gender reversal in the relationship dynamics between Sophie and Jonah, given that he is portrayed as someone that can easily be manipulated –like Thomas in *Crimson Peak*– and whose immoral and violent actions are orchestrated by a stronger, more intelligent and cunning character: his sister Sophie. She cannot directly claim or exert her political power over The Burgue because she is a woman, so she uses Jonah to achieve that goal. Unlike Lucille, who is a madwoman outside of the attic and the mistress of the house, not at all interested in the public sphere, Sophie is the complete opposite. She has been confined in the domestic sphere of the family home since she was born and now longs to see the world and to become an influential political figure. However, she still needs a man to fulfil her dream and she uses cunning arts, seduction techniques and manipulation in order to do so –traits that were adscribed to ‘*femmes fatales*’ in the nineteenth century. Therefore, despite the fact that both Piety and Sophie are seemingly portrayed as transgressive characters at first –as they show agency, ambition and determination, especially when compared to their male counterparts–, they are actually depicted in a very negative light: the former, as a Demetrian mother that obsessively controls her son’s life, and the latter, as an ambitious *femme fatale*.

As a consequence, despite the ground-breaking potential that these neo-Victorian texts first showed in adapting and re-inventing mother-daughter –and mother-son– relationships by relocating them in a Victorian context oriented towards our present, they end up perpetuating traditional and conservative understandings of motherhood and femininity. Even though both Lucille and Vanessa are strong-minded female characters that challenge their dysfunctional mothers in order to explore their sexuality and escape patriarchal violence, they are eventually punished for their transgressions. Likewise, rather than disrupting the clichéd dichotomy of ‘virgin versus whore’ in appropriations of the biblical ‘Maries’, *Penny Dreadful* seems to bring to the fore the differences between these two female archetypes and pointing out that the adulteress and fallen woman –as the opposite of the proper and respectable woman: The Virgin– can only be redeemed by becoming a self-sacrificing mother.

Furthermore, Demetrian and Medean mothers –e.g., Salish and Piety– are not portrayed in positive or subversive ways either, given that their monstrous and overbearing personalities are deemed a traumatising influence for their adult sons. They are depicted as madwomen and racial Others whose strong-minded and independent nature poses a threat to their male partners and children. Thus, rather than challenging misogynistic representations of classical and biblical women, these screen texts are

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

actually repeating and reinforcing established patterns of ‘proper’ femininity –even though they were initially presented as feminist texts that offered new and subversive representations of Victorian female characters, a contradiction that is undoubtedly rooted in their postfeminist context of production.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that there is often a conflict between two mother figures for neo-Victorian daughters: “a domestic one, who represents traditional, heteronormative motherhood and femininity, and an unconventional one –a teacher or an artist– who becomes a model of strong, assertive and sexually powerful woman” (Braid, “Mother against Daughter” 93). This is the case of Vanessa, whose ‘domestic’ mother triggered the collapse of her nuclear family by engaging in an extramarital affair with Sir Malcolm Murray, which arguably triggered Vanessa’s sexual desires. After the death of her biological mother, Vanessa meets and moves in with Joan Clayton, the Cut-wife of Ballentree Moor, who, as explained in the previous chapter, eventually becomes Vanessa’s mentor and surrogate mother. Despite Vanessa’s efforts to escape the Cut-Wife’s inheritance –both in terms of material possessions and supernatural abilities–, she is still influenced by this ‘unconventional’ mother, even after the latter is burned alive by her own neighbours.

As Kathryn M Huie Harrison points out, surrogate mothers were “controversial figures” during the Victorian period, seen as “both angelic, like the fairy godmother, and monstrous and unloving, like the wicked stepmother” in Cinderella’s fairy tale (106). They were simultaneously valued for their disposition to raise orphan children and feared for their potential usurpation of the biological mother’s place in the nuclear family. This social dichotomy was also reflected in Victorian literature, where we can find varied representations of the surrogate mother, which range from Mrs. Norris in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, who is cruel to her niece, constantly reminding her of her precarious position in the family, to Miss Temple in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, who shows Jane a sense of loving maternity, as opposed to her aunt, Mrs Reed, who mistreated her and confined her in the red room. Given that the death rate of mothers in childbirth was considerably high in the Victorian period –i.e., “4.7 per 1000 live births in England and Wales” (Poulson 61) –, it was often the case that a surrogate mother would step in and replace her in raising her orphan children. However, “[t]he idea that biological mothers were replaceable often led to social anxiety about the women who succeeded them” (Harrison 107). Even though they were often necessary, replacement mothers were seen as a threat to the nuclear family, as well as to marital and maternal relationships in

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

Victorian England. As Christine Poulson asserts, “the step-family was often seen as problematic, unnatural, and deviant rather than as a normal part of the social structure and of family life” (60).

Furthermore, Harrison maintains that there were two types of surrogate mothers in Victorian England. On the one hand, “governesses, teachers, aunts, friends, and dry nurses” who “were largely accepted because they did not threaten to replace biological mothers”. On the other hand, there was a more subversive type of replacement mother, the one who physically, emotionally and socially ‘usurped’ the place of the biological mother: “stepmothers, by becoming the new mother legally, and wet nurses, by biologically infiltrating a child through breast milk”. The latter type of surrogate mother was feared in Victorian society because it was commonly thought that a deceased biological mother would like to think of herself as “irreplaceable”, an idea that was particularly conveyed through conduct manuals (Harrison 108-9).

Nonetheless, as mentioned above, there were also positive representations of surrogate mothers in Victorian England, despite the fact that they were not as commonly accepted as biological mothers. In fact, “such literary representations helped shift understandings of motherhood in the social imagination, separating the role from the maternal body to encompass surrogate motherhood” (Harrison 109). Replacement mothers were constructed as monstrous, not because of the way they treated their step-children, but because they embodied an uncanny ‘double’, an ‘Other mother’ through whom the concept of motherhood could be scrutinised outside the traditional biological context. As a result, the stepmother became a dangerous figure, precisely because of their potential to subvert traditional social conceptions of the Victorian nuclear family, and this destabilizing power is “what ultimately gave them the ability to affect the world around them, including affecting perceptions of their own roles” (Harrison 109). Thanks to these positive representations of surrogate mothers in literature, there was a shift in the social conceptualisation of non-biological motherhood in Victorian England, as their role became more accepted and normalised.

The Cut-Wife of Ballentree Moor, Joan Clayton, is portrayed as a positive surrogate mother in *Penny Dreadful*, since she helps Vanessa accept her supernatural abilities and teaches her how to use them in order to help other women –e.g., preparing cures and love potions or practising primitive abortions. Thus, this contemporary adaptation of the Victorian surrogate mother encourages the audience to question the seemingly incontestable place of the biological mother in the child’s heart. Vanessa’s

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

mother could not offer her the guidance and understanding that she needed because she was not a witch herself. She lacked the abilities to teach her how to fight her inner demons and, instead, sent her to a mental institution. Moreover, she destabilised their nuclear family by engaging in an affair with the father of Vanessa's best friend –an event that arguably triggered her sexual desires and life-long struggles with her supernatural suitors, Dracula and Lucifer. Consequently, Clayton's portrayal in the series follows the pattern of the abovementioned positive replacement mothers in Victorian literature, as a good fairy godmother that rescues the heroine from a highly dysfunctional family. Likewise, this positive depiction of surrogate mothers –who raise and educate children on their own, without the help of a male figure and outside the confines of more traditional family models– also favours contemporary alternative understandings of the family unit, most notably single motherhood and adoption, which can be seen as beneficial for children as the conventional and biological nuclear family.

However, not all the surrogate mothers that feature in *Penny Dreadful* are as positively depicted as Clayton. The resurrected and now immortal Lily Frankenstein could also be defined as a replacement mother, but one that uses her influence over her surrogate daughters for violent purposes. As discussed in the previous chapter, Lily lost her baby daughter before she was resurrected by Dr Frankenstein –when she was still the Irish prostitute Brona Croft. This event deeply traumatised her –as she herself confesses to Dr Frankenstein and Dr Jekyll when they try to 'cure' her hysteria and make her a proper woman at Bedlam– to the point that she attempts to compensate her loss by creating an army of prostitutes and becoming their leader and mother-like figure. Lily is especially close to her first acolyte, a young prostitute named Justine, who was bought and sexually abused by a despicable man from a very early age:

He bought me when I was twelve. He used me as his pet whore for a time. Like a monkey on a chain. When I got older, he grew tired of me and whored me out. Set me up on a platform and let them fuck me ten at a time. Gave me to the sailors and the Chinks and the Lascars, finally (Logan, Season 3, Episode 3, 00:40:50-00:41:16).

Lily and Dorian Gray first met Justine in a shady room where she was to be tortured and killed in front of a male audience. Lily and Dorian slaughtered the voyeuristic viewers and took Justine to Dorian's home, where she joined the immortal duo in their

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

violent plan to take down patriarchy. Justine is as resentful as Lily and longs to avenge herself and other women who suffered sexual abuse at the hands of vicious men. Without a nuclear family that could have protected her from all the abuse she had to endure as a teenager, Justine sees in Lily an admirable female mentor that can right all her wrongs. Prone to violence, she follows Lily's orders to murder and subjugate all men to the letter. Thus, unlike Clayton, whose guidance and support enabled Vanessa become a better person and unleash her potential to help vulnerable women, Lily is depicted as a monstrous replacement mother that promotes hatred and leads her stepdaughters to a bloody war. This gendered violence is perceived by Lily's disciples as liberating, even though it would not really produce a shift in the ideological and political Victorian mindset—from a patriarchal to an egalitarian society—, but only invert the role of the oppressors—from men to women— and the oppressed—from women to men.

Although Dorian seemed to enjoy Lily's plans to topple patriarchy at first, her violence increased to a point where he had to stop her. Moreover, he became jealous of Lily's maternal love and affection towards Justine and the rest of her acolytes, since she no longer paid any attention to him. As a result, he joined forces with Dr Frankenstein and Dr Jekyll, who—as explained in the previous chapter— capture Lily and try to inject her with a serum that would neutralise her rebellious self and turn her into a docile angel of the house. Although Dr Frankenstein eventually decides not to drug her, her army of prostitutes is dismantled, as Dorian throws all of her disciples out of the house and murders Justine, his rival for Lily's affection. Thus, Lily's ambitious plan to avenge abused women and compensate for the loss of her deceased baby daughter are curtailed by the end of Season 3. While kneeling by Justine's dead body, she tells Dorian that her "great enterprise" has resulted in yet "one more dead child" (Logan, Season 3, Episode 9, 0015:05-00:15:13). Despite the fact that Lily's feminist and activist self remains untouched in the end, she has been deprived of her wards—and replacement daughters—and condemned to spend eternity alone, whilst the patriarchal authorities—Dorian and the doctors—are free to keep on living as privileged male citizens in a patriarchal status quo that systematically punishes any woman that tries to subvert it.

Unlike *Penny Dreadful*, the other screen texts that make up my corpus of analysis do not feature any prominent surrogate mothers or daughters, but rather focus on orphan children and how their parents' absence has a direct impact on their adult lives. This is the case of *Carnival Row*, where, as discussed in the previous chapter, the biracial male protagonist, Philo, was abandoned by his fairy mother as a baby, so that he could pass as

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

human in *The Burgue* and have the same social privileges ascribed to that 'race'. Moreover, as an unmarried ethnic mother whose lover was a wealthy young man with good marriage prospects, Aisling was forced to give up her baby, even though she did not really want to abandon him in a human orphanage. She visited Philo every night and sang to him until he fell asleep, as a loving mother would do with her child at home. As Chambers claims, "[b]eing forced to watch the child from a distance reinforces the idea of motherhood as a marginalised role, on the edge of culture because her emotional capacity to control is a source of resistance to the class-based nature of the patriarchal social order" (68). Aisling is doubly marginalised in the series, first for being non-human and second because she is an unmarried woman. According to the Victorian conventions of proper femininity, she would be a fallen woman, a bad example for her son, so that she is forced to step aside and not be an active part in his life. Although mothers who give up their children are usually portrayed in a negative light in literature and popular culture, they are sometimes, as in the case of Aisling, victims of the patriarchal and capitalist status quo, which see them as a threat to social stability:

Motherhood has the potential to transcend society so its power has to be condemned and punished in order to be contained. The child can only succeed if the mother sacrifices herself. In response, the mother is forced to take on the mantle of anonymity to allow her child to enter society and progress. The negation of her identity is the price to be paid for her child's life (Chambers 68).

Philo grew up alone in the human orphanage *The Light of the Martyr Foundling Home*, fully aware of his fairy self and the fact that he had to conceal it, lest he would be stripped of his rights, privilege and future prospects. Even though he knew he was mixed-race, he never suspected his mother's identity—the fairy celebrity Aisling Querelle—, until much later in his life, when he is investigating her murder as a police inspector. As discussed in the previous chapter, adult Philo first becomes a soldier in the service of *The Republic of The Burgue* and, upon his return to the metropolis, he starts working for *The Burgue's Constabulary*. Thus, his mother's dreams of him becoming an upstanding citizen of the republic by concealing his biracial nature seem to come true, at first. Nonetheless, contrary to *Penny Dreadful*, *Carnival Row* does not offer its male protagonist a surrogate parent that might help him accept his true nature or guide him in his journey of self-discovery. Instead, Philo finds a 'surrogate family' in his trip to



## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

Tirnanoc during the war against The Pact. There, he feels more at home than he ever felt in The Burgue, and finds true love with a fairy, Vignette.

Although they spend several years apart after the war, they reunite in The Burgue, where, at the end of Season 1, mythological creatures are being segregated from humans and taken to concentration camps in The Row. Vignette is captured and forced into the camp, whereas Philo can still pass for human and is spared by the police officer in charge: “You're all right, mate. You're all right. Just Critch, mate, move along” (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 8, 01:03:16-01:03:21). Despite the fact that he could continue with his racial pretence and save himself, he decides to be true to his fairy side and accept his mother’s heritage for the first time in his life. Thus, he informs the police officer, “I am Critch” (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 2, Episode 8, 01:04:29-01:04:31), so that he is forced into the concentration camp with Vignette and the other creatures. As a consequence, it could be argued that Philo’s family of choice, Vignette and the fairies in Tirnanoc, actually help him to accept himself and his biological mother’s ethnic identities. In spite of his self-hatred and shame, which he both acquired during his stay at the orphanage and his time in the army, he finally manages to find his way back to his ‘maternal’ place of origin.

In conclusion, despite the apparent feminist drive of the neo-Victorian texts analysed here, and their deceptive support for subversive understandings of motherhood, they end up reinforcing traditional and misogynistic critiques of such gender disruptions. Gender reversals, in both *Crimson Peak* and *Carnival Row*, are presented in a sexist and clichéd manner, as the male characters are portrayed as weak and manageable, while the female ones are downright emasculating and cruel figures that only seek power and control. Thus, the audience is encouraged not to empathise with these female characters and their egotistic actions, as they are eventually punished for trying to disrupt the abovementioned separate spheres ideology.

Moreover, these screen texts attempt to present an updated and feminist version of classical models of mother-daughter relationships –i.e., Demeter and Persephone, Medea and her children or the biblical dichotomy of the two ‘Maries’: the Virgin and the prostitute– in a neo-Victorian context. However, they actually end up replicating traditional misogynistic representations of the ‘monstrous mother’ trope. Indeed, the female characters that follow these classical patterns of subversive motherhood in these screen texts are punished in the end for transgressing Victorian gender conventions.

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

Finally, regarding the representation of surrogate motherhood and the concept of family of choice, these neo-Victorian texts also offer contradictory depictions of mother figures that might contribute to negative understandings of alternative family models in both Victorian and contemporary societies. In the case of *Penny Dreadful*, although the series presents the two opposite Victorian views of surrogate motherhood –both the good, ‘fairy godmother’ and a more negative, violent and monstrous stepmother– they are both punished by the patriarchal system, as Joan Clayton is burned alive by her own neighbours for helping other women to have access to abortions, and immortal Lily is isolated and ostracised due to her man-hating and female supremacist agenda. In both cases, these replacement mothers are deprived from the right to continue their humanitarian work in saving and protecting vulnerable women from abusive men who want to take control over their female bodies. Finally, *Carnival Row* seems to be the only screen text from the ones analysed here that seemingly features a positive family of choice –the fairy community accepting Philo as one of their own– that guides the male protagonist in his journey of self-discovery and identity formation.

Nonetheless, it is also worth commenting that there are also surrogate fathers in these screen texts, most notably in the case of *Penny Dreadful*. In this TV series, there are mainly two surrogate fathers. On the one hand, Sir Malcolm Murray –who becomes a replacement father to Vanessa, Ethan and the other ‘orphan’ members of his team– and Dr Frankenstein – who could arguably be defined as both a surrogate mother and father to the three of his creatures, as he created them on his own through science and new technologies, in a way that could be compared to contemporary assisted reproductive technology. In the next section, I explore the manner in which the trope of the replacement father is explored in *Penny Dreadful*, as well as the perpetuation of the father figure in the Victorian nuclear family by presenting him as absent, tyrannical oppressive in all the screen works that are being analysed in this PhD thesis.

### 5.2. Perpetuating and Subverting the Ideal of Victorian Masculinity: Absent and Surrogate Fathers

The Victorian nuclear family has traditionally been understood as a social and national realm supported by a masculine figure, i.e., the father or patriarch (Chambers 33). As a result, deviations within that ‘idyllic’ realm are sometimes caused by absent fathers, who can eventually lead the nuclear family to degenerate into a dysfunctional one. According to Chambers, political speeches that explore the concept of dysfunctional and fragmented

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

households tend to repeat terms and expressions that evoke “family crisis and moral disintegration: ‘disaster’, ‘dissolution of the family’, ‘absence of fathers’, ‘critical threat’” (4). Thus, society places the blame on the father figure, who is not only accused of disregarding his parental responsibilities at an individual level, but more importantly, is held accountable for the collapse of the family institution at a national level:

The main emphasis is on the problem of the man’s role in the family as father. Fatherhood is being singled out as the crucial part of the family under threat. Its absence delegitimises the family [...] In order for the state to avoid being burdened by family welfare, the father must be reasserted as the ‘head’ of the family. He must not shirk his heavy responsibilities, so, as a reward, he is conferred a privileged status and identity within a system of patriarchy, not simply as a father, but as patriarch (Chambers 4).

From the end of the eighteenth century through the Victorian era, the role of fathers dramatically changed from previous historical periods. As previously discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the Industrial Revolution had a major impact on family life, as it forced men to work outside the domestic space and “the cult of motherhood began to monopolize parenting” (McKnight 1). Moreover, scientific revolutions started to make people question their religious faith in the Christian God, who had been considered as a referent for Western fathers up to that moment. As a consequence, Victorian novels explored these shifts in parental roles, as well as the anxieties attached to them. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, fathers began to lose contact with their children, since “small farms were consolidated under large states and home craftsmanship gradually shifted to factories, work began to move away from the home, and fathers had less opportunity to educate, train, and interact with their children” (McKnight 1).

Nevertheless, Victorian fathers still tried to instil virtues in the children that were mainly ascribed to men in the nineteenth century, such as self-control or self-sufficiency, despite their undermined role in the family home. However, sometimes they achieved the opposite effect. The father’s efforts to connect with their children through discipline was often perceived by the latter as an imposition from a dominant and alien force. As McKnight contends, “[i]ronically the stern Victorian father stereotype [...] emerges due to the weakening of the role of father. The figure dominates because of its distance, and the sternness results from the severing of what had been more intimate connections

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

between fathers and children” (McKnight 2-3). Regardless of the fathers’ good intentions, Valerie Sanders contends that “fatherhood had failure built into its very purpose and fabric” (56), given that –despite their main role as protectors and providers of the Victorian family– fathers could not protect their children from every source of danger. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the separation of the spheres and the precarious position of fathers within the nuclear family were a question of class, as male aristocrats and upper-middle-class men still had the privilege of working within the confines of the family home. The working and middle classes were the ones that mainly experienced the impact of the separate spheres ideology, as they had to work for long hours away from home and often returned “fatigued and alienated” (McKnight 3).

Furthermore, changing conceptions of what masculinity entailed during the nineteenth century also eroded men’s connections to domesticity and, by association, to their children. Even though heterosexual marriage and fatherhood were considered the epitome of Victorian masculinity, the domestic sphere and the care of the children were strongly associated with femininity. In fact, conscious efforts were made at a social level to keep men outside the domestic sphere. According to McKnight, “[p]ublic schools trained boys to suppress their domestic affections, and popular culture in the latter half of the century adventure stories to lure male imagination even further from home” (3). This is the case of Sir Malcolm Murray in *Penny Dreadful*, an upper-middle-class father who has spent most of his adult life in Africa as an explorer. John Tosh classifies Victorian fathers into four different categories and only one is positive: absent, distant, tyrannical and intimate (93-9).

Even though the screen texts analysed here mainly focus on mother-daughter and mother-son relationships, and how the maternal bond is an unescapable force that has a decisive impact on their children’s life, it is also worth commenting on the role that fathers have in the protagonists’ process of identity formation. The fathers that feature in these neo-Victorian screen texts are largely absent figures –in the case of James’s father in *Taboo* or the Sharpe patriarch in *Crimson Peak*, they are only mentioned occasionally by their children to explain the current economic ruin of the family and the abuse they inflicted upon their respective mothers, but do not actually appear in the texts themselves, nor are they portrayed by any actors. Thus, they fit Tosh’s category of the Victorian absent father, whose “[a]uthority and nurture went by default, as fathers took the line of least resistance, exploiting the mother’s sense of responsibility while preserving their freedom from domestic constraints” (93). When Edith asks Thomas whether he and Lucille spent

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

all their time alone in the attic of the manor, he replies: “Father was always travelling. The family fortune didn’t lose itself. Papa really had to put his back into it” (Del Toro, 00:54:27-00:54:34). When he was in the house, Lord Sharpe was abusive towards his wife, although these scenes are only described by Lucille,<sup>44</sup> but not graphically shown in the film itself. In the same vein, as an adult, James finds out that his father had bought his Nootka mother and then forced his imperialist culture on her, before sending her off to a psychiatric institution.

Nonetheless, there is a key difference between Sir Sharpe and Mr Delaney, as the latter has a notable influence over his son’s life in the form of repetition compulsion, since “Delaney is assuming his father’s place and repeating his fate” (Mousoutzanis 5). When, James asks his servant, Brace, to board up the windows of the house to protect themselves from the mercenaries that are after him, Brace responds:

So we are besieged. I suppose I can use the same carpenter to board up the windows that your father used when he was under siege and he can put the same old nails in the same old holes. You can sit there with the same old gun cocked on your lap. And when you sit there with that same look of defiance on your face, I will ask you the same old 6 question: for what do you risk your life? (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 3, 00:10:05-00:10:30).

James seems condemned to repeat his father’s fate, as he has followed in his colonizing footsteps and has inherited his mental instability. Nevertheless, he is determined to recover from his family trauma –and to erase his father’s influence from his life– with his project to leave England, his father’s country, and travel to his mother’s native land in the Pacific Coast. In the season finale, he severs all his emotional ties with his father when he chooses not to include Brace in his crew: “you have always been my father’s man, in my father’s world. We’re headed to my mother’s now (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 8, 00:43:13-00:43:19).

By the same token, *Penny Dreadful* presents two absent and dysfunctional fathers: Sir Malcolm and Dr Frankenstein, who feel responsible for the collapse of their respective families. Sir Malcolm was an absent father and husband, as he spent most of his time away in African expeditions. He represents “the increasingly commercialised and militant

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<sup>44</sup> See Chapter 4 of this PhD thesis.

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

nature of British exploration in Africa” (Murray 151) and how ‘peripheral’ Africa was used to construct and perform a notion of Anglo-Saxon manliness in the face of adversity. As Adams contends, the exoticised and colonised African continent became the most suitable space to test the strength of Victorian male discipline, “precisely because it is so attractive as an imagined realm of self-indulgence” (111) and men actually ran the risk of going native. Sir Malcolm also cheated on his wife, not only with Vanessa’s mother, but also with Native women from the African towns that he colonised and plundered. In Season 2, he is also seduced by Mrs. Poole, the leader of the nightcomers, who puts him under a love spell so as to attract Vanessa to her master Lucifer. In order to get rid of Sir Malcolm’s wife, Gladys, Mrs. Poole tortures her with a voodoo doll until she slits her own throat (Logan, Season 2, Episode 5, 00:48:44-00:51:25).

Moreover, he always felt ashamed of his son Peter, whose kind and quiet disposition sharply opposed Sir Malcolm’s ideal of Victorian masculinity. Victorian men were forced to look physically strong (Lewis 13), so as not to appear weak or effeminate, owing to a “homosexual panic” that led them not to be overtly “attached to other men” (Lewis 46). Likewise, they were supposed to achieve “manhood”, which was not an innate masculine quality, but rather “the result of arduous public or private ritual and, for the Victorian bourgeois, of continued demanding self-discipline” (Sussman 13). Instead, Peter was “such a disappointment to him. I was never the son he wanted. Always ill, never good at games. A disappointment. He needed someone more like... [Vanessa]” (Season 1, Episode 5, 00:15:58-00:00:16:13). In order to make a ‘true man’ out of him, Sir Malcolm forced Peter to accompany him to an expedition to The Congo, where he eventually fell ill with Malaria. He left him to die alone in the wild, where his body was eaten and desecrated by animals and insects. Thus, he could not be buried in the Murray’s family graveyard and they had to put an empty coffin into the ground, instead.

As a result, Sir Malcolm would also fit Tosh’s category of the distant father, which represented “the ambivalence” that many men felt towards their role as fathers (Tosh 97). They felt compelled not to show emotional and physical tenderness, as they were associated with female sensitivity. Victorian fathers were afraid of seeing their manhood compromised, but were even more concerned about their sons’s manhood (Tosh 97). Moreover, Victorian fathers thought it was their parental duty to prepare their sons for more formal aspects and relationships in life. Indeed, “[f]orming character’ is a recurrent theme of paternal reflection. It was an anxiety which weighed with any father who

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

recognized his responsibility not only to protect and provide for his children, but also to oversee their preparation for adult life” (Tosh 98).

However, in following Victorian conventions of proper fatherhood, Sir Malcolm abandoned his son and made him feel as if he were not enough. His parental guilt is brought to the fore on the second episode of Season 1, during a séance that takes place a party hosted by Mr Lyle. There, Vanessa is suddenly possessed by Peter’s spirit, who reproaches his father –through Vanessa’s body– his negligence and abandonment in the African continent:

Vanessa: [In a boy's voice] Father mine, let me come with you. What a ripping time we'll have. Let me come with you. It'll be an adventure. You'll teach me! I'll prove myself a proper explorer. Peter loves you, Father... [Shaky, frightened breaths] But Father, if the porters go, how are we to survive? I'm not frightened, I'm not. What an adventure. It's so green, so beautiful. But the porters are dying and I can't go on, I'm sick. Is it the dysentery? I'm bleeding. Oh God, I'm bleeding. I'm shitting blood now. I have no more clean trousers. I'm sorry. I'll stay at base camp. You go. Leave me. Will you name a mountain after me? Are you proud of me? [Roars] Go! Goodbye. I'll see you soon, Father. Father [...] [Chokes and gasps] I am... weak. Can't feel my hands. There's no water. I can't swallow. You knew I was dying... didn't you, Father? Did you name a mountain after me? [Exhales slowly as though dying] (Logan, Season 1, Episode 2, 00:33:22-00:36:02).

After Peter died, Sir Malcolm tried to make amends for his parental errors by searching for Mina when she was abducted. However, he failed to save her, as she had already been turned into a vampire. Sir Malcolm blames Vanessa for Mina’s disappearance, as she had caused her friend’s escape and involvement with a vampire master when she had sexual intercourse with Mina’s fiancé the night before their wedding. He does not forgive Vanessa for that betrayal and, throughout Season 1, he is willing to sacrifice her in order to save his daughter. Nonetheless, during the abovementioned séance, Vanessa is also possessed by Mina’s spirit, who blatantly accuses her father of both their family’s collapse and Vanessa’s indiscretions, given that he was the one that awakened the latter’s sexual curiosity when she discovered her mother having sexual intercourse with him:

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

Vanessa: [In a demonic female voice] Father? Mina's waiting. No! I wonder... I wonder when was the moment you knew you wanted to fuck her? Why were you not more discrete? Vanessa heard you. The two of you. She heard you fucking and she was curious. She walked closer, she rounded the corner and discovered you, the two of you, you know, fucking. Fucking her cunt. Vanessa saw that. Fucking animal. You, man. You, animal. You, man. You, animal. Betrayer! Creature! I look into his [the vampire master's] eyes and they are red with blood like from Peter's ass. His lips are red like blood from her cunt when you fucked her. His teeth are sharp like yours when you bit her cunt and it's so cold and dark and wet like the jungle. [Growing desperate] Like tears, I am crying. I am so afraid, Father. Find me! Find me! Save me! Save me! (Logan, Season 1, Episode 2, 00:36:49-00:38:14).

Despite his daughter's accusations by proxy, Sir Malcolm does not publicly own up to his parental sins, and still holds Vanessa as the person responsible for Mina's fate. When Vanessa realises that Mina is manipulating her in order to attract her to the vampire master, Sir Malcolm tells her: "She may be your enemy. Can you blame her?" (Logan, Season 1, Episode 4, 00:52:25-00:52:29). Nonetheless, he gradually becomes aware of the fact that he and Vanessa have much more in common than he first thought, since their reckless and selfish natures have led them both to make mistakes which have taken a toll on their respective families. As a consequence, he realises that Vanessa seems more like his birth daughter than Mina ever did: "There are times I wish Mina had been born with your cruel spirit. You are the daughter I deserve" (Logan, Season 1, Episode 4, 00:52:46-00:52:58).

Sir Malcolm manipulates Vanessa and forces her to use her supernatural abilities in order to find Mina, to the point where he does not care whether she dies when she is possessed at the end of Season 1. He wants her to use her connection with the Devil to locate his daughter. However, Dr Frankenstein and Ethan confront him and make him realise that, even though he might have lost Mina, Vanessa is still there and she is like a surrogate daughter to him: "You've got a girl dying in there. Not some monster with fangs. You want a daughter? There she is" (Logan, Season 1, Episode 7, 00:44:10-00:44:19).

Indeed, in the Season 1 finale, there is a decisive shift in Sir Malcolm's perception of Vanessa. When his team finds Mina and her vampire associates, she tries to bite



## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

Vanessa and turn her into a vamped creature, following her master's orders. Sir Malcolm then faces his last chance of saving his daughter from eternal damnation, but, instead of sacrificing Vanessa, he spares her by shooting his own daughter. Mina tries to appeal to her father's paternal instincts by reminding him that "I'm your daughter", to which he replies, while looking at Vanessa, "I already have a daughter" (Logan, Season 1, Episode 8, 00:45:02-00:45:13). In doing so, he symbolically adopts Vanessa, and favours his family of choice over his own blood. Nonetheless, as Primorac contends, "what is interesting is that these families of choice are patrilineal, and that they come at the cost of sisterly as well as mother-daughter relationships" (*Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 151). Sir Malcolm becomes the replacement patriarch of *Penny Dreadful*'s family of choice to the detriment of the mother figures in the series who, as discussed in the previous section, are either portrayed as monstrous and deviant or punished for their gender transgressions.

Likewise, he acts as a father figure to both Dr Frankenstein and Ethan, to the point where they even compete for his parental love when he invites the latter to accompany him to his next expedition to The Congo. When Dr Frankenstein reproaches him for choosing Ethan over him, Sir Malcolm notes that he "lost a son in Africa. He was much like you in a way. Mr Chandler means nothing to me. He is just a finger on a trigger. You are not" (Logan, Season 1, Episode 4, 00:34:17-00:34:32). Similar to his son Peter, Dr Frankenstein does not possess Ethan's strong physique, nor his natural disposition to face evil or take part in bloody fights. Sir Malcolm has learnt from his previous mistakes as a father, so that he no longer diminishes young men that do not display the personality or physical traits that were traditionally ascribed to manliness and manhood. Nonetheless, he eventually comes to regard Ethan as one of his children of choice, as it can be seen throughout Season 3 of the series, when the latter is captured and taken to New Mexico – where his biological father is expecting him to atone for his past sins against the family.

Ethan Chandler is an American soldier from the New Mexico territory that was forced to leave his home country due to "colonial violence and is never able to recapture what home once meant for him" (Marino 66). His past is marred with Apache blood, as he was involved in the genocide that wiped out an entire indigenous village when he was a young soldier. This violent and colonial past is now part of his identity, and –even though he runs to England to escape from his sins– he cannot put it behind him. As Alyssa Marino contends, Ethan's monstrous identity as a werewolf "is linked not only to crimes against humanity committed in the name of imperialism, but to Native American ideas on shape-shifting, or 'skinwalking'. Ethan's struggle with his two selves –or as he says,

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

‘the monsters inside us’– has now become an inseparable part of his identity” (68). He was turned into a werewolf by Kaetenay, an Apache werewolf whose family was annihilated by Ethan and his fellow white soldiers. Ethan came to him covered in blood and begged him for forgiveness. Instead, Kaetenay decided to punish him with the werewolf’s curse, tying him to the Native American community in the process. As Marino argues, “monsters can be understood as representations of societal or personal anxiety –a challenge to identity”. Thus, Ethan’s construction as both an American coloniser and a Native American werewolf could be understood “through the lens of colonialism and colonial history [...] as [a] representation of national anxiety due to the era’s economic and cultural instability that arose as destructive colonial ideology was challenged and exposed” (Marino 66).

Furthermore, Ethan’s monstrous transformation and atonement for his crimes against the Apache community made him establish a father-son relationship with Kaetenay, which is later challenged when Sir Malcolm appears in Ethan’s life. As mentioned in previous sections, Ethan’s biological father is a tyrannical and abusive parental figure for whom his son only feels hatred and resentment. According to Tosh, tyrannical fathers wanted to reaffirm their authority and control in the domestic sphere. They felt compelled to use violence if needed in order

To insist that the routine of the household should be subordinate to every aspect of his own convenience, to enforce tight controls on family expenditure, to treat family prayers as a means of keeping his dependants in subservience, and to mete out regular and painful punishments to his children, were all means of bolstering a man’s domestic authority in his own eyes and the eyes of others (Tosh 95).

As a result, Ethan tries to find an alternative father of choice, first in Kaetenay and, later on, in Sir Malcolm. Whilst the former reflects Ethan’s struggles with his past colonial violence against the Native American people and how to make reparations, the latter could be understood as his chance to find his way back to the Anglo-American white community. In the end, Ethan finally manages to reconcile these two seemingly conflicting identities, given that his two fathers of choice join forces in Season 3 to save him from both himself and his biological father in America.

In a similar vein, Dr Frankenstein has not been a good father figure to his creatures either. As discussed above, he could be considered as both a mother and a father figure

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

to his three creatures, given that he created them through science, in what could be compared to contemporary assisted reproductive technology. As Shannon N. Conley contends, “[a] common theme in social discourse around technology is that society tends to fall behind technological progress [...] and that new technologies advance with little attention given to their potential implications until it is too late” (245). One way to anticipate the ethical issues that might arise as a result of scientific advancements is through science fiction, as the genre allows us to imagine and engage with both the beneficial and dangerous consequences of technological futures. Shelley’s *Frankenstein* anticipated artificial reproduction and the concept of single fatherhood, even though the novel has traditionally been considered “a horror story of maternity” (Moers 95). Indeed, Anne Mellor cites “Frankenstein’s failure to ‘mother’ his child”:

[...] rather than clasping his newborn child to his breast in a nurturing *maternal* gesture, he rushes out of the room, repulsed by the abnormality of his creation. And when his child follows him to his bedroom, uttering inarticulate sounds of desire and affection, smiling at him, reaching out to embrace him, Victor Frankenstein again flees in horror, abandoning his child completely (41-2).

This scene is replicated in *Penny Dreadful*, as Dr Frankenstein repudiates his first ‘reborn’ because he is afraid of him, and leaves him to fend for himself, without even giving him a name. In fact, he only refers to him as either “demon” or “monster”. The creature first names himself Caliban –after Shakespeare’s character from *The Tempest* (1610)–, and eventually changes it to John Clare, in honour to the Romantic poet. He feels affinity with the latter because he was “considered freakish”, which made him develop sympathy for the “outcasts and the unloved. The ugly animals, the broken things” (Logan, Season 2, Episode 5, 00:34:16-00:34:29), traits that perfectly describe Frankenstein’s creature. Indeed, he is not only rejected by his creator, but by most of the people he encounters on account of his pale and scarred face: he “has long black hair and straight black lips. His pallor and coldness of his skin are commented on at various times, and the terrible scars on his face are a testament to how he was created” (Heholt 4). Although he has developed a compassionate side and does not usually want to harm others, he brutally kills Dr Frankenstein’s second creature, Proteus, by slitting him open in front of their creator (Logan, Season 1, Episode 2).

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

As Braid states, the choice of Proteus's name is quite symbolical, since Dr Frankenstein wanted to foreground the creature's identity as a "a form of new mankind" ("The Frankenstein Meme" 235), but without giving it a Christian connotation –as the name "Adam" has. Hence, he let the creature choose his own name from a collection of Shakespeare plays –which are, according to Braid, "a symbol of secular roots for the new mankind" ("The Frankenstein Meme" 235). The creature selects "Proteus", a character from the play *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1623). However, the name "Proteus" actually comes from the Greek words "πρῶτος", which means "first" and "πρωτόγονος", which could be translated as "firstborn" (Bartoněk 94) –as in the case of Adam, his biblical counterpart. Proteus was a Greek Sea God, son of Poseidon. Water is the part of nature associated with change and fluidity and it was believed that Proteus had a multitemporal knowledge –i.e., past, present and future– but was reluctant to reveal it (Smigielska 91).<sup>45</sup> This multitemporality and fluidity also seem to point to the very nature of neo-Victorianism, which encompasses both our present and Victorian past, but is also oriented towards our future. As a result, Frankenstein's second creature, Proteus, represents a new version of mankind that would be characterised by "mutability and versatility", but especially "the embodiment of the Frankenstein Meme, a mutable story of science and humanity" (Braid, "The Frankenstein Meme" 235). Nonetheless, the fact that Proteus is later killed by Dr Frankenstein's first creature –one that resembles more faithfully Shelley's original, as he was born in blood and pain and encapsulates the marginalised Other– seems to symbolise that "the protean flexibility of the contemporary culture has a dark undercurrent of trauma, the pain of rejection, and violence" (Braid, "The Frankenstein Meme" 235).

Clare then orders Dr Frankenstein to make a bride for him, so that he does not have to spend eternity all alone. Although the doctor feels horrified and guilty for what he has created and does not want to continue with his experiments, he is afraid that Clare will kill him or harm any of his new friends, so he finally obliges and murders a tuberculous prostitute, Brona Croft, and later resurrects her as Lily Frankenstein. At first, he treats her as a relative and tries to persuade her to marry Clare, but he eventually falls

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<sup>45</sup> Water's fluidity and its temporal affinity was first discussed by Heraclitus of Ephesus, who claimed that "all things move and nothing remains still", and he compared the universe to the current of a river, as "you cannot step twice into the same stream" (as quoted in Plato 402a).

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

in love with her and they engage in a father-daughter incestuous relationship.<sup>46</sup> However, both Clare and Dr Frankenstein's jealousy and possessiveness eventually drive Lily away.

On a similar note, Sophie's father in *Carnival Row* is a tyrannical and distant parent; a conservative politician focused on his professional career. As discussed in the previous chapter, he is abusive and authoritarian towards his daughter,<sup>47</sup> as he forces her to stay in the family house, and it is implied that he has been both physically and verbally threatening towards her in the past. Nonetheless, unlike him, Jonah's father, Absalom Breakspear, is not a violent man. In fact, he seems to be dominated by his wife, Piety, as he does her bidding so as not to cause her a nervous breakdown. By the end of Season 1, Jonah finds out that Mr Breakspear is not really his biological father, but Mr Longerbane is. Jonah remembers his childhood and how the person that he thought was his father never treated him as a real son: as his true successor. Mr Breakspear spoiled him and never prepared him for the political arena because he thought that Jonah was not worthy—as he was not his own blood, but his rival's. Jonah feels betrayed and rejected by one of the people that should have loved him the most:

Jonah: Did it cross your mind how ill-equipped I was to assume your responsibilities if you hadn't [...] Survived.

Mr Breakspear: But I'm likely to. They-they say that I'm likely...

Jonah: I keep thinking how... odd it is that you never remedied that, with so much at stake. That you'd always let me get away with anything.

Mr Breakspear: If I was too soft, it's because I have such love for you.

Jonah: But no ambitions, no plans. It's as if you never saw me as a true successor (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 8, 0022:03-00:22:33).

Even though Jonah was not his legitimate son, Mr Breakspear had a biological child with his fairy mistress: the male protagonist of the series, Philo. Mr Breakspear did not find out the truth until Aisling was murdered by his own wife, Piety, through a monstrous creature, the Darkasher, which she controlled through dark magic. When Mr Breakspear discovers that Philo is his secret son, he fears that the latter will despise him, given that he abandoned Aisling because he was afraid of his own father—a very powerful man in *The Burgue*—, since he would have cut him off if he had continued his affair with

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<sup>46</sup> This incest relationship is explained in more depth in Chapter 6.

<sup>47</sup> See Chapter 4 of this PhD thesis.

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

the fairy. However, Philo sees much of himself in his father's actions, as he also abandoned Vignette in Tirnanoc during the war and returned to his 'human' and prosperous life in *The Burgue*:

Mr Breakspear then tries to protect his newfound son, but his wife's obsession with the oracle's prophecy –that Mr Breakspear would become a very powerful man in *The Burgue* and his son, even more so– leads her to look for Philo by whatever means necessary in order to kill him, so that her son, Jonah, will fulfil the prophecy. Mr Breakspear tries to hide his son's whereabouts, but Piety kills him and later finds Philo and Vignette through dark magic. Consequently, *Carnival Row* seems to deny Philo the possibility of getting to know his biological family once again, even though he eventually finds a family of choice with Vignette in the fairy community, and will likely fight alongside them against the far-right government in Season 2. However, the series also appears to perpetuate the Victorian archetype of the absent and distant father, since Mr Breakspear is murdered just when he was about to become the only positive parental figure represented in *Carnival Row*.

As a result, it could be argued that the only positive birth father that features in the screen texts analysed here is Mr Cushing, Edith's father in *Crimson Peak*. After his wife's death, he is left in charge of their only child, who grows up without a mother figure. Thus, she develops a strong emotional bond with her father, unlike the male and female protagonists from the other screen texts. Mr Cushing does not entirely defy the Victorian separate spheres ideology, as he is an influential businessman in the city of Buffalo, who devotes most of his time to his business and has female servants to look after the family house. However, he is neither an absent nor a tyrannical parent, but rather an understanding and affectionate one, given that he encourages his daughter to pursue a professional career in writing. Therefore, he fits Tosh's category of the "intimate" Victorian father, who "set more store by the transparency of spontaneous relations than by the disciplines of restraint. Through anxieties about the future and tensions between the parental roles, the intimate father held to the value of tenderness and familiarity, both to himself and his children" (99).

Indeed, Mr Cushing is such a strong influence in his daughter's life that, when he is murdered, Edith feels so lonely and desperate that she hastily accepts Thomas's marriage proposal. This is when she becomes trapped by the surrogate mother figure she never had, Lucille, and is helped by the ghostly sorority that try to guide her out of Allerdale Hall. Thus, despite her father being such a strong and positive influence in her

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

life, it seems that Del Toro brings to the fore the matrilineal relationships between the female characters in the film, in detriment to the more passive and background male characters. This seems to be proven by the fact that Edith is haunted by her mother's ghost –even though she barely knew her and did not have such a strong emotional bond with her as she had with her father.

In conclusion, neo-Victorian screen texts produced in the last decade seem to perpetuate the Victorian stereotypical representation of fathers as absent, distant and tyrannical figures, whose involvement in their children's life is scarce and largely negative. Even though there are some exceptions to this representational pattern –i.e., Edith's father in *Crimson Peak* or Mr Breakspear in *Carnival Row*–, these characters are eventually murdered, leaving their children orphaned and without a parental guide that might help them and protect them. Nonetheless, TV series like *Penny Dreadful* or *Carnival Row* offer these orphan characters a father or parental figure of choice that provides them with the understanding and love that they would not have found otherwise. This form of parental surrogacy offers a positive portrayal of alternative family models – especially for our twenty-first century context, where there are increasingly new family units and ways of understanding family life, such as single parenthood, queer families, adoption, surrogate motherhood, or assisted artificial technology, among others.

## 5. Parent-Child Relationships in Neo-Victorianism on Screen



## 6. THE INCEST TROPE IN NEO-VICTORIAN FAMILY TRAUMAS ON SCREEN

As discussed in previous chapters, the nuclear family has held a central position in the social, political and fictional arenas of Western countries. The institution has come to represent the patriarchal, national and capitalist values of our culture at a private and domestic levels. Nonetheless, this seemingly 'ideal' unit is sometimes disrupted when its members engage in 'deviant' relations, as in the case of the incest plotline in neo-Victorian screen texts. Claude Levi-Strauss identified the evolution of our culture with the prohibition of incest, defining the latter as "the fundamental step because of which, by which, but above all in which, the transition from nature to culture is accomplished" (12). Probably due to the legal prohibition of this phenomenon and its treatment as a social taboo, incest has become a prominent motif in a wide range of artistic manifestations, most notably literature and the visual arts, in Western culture. This is the case of Gabriel García Márquez's novel *Cien años de soledad* (1967), the original *Star Wars* trilogy (1977-1983), Almodóvar's Spanish film *Volver* (2006), or the successful TV series *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019).

Incest has traditionally been considered "a universal and trans-historical taboo" (Tate 181), even though what actually constitutes incest and the sociocultural reactions to this practice vary from period to period and from culture to culture. According to Alexandra Cheira, anthropologists do not just deny the universality of incest "because the offspring may be deformed, insane, or markedly ill in other ways". Its stigmatisation and prohibition are actually "a privileged synthesis of nature and culture, simultaneously inscribed within natural, spontaneous, universal tendencies and instincts, and culturally specific, historically contingent, coercive laws and institutions" (Cheira 148).

During the Victorian era, there were intense social and legislative debates around this topic, despite the fact that sexual intercourse between family members was technically legal (Llewellyn, "Perfectly Innocent" 135). Although our society is influenced by feminist readings arguing that this practice is based on patriarchal privilege, Carolyn Tate also scrutinises nineteenth-century views on incest in terms of class privilege, given that the higher classes criticised "'single room' conditions of the poor and the subsequent sexual debauchery they believed was inevitable in such cramped quarters, while members of the upper classes defended their right to marry cousins and deceased wives' sisters" (181). This hypocritical understanding of incest is most noticeable in the series *Carnival Row*, where Sophie Longerbane defends her right to

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

procreate with her half-brother to continue the family line, as their aristocratic ancestors allegedly used to do in the past.

Our present fascination with incest arguably derives from its ambiguous theorisations during the Victorian era, which were the result of the period's ethical and aesthetical understandings of the topic (Llewellyn, "Perfectly Innocent" 135).<sup>48</sup> Incest was a prominent literary trope during the long nineteenth century, which developed "at the heart of the Romantic movement" (Richardson 738) and focused on brother-sister or sibling love, whilst in the Gothic period it was explored through parent-child relationships. Moreover, the emergence of psychoanalysis at the turn of the century marked an important date for its representation, particularly with Freudian diagnoses of primary desires, narcissism and Oedipal complexes in his publication *Three Theories of Sexuality* (1905).

Likewise, the incest trope has increasingly become a central concern in narratives of family trauma, not only in neo-Victorianism, but also in other fictional genres on screen. This is the case of the HBO TV series *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019), *American Horror Story: Coven* (2013), or the teen TV dramas *Pretty Little Liars* (2010-2017), *Riverdale* (2017-present) or *Gossip Girl* (2007-2012). The current prominence of the incest plotline on screen seems to be due to two main reasons: 1) the audience's morbid and voyeuristic expectations, and 2) the need to scrutinise our familial, national and personal identities within the confines of the dysfunctional family. As Elizabeth Barnes contends, "the narrativizing of incest reveals the ways in which discourses of sex, gender, class, race, desire, intimacy, family, domination, love, and violence inform, and have informed understandings of personal, political, and cultural experience" (3). Moreover, the representation of incest in a neo-Victorian context can help us to reinterpret "the domestic, and desiring, spaces of the (neo-)Victorian family" (Llewellyn, "Perfectly Innocent" 134).

It is also worth commenting on how neo-Victorianism on itself could also be considered a form of 'intellectual' incest. This would be so because we long for narratives that are similar to the ones that were produced in the nineteenth century so as to achieve

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<sup>48</sup> The use of the term 'ethical' here follows Llewellyn's understanding of the concept, not reflecting what is actually good behaviour, but rather as a collective compendium of "the cultural, legal, moral, and social encoding of actions" that are deemed acceptable or unacceptable conducts in a particular period or society. As a consequence, the word 'ethics' regarding incest in the Victorian context could be defined as "the codification of prohibitions against incest, not an endorsement of its practice" (Llewellyn, "Perfectly Innocent" 135).

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

“the reassuring confidences of the familiar within a family setting”, as well as “the connections that run beyond bloodlines to textual encounters, [which] lies as much at the heart of our contemporary desire to see ourselves in the Victorian and the Victorian in us (Llewellyn, “Perfectly Innocent” 158). This collapse of the difference between self and the Other reflects our quasi incestuous relationship with the nineteenth century, its literature and culture through neo-Victorian fiction. Thus, contemporary representations of the incest taboo in neo-Victorian trauma narratives challenge the understandings of this phenomenon in the nineteenth century, but are, at the same time, reflections of them. Following Llewellyn’s analysis of incestuous relationships in neo-Victorian novels, in this chapter I examine the screen texts that make up my corpus of analysis through an “structural and conceptual triangulation between ethics, aesthetics and psychoanalysis” (Llewellyn, “Perfectly Innocent” 135).

In section 6.1. I explore the most frequent type of incest that features in the screen texts analysed here: sibling incest, which is explored in two different ways. First, the most common incestuous relationship is that between a (half-)brother and a (half-)sister, as explored in *Crimson Peak*, *Taboo* and *Carnival Row*. Second, there is a non-heteronormative relationship between two female friends who are “closer than sisters” (Logan, Season 1, Episode 5): Mina Murray and Vanessa Ives in *Penny Dreadful*. Thus, section 6.2. is devoted to lesbian incest in the neo-Victorian family of choice. Finally, only one of the screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis explores father-daughter incest: *Penny Dreadful*. Even though the characters involved in these incestuous relationships are not blood-related, they are surrogate fathers and daughters, as I contend in Chapter 5. These characters are Lily and Dr Frankenstein and Vanessa and Sir Malcolm. Thus, section 6.3. examines their incestuous relations and how *Penny Dreadful*’s seemingly feminist agenda is curtailed in the end, as both Lily and Vanessa are punished for trying to rebel against the patriarchal authorities that have abused them throughout the series.

### 6.1. Sibling Incest in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

Nineteenth-century England was marked by the legislative debates around the incest phenomenon. According to Llewellyn, “the period between 1835 and 1908, from the Deceased Wife’s Sister Act through to the Punishment of Incest Act,<sup>49</sup> can be divided

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<sup>49</sup> The Deceased Wife’s Sister Act (1907) legalised that a man could marry his dead wife’s sister, which had been prohibited in England since 1835 (Kuper). This law overturned the Marriage Act of 1835, which forbid any marriage contract between a man and his dead wife’s sister, even though it made legal “those

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

into four decades where incest was a question of ethics, morality and issues of legal (mis)conduct” (“Perfectly Innocent” 135). During the following thirty years, however, incest became “a structural, artistic and creative device or trope [that] played with, reinvented and reinterpreted these earlier ethical concerns” (Llewellyn, “Perfectly Innocent” 134). There are several literary examples in both American and English novels from the nineteenth century that exploit the aesthetic aspect of incest, such as Herman Melville’s *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities* (1852) or Charles Dickens’s *Hard Times* (1854).

However, Jen Shelton claims that incest was constructed in literature as a “cultural phenomenon in other people’s societies” in the past, but as a “private problem within our own” (226). This understanding of the incest taboo was particularly in vogue during the twentieth century, but contemporary texts –especially those written by feminist women writers– attempt to erase that distinction between “the cultural or anthropological (elsewhere) and the familiar and doubly domestic (homely and here, rather than abroad)” by exploring new ways to “encode, make public, and revise aspects of a culturally incestuous story” (Llewellyn, “Perfectly Innocent” 136). Neo-Victorian screen texts usually follow this latter pattern, which, from a psychoanalytic perspective, could be understood as a way to bring repressed sexual traumas to light.

Moreover, the instances of sibling incest in the screen texts analysed here seem to follow Richardson’s classification of incest love in English Romantic poetry (739-40). According to Richardson, there are three different types of sibling incest relations in Romantic literature. The first one entails a foster-brother and sister that have been raised as siblings, as the ones explored in Coleridge’s *Osorio* (1797) or Southey’s *Thalaba* (1801). The second relation is that between a brother and a sister who are very close and share a common fate, but do not have sexual intercourse, as in Wordsworth’s *White Doe of Rylstone* (1815). Finally, the third one is the most traditional form of Romantic sibling incest: that between a sister and a brother who are sexually involved, as in Percy B. Shelley’s *Manfred or Laon and Cythna* (1817) (the unexpurgated version of *The Revolt of Islam*). The first and third categories are similar in that the attraction between the siblings is based on a shared experience, rather than on a blood tie. Moreover, what these three categories of sibling incest have in common is that they all culminate with a death

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marriages already contracted under the terms of canon law, which allowed such a union prior to 1835” (Llewellyn, “Perfectly Innocent” 139). The Punishment of Incest Act (1908) made it illegal for a man to engage in sexual intercourse with any female he knew he was related to (i.e., his sister, mother, half-sister, etc.) (Bailey and Blackburn).

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

that separates the siblings, which is arguably related to “the consummation –whether physical or spiritual– of their love” (Richardson 740). Incest was punished with death in primitive times, and Freud suggests that this fear persists in us at a psychic level in relation to the horror of incest (*Totem and Taboo* 3).

Both *Crimson Peak* and *Taboo* would fall under Richardson’s third category, as they feature the relationship between a brother and a sister who sexually consummate their union and whose attraction is based on shared experience, rather than on their blood ties. Moreover, in both cases these incestuous relationships culminate with the death of – at least– one of the siblings: Zilpha commits suicide at the end of Season 1 in *Taboo*, and Lucille murders her brother and lover, Thomas, before she is killed by Edith. On the other hand, Vanessa and Mina’s relationship would belong to the first category, given that they are not biological sisters, but were raised together and, therefore, their attraction and connection is also built on a common life experience. Despite the fact that they never have sexual intercourse, their union culminates with Mina’s death.

On the contrary, the Gothic tradition usually features a brother and a sister that were separated at birth, and who later reunite as adults, feeling an undeniable attraction and an intimate bond for each other. Thus, Gothic novels that explored sibling incest put “its emphasis on nature over nurture, birth over experience; the couple is drawn together not by shared memories but, as in the *Nibelungenlied*, by the intuitive attraction of a blood tie” (Richardson 739).<sup>50</sup> *Carnival Row* seems to follow this pattern in its portrayal of incest, given that the two half-siblings, Sophie Longerbane and Jonah Breakspear, grew up in different family units, as they had different mothers, but unknowingly shared their birth father. As a result, their attraction when they first meet as adults is not based on shared experience, but on a biological level: that of a blood bond. When they discover the truth about their family, Jonah finds their union repulsive at first, but Sophie finally convinces him of forming an alliance and a dynasty, like their ancestors did before them:

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<sup>50</sup> Wagner’s opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen* comprises four operas: *Das Rheingold* (first performance, Munich 1869), *Die Walküre* (first performance, Munich 1870), *Siegfried* (first performance, Bayreuth 1876), and *Götterdämmerung* (first performance, Bayreuth 1876). The story revolves around a ring that gives its owner the power to rule the world, and is riddled with incestuous stories. Wotan, the most powerful of the Gods, has a lot of children that he has fathered out of wedlock: eight Valkyries –of whom Brunnhilde is his favourite and for whom he seems to have romantic feelings (Kogan 1056)– and two mortal children that he had with a human woman: Sigmund and Sieglinde. The latter were abandoned by their father when they were children, and were later separated when Sieglinde was abducted. They reunite as adults and fall in love, consummating their incestuous union and having a child named Siegfried. When he grows up, he falls in love with his aunt, Brunhilde, without knowing that they are related. However, he is murdered and she commits suicide in the end. Therefore, *Der Ring des Nibelungen* shares the lovers’ unawareness of their blood relation with the Gothic tradition, and the punishment of death with Romantic literature.

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

“we are descended from emperors and pharaohs. You really think this is the first time this has happened in our family tree? This is how power was born” (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 8, 00:29:10-00:29:15).<sup>51</sup>

From an ethical perspective, incest came to be defined in legal terms as a punishable act, particularly at the beginning of the twentieth century with the passing of The Punishment of Incest Act (1908), which “served as a statutory demarcation of the moment at which [...] incestuous actions [were] separated from the debates about consanguinity, deceased wives and their sisters, Darwinism, eugenics, and anthropological research that had marked the period from the 1830s onwards” (Llewellyn, “Perfectly Innocent” 144). Thus, the conceptual triangulation between ethics, aesthetics and psychoanalysis strengthens a tension in the representation and reinterpretation of the incest motif in neo-Victorian narratives of family trauma. From an ethical perspective, incest was considered an immoral practice and a sexual deviation during the nineteenth century, which is one of the reasons why the Sharpe siblings in *Crimson Peak* are forced to hide their forbidden romance, or why Zilpha asks James to forget about their relationship and to bury it “in a deeper grave” (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 1, 00:54:20-00:54:22).

From a psychoanalytical point of view, neo-Victorian fiction is concerned with “the lack of representation of sexual traumas in Victorian culture and its main aim is to unveil precisely those experiences that were concealed from public view in nineteenth-century texts” (Pedro, “Challenging the Victorian Family Myth” 87). Thus, by verbalizing silenced traumas, neo-Victorian fiction contributes to the victims’ healing process, as it returns to the past in order to expose, and so work through, past experiences of violence. As noted throughout this PhD thesis, Thomas and Lucille Sharpe were victims of child abuse, since their mother confined in the attic and frequently abused them while their father was mysteriously absent.

In *Taboo*, the Delaney siblings had to live in a dysfunctional household that was both haunted by the presence of its former mistress –James’s mother– and the metaphorical ghosts of slavery and colonialism –two imperial endeavours that had made

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<sup>51</sup> Sophie seems to be pointing here at her Pharaonic ancestors, a human ethnic group in *Carnival Row* that appears to be based on Ancient Egyptians. Egyptians had a different view on incest than we do at present, as “one striking feature of domestic life [in Egypt] was that marriage was permitted, even encouraged, between brother and sister, whose union has often been considered prohibited by a universal taboo on ‘incest’, that is, on sexual relations within the elementary family of father, mother, daughter and son” (Goody 319). In fact, “brother-sister marriage was supposedly a ‘well-known’ practice indulged in by the Pharaohs”, but there is no evidence supporting that the same applied to ordinary Egyptians (Shaw 274).

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

James's father a wealthy man, although they also drove him mad in the end. I argue that in both *Taboo* and *Crimson Peak*, the siblings try to cope with their respective family traumas by engaging in an incestuous relationship. In *Crimson Peak*, the romantic relationship between the Sharpe siblings is revealed towards the end of the film –when Edith catches the siblings having sexual intercourse– whereas in *Taboo*, the audience is fully aware of the siblings' relationship since the very first episode. The explicit depiction of incest in neo-Victorian narratives of family trauma arguably has a cathartic effect, since “the traumas of the past –so often ignored at the time– must be written in order for us to come to terms with our collective history; we must write the traumas of the past in order to confront and ultimately deal with them” (Cox, “Narratives of Sexual Trauma” 140).

Furthermore, Heilmann and Llewellyn claim that the protagonists of neo-Victorian narratives of family trauma tend to be archetypically “abandoned children, whose lives are profoundly affected by dysfunctional parental and sibling ties, and who must negotiate a precarious sense of self against the backdrop of past and present family trauma played out over their bodies” (41). As it has been widely discussed in previous chapters, the Sharpe siblings in *Crimson Peak* were abused and isolated by their own mother in the attic of their family house as children. I contend that they tried to cope with this family trauma by engaging in an incestuous relationship, since they were isolated and could only find love and support in each other. Indeed, Murphy contends that their incestuous relationship is a “response to the childhood abuse they sustained at the hands of their brutal father and cold-hearted mother” (161). Therefore, Del Toro does not depict the Sharpe siblings as monsters, but as survivors of domestic violence. As Lucille tells Edith: “you should have seen him as a child, Thomas. He was perfect. So, from all his small infractions, from my mother's cane, I protected him. I took so many beatings. And when she found out about us, well... The only love Thomas and I ever knew was from one another. In these rotting walls. Hiding” (Del Toro, 01:38:56). Likewise, Weeber states that del Toro transforms the villains of the story into victims that are trying to survive in a world that is increasingly becoming more modern (124).

There are other aspects of the incest trope in these screen texts that can be analysed from a psychoanalytic approach. The incestuous relationships between the Sharpe and Delaney siblings take us back to Freud's uncanny phenomena and the largely exploited phenomenon of the double in Gothic fiction. According to Freud, this uncanny sensation occurs when two different people are physically identical, have a deep emotional connection and share the same knowledge and vital experiences. These people identify

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

themselves “with another person, so that his self becomes confounded, or the foreign self is substituted for his own –in other words, by doubling, dividing and interchanging the self” (234). Freud also describes the frequent manifestation of similar situations, physical and personality traits, or even committing a similar crime. Furthermore, the trope of the double and how it is explored in incest narratives also seems to be related to the associationist psychology of David Hartley, an eighteenth-century British philosopher whose influence on Coleridge and Wordsworth is widely acknowledged, particularly regarding their incest poems –as in the case of Coleridge’s *Osorio*, which inaugurated the brother-sister incest theme (Richardson 741). Hartley claimed that “if beings of the same nature [...] be exposed for an indefinite time to the same impressions and associations, all their particular differences will, at last, be overruled, and they will become perfectly similar, or even equal” (68).

Both *Crimson Peak* and *Taboo* have inherited this Romantic influence and understanding of the incest bond, since, in both cases, the siblings share the same impressions and associations regarding the family traumas and dysfunctions they were exposed to as children. In the case of *Crimson Peak*, Weeber argues that, due to the child abuse that she suffered, Lucille developed a split personality, “which she has filled by absorbing parts of her parents, of her brother and of the house” (123). Weeber further contends that Lucille and Thomas actually look like twins, since they always wear the same dark colours, have very similar physical traits (123), and share the same vital experiences –i.e., child abuse, a murderous past and incest. Their emotional co-dependency can be seen in the following excerpt, when they promise to never abandon each other:

Lucille: We stay together. Never apart.

Thomas: Never apart.

Lucille: You couldn’t leave me. You wouldn’t.

Thomas: I can’t. I can’t.

Lucille: I know (Del Toro, 01:26:38-01:26:56).

Even though the Sharpe siblings’ romantic and erotic bond, as well as their nature as doubles, seem unbreakable at first, their ties are eventually severed after Thomas falls in love with Edith. As I contend elsewhere, “this is a turning point for him in the film”, since it is the moment when he becomes aware that the relationship with his sister is



## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

“unnatural and that their murderous cycle needs to stop” (Pedro, “Fictionalising the Unspeakable” 224). However, Lucille refuses to accept her brother’s rejection, which condemns both siblings to an imminent death. Towards the end of the film, Lucille murders her brother because she cannot bear to lose that part of her identity, although she is then killed by Edith, assisted by Thomas’s translucent ghost.

In the same vein, *Taboo* explores the uncanny phenomenon of the double through James and Zilpha’s relationship. The former hints at their forbidden love as the cause of his forced exile –and the fact that it did not help him to forget her– in the very first episode of the series: “One thing Africa did not cure is that I still love you” (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 1, 00:13:17-00:13:22). Even though Zilpha tries to resist him and make him understand that she is a married and Christian woman now, James relentlessly pursues her, reminding her of the connection they once shared: “We used to talk to each other without words in dark corners. Your curiosity and hunger for all that is possible out there could never be tethered by base religious morality, ship insurance and new china” (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 3, 00:35:19-00:35:42).

The Delaney siblings are the embodiment of the Freudian double in that they see themselves as two parts of the same being, or the other as an extension of oneself, as James tells Zilpha: “I used to think we were the same person” (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 3, 00:45:32-00:45:34). The idea of the double seems to be associated with what Llewellyn describes as the process of identity formation through “the trauma of excessively close familial relationships” (“Perfectly Innocent” 137). In this case, the trauma is rooted in a dysfunctional family whose economic power and social status are based on colonial endeavours. As Mousoutzanis points out, *Taboo* revolves around the Delaney family, characterised by power and imperial dynamics, disputes over inheritances and familial legacies, but, above all, an “Oedipal family drama”, which includes James’s “succession of his father Horace (Edward Fox), his traumatic fixation with his mother Salish (Noomi Rapace), and his incestuous relationship with his sister Zilpha (Oona Chaplin)” (4). Incest is multitemporal, in the sense that incestuous entanglements are “repetitive, cyclical, and simultaneously reconstructive, and deconstructive”, so that the traumatic forms part of the victims’/survivors’ identities, and is core to their “development” and “existence” (Llewellyn, “Perfectly Innocent” 137). The Delaney siblings come from a patriarchal and imperialist family with deviant psychosexual dynamics, so that James’s colonizing endeavours, as well as his relationship with Zilpha, are symptomatic of their family’s violent and dysfunctional origins.

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

Another fact that arguably proves the Delaneys' nature as doubles is that James can project himself in his sister's dreams, but he cannot penetrate other people's minds. When Zilpha rejects him in one of her letters and warns him that she will no longer respond to his messages, he promises her: "Then I'll visit you in your dreams, my love" (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 3, 00:35). It seems that the siblings share a telepathic connection that has survived their long separation across continents, even though Zilpha tries to resist it through Christian penitence and her husband's beatings: "My husband is harsh, and as a Christian, I welcome it. I deserve it" (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 00:35:01-00:35:06). Nevertheless, it seems that the passage of time and Zilpha's newfound fervent Christian devotion has ultimately severed the unnatural connection that the siblings once shared, as James no longer sees Zilpha as an extension of himself by the end of Season 1:

Zilpha: I know you. I know your nature. I know you.

James: No. I believed once that we were the same person.

Zilpha: We are.

James: We are not [...] Not anymore. Perhaps you should thank your God for that (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 7, 00:17:28-00:17:55).

In spite of what James tells her, the underlying reasons for leaving his sister –after persistently pursuing her for most part of Season 1– seem to be more rooted in his unresolved traumas with her mother than in Zilpha's religious beliefs. After the latter murders her husband and finally acknowledges that she is in love with James, her behaviour turns somehow erratic and reckless. James believes that she has gone insane, as his own mother allegedly did before she tried to kill him. In Episode 6, Zilpha hears a voice in her head that exhorts her to murder her husband, and she believes that voice belongs to James. Led by that voice, she picks up a hatpin from her dresser while he is fast asleep. She then straddles him and sinks the hatpin in his stomach, while he cries for help (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 6, 00:32:56-00:34:35).

It is worth noting that, in turning the hatpin into "an assassin's" weapon, she is arguably subverting "the feminine ideal" (Noimann 95) of the tamed and domesticated angel of the house, since the hatpin, as the corset, was used as a fashion accessory to

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

further oppress women in the Victorian patriarchal system.<sup>52</sup> Afterwards, she goes to her brother's house and tells him what she has done: "I killed him, just like you said" (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 6, 00:35:52-00:35:55). While James is worried about whether her sister might be found guilty of her husband's murder and be hung, she appears to be content and satisfied, freed of the man that had been forcing himself on her, as well as battering and torturing her. There had been previous signs of rebellion in Zilpha's attitude towards her husband, particularly after he brought a priest to perform an exorcism on her because he believed she was possessed by the devil (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 5).<sup>53</sup> Even though he apologises to her and promises her that he will stop the abuse and become a loving husband, she asks him to leave her alone in a firm tone (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 6, 00:22:32-00:23:39).

After the funeral of Zilpha's husband, the Delaney siblings rush to her bedroom to engage in sexual intercourse –as they used to do in the family house when they were still adolescents. However, James abruptly stops, as he starts having flashbacks of his mother in the river, his perception of the chronological line being disrupted by his PTSD. Cuts of Zilpha's face are superposed with images of his mother bathing and laughing in the river before she tried to kill him. Thus, in this scene James arguably associates –and even confuses– Zilpha with his mother. As Mousoutzanis contends:

[T]he editing clearly suggests [Zilpha's] role as a substitute for the mother, as the scenes of their sexual encounter in bed are intercut with intrusive flashbacks of his mother trying to drown him. In fact, Delaney's entire project seems to be propelled by his attempt to recover from this trauma as it is revealed to be one of a return, a return to his mother's land (6).

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<sup>52</sup> The use of hatpins as deadly weapons in a woman's hand is inspired by historical accounts of the period. By 1900, hatpins were starting to be considered serious weapons, as some head and brain injuries were hatpin-related, and this fashion item was deemed to be particularly dangerous in crowded spaces (Godfrey 80-1). The hatpin also came to be used as a crime weapon, as an American paper of the period described: "A woman can't very well carry a stick. But she has a weapon in a long hatpin" (qtd. in Godfrey 81). The hatpin was also used as a suicide method, as well as for "eye-stabbing", "self-defence, revenge, or [...] jealousy" (Godfrey 81). As a result, long hatpins started to be declared dangerous and illegal across Europe and the US. Indeed, Plowden claimed that "a hatpin is as dangerous a weapon in the hands of a woman as a revolver in the hands of a man" and he wanted to get them licensed (qtd. in Godfrey 82).

<sup>53</sup> The exorcism scene is a turning point in Zilpha's domestic abuse, as her husband further humiliates her by bringing in another male authority to torture and vex her. The priest pins her down on the floor, inside a circle of candles, while she desperately cries for help. He recites some prayers in Latin and pours holy water on her body, which is in full display for the male authorities to inspect and violate. The priest even fondles her in a sexual manner without her consent (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 5, 00:53:10-00:54:59).

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

Salish and Zilpha are similar characters in that they both rebel against patriarchal oppression in a violent manner. Salish resisted the social impositions that her husband and nineteenth-century British society tried to instil upon her, and eventually became a Medean mother who tried to drown her own child. Likewise, Zilpha turns into a perpetrator of androicide after she can no longer stand patriarchal abuse, not unlike Lily Frankenstein in *Penny Dreadful*.<sup>54</sup> Due to the similarities between them, James's obsession with the women in his family might be understood as an unresolved Oedipal complex, which, according to Freud, is a universal phenomenon that affects both men and women in the nuclear family. Whilst sons fall in love with the mother and want to kill the father, daughters are jealous of their mothers and plan to assume their role as their fathers' psychosexual partners ("The complete letters of Sigmund Freud" 265). In light of this reasoning, James would have developed romantic feelings and sexual desires towards his mother as an infant, and wished his father's death in order to keep her to himself. According to Freud, the Oedipal complex affects all human children, and overcoming it –that is to say, accepting the sexual and emotional bond between our parents and fixating our desires on an individual outside our familial nexus– is key to enter adulthood. Those who fail to work through this complex usually suffer from neurosis (*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* 10).

This could be James's case, since obsessive fixation on his mother through recurring flashbacks and his ferocious defence of her innocence, especially when comparing her to his father. When his servant Brace tries to convince James that his father was not as bad as he makes him out to be, the latter replies that Horace Delaney killed his wife "for convenience" (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 6, 00:02:48-00:02:50). James's unnatural obsession with his mother is symptomatic of his unresolved Oedipal complex, which caused him a psychosexual trauma that was probably triggered by her death. As a consequence, he directed his sexual and romantic feelings to the only other female member of his family: his half-sister Zilpha. Their incestuous relationship as children strengthened his Oedipal inclinations, but as soon as he directs his romantic

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<sup>54</sup> 'Androicide' is a term to designate "[t]he murder of men *as men* [...] Androicide, perpetrated by men on one another, is common in gang subcultures and has in the past been widely practiced during old-style warfare. Without endorsing this act, we might expect women to commit androicide as a natural response to 'gynocide,' given the basic human drive to retribution". However, Western feminists do not "openly recommend androicide as an antidote, deterrent or punishment for patriarchy" (Addison 6, emphasis in original). In the screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis, the most prominent case of androicide can be found in *Penny Dreadful*, where Lily Frankenstein and his army of prostitutes attempt to eradicate abusive men.

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

longings outside of his nuclear family –when he meets Lorna Bow, his father’s widow–, he realises that he no longer seeks familiarity and similarity in his partner, but quite the opposite. This is arguably why he abruptly stops his and Zilpha’s sexual encounter: because she reminds him of his deceased mother and he now feels repulsed by it.

Likewise, Zilpha and Lucille could be considered as both socially deviant and sexually defiant females, a definition of the incestuous Victorian woman put forward by Alexandra Cheira (149) when describing the character of Eugenia from A. S. Byatt’s novella *Morpho Eugenia* (1992). Lucille’s and Zilpha’s incestuous relationships with their (half-)brothers would undoubtedly fall under the first category, as those practices were not sanctioned by the nineteenth-century English society –in other words, they were considered unethical. Moreover, the fact that Zilpha continues with that relationship, even while being married to another man, further problematizes the morality and ethical nature of her actions, as she also becomes an adulteress. Zilpha’s “sexual agency and the fact that she is no longer a virgin when she marries defy the normative constructions of female sexual politics of her time” (Cheira 150), making her fit the second category, that of a sexually defiant woman. Despite the fact that Lucille is not a married lady, this latter category could also apply to her, since she pretends to be a pure and virginal spinster in public, while in the privacy of the domestic sphere she engages in romantic and sexual practices with her brother Thomas.

On a different note, *Taboo* also perpetuates the nineteenth-century trope of the adulteress that commits suicide at the end of the novel, as she cannot endure the social ostracism she is being subjected to on account of her sexual transgressions. In the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a type of novel that centered around female adultery, which thrived in continental Europe –even though there also several instances of this type of novel in nineteenth-century America. With some minor differences, the plot of these novels focused on an upper-middle class wife who is seduced by an unmarried male character. When her sexual transgression goes public, she is socially ostracized and finally commits suicide (Overton 3). These novels were usually written by a male author –with the notable exception of the American novel *The Awakening* (1899), written by Kate Chopin–, such as: Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1857), Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (1878), Theodor Fontane’s *Effi Briest* (1895), Leopoldo Alas (Clarín)’s *La Regenta* (1884-5), or Eça de Queirós’s *Cousin Bazilio* (1878).

Similar to the female protagonists of the abovementioned novels, after her brother/lover rejects her, Zilpha experiences “a universal meaninglessness and her suicide

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

from the end of a platform that offers nowhere to go” (Tanner 30) seems to be her only way out. According to Tory Tanner, one of the most famous adulteresses in Ancient History, Helen of Troy, also lived a meaningless existence with her lover Paris in his homeland (30). She seemed to regret abandoning her home country, and missed her husband, family and friends. Tanner argues that she might have felt like she was dead to her loved ones in Sparta, even though “legend generously restore her to her husband” at the end of *The Iliad* (30). Nonetheless, later women –particularly nineteenth-century adulteresses in Western literature, such as Anna Karenina, Madame Bovary, or Edna Pontellier in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899)– were not granted the same mercy, so that they often found “themselves intimate with death –but more usually it is their own” (Tanner 30).

This is normally so because there is no land in Western societies that condones adulterous practices, so that adulterers usually feel ostracised. They fantasise about a world where they could love each other without obstacles and where they could be accepted. As a result, fiction exploring adultery usually has at the centre of its narrative “[t]he quest for, or dream of, such an impossible world apart recurs constantly in the novel of adultery –for all available areas of the given world ultimately seem inhospitable to the adulterous lovers” (Tanner 34). This is the case of Agreus and Imogen in the season finale of *Carnival Row*, who –as discussed in Chapter 4– are forced to leave The Burgue and look for another country that will be more accepting and open-minded to interracial couples. James also wants to flee England and move to a country where he does not have to hide his love for Zilpha. The Americans that want to make a deal with him in exchange for the Nootka Sound territory make him a very tempting offer, as they promise to help him and Zilpha escape to America and get them identities, so that they can finally live as a real couple:

Now, I make no moral judgments [...] Well, you can have her as part of the deal, part of our second offering. So why don’ you just take her? Just take her with you. No more hiding. We can guarantee you safe passage, anonymity, new worlds. Now, look, if you don’t want to deal with the obstacle, we can certainly take care of that for you. Say her husband gets drunk, no surprise, falls from a bridge, something. Let me just make the point, from an American point of view: Love is now part of the deal that we are offering (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 4, 00:42:31-00:43:20).

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

However, James does not take the Americans up on their offer, and it is actually Zilpha the one that eventually murders her husband as a way to escape domestic violence. Moreover, James's dream of escaping with his sister to a land where they do not have to conceal their love any longer is not fulfilled in the end either, as he breaks up with her and she commits suicide. Considering that *Taboo* is set in the 1810s –the period when Romantic poets produced their most successful texts –I argue that the series is influenced by the Romantics' work and understandings of sibling love. As in *Taboo*, Romantic English poets from the Second Generation tended to blend sibling love –based on shared experiences and associations since early childhood– with erotic love, in an attempt to create the perfect foundation for “sympathetic love” –which Romantic poets were obsessed with (Richardson 744). Even though at first it might seem that the blending between sibling and erotic love will bring about the most perfect sympathy, such a union never lasts in Romantic poetry, and nor does it in *Taboo*.

Despite the fact that James has seemingly overcome his Oedipal complex, Zilpha is still attached to him. When he abandons her –after she has murdered her abusive husband and has finally decided to start a new life with him– she feels like she has nothing else to live for, so that she commits suicide by jumping off a bridge to drown in the river Thames. James finds out about her death through a goodbye letter that she writes to him:

Dear James,

At last, I have found a way out of the cage in which I have been living. Eyes I didn't know I had were opened. I saw the limits of my life, the iron bars around my soul. At last, I found a way to slip between them. I intend to leave society, leave London, leave England behind, travel to a place where I will be free. It is a place where, someday, I hope we will meet and be happy. [...] I'm planning to journey to heaven, James. I've realized the truth. My cage is my flesh; I can shed it. The River Thames will take me to God [...] (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 8, 00:02:12-00:02:53; 00:28:22-00:28:34).

It is worth noting that the description of Zilpha's feelings in this letter follows the prominent Victorian metaphor that represented women in society as caged birds. Examples of Victorian texts that explored this metaphor range from Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850) or Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856), where

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

the ideal middle-class Englishwoman is portrayed as “a stunted existence of dull domesticity in which women are expected to glory in the very limitations to their freedoms, knowledge and experience” (Primorac, *Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 96). In Barrett Browning’s poem, Aurora describes her aunt’s personality and compares her to a trapped bird that is content with its confined and domestic life as follows: “She had lived/ A sort of cage-bird life, born in a cage,/ Accounting that to leap from perch to perch/ Was act and joy enough for any bird” (lines 304-7).

Contrary to Aurora’s aunt in Barrett Browning’s poem, Zilpha has always despised her cage. However, she has finally come to realise that the very thing that was trapping her was her own flesh, a metonymy that represents her female body. She feels that her biological sex has forced her to perform the social role of the submissive woman and tied her to a violent man that she did not love. Thus, the only way she can escape her cage –i.e., her own body and the social constraints attached to being a woman– is through death, where she hopes to be free at last.<sup>55</sup> Thus, in spite of *Taboo*’s potential in challenging the nuclear family as a natural and undisputable institution that instils national and moral values, it fails to offer Zilpha a sense of female empowerment and independence. In reproducing –rather than challenging– the tragical ending of nineteenth-century adultery novels, the series is subjugating its female protagonist both to her male counterpart –without whom she does not want to keep on living– and to the oppressive social rules of Victorian society, which cannot accept a woman’s active sexuality.

On a different note, if we have a look at the incest trope from an aesthetic point of view, the sensationalist agenda of some contemporary screen texts that build on sexual traumas “may serve to highlight past wrongs, [but] they might also be read as both opportunistic and voyeuristic, indicative of a contemporary fascination with personal narratives of trauma” (Cox, “Narratives of Sexual Trauma” 139). As I point out elsewhere, in the case of *Crimson Peak*, “Del Toro’s use of the incestuous plotline partly capitalises on the morbid, voyeuristic expectations of contemporary audiences, even as it simultaneously asks them to bear witness to hidden past traumas” (“Challenging the Victorian Family Myth” 87). *Taboo* appears to be following the same pattern, especially

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<sup>55</sup> Unlike the case of Zilpha in *Taboo*, the caged bird metaphor is often translated in screen adaptations of the long nineteenth century through the use of corsets and crinolines. Indeed, in these neo-Victorian screen texts, “the image of a tightly-laced, corseted female figure in particular becomes an accepted visual shorthand for the notion of the literally and metaphorically repressed Victorian woman” (Primorac, *Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 98). I further discuss this trope in section 6.3., when I focus on the character of Lily Frankenstein and her incestuous relationship with her surrogate father, Dr Frankenstein.



## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

considering that the interrupted sex scene between the Delaney siblings is graphic and explicit (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 6, 00:46:19-00:47:29), and Zilpha's erotic dreams are plagued with Orientalist and sensual imagery while she has sexual intercourse with a masked James. Nonetheless, at the same time, the series also challenges the ideal myth of the perfect nuclear family through the incest plotline, as this 'deviant' relationship reveals the fragmentation of the Delaney household and brings to the fore James's unresolved issues: his mother's attempted murder, his conflicted feelings towards his father's colonizing endeavours and his forbidden love for his sister.

The case of *Carnival Row* differs from the other screen texts in that the half-siblings Jonah and Sophie did not grow up together and did not know they were related until they were both adults. Aesthetically, there are graphic depictions of their sexual encounters that cater to the audience's morbid desires. However, the Burguish society discourages incestuous relationships in this Victorian-based universe, and Jonah tries to resist his half-sister's sexual advancements at first, on the grounds that "the world out there has boundaries" (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 8, 00:19:58-00:20:00). Nevertheless, she finally convinces him that these social rules do not apply to them, since they are descendants of Pharaohs and kings that created empires by marrying family members. It is worth noting how Sophie's view of incest—as a privilege to the aristocratic upper classes in order to perpetuate and preserve the 'purity' of their family bloodline—ties with Tate's argument that Victorian understandings of incest were biased in terms of class privilege. The upper classes were disgusted by the alleged "sexual debauchery" of the lower classes in "'single room' conditions" (181), while they simultaneously advocated for their 'birth right' to marry and procreate within their own families. Nonetheless, in order to keep up appearances and their political power, Sophie and Jonah have to hide both their romantic involvement and the fact that they are related.

In the same vein, *Crimson Peak* would also follow the idea that incest was morally understood in terms of class privilege in Victorian England—since the siblings are the last remnant of a now impoverished aristocratic family and, therefore, the only ones that can preserve the Sharpe name. Indeed, Thomas's fixation on modernizing the family mines is actually a futile attempt to recuperate the family's former glory and prestige. Through the siblings' systematic failures, Del Toro seems to be criticising the rural aristocracy's family inbreeding and reticence to adapt to modern times, as the only baby that Lucille and Thomas were able to produce was born with multiple malformations and died when he was barely a few days old.

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

The same thing could be said about Thomas's entrepreneurial project, since all his efforts to repair and revitalise the family mines with new technology fail miserably. This seems to point, once again, to the film's emphasis on the siblings' backwards and corrupted nature, and to the need for them to leave the family past behind and embrace the future. Moreover, the emphasis on family preservation and the importance of blood ties are heavily criticised in the film, as they prevent individuals from making their own choices and expanding their horizons outside the nuclear family. Throughout the film, Edith tries to bring Thomas back to the present, forcing him to break with his family past. Halfway through the movie, she tells him: "The past, Thomas. You're always looking to the past. You won't find me there" (Del Toro, 01:10:29-01:10:36). In fact, it is actually the siblings' incapacity to do so what seals their fate at the end of the film.

On the contrary, Sophie and Jonah's union could be interpreted as a way to question the socially imposed boundaries that define the nuclear family. Given that they are not officially brother and sister –as they grew up in different households– and that they belong to rival families, their alliance is a choice that they consciously make and that would likely end years of dispute between their respective families. Unlike their parents –who constantly questioned their dreams and abilities–, Sophie and Jonah support each other's ambitions and have a common goal, so that they decide to put their parents' disagreements behind and form an 'alliance of choice' that will allow them to fulfil their dreams and political ambitions.

Finally, it is worth noting the contrast between urban modernity and the rural past through the uses of colour in the film. This contrast is portrayed in such a noticeable manner that Primorac describes *Crimson Peak* as "Guillermo del Toro's flamboyant, colour-coded take on Gothic Victoriana" (*Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 133). Bright and warm colours are associated with America, whereas rural England is marked in the film with dark, subdued and even gelid touches. Indeed, when interviewed for the film magazine *Sight and Sound*, Del Toro claimed that "the movie is divided into two –a golden passage which is modernity, and then a cyan blue passage which is Allerdale Hall. In the middle you have the colour red linking Lucille to the ghosts, to the ground" (25). This aesthetic features are also present in both his Spanish-language films and his Hollywood productions –such as *Hellboy I and II*–, where there is "a notable use of colour, including contrasts of reds and golds with colder blues and greys" (Tierney, Shaw and Davis 2).

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

To conclude, sibling incest is portrayed in these neo-Victorian screen texts following the main characteristics of both Romantic and Gothic representations of the topic, but also incorporating a three-fold approach –based on ethics, aesthetics and psychoanalysis– that brings to the fore the psychosexual, socio-cultural and morbid dysfunctionalities of the traditional nuclear family. Moreover, it is worth underlying the rather misogynistic treatment of the female characters that form part of these incestuous relationships, despite the apparent feminist drive of the screen texts analysed here. Lucille is not granted the possibility of finding a love interest outside her nuclear family, and her ghost is condemned to spend eternity haunting Allerdale Hall with no other company than the rotting walls in her family's mansion. Zilpha is seemingly empowered by the end of Season 1 when she murders her abusive husband, but is then rejected by her brother-lover, who is repulsed by her violence and apparent madness. In the end, she can only find one way out of social ostracism and her beloved's rejection: suicide. Finally, Sophie is portrayed as a manipulative character that uses her brother in order to achieve power and perpetuate the family bloodline, even though Jonah is as responsible as she is for engaging in an incestuous relationship.

### 6.2. Lesbian Sibling Incest in the Neo-Victorian Family of Choice

Perhaps in a less explicit manner than in the abovementioned examples, *Penny Dreadful* also explores the taboo of sibling incest through the relationship between Mina Murray and Vanessa Ives, who –despite not being blood related– could be regarded as sisters within a family of choice. The fifth episode of Season 1 is constructed as a flashback where Vanessa replays her childhood memories in the countryside with her close friend, Mina, and their respective nuclear families. The title of the episode, “Closer than Sisters”, is quite self-explanatory, as it depicts how the Murray and Ives families shared a strong and intimate bond, almost as if they were blood relatives. Vanessa used to spend most of her days at the Murray's cottage, and the gate that separated their houses was always open. As Vanessa tells Mina in one of her letters: “Were ever two families closer than ours? I don't remember a day that gate between our homes was closed. Until the day it closed forever” (Logan, Season 1, Episode 5, 00:04:59-00:5:09). Furthermore, as discussed in the previous chapter, Sir Malcolm adopts Vanessa as his surrogate daughter, which would make her and Mina sisters of choice. Finally, the adulterous affair between Mina's father and Vanessa's mother further problematizes the bond between the two female friends, as their parents' relationship almost turns them into step-sisters.

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

Tate contends that recent studies on incest in the long nineteenth century touch upon, but fail to directly address queer incest, and how it both perpetuated and challenged bourgeois family values. This academic void in the literature “is perplexing considering that the period offers the most public and prominent example of queer incestuous coupling, that of Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper, an aunt and her niece who lived, loved, and worked together under the joint pseudonym Michael Field” (Tate 182). However, in recent decades, there have been “long-running debates on lesbian historiography of the 19th century that [sic] considers whether erotic attraction between women was manifested in passionate ‘romantic’ friendship or in sexual practice” (Morse 1), and how these ambiguous relationships were portrayed in the literature of the period, particularly in Victorian canonical novels such as Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* or *Villette*.

According to Sheila Jeffreys, feminist historians studying these female relationships have traditionally assumed that “they were devoid of genital sexual expression on the grounds that the repression of women’s genital sexuality in the nineteenth century would have made spontaneous genital expression unlikely” (Jeffreys 104). As a consequence, these historians have drawn a distinction between passionate female friendships and lesbian relationships. Nevertheless, feminist historians that claimed that ‘genital’ sexual relations between women did not exist before the twentieth century seem to be contradicted by Anne Lister’s diaries, “called ‘the Rosetta stone’ of lesbianism” (Longmuir 151).<sup>56</sup>

Although Deborah Denenholz Morse suggests that Lister’s diaries can be understood as intertexts that illuminate queer interpretations of canonical Victorian novels such as *Jane Eyre*, little has been written on lesbian desire in Brontë’s text (3). In the novel, Jane shares a very strong bond with her female friend at Lowood’s school, Helen Burns –an intimate friendship that could be compared to Mina and Vanessa’s relationship in *Penny Dreadful*. Nonetheless, “[t]he intense friendships that Jane finds with other women throughout her narrative pilgrimage have been traditionally viewed in

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<sup>56</sup> Anne Lister (1791-1840) was an early nineteenth century landowner, whose diaries are made up of 27 volumes that span 35 years and are particularly interesting to scholars studying the history of sexuality, given that their content focuses on explicit depictions of queer female sexuality. The importance of Lister’s journals lies not only in the fact that they question “the assumptions around female sexuality in pre-Victorian Britain, but also provides a unique insight into the construction of gender roles during this period, and more specifically, the extent to which they were being shaped by the institution of marriage” (Roulston 182). Based on Anne Lister’s “gender and sexual non-conformity –particularly her romantic interactions with women and her mobility through the world”, the TV series *Gentleman Jack* (BBC/HBO, 2019–present) offers a “post-heritage” drama that explores Lister’s romantic affairs with other women without questioning her elite status as a wealthy, high-class landowner (Ng 2397).

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

Brontë scholarship from a biographical perspective or through the feminist lens of female community” (Morse 4). Indeed, Helen Burns is thought to be based on Charlotte’s older sister and mother figure, Maria Brontë, who assumed her mother’s role in the Brontë family after the latter died. Consequently, queer readings of Helen and Jane’s relationship have generally been discouraged because of their alleged filial connection (Morse 4).

Nevertheless, the fact that two women are portrayed as sisters does not necessarily prevent them from having romantic feelings and sexual desires for each other, as in the case of Mina and Vanessa. There is a scene in the flashback episode of Season 1, where they share the same bed the night before Mina’s wedding, which evokes Jane and Helen’s final embrace in the latter’s bed before she finally dies of tuberculosis. According to Morse, this embrace could “be interpreted as a displacement and expression of sororal, filial, and erotic desire, indistinguishable from one another”, so that, while we can read “Charlotte’s yearning to join the dead mother and dead maternal sister, there is also Jane’s desire for the dead beloved first girlfriend who rises in her memory” (Morse 8). Likewise, there is sisterly companionship in Vanessa and Mina’s last embrace –as they share a common family experience and fatherly figure–, but also a romantic and sexual yearning, which Vanessa later satiates by having sexual intercourse with Mina’s fiancé.

In a similar vein, there are other Victorian canonical texts that have been reinterpreted through the lens of Queer Studies ever since the twentieth century. Christina Rossetti’s *Goblin Market* (1862) is one of them. Despite “the text’s ostensible form as a children’s poem” through its “nursery rhyme qualities” (Hay 9), its central theme is arguably of a more mature nature: the secret queer relationship between its two female protagonists, the sisters Laura and Lizzie. Johnathan Hay contends that Rossetti’s secrecy and ambiguity in describing the sisters’ relationship were probably due to Victorian patriarchal censorship (9). Victorian texts and their later critical readings tended to interpret romantic lesbian relationships as mere friendships, as Adrienne Rich points out: “in its patriarchal definition, female friendship and comradeship have been set apart from the erotic, thus limiting the erotic itself” (650). Nonetheless, Rossetti describes the sisters’ relationship as physically intimate, as they are “[c]rouching close together” (l. 36), and there are descriptions of “clasping arms and cautioning lips [...] tingling cheeks and finger tips” (l. 38-9), and how they are “[f]olded in each other’s wings” (l. 188), while they are lying together in bed –a relationship that is also comparable to Mina and Vanessa’s in *Penny Dreadful*. All these descriptions of their joined bodies seem to point to their lesbian

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

relationship, which is “resistant to definition in simplistic terms, as it evades and exceeds any attempt at discerning and hence colonising its meaning” (Hay 9).

However, Rossetti’s poem also focuses on the goblins’ alluring presence, which arguably represents heterosexual male desire, and how it disrupts the sisters’ relationship (Hay 9). As Luce Irigaray argues, lesbian “desire [...] may be recovered only in secret, in hiding” (30), and the goblins heterosexual and public seduction disturbs the sisters’ Sapphic privacy. This is similar to Mina and Vanessa’s relationship in *Penny Dreadful*, as their close relationship was possible while they were children and, therefore, sheltered from public, heteronormative courtship. However, once they became adult women and Mina was courted by her fiancé, their Sapphic relationship had to end. Likewise, at the end of Rossetti’s poem, Laura and Lizzie have “both [become] wives” (l. 544), demonstrating that “pregnancy, childbirth and parenting are unavoidable side effects of” (Yates 114) the patriarchal *status quo*. Nevertheless, it is quite surprising that, even after Laura has submitted herself to a heteronormative marriage, she still “fondly recalls ‘Those pleasant days long gone’, which have become locked away in ‘not-returning time’. Now merely a memory, the sisters’ generative affect has become locked away in a past as irretrievable as it is queer” (Hay 11).

Furthermore, lesbian love between two women that are “closer than sisters” (Logan, Season 1, Episode 5) was also explored in Victorian texts whose central theme was female vampirism. As Nina Auerbach contends, even though male vampires were constructed as a sexual threat against women in Victorian literature, female ones “promised protection against a destiny of girdles, spike heels and approval” (4). This is arguably so because female vampires are socially disruptive creatures who, as Vanessa in *Penny Dreadful*, “destabilise such comfortable, culturally inflected investments and complacencies and reveal them as aspects of constructed gender identity resulting from social and cultural hierarchies” (Wisker 150). When female characters reject the social conventions attached to their gender –e.g., chastity, modesty, family life, submission to a male authority, etc.– they are portrayed as a dangerous and demonised Other. However, the gothic character of the vampire might also offer a critique of “what is feared and desired” (Wisker 151) at different historical periods, namely female sexuality in the Victorian era, venereal diseases –such as syphilis in the nineteenth century or AIDS in the 1980s–, foreign invasions or homosexuality.

One of the Victorian canonical texts that simultaneously explores the allure and danger that female sexuality poses to patriarchal order is Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla*

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

(1872). This novella has long been interpreted as “an early lesbian tale” (Wisker 153), where a female sexual predator targets other young women to feed on them. The story is narrated by Laura, her latest victim and lover, whose health starts deteriorating after meeting the tempting vampire. As Botting suggests, “[f]eline, darkly sensual and threatening in its underlying, cruel violence, Carmilla’s unnatural desires are signalled in her choice of females as her victims and the alluring as well as disturbing effects she has on them” (*The Gothic* 144-5). Carmilla is first presented as a charming guest in Laura’s home, who develops contradictory feelings towards the ancient vampire. She claims that “a strange tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable, ever and anon, mingled with a vague sense of fear and disgust [...] I was conscious of a love growing into adoration, and also of abhorrence” (Le Fanu 178).

Nonetheless, just like Vanessa Ives in *Penny Dreadful* and other Victorian female vampires, Carmilla is vanquished by a Victorian male doctor.<sup>57</sup> Tamar Heller establishes a connection between nineteenth-century ‘hysterical’ women and female vampires through her examination of a Victorian doctor, Weir Mitchell, who claimed that a “hysterical girl is a vampire who sucks the blood of the healthy people about her [...] surely where there is one hysterical girl there will be soon or late two sick women” (Heller 78). As a result, Carmilla could be considered as a representation of the Victorian hysterical woman, although she also exhibits symptoms of anorexia, as “she sleeps late, does not eat, and can scarcely walk several steps before coming completely exhausted” (Heller 80-1). Considering her lesbian tendencies and her influence over Laura, the male authorities decide to neutralise her before she ‘contaminates’ her further. A similar pattern is adopted in Vanessa’s narrative in *Penny Dreadful*, since she is diagnosed with hysteria by a male doctor and sanctioned in an asylum after she tries to stop Mina’s wedding.

As a result, the ambiguous representation of same-sex relationships in Victorian literature –as a sisterly bond with sexual undertones–, which can be found in *Jane Eyre*, *Carmilla* or *Goblin Market* is replicated in *Penny Dreadful*. Even though Vanessa was close to Peter, heir to the Murray family’s money and prestige, and that the parents from both families took for granted that they would eventually get married and continue both family lines, Mina and Vanessa shared an especial and intimate bond. Said bond is dubiously described by Vanessa in her obsessive letters to her long-lost friend. As Primorac asserts, “Vanessa’s feelings for Mina are depicted through a convoluted, opaque

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<sup>57</sup> Lucy, Mina’s original vamped friend in Stoker’s *Dracula*, is also vanquished by the male doctors, Dr Van Helsing and Dr Seward in the novel.

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

mixture of guilt, homosocial possessiveness and homoerotic devotion” (*Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 151). When Mina is asked for her hand in marriage, while her friend remains a single maiden, there is a sudden shift in Vanessa’s attitude and feelings towards her. She is both afraid of being left behind and that Mina would experience love in the arms of a man before she did. In other words, she is jealous that her friend would explore her sexuality with someone other than herself:

He spoke of India and suddenly I saw you going. When would I see you again? Isn’t India so terribly far away? What would I do? Marry Peter? God, how I envied you! Perhaps I even hated you. How was it possible that you, always so meek and obliging, were to have this greatest of adventures before me? You would know love, you would know a man’s touch, while I, the courageous one, knew nothing of life (Logan, Season 1, Episode 5, 00:14:19-00:15:00).

While Mina is engaged to her suitor, Vanessa tries to restrain her pent-up passions and jealousy, but the fear of being left behind by the Murray siblings is too overwhelming, so that she eventually tries to seduce Peter. When he tells her, “you’ll be all alone when I’m gone. Mina in India, me with Father. That’ll be sad for you” (Logan, Season 1, Episode 5, 00:16:17-00:16:25), she interrupts him by kissing him passionately. However, Peter breaks away from the kiss and runs to the house. In this scene, Vanessa had arguably tried to fulfil her sexual desires for Mina through her brother, and his gallant rejection did nothing but increase her frustrations.

That night, the eve of Mina’s wedding, Vanessa prayed to God to help her, but it was actually the Devil who replied to her call. Seemingly possessed by this evil force, Vanessa seduced Mina’s fiancé, as it was the only way she had to consummate her forbidden –and incestuous love– for her friend (Logan, Season 1, Episode 5, 00:21:02-00:22:29). After her sexual transgression, Vanessa has what appears to be a nervous fit – although she is actually possessed– and falls terribly ill. She is confined to her bedroom and is not allowed to see or visit any member of the Murray family. Here, *Penny Dreadful* seems to be following the pattern of the classic twentieth-century horror films, where a family is haunted by a repressed lesbian passion that is eventually unleashed in the form of a supernatural force (Primorac, *Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 142).

The creator of the series, John Logan, has admitted that his monstrous and Other characters in *Penny Dreadful* are partially based on his experiences of marginalisation



## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

and social rejection as a gay man.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, there are several gay and bisexual men in the show, most notably Mr Lyle, Dorian Gray and Ethan Chandler, who once had sexual intercourse, despite the fact that Ethan was dating Brona Croft at the time. However, there are no openly lesbian characters portrayed in the series, and the only seemingly female couple –Mina and Vanessa– are not allowed to consummate their love, and have to do it through other male characters. As Primorac contends, in spite of a suggestive scene where they “share bed on the eve of Mina’s wedding, their desire can only erupt onscreen by proxy: in the destructive seduction of Mina’s fiancé by Vanessa which is caused, as Vanessa’s retrospective narrative suggests, by the fear of losing her friend to marriage” (*Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 151). Thus, even though Logan’s text encourages and portrays queer narratives on screen, it seems to do so only in the case of male homoerotic relationships, whereas female ones are not granted a space in the narrative.

Finally, regarding the triangulation of the incest plotline put forward by Llewellyn (“Perfectly Innocent”), Mina and Vanessa’s relationship could not be interpreted from an aesthetic point of view, since it is portrayed in a convoluted and implicit manner. As a result, there are neither explicitly romantic nor sexual scenes between them. From an ethical perspective, they do not have a public romance, probably because at the time it was unthinkable that two women could be romantically involved.<sup>59</sup> Thus, their romantic feelings for each other had to be repressed, so that –at a psychoanalytical level– the ambiguous portrayal of their friendship brings to light the complex web of emotional entanglements in the Murray’s and Ives’s respective homes. The parents’ sexual desires appear to have been inherited or replicated by their daughters –particularly after Vanessa saw Sir Malcolm and her mother having sexual intercourse in the maze that connected their houses–, who cannot act on their feelings.

Thus, *Penny Dreadful* also fails to grant its female protagonists gender emancipation through incest love. Despite the series’ apparent feminist and LGBTIQ+ agendas, the only seemingly lesbian relationship in the story is ambiguously portrayed as the friendly love between two sisters of choice –denying visibility and representation to

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<sup>58</sup> Logan claimed in an interview that the marginalisation and alienation experienced by his characters in *Penny Dreadful* was inspired by his own experience growing up as a gay man, in a society where this sexual orientation was not completely accepted. Nonetheless, “that very thing that made [him] monstrous to some” also empowered him and allowed him to develop his identity, in the same way as his characters’ identities in the show are constructed through their very Otherness and monstrosity (Logan par. 4).

<sup>59</sup> Despite the fact that the infamous legend where Queen Victoria allegedly denied the existence of lesbianism is probably false, any kind of romantic or sexual involvement between women “has been largely downplayed or invisible” for centuries in both literature and society (Jennings 1).

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

the lesbian community. In doing so, the series follows the misogynistic pattern of the other screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis, which can be understood in their postfeminist context of production. As explained in Chapter 2, in these texts, key aspects of feminism –such as women’s empowerment or their right to choose– are appropriated and twisted by neo-liberal media for capitalist and consumerist purposes so as to manipulate female viewers into believing that feminism is no longer necessary (Primorac *Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 4). As I discuss in the next section, *Penny Dreadful* further compromises female empowerment through its ambiguous portrayal of father-daughter incest, as it depicts Lily’s feminism as a radical and violent cause, but does not criticise Frankenstein’s patriarchal authority over her. Moreover, Vanessa’s sexual encounter with Sir Malcolm is portrayed in a way that might be interpreted as consensual, which would contribute to the character’s victim-blaming.

### 6.3. Father-Daughter Relations in *Penny Dreadful*

Father-daughter incest was a common trope in nineteenth-century sensation novels, “a genre both popular and yet highly criticized” (Vance ii), which unveiled the underlying dysfunctionalities of the Victorian nuclear family. Some of these novels include Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* (1859-60), Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862), and Charles Dickens’s *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870). Holly Vance contends that sensational novels questioned nineteenth-century marriage practices, namely “the frequently vast age difference between husbands and wives; the way women are ‘prepared’ for marriage through their relationships with their fathers and brothers; and how women are regarded virtually as children even after marriage” (1). Consequently, a parallel is inevitably drawn between father-daughter and husband-wife relationships. Vance further argues that such symmetric family relations can lead to only one of two results: they either sexualise the incestuous relationship or “remove sexuality from the husband/wife relationship” (1). Likewise, father-daughter incest takes place most commonly in families where there is a patriarchal conception of gender that favours men over women, so that abusive fathers are “perfect patriarchs” and male superiority is not questioned (Herman 71). Indeed, Michèle Roberts takes up the idea that “trauma is gendered” in one of her neo-Victorian novels, *In the Red Kitchen*, where she “presents incest as the product of patriarchy, which encourages daughters to idolise the father and denigrate the mother” (Parker 123) –as Vanessa in *Penny Dreadful*.

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

In the same vein, Madelon Sprengnether regards Freud's Oedipal complex, which he explored in *Three Theories of Sexuality*, as incomplete, since he focused on mother-son incest and how it could be prohibited or prevented by the father figure on account of the castration threat –since the father is afraid that his son will overthrow him and assume his patriarchal role in the family. However, he did not even consider the daughter's protection against father-daughter incest. According to Sprengnether, “the father's authority over his daughter's choice of a mate not only assures her subordination to him but also facilitates his use of her as a sexual object”, especially considering that Freud does not consider the mother “as a blocking figure” (10). This appears to be the case of Lily Frankenstein in *Penny Dreadful*, as she is at the mercy of her maker's lust and patriarchal authority, thus becoming a mere object in his possession, without a mother figure that could act as a blocking mechanism to prevent the incestuous relationship.

It is worth noting that, although the parent-child incest taboo has been abundantly explored in literature and the arts across history –the most prominent example being the story between Oedipus and his mother, Iocasta, in *Oedipus Rex* (Sophocles 429 BC)–, examples of father-daughter incest are not as prominent as sibling relations in neo-Victorianism on screen. In fact, there are only two examples of this type of incest in my corpus of analysis, and both are presented in the TV series *Penny Dreadful*. First, the incestuous relationship between Dr Frankenstein and his resurrected ‘child’, Lily Frankenstein, which ends tragically for both of them. Lily had been originally created to be the immortal bride of Frankenstein's first creature, John Clare, but the doctor eventually falls in love with his own creation and they consummate their seemingly mutual attraction. Second, there is arguably another incestuous relationship in the series, that between Sir Malcolm and Vanessa, when she is being tantalised by the Devil –who appears disguised as Sir Malcolm and seduces her (Logan, Season 1, Episode 5). As a consequence, for both Vanessa and Lily, “the (quasi)paternal figure appears central to their identities, and it is the relationship between the male or masculinised parent (real or surrogate) that underscores the key aspects of their narratives” (Llewellyn, “Perfectly Innocent” 157).

Father-daughter incest was feared –and to some extent even expected– in the past, particularly after the mother's death. In fact, Lisa Hirschman and Hermann contend that the Cinderella fairy tale was first created as a cautionary story for daughters, which represented the social fear of the incest taboo: “The Cinderella story warns little girls that it is dangerous to be left alone with a widowed father” (1). This is particularly the case of

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

Lily Frankenstein in *Penny Dreadful*, since she is the only woman –apart from Vanessa– in the doctor’s life. As discussed in the previous chapter, Frankenstein resurrected Lily – and his other two creatures– on his own, replacing a mother’s womb with science and electricity. Thus, despite the fact that Dr Frankenstein and Lily are not blood related, I contend that they engage in father-daughter incest, as the former resurrects the latter and, therefore, becomes her replacement father. In a way, he ‘gives birth’ to her through his scientific experiments.

Moreover, he establishes a co-dependent relationship with Lily, in which he strives to be her only provider and mentor, teaching her how to navigate the human world again. In other words, Dr Frankenstein wants to exert a patriarchal and paternalistic control over her daughter-lover, keeping her caged and dictating how she should behave, until Lily finally rebels. Their incestuous relationship starts in a very subtle way, as a domination game where the doctor first uses her as an immortal doll that he can mould to his personal taste. He transforms the dead body of Brona Croft, a Northern Irish prostitute, into an angelic Victorian beauty, as he dyes her hair blond and buys her white, virginal clothes and corsets, forcing her to be a ‘proper’ Victorian woman. He also buys her make-up and teaches her how to behave as a high-class lady in public.

Consequently, Dr Frankenstein and Lily’s incestuous relationship could be interpreted as a neo-Victorian Gothic appropriation of the Greek myth of Pygmalion and Galatea, even though “the woman created by Frankenstein is not intended for himself, but for the Creature” (Braid “The Frankenstein Meme” 236), at least at first. Likewise, this is also a common literary motif defined by Elizabeth Frenzel as “la animación de la estatua” (“the animation of the statue”) (22) or “el hombre artificial” (“the artificial man”) (153). According to Frenzel, “[l]a idea de producir artificialmente un ser humano eludiendo el acto sexual constituye uno de los sueños dorados del hombre. En ella se expresa sobre todo el impulso inventivo y creador del hombre” (153).<sup>60</sup> This literary motif can be traced back to creation myths in several cultures, most notably in Ancient Greece. In the case of artificial women, such as Pandora Galatea –or Lily herself– they usually have a romantic function in literature: that of seducing a man (Frenzel 154).

The most famous retelling of this Greek myth in Ancient times can be found in Book 10 of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (8 AD). Pygmalion was a sculptor in Cyprus that remained a bachelor because he was appalled by the prostitutes’ alleged

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<sup>60</sup> “The idea of producing a human being artificially, avoiding the sexual act, is one of humanity’s great dreams. In it, it is expressed their inventive and creative impulse” (Frenzel 153, my translation).

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

wickedness and vices (Hung 146). He carved an ivory sculpture representing his ideal of female beauty –named Galatea in later versions of the myth– and fell in love with it. He then begged Aphrodite (Venus, in Ovid’s version) to transform his ivory sculpture into a flesh-and-blood woman and she granted him that wish (Ovid l. 326-51).

As a consequence, Pygmalion is not only guilty of narcissism, but also of incest, since he is “Galatea’s fathering maker as well as her husband. To sleep with her is to sleep with his own daughter. Pygmalion avoided the painful encounter with the otherness of other persons [...] But a relationship in which there is no otherness, in which the same mates with the same, is, precisely, incest” (Miller 10-1). In a similar vein, Lily is Dr Frankenstein’s creation –although she was a human woman in another life–, and he ‘moulded’ her according to his definition of beauty. He gives her a name of his choice – Lily: the flower of rebirth (Green 111-2)–, unlike his other two male creatures, who are allowed to choose their own names from a selection of literary and mythological characters. He also wants her to follow his moral code and the gender conventions that he considers ‘proper’ for a woman. Hence, Lily is arguably an appropriation of Galatea, a patriarchal creation that was meant to be submissive and obedient to her father and husband, but that eventually rebels against this masculine authority.

Shelley learned about Pygmalion’s myth through Mme de Genli’s sketch *Pygmalion et Galatée*, which she allegedly read before writing *Frankenstein*. In this text, Pygmalion’s creation, Galatea, reads about “the evils of mankind” (James 79) just like Frankenstein’s creature learns about human injustice through the books he reads in the De Lacey’s cottage. Likewise, the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea also merges with Frankenstein’s story in that they both present a “fable of ideal love turning into one of malign possession” (James 79) –a toxic love story that also applies to Dr Frankenstein and Lily’s relationship in *Penny Dreadful*. In fact, in Robert Buchanan’s poem “Pygmalion: an Allegory of Art” (1820), Galatea is turned into a vampiric creature, a *femme fatale* not so different from Lily Frankenstein in *Penny Dreadful*:

[...] Then the Dawn  
stared in upon her: when I open’d eyes  
I saw the gradual Dawn encrimson her  
like blood that blush’d within her, –and behold  
she trembled –and I shrieked (l. 231-5)

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

Likewise, Logan also appears to draw inspiration from other nineteenth-century intertexts of Ovid's *Pygmalion*. Lily's seemingly duplicitous nature –as she acts innocent, coy and submissive at first, only to later become a violent misandrist– seems to be inspired by George Bernard Shaw's play, *Pygmalion*, where the “tension between Eliza's innocence and her artifice must be seen as a departure from Ovid's one-dimensional Galatea” (Joshua, “The Mythographic Context” 119). Galatea's duplicitous nature is recuperated by Logan in *Penny Dreadful*, since, at first, Lily pretends to be a perfect angel in the house; an innocent and ‘empty vessel’ that does not remember her previous life and expects Dr Frankenstein to help her create a new one for her. However, as time passes and she gathers enough confidence and a powerful ally –Dorian Gray–, she drops her act and shows her true self: a scorned woman and a victim of gender-based violence that now plans to take down patriarchy. As a result, Lily and Dr Frankenstein's relationship brings to the fore these two questions: What are the ethical implications of creating an immortal woman according to a man's idealised conception of beauty? And does he have a right to impose his romantic ideals and gender conventions on her just because he created her?

From the very moment he created Lily, as a companion for his other male creature, Dr Frankenstein was exerting his patriarchal authority over her and constructing her as a mere desirable object at the hands of a ‘superior’ male. Later on, when he starts an incestuous relationship with her, he becomes both her father and partner: the two ultimate masculine and patriarchal authorities in Victorian England. Moreover, it is also worth noting that the biological role of mothers in reproductive terms is “related with the social function of knowledge” (Özyol 79), since their identity is known and certain, whereas that of fathers might be ambiguous or suspicious in some cases. This poses a threat to the patriarchal status quo, as the father's authority is challenged, while the mother's is reaffirmed. However, in the case of Galatea's and Lily's ‘births’, there is not a mother figure involved in the process. Thus, the mother's threat to patriarchal order and authority is removed here, and the ‘father’ figure –Pygmalion and Dr Frankenstein, respectively– retains the traditional traits of masculine authority, but also appropriates the female –or motherly– ones. For Tracy M. Hallstead, in Ancient times masculinity meant “*power over* others. It also means power to define reality, as ‘might make right’. For Galatea, questioning the patriarch Pygmalion's rule in Cyprus or over her is strictly forbidden [...] and she must support it behind the scenes, in relative silence” (51, emphasis in original). Nonetheless, Lily subverts Galatea's traditional portrayal as an innocent and submissive woman and rebels against her father and lover to take down the patriarchal system.

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

It is also worth mentioning that incest is not a new trope that Logan brings into Frankenstein's story, since it was also present in Shelley's original work. As Anca Vlasopolos contends, the central theme of the novel is actually "the private drama of a man who sees himself as ineluctably driven to incest" (125) to perpetuate the inbreeding practices of his aristocratic and upper-class family. As a result, Frankenstein's actions throughout the novel "involve incest-avoidance". Indeed, his irrational fears eventually lead him to give 'birth' to his monster, which ultimately causes the rejection of his family and friends. Psychoanalytic scholars have long established the novel's incestuous subtexts "through the monster's or Frankenstein's Oedipal obsession, which appears marginal in the context of the brother-sister tensions dominating the various relationships in the novel" (Vlasopolos 125).

In Shelly's original text, Frankenstein's mother, Caroline, asks her son to marry Elizabeth, his adopted sister, and to have children with her on her deathbed. Horrified by this request, he breaks off communication with his family for two years to avoid the incestuous pending marriage. Since he is not free to marry another woman, he decides to use science to produce an heir on his own, therefore avoiding both disobeying his own mother's wish and the possibility of fathering children with his own sister. Nonetheless, once the monster is born, it "turns out to be the very thing Victor sought to escape, [so that] he flees, has a nightmare in which mother, Elizabeth, and corpse-like monster are superimposed and blend into one fear, and finally succumbs to an attack of madness" (Vlasopolos 128). In Logan's version of Frankenstein's story, however, incest is not avoided, but obsessively pursued by the doctor, who relentlessly chases his daughter Lily, despite her constant rejections.

When Lily first wakes up after her resurrection, Dr Frankenstein is her only reference point in a world that she does not remember and that is a total mystery to her. As a result, she apparently trusts him blindly at first, even though there are some early signs that anticipate her later misandry. The first hints of her radical feminism can be spotted in the scene where she is trying on some new clothes that Dr Frankenstein has bought especially for her.<sup>61</sup> These items of clothing seem to have a two-fold purpose: they are designed to make women attractive and pleasant, but also to keep them "corseted" (Pedro, "We're Going to Make you into a Proper Woman" 205). Indeed, when Lily

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<sup>61</sup> The fact that he is the one that chooses Lily's clothes and dresses her up seems to be inspired, once again, by Ovid's *Pygmalion*, where "[h]e decks her limbs with robes and on her fingers/ Sets splendid rings, a necklace round her neck/ Pearls in her ears, a pendant on her breast;" (Ovid l. 318-20).

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

complains about wearing the corset, as she finds it a very constraining accessory, Dr Frankenstein claims that women wear it because they are not meant to “exert themselves”, otherwise they would “take over the world”, so that men have to keep them “corseted, in theory... and in practice” (Logan, Season 2, Episode 4, 00:35:00-00:35:13). Despite Lily’s apparent submission, her reply advances her radical critique of patriarchal control over women’s bodies, which will culminate in her project to eradicate all abusive men and establish a new status quo where women will rule: “All we do is for men, isn’t it? Keep their houses... raise their children, flatter them with our pain” (Logan, Season 2, Episode 4, 00:35:25-00:35:35).

It is worth noting that the issue of women’s dress etiquette was part of “the so-called ‘Corset Controversy’ of the 1860s”, which was not only concerned with women’s fashion, but also with “the female body as well as with questions of mobility and freedom from restraint”. Thus, the corset was “in fact part of a larger debate about women’s legal, social and bodily autonomy: in other words[,] the ‘Woman Question’” (Berglund 220). One of the main reasons for wearing a corset was, of course, aesthetic, because it made women look much thinner and display a seemingly slender figure. Nonetheless, moral aspects were even more important for Victorian women. According to Berglund, a woman that did not wear a corset was socially regarded as “lazy, sloppy, indecent; indeed, loose” (222), so that ‘proper’ women usually wore this item of clothing.

Corsets have become part of our cultural imagination when we think about Victorian women. We see them as a fundamental part of the outfit that shaped them, physically and metaphorically, as oppressed and controlled individuals. Like Zilpha in *Taboo*, Lily finds herself trapped in the golden cage of domesticity, as a bird that is not allowed to fly away and be independent, and her oppression is metaphorically represented through the corset. However, over the last century, this item of clothing has become an indispensable element of the clichéd Victorian costume, and has come to be understood as “a visual shorthand used to metaphorically and metonymically represent embodied Victorian female subjectivity” (Primorac, *Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 99). In particular, it has come to embody the social constraints imposed on them regarding behaviour, personal aspirations or sexuality.

Despite the fact that the idea of Victorian sexuality as being repressed, naïve or hypocritical has long been contested by scholars such as Michel Foucault or Mathew



## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

Sweet,<sup>62</sup> this misconception still persists in our collective imagination, in part because of “contemporary Victoriana on film and its use of rarely questioned clichés and visual stereotypes which are, paradoxically, associated with the idea of period authenticity” (Primorac, *Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 100).<sup>63</sup> In the case of *Penny Dreadful*, the emphasis on both Frankenstein forcing Lily to wear the corset and her fierce critique of this item of clothing simultaneously reinforce the former’s patriarchal ideology and his idealisation of the Victorian woman as a coy, submissive and controlled being, and the latter’s radical feminism.

As explained in previous chapters, Lily’s activism is punished at the end of the series. Dr Frankenstein and his colleague, Dr Jekyll, capture her and she is forced to give up both her army of misandrist disciples and her crusade against the patriarchal system. Even though Frankenstein spares her life in the end after she adopts a begging and motherly stance, she is metaphorically vanquished by these two male authorities and presented to the audience as a blood-thirsty misandrist, rather than as a victim of gender-based violence. In doing so, this TV series is, once again, punishing female rebellion and denying any possible critique against the patriarchy.

On a different note, there is arguably another father-daughter relationship in *Penny Dreadful*: that between Vanessa and her replacement father, Sir Malcolm. The nature of this relationship is not as sustained as in the case of Lily and Dr Frankenstein, nor does it have a romantic component either. As largely discussed in this PhD thesis, Vanessa’s sexual awakening was triggered by Sir Malcolm’s adulterous relationship with her mother. As explained in Chapter 5, Vanessa strives to occupy her mother’s place as a sexually active adult woman. Thus, she was bound to be attracted to Sir Malcolm, as he is both her mother’s lover and her surrogate father.

Llewellyn contends that incestuous relationships between a (replacement) father and his daughter usually bring to the fore another important social concern, which is “as true of the Victorians and Edwardians as of now, about the nature of age in relationships, about the potentially ‘unnatural’ or subversive (even perverted?) desires judged so by a society that sees age difference between partners, lovers, spouses, as itself immoral” (“Perfectly Innocent” 146). Throughout the series, Vanessa feels attracted to parental

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<sup>62</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 2.1. of this PhD thesis.

<sup>63</sup> The image of the corseted woman has been the embodiment of the high- and middle-class Victorian lady ever since the waist-cinching scene in the classic film *Gone with the Wind* (dir. V. Fleming 1939), where an enslaved Black woman, known as Mammy, laces up Scarlet’s corset.

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

figures that exert a patriarchal and oppressive control over her. The two daemonic suitors that relentlessly pursue her throughout the series –Lucifer and Dracula– are much older than she is, and they act as tyrannical and abusive fathers to their ‘adopted’ children: the Nightcomers and vampires, respectively. As discussed in Chapter 4, Lucifer marks her female servants –the satanic witches– with a pentagram on their backs and forces them to perpetrate human sacrifices and bloody crimes in his honour. Dracula controls his servants through blood, and uses them as spies to monitor Vanessa’s every move.

According to Logsdon, Vanessa’s troubled relationship with men might be due to “sexual abuse and therefore sexual dysfunction”, since there seems to be a connection between her sexually active lifestyle and her sudden “bouts of possession” (18). As discussed in previous chapters, Vanessa’s incestuous longings for Sir Malcolm are consummated when Lucifer adopts his form while she is confined in her bedroom, after being discharged from Bedlam Asylum. As Logsdon further contends, “[a]fter the devil enters him, Sir Malcolm rapes his ward, restores her to somewhat normal functioning [...] [and] the sexual encounter with her surrogate father certainly fuels the suspicion that Malcolm may have sexually abused Vanessa before this point” (19). Vanessa’s mother then enters her bedroom and finds her fully naked, white-eyed and having sexual intercourse with an invisible being.

Amy Montz questions whether Vanessa is a willing participant of this sexual encounter or if, on the contrary, she is being the victim of a “diabolical sexual assault”, since “[w]e as an audience are never quite sure” (61). Vanessa’s mother drops dead in shock, while she is trapped in the Devil’s claws, which, for Montz proves that “Vanessa’s sexuality has destroyed those around her” (62). It is at this point that she becomes a “sexual Other”, a being in Gothic texts that “takes on the aura of dangerous power from the supernatural”, which suggests that she becomes, “like the ghostly manifestation, preternaturally dangerous” (Rocha 5).

Both Rocha’s and Montz’s arguments seem to perpetuate a victim-blaming approach to sexual assault and father-daughter incest, embedded in the context of rape culture and patriarchal oppression. Victim-blaming is a concept mostly researched in criminology, “where individuals find instances within the victims’ behavior, such as drinking alcohol, to hold the victim at least partially responsible for the incident” (Hayes, Lorenz and Bell 203). The fact that she is haunted and possessed by the Devil –in this and other scenes in the series– make Vanessa’s frame of mind and mental state arguably comparable to those of a sexual-assault victim who has been drugged or mentally

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

controlled. Moreover, she is diagnosed with female hysteria and depression in two separate instances in the show –the former in the flashback episode and the later in Season 3–, so that her agency and consent in her so-called ‘sexual transgressions’ throughout the series should, at the very least, be questioned in the light of these events. However, Vanessa is described by both Rocha and Montz as a “sexual Other”, rather than as a victim of sexual assault. The fact that she is sexually active –and seemingly compliant with those sexual encounters– throughout the series seems to prevent her from being considered sexually coerced by two patriarchal authorities: Sir Malcolm and Lucifer.

Moreover, given that victims of sexual abuse are statistically more likely to be female, “victim blaming may disproportionately influence society’s views on women. A form of victim blaming more often directed at females is acceptance of rape myths” (Hayes, Lorenz and Bell 203). In this case, victim-blaming influences both the audience and the series’ critics against Vanessa, as they are predisposed to judge her as a seductress and a *femme fatale* that succumbs to her sexual desires, rather than holding Sir Malcolm and Lucifer accountable for sexually assaulting her. As a consequence, *Penny Dreadful* fails, once again, to grant its female protagonists a sense of female emancipation from their patriarchal oppressors and, instead, persists in portraying them as active and willing participants of their own assault. In doing so, the series’ apparent feminist agenda is curtailed, since patriarchal villains and anti-heroes are given a platform where their sexual crimes are presented as instances of sexual consent.

To conclude, *Penny Dreadful*’s take on father-daughter incest further contributes to present the female protagonists as active agents and perpetrators, rather than as victims of gender-based violence. Even though the series seems to have a feminist drive at the beginning, its misogynistic portrayal and its failure to grant its female characters a sense of gender emancipation demonstrates that the show actually falls under the category of postfeminist TV serials. Thus, despite the capacity that the screen texts analysed in this chapter might have in critiquing the nuclear family myth through the incest trope, they ultimately fail to portray their heroines as emancipated and liberated characters. Moreover, any critique against patriarchy is systematically curtailed and punished in these texts, as if they were trying to warn their female viewers not to rebel against the current patriarchal status quo in their real lives. In doing so, these neo-Victorian TV series are reinforcing postfeminist understandings of neo-Victorianism, as well as siding with patriarchal perpetrators while blaming the victims, as I discuss in the next chapter.

## 6. The Incest Trope in Neo-Victorian Family Traumas on Screen

## 7. VICTIMS BECOME ABUSERS: PERPETRATOR TRAUMA IN NEO-VICTORIANISM ON SCREEN

As discussed in Chapter 3, neo-Victorian fiction is commonly used by contemporary creators as a platform to acknowledge, and so work through, the patriarchal and supremacist horrors of the British empire and its legacies. Victims-survivors of atrocious experiences are usually regarded as worthy of attention –particularly in the case of traditionally oppressed collectives, such as ethnic and sexual minorities. However, the experience of offenders and bystanders –or the idea that perpetrators can become traumatised by their own atrocities– tends to be ignored or treated as a taboo. The screen texts analysed in this PhD thesis –as well as recent neo-Victorian TV series such as *The Irregulars*– explore perpetrator trauma through the experiences of their main characters.

Literature and screen texts that explore perpetrator trauma tend to portray offenders as responsible for atrocious crimes that have left them “emotionally numbed and with unresolved guilt –gradually willing to take responsibility for their deeds” (Morag, “Perpetrator Trauma” 95). It goes without saying that the main aim of studying perpetrator trauma is in no way to undervalue or disregard the victim’s experience, nor to side with or forgive the person(s) responsible for committing atrocious crimes against humanity. Nevertheless, exploring the trauma of perpetrators might help us understand the causes of their violent behaviour, as well as how it affects them at a psychological level (Morag, *Waltzing with Bashir* 19). Likewise, and perhaps more importantly, their repentance and willingness to make reparations might prevent such violence from being replicated in the future (Morag, “On the Definition of the Perpetrator” 17).

Perpetrators tend to be portrayed in trauma narratives as former victims who have not overcome the violence they were subjected to (Mohamed 1176). Instead, they perpetuate that cycle of violence. This is the case of the victims-perpetrators present in my corpus of analysis: characters that became traumatised from a very early age in the confines of nuclear family and who interiorised that violence to the point where they even normalised it. These characters are the Sharpe siblings, Sophie Longerbane, Ethan Chandler, James Delaney or Vanessa Ives. As a consequence, they have now become perpetrators and abusers who use their power as adults to replicate the very same violence they experienced on vulnerable others. These characters could be classified according to their position towards their victims. While some of them regret their decisions and are haunted by their past actions –such as Thomas Sharpe or Ethan Chandler–, others are

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

quite comfortable in their new-found role as offenders –as in the case of the female abusers Sophie Longerbane, Lily Frankenstein and Lucille Sharpe. There are other ‘in-between’ characters, such as James Delaney and Vanessa Ives, whose ambivalent behaviour towards their victims and their conflicted willingness to make amends makes them difficult individuals to scrutinise in terms of perpetrator trauma. In any event, only those perpetrators who are willing to be held accountable and to empathise with their victims –so as to make amends and help society advance towards a future where such violence becomes unthinkable– are worthy of being analysed from this perspective. Nonetheless, this in any way means that we should either forgive them or forget what they did.

In this chapter, I explore the manner in which neo-Victorianism on screen usually portrays traumatised perpetrators –at both domestic and imperial levels– that were originally victims of gender-based and/or domestic violence. In section 7.1. I scrutinise the concept of imperial perpetrators and how their colonizing endeavours now haunt them in the form of PTSD and repressed traumas, particularly in the case of Philo in *Carnival Row*, James in *Taboo* and Sir Malcolm and Ethan in *Penny Dreadful*.

Section 7.2. covers the surprisingly recurrent topic of female perpetrators of domestic and mass violence in neo-Victorianism on screen. Despite the fact that mass perpetrators are statistically more likely to be male in real life, all the screen texts analysed here –with the notable exception of *Taboo*– present female mass perpetrators who are unrepentant of their crimes against humanity. Lily’s feminist cause might be said to have some redeeming qualities, as she seeks to overthrow patriarchy and stop violence against women. However, Sophie is depicted as an ambitious woman who implements far-right racist and xenophobic politics in order to achieve more power, and Lucille is a domestic perpetrator that continues the cycle of violence she was once subjected to as a child. This last section also focuses on a female character who is ambiguously portrayed in terms of victimhood and perpetration: Vanessa Ives in *Penny Dreadful*. At first, the Gothic heroine is depicted as a victim who is relentlessly pursued and used by both Lucifer and Dracula. However, as the series unfolds, she eventually accepts the latter as her companion, bringing about an apocalypse on earth. Yet, the fact that she sacrifices herself for the good of humanity makes her a redeemable character in the end.

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

### 7.1. Imperial Male Perpetrators

In approaching perpetrator trauma, we need to examine the social background where offenders committed their crimes and what social factors led them to perpetrate those atrocities in the first place. As explained in Chapter 3, the perpetrator should be defined “according to the context”, such as atrocity-producing situations, where society must “recognize that it sent the soldiers-who-became-perpetrators into these atrocious situations” (Morag, “On the Definition of the Perpetrator” 17). As mentioned in previous chapters, the long nineteenth century is regarded at present as a shorthand for the British empire, as well as its colonial atrocities and misappropriations (Ho, *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of Empire*). As a result, male characters that are based on imperial colonisers, slaveholders, explorers or soldiers in the service of a powerful empire feature prominently in contemporary revisitations of the Victorian era. In the screen texts analysed here, there are several male characters that fit the traditional pattern of imperial perpetrator: the former slave trader James Delaney in *Taboo*, veteran soldier Philo in *Carnival Row*, the American foot soldier Ethan Chandler and the imperial explorer Sir Malcolm Murray in *Penny Dreadful*. These screen texts are set in Victorian England, where the British empire gave rise to the crimes of colonial perpetrators. However, it is important to stress that these neo-Victorian works portray such characters “without in any way condoning their actions” (Karam 80).

Neo-Victorian texts usually make contemporary audiences reflect on the role that institutional agents –such as colonisers, slave traders, explorers and soldiers– played in colonising endeavours, namely slavery, the Middle Passage, genocides, as well as sexual and physical violence against ethnic individuals. Moreover, Karam contends that “understanding perpetrator trauma needs a society to acknowledge its role in the perpetration of such violence against collective others” (74). Nonetheless, society usually refuses to acknowledge either the perpetrator’s traumatising or its own responsibility for placing the perpetrator in “a position where they had to perpetrate crimes against humanity” (Morag, “On the Definition of the Perpetrator 74). The screen texts analysed here are set in the context of nineteenth-century colonial atrocities and interrogate the degree of responsibility that Victorian society had in both creating and placing perpetrators in those situations. This is particularly seen in the case of *Taboo* and its critique of the EIC’s imperial policies. In doing so, these neo-Victorian texts allow the audience to reflect on both the colonial endeavours committed by the British empire and its present legacies in the form of neo-imperial, racist or discriminatory policies.

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

One common feature that male perpetrators share in my corpus of analysis is that, as children, they all experienced a form of domestic trauma that was intimately related to their dysfunctional and fragmented families –with the notable exception of Sir Malcolm, whose personal story before becoming an explorer and forming his nuclear family is unknown to the audience. In the case of James, both his family’s foundation and fortune are based on colonialism and Oedipal struggles. In fact, as a biracial individual, he himself is also the very product of imperialism and colonialism. Philo is an orphaned biracial character who has been forced to conceal his ethnic identity, thus being simultaneously a product and a victim of colonialism. Ethan was raised by an absent and tyrannical father, whose fortune was built on imperialism and the systematic violence against Native American tribes. Finally, it is worth noting that, despite the fact that we do not know whether Sir Malcolm experienced any kind of family traumas while growing up, he later inflicted them as an adult when he created his nuclear family, becoming both a domestic and an imperial perpetrator.

The fact that these characters –former victims of trauma and abuse– decide –or are forced– later in their lives to perpetuate a similar cycle of violence against other people seems to confirm Mohamed’s theories on perpetrator trauma, as discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.1. Mohamed argues that perpetrators are usually portrayed in fiction as being former victims of child abuse, either by an aggressive or addict parental figure, which has somehow triggered their violence in adulthood (1176). Such portrayal seems to be rooted in society’s tendency to empathise with and give voice to trauma victims, rather than scrutinizing the perpetrator’s violent behaviour. Likewise, Karam contends that studies conducted on perpetrators are often “an attempt to decipher where his or her inhumanity was birthed, to question their childhood experiences or their psychological defects”, even though “scholars are realising that this so-called ‘monster’ out there, is not actually out there, but is often our neighbour” (74). Moreover, victims of abuse that do not acknowledge and come to terms with the horrors they have suffered are likely to become perpetrators, as in the case of James Delaney in *Taboo*.

As explained throughout this PhD thesis, James comes from a highly dysfunctional and fragmented household. His father, a white Englishman, married Salish, a Native American woman, and the series stresses Delaney’s mixed-race heritage to mark him as an ethnic Other. James’s portrayal as mixed-race, however, is one of *Taboo*’s main racial misrepresentations, as the show seemingly gives voice to a historically marginalised collective, but through a white actor (Tom Hardy). Despite this



## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

whitewashed representation, James encapsulates two of the main racial anxieties of the long nineteenth century: the cannibal and the mixed-race individual (Mousoutzanis 12).

Cannibalism was considered to be “the absolute nadir of human behavior” and was thought to be “practiced by black or brown savages but not by white Christians”, who had to save the former “from themselves” (Brantlinger, “Taming Cannibals” 2-3). Miscegenation –particularly between white and African individuals– was one of the biggest threats against white supremacy “from about 1860 to 1914”, as it could bring about “English, racial degeneration” (Brantlinger, “Taming Cannibals” 2). Thus, Africa was associated with negative stereotypes “of barbaric practices, bloody human sacrifice, cannibalism, slavery and fetishism”, and Western colonisers thought it was their moral and religious duty to extinguish such practices, sometimes by enslaving or exterminating African people (MacMaster 75). However, the whitewashed representation of James’s racial Otherness in *Taboo* “makes the associations between cannibalism, miscegenation and whiteness even more problematic” (Mousoutzanis 12). The depiction of ethnic oppression through a white actor is arguably a cultural appropriation of the traumas of biracial and Native American individuals. In doing so, *Taboo* is actually replicating imperial practices that appropriated and exploited the natives’ cultural and territorial heritage for the benefit of Western individuals.

This biracial misrepresentation is also present in *Carnival Row* and *Penny Dreadful*, where the two colonial perpetrators –Philo (Orlando Bloom) and Ethan Chandler (Josh Hartnett), respectively– are mixed-race individuals played by white actors. From a strictly genetic point of view, Ethan’s biological family is entirely white – and, by extension, so is he. However, his adopted or surrogate father, an Apache man named Kaetenay, passes the Native American curse of the werewolf on to him, as a punishment after Ethan wiped out his entire village. Despite the fact that European legends about lycanthropes date as far back as the 1500s, the werewolf in *Penny Dreadful* is actually based on the Native American ‘skinwalker’, a term used by South-Western tribes –including the Navajo, Hopi or Utes– to describe witches that “can alter their shapes at will to assume the characteristics of a certain animal” (Kelleher and Knapp 35). Even though the features of skinwalkers may vary from tribe to tribe, they all seem to agree on the fact that these beings are malevolent witches that can turn into wild animals –such as a wolf or a coyote– by wearing their skins. When the transformation takes place, “the human witch inherits the speed, strength, or cunning of the animal whose shape it has taken” (Kelleher and Knapp 36).

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

Ethan had always had a troubling relationship with his tyrannical birth father – a wealthy white rancher from New Mexico territory–, who wanted him to become a ‘real man’. Thus, he sent him to the army to fight in the Indian wars, where he served under the command of a senator’s son that ordered him to murder an entire tribe of innocent Apaches. This atrocity left him torn with guilt, so that he decided to kill his commanding officer and join the Apaches against the very same US army he had previously served. However, his alliance with the tribe eventually led to the slaughter of his mother, brother and sister, making him partly responsible for his family’s collapse. After this slaughter, Ethan flees from the US and his father’s wrath to Europe, thus becoming “a man running away from his true self, this time a real monster within rather than a monstrous personality. Yet like Sir Malcolm, he comes from money made on the backs of colonized brown bodies and the taming of the primitive natural environment” (Anyiwo 116-7).

The systematic genocide and exploitation of Native Americans forms part of an ethnic collective trauma, similar to the one suffered by victims of trans-Atlantic slavery and colonialism all over the world. According to Jeffrey Alexander, a collective trauma “occurs when members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (1). Thus, both Black slavery and Native genocides on the part of white explorers and soldiers should be considered as collective traumas that need to be brought to the forefront (Balaev 154-5), as well as its present repercussions in the form of racism or racially motivated violence (Masson and Smith 13). Likewise, women have arguably suffered the collective trauma of sexual, physical and psychological violence perpetrated by men against them on the basis of their gender for generations. As I explain in the next section, this gender-based violence leads some of the female characters in my corpus of analysis to become (mass) perpetrators in order to stop patriarchal violence against women, as in the case of Lily Frankenstein.

*Taboo* features a half Native American perpetrator who is forced to commit colonial crimes by his white tyrannical father, just like Ethan in *Penny Dreadful*. Due to his incestuous relationship with his sister, Zilpha, his father sent him to an East India Company (EIC) military seminar.<sup>64</sup> There, he learnt the Company’s colonizing practices,

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<sup>64</sup> It is implied in the series that the Delaney siblings had an illegitimate child. When their father found out, he gave the baby to an old farmer and his wife, who believed he was actually one of Mr Delaney’s illegitimate children.

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

which he would later replicate against enslaved African individuals in the Middle Passage. As he tells Sir Stuart Strange, chairman of the EIC, “[c]onquest? Rape? Plunder? I studied your methods in your school and I do know the evil that you do because I was once part of it” (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 1, 00:50:56-00:51:13). Nonetheless, his time in the service of the EIC did not help him overcome his family traumas. On the contrary: it reinforced them and triggered some new ones.

A person can become traumatised by being the victim of a catastrophe or a crime, but perpetrating an atrocity might also cause “a psychological injury” to perpetrators themselves (Karam 74). As a result, they might experience PTSD symptoms that are similar to those of the victims, such as nightmares, insomnia, flashbacks or paranoid episodes. However, unlike the trauma of victims, characterised by shock and the opposition between knowing and not knowing “the threat of death”, perpetrators have to face “the perplexity of denial of wrongdoing or the inability to prevent returning to the guilt-ridden experience” (Morag, *Waltzing with Bashir* 19). In fact, victims are condemned to relive the past atrocity without fully comprehending that the experience they suffered was traumatic. However, perpetrators are aware of those traumatic events, as they actively took part in them and knew them in advance. Thus, once they acknowledge their active role either as a perpetrator or as a passive bystander, they have to also recognise “the ‘fissures’ of their own veracity and authenticity” (Karam 76).

In the case of Ethan in *Penny Dreadful*, he tries to repress his guilty conscience in order to move forward, given that, as he tells Brona there “are such sins at my back it would kill me to turn around” (Logan, Season 1, Episode 4, 00:20:19-00:20:22). As U. Melissa Anyiwo contends, “like a true American, his path is to keep running forward and never look back; allowing his past to feel like the monster lurking around every corner” (118). She further argues that Ethan feels attracted to vulnerable women: Brona, who is dying of consumption, and Vanessa, who is perpetually being threatened by an imminent danger. The fact that he can protect and defend these women in need seems to help him become a better man, as his love and care might compensate for all his crimes against humanity: “It soothes his conscience to care for those he helps (or fails to) as if somehow emotion trumps action [...] Like a true Romantic hero, he wears his masculinity and empathy like a cloak that ultimately excuses his darkest actions” (Anyiwo 118).

Nonetheless, despite his willingness to put his violent past behind and move forward as a new, better man, his supernatural double –the Native American werewolf– makes him a reluctant perpetrator that raises uncontrollably every full moon. This idea

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

that a perpetrator's self is split into two –a moral, more humane self and a violent one– echoes Caruth's claims about the mechanisms at work in atrocity-producing situations:

Extreme trauma creates a second self. [...] It's a form of doubling in the traumatized person. [...] There have to be elements that are at odds in the two selves, including ethical contradictions [...] The second self functions fully as a whole self: for this reason, it is so adaptable and so dangerous. It enables a relatively ordinary person to commit evil ("Trauma Explorations 137).

This is the case of Ethan with his werewolf double, who functions independently from his human self, taking full control of his body and ignoring his moral and ethical codes. Indeed, when Ethan's human self regains control, he has no recollection of what he did while his other half was unleashed. This split self also echoes Stevenson's Victorian novel *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), where the doctor's monstrous alter ego takes over him to commit horrible crimes that would be unthinkable for his human side.

In the case of *Taboo*, James has frequent PTSD symptoms related to his traumas as both victim and perpetrator. Throughout the series, he has continuous flashbacks of his mother bathing in the river where she tried to drown him as a toddler, particularly when he finds himself in a liquid space –e.g., the river Thames. But he also has vivid flashbacks of his time as a slave trader in a EIC ship called the Cornwallis. As explained in Chapter 4, when he was part of the crew of this ship, the captain ordered him to trap the enslaved African prisoners in the hold of the boat one stormy night. He left them there to die and then abandoned the ship. As a result, he also has paranoid episodes related to this event, where the enslaved prisoners directly accuse him of their ordeal: "You did this. You will pay for this" (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 1, 00:38:57-00:39:00). Thus, the ghosts of enslaved prisoners haunt and disrupt his present life, constantly reminding him of and bringing him back to his criminal past.

By the same token, Philo also has intrusive flashbacks of both his lonely childhood in an orphanage and his time as a Burguish soldier in Tirnanoc. The Burguish army had first offered humanitarian aid and manpower to the fairyland, but they eventually abandoned them at the mercy of The Pact. Unlike the latter, the Burguishmen did not enslave the fairies, nor did they commit an ethnic genocide during the time they spent in Tirnanoc. However, they still contributed to the fairies' collective trauma of colonisation.

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

Before going back to their homeland, they appropriated a large portion of Tirnanoc's cultural and material resources –namely, ancient books, robes and golden relics– that are later displayed in sumptuous exhibitions where fairies are not allowed to go “unaccompanied” (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 6). This seizure of the fairies' material legacy should be considered as a form of cultural appropriation,<sup>65</sup> which could be defined as “the use of a culture's symbols, artifacts, genres, rituals, or technologies by members of another culture”. This other culture is usually “involved in the assimilation and exploitation of marginalized and colonized cultures and in the survival of subordinated cultures and their resistance to dominant cultures” (Rogers 474). Much of the discussion on cultural appropriation in academia focuses on physical or material appropriation,<sup>66</sup> including “physical remains and archaeological finds, or slightly more esoteric forms of property ownership –such as ownership of genetic information, or intellectual property” (Nguyen and Strohl 982). Given that the Burguishmen stripped the fairies of their cultural and material resources in order to make profit from them, I argue that the former should be considered as imperial perpetrators that ought to be held accountable for appropriating the cultural identity of the latter.

Moreover, the cultural appropriation of material objects in *Carnival Row* arguably echoes contemporary practices against Native American nations, who see how the heirs of white imperialism continue to make economic profit from their cultural artefacts. C. Thi Nguyen and Matthew Strohl pose the commodification of Native American war bonnets as an example of this practice. These bonnets are being sold as fashion accessories by American retailers. Most Native American tribes object to this cultural appropriation, as it symbolically re-enacts the dynamics of colonialism and imperialism. As Nguyen and Strohl claim, white settlers “invaded North America [...] created conditions where Native Americans face systematic disadvantages, and now add insult to injury by appropriating a garment that has special meaning for many tribes despite objections from tribal members” (985).

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<sup>65</sup> According to Nguyen and Strohl, the term cultural appropriation tends to be used pejoratively, even though there are two polarised positions around the topic. On the one hand, there is “*universal entitlement*”, which would approve of anyone appropriating anything they like from another culture “within the boundaries of property law”, on the grounds of “freedom of expression”. On the other hand, there is “*universal restrictiveness*”, according to which cultural appropriation is immoral and inadmissible, due to “the vulnerability of marginalised groups and the fact that appropriation disproportionately benefits dominant groups” (Nguyen and Strohl 982, emphasis in original). In this PhD thesis I align with the latter view, as I consider cultural appropriation as another form of (neo-)imperialism and colonisation of marginalised and ethnic communities on the part of white, dominant groups.

<sup>66</sup> James Young examines other types of cultural appropriation, such as content appropriation, which entails borrowing the content of other culture's artistic works, stories or myths (6).

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

In the same vein, Vignette, who had been responsible for guarding the library that contained all the treasures in Tirnanoc, had warned Philo that he should not touch those relics, as they were Tirnanoc's most precious and valued assets. As she explains to him, they are ancestral remnants whose sentimental and cultural value could not even be fathomed by human invaders: "There are books in this room that are older than the first words your oafish species ever uttered. And I will gladly spend all day mopping your blood off this floor before I see them crated up to be gawked at in some fucking Burguish museum" (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 3, 00:10:46-00:11:01). When she finds out that her worst fears have finally come true, as those relics are displayed in a Burguish museum, for all the world to see—except for their righteous owners, the fairies themselves—she feels betrayed by Philo. Hence, Vignette here represents the ethnic Other who, after enduring enslavement, land expropriation and even sexual assault, still has to helplessly bear cultural appropriation on the part of the dominant ethnic group.

Moreover, given that Philo is half fairy, his complicity and participation in this cultural appropriation and plundering of Tirnanoc further problematizes his conflicting ethnic identity. First, he passed as a human soldier and then he left the fairy community in Tirnanoc at the mercy of The Pact because he wanted to keep his class and racial privileges as a Burguisman. He was afraid of being treated as a second-class citizen, were he to reveal his true origins. In order to leave the country, he made Vignette believe that he was dead so that she would not look for him. Thus, he did not embrace his fairy side and, instead, abandoned his fellow fairies to be killed or enslaved by another human power. Moreover, once back in The Burgue, he does not acknowledge his biracial origins until the end of Season 1, when he is being investigated for the murder of Aisling Querelle, his fairy birth mother.

However, he finally joins the fairy community when Jonah and Sophie implement segregation policies against mythological creatures, showing a social commitment in sharing the burden of discrimination with his fellow fairies. In doing so, I argue that Philo's behaviour at the end of the series echoes LaCapra's claims that the trauma of the perpetrator "must be acknowledged and in some sense worked through if perpetrators are to distance themselves from an earlier implication in deadly ideologies and practices" (79). Here, Philo has acknowledged his responsibility for abandoning his people and concealing his genetic ties with them, taking the first steps to move forward and advocate for the social improvements of ethnic minorities in The Burgue. Therefore, Season 1 ends on a hopeful note, both in terms of perpetrator trauma and the need to embrace one's

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

ethnic identity. In this case, the series seems to be encouraging its Western audience to reflect on their colonial past –including cultural and land appropriation, as well as the enslavement and genocide of ethnic groups–, and to acknowledge their discriminatory ideologies towards biracial individuals. Nonetheless, these expectations of racial and postcolonial uplifting will not be confirmed –or rebutted– until Season 2 is released – probably at some point in the second half of 2022 (Vyper par. 4).

*Penny Dreadful* also touches upon the collective trauma of African slavery and colonisation through Sir Malcolm Murray, a former explorer in the service of the British empire, and a character based on mid-nineteenth-century expeditions “to discover the source of the Nile by the likes of Henry Morton Stanley, David Livingstone and Richard Burton” (Howell and Baker 6). Furthermore, Sir Malcolm also evokes a popular literary genre from the Victorian period: adventure novels (Howell and Baker 6). The parlour of Sir Malcolm’s London residence is decorated with a map of the Nile –a constant reminder of his ‘glorious’ past as an imperial explorer, but also of his present family ordeal, which has kept him away from the African continent for the last couple of years.<sup>67</sup> One of Sir Malcolm’s most salient sins is his vanity. Indeed, he speaks tirelessly about his African explorations and his contributions to the progress of the British empire. He spends most of Seasons 1 and 2 ceaselessly expressing his desire to return to Africa, a continent that gave purpose to his life. However, after the death of his family, he grows disillusioned with it, and only decides to return in Season 3 in order to escort the corpse of Sembene – his African manservant–, who had been brutally murdered by Ethan’s werewolf at the end of Season 2. According to Logsdon:

Sir Malcolm’s sense of his own significance is tied to an occasional mountain to which he attaches a family name and to the members of his immediate family, whose willingness to listen to the adventurer’s tales reinforce Sir Malcolm’s conviction that he has played a significant role in England’s colonization of

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<sup>67</sup> The fact that Sir Malcom has transformed the parlour of his London house into a home office –where he keeps his African trophies and maps as nostalgic reminders of his imperial past– echoes Benjamin’s understanding of private interiors as a representation of the bourgeois need for privacy in the urban landscape. According to Benjamin, “[t]he interior is not just the universe of the private individual; it is also his *énuï* [...] the bourgeois has shown a tendency to compensate for the absence of any trace of private life in the big city. He tries to do this within the four walls of his apartment” in order to prevent the traces of his everyday life from getting lost. Benjamin further contends that the bourgeois interiors are the precursors of detective fiction, given that “the apartment becomes a sort of cockpit. The traces of its inhabitant are molded into the interior. Here is the origin of the detective story, which inquires into these traces and follows these tracks” (20).

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

Africa. With the deaths of every one of his family members, no one remains to listen to and validate the man (24).

As a consequence, there is a concept in *Penny Dreadful* that Stephen Arata regards as one of the key historical and cultural concerns in Stoker's *Dracula*: a sense of the “decline of Britain as a world power” and how “the increasing unrest in British colonies and possessions” all “combined to erode Victorian confidence in the inevitability of British progress and hegemony” (“The Occidental Tourist” 622). Sir Malcolm could arguably be described as a decadent explorer who misses ‘the good all days’, when the British empire was in full expansion mode. As a result, his decadence is a faithful representation of a key trope in imperial Gothic narratives: the “diminution of opportunities for adventure and heroism” (Warwick 338). After going back to Africa in Season 3, he complains that it is no longer an uncharted territory, placidly waiting to be discovered, penetrated and conquered. Instead, the continent has been plundered and looted by other European powers, so that it has now lost its raw beauty and appeal for him. As can be seen in the following excerpt, Sir Malcolm does not repent for his colonial crimes in Africa, nor is he traumatised by them. On the contrary, he clings to his idealised and romanticised view of imperialism and colonisation, lamenting that there seem to be no other marvels in the world to be discovered:

Most of the local natives have been run off, or captured by the Germans and the Belgians for the rubber and ivory trade, for slaves in all but name. What romance I saw in Africa is done for me, the land is tainted now beyond repair, and I want to be quit of the filthy place. What then? Are there no fresh wonders left? No worlds yet to conquer? (Logan, Season 3, Episode 1, 00:15:40-00:16:07).

Despite the fact that Sir Malcolm does not exactly fit the pattern of the traumatised colonial perpetrator –since he is not traumatised by his imperialist past– his story in *Penny Dreadful* is marked by his past failures, both as a British coloniser and as a family man. As Amanda Howell and Lucy Baker contend: “The horrors of his domestic dereliction, neglect, and abuse are highlighted at the climaxes of both Seasons One and Two, even as the map overlooks the scene of a new family of sorts” (6): his new family of choice. Sir Malcolm's guilt for his family's collapse and eventual death is hinted at in Season 1, where he tries to channel it into the quest of his daughter Mina. By the end of that season,



## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

it even seems that he might move past his perpetrator trauma by forming a family of choice and protecting his surrogate children, as he has made peace with the fact that he cannot save his daughter, so that he kills her to save Vanessa, instead. However, as explained in Chapters 4 and 5, his guilt is even more thoroughly explored at the end of Season 2, when he and Dr Frankenstein are trapped in the parlour of Mrs. Poole's house and they have to face the ghosts of their respective families. Both male characters are about to give in to the ghosts' demands and end their lives to atone for their family sins, just before Vanessa vanquishes the Devil and his acolyte, Mrs. Poole. Nevertheless, after these events, Sir Malcolm returns to Africa to bury Sembene's corpse, leaving Vanessa behind in London, which precipitates her to Dracula's arms.

On a different note, it is also worth stressing the role of ghosts in these neo-Victorian texts, from the perspective of both victims and perpetrators. As discussed in previous chapters, Salish is portrayed as a persistent ghost that haunts her son's memories throughout the series, especially when he bathes in the river, the liquid space where she tried to drown him as a child. As I explained in Chapter 3, the ghost features prominently in trauma research, particularly in two related critical sources: Derrida's *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (1994), and Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's *The Shell and the Kernel* (1987). In these publications, ghosts are understood as a metaphor for the victim's need to remember and share their stories "for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims" (Herman 1).

As previously mentioned, Salish has a very limited presence in the series. We only get to know her through James's fragmented and distorted flashbacks, especially the one where she is bathing in the river fully clothed and covered in Native American body paint. Hence, Salish could be considered an apparition that haunts her son's memories and represents the patriarchal and colonial violence that her husband inflicted upon her. She arguably haunts her son, a coloniser like his father, to make him reflect on his past atrocities and prevent him from continuing them in the future. Nonetheless, James's contradictory morality—that of a former slave trader who simultaneously resents his father for buying her Native American mother, but is also planning on making economic profit from her Native land—prevents any possible reparation to the racial 'Other' in the show.

Nonetheless, Morag suggests that there is also an "unwelcome ghost", that of the perpetrator, "who stands as a profound challenge and hurdle for the society at whose behest s/he was sent" (*Waltzing with Bashir* 5). While he was still in Africa, James found

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

out that his father had bought Salish along with a piece of Native American land called Nootka Sound thirty years before the events in the series. After Mr Delaney dies, James returns to England to take over that territory, as its strategic location –close to the American-Canadian border– could benefit him economically. Nonetheless, both the EIC and the British Crown are also interested in owning this territory for the very same reason.

The EIC make Delaney a very generous offer and try to appeal to his patriotism as an English subject, but he refuses to sell it to them, as he is planning to make a deal with the Americans. When he returns to England, he is feared and described as a ghost by the rest of society because he was thought to be dead. One of these examples is when Sir Stuart Strange tells him, “[i]n those days, I always chose boys who had the shadow of death on them. I thought they were less likely to return. Of course, they do return... as ghosts” (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 8, 00:03:08-00:03:22). According to Morag’s theories on perpetrator trauma, James would represent the perpetrator’s unwanted ghost, who the EIC company sent to commit the atrocity of slave trade in the Middle Passage. Nevertheless, they do not want to be held accountable for the crime they committed “by proxy” (Morag, *Waltzing with Bashir* 8) after profiting from it, so they reject this unwelcome ghost because it reminds them of their unacknowledged guilt. In depicting the enslaved prisoners, as well as James and his mother –who conform the main ethnic characters in *Taboo*–, as ghosts, the series is further alienating them from the rest of the characters –who are depicted as white and alive. Therefore, their ghostly nature could be deemed as another Othering trait that exoticises these ethnic characters.

The horrors of slavery and the Middle Passage took place in the context of the British Empire, which could be defined as what Robert Jay Lifton considers as an “atrocity-producing situation”, which is “structured, psychologically and militarily, [so that] that ordinary people [...] can commit atrocities” (qtd. in Morag, “On the Definition of the Perpetrator” 15). In such situations, a sense of “sanctioned brutality becomes the norm” so that perpetrators can justify any abhorrent action they commit: “dormant sadistic impulses are expressed”, and there is a “quest for meaning through the act of atrocity” (Morag, “On the Definition of the Perpetrator” 15). Thus, the structures of power sending soldiers to atrocity-producing situations should be held accountable for their complicity in order to help society move forward. In the case of *Taboo*, the EIC is the imperialist power that has sent men to the Middle Passage and has been profiting from the horrors of slave trade. However, several critics have pointed out *Taboo*’s historical inaccuracy in portraying the EIC as more powerful than it really was (Mousoutzanis 2020,

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

Major 2017, Singh 2014), while simultaneously disregarding “its most significant sphere of influence”: India, that is largely absent from the series (Major). By 1814, the impact of the EIC was in decline. Thus, in portraying it as more powerful than it actually was, *Taboo* is “both in tandem with and in reaction against the imperial nostalgia” that characterises neo-Victorian Gothic on screen (Mousoutzani 10).

Nonetheless, the structures of power promoting mass perpetration by sending soldiers to atrocity-producing situations are neither interested in taking responsibility for their actions nor in allowing perpetrators to own up to the crimes they carried out in their name. This runs counter to the fact that “acknowledgement of perpetrators’ trauma will set in motion society’s acknowledgment of the perpetrator as its envoy, and its relation to (usually ethnic) others” (Morag, *Waltzing with Bashir* 7). This is the case of Sir Stuart Strange in *Taboo*, who refuses to acknowledge his active participation in illegal slave trade and tries to prevent James from confessing his crimes (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 8).

Furthermore, mass atrocities usually “become part of systemic atrocities that have undergone naturalization and are thus difficult to notice even as they are being produced” (Morag, *Waltzing with Bashir* 7). The horrors of slavery depicted in *Taboo* are arguably examples of these naturalised atrocities, since ethnic Others were considered inferior to white individuals in the long nineteenth century, so their ordeal was accepted as necessary, or simply ignored. Nevertheless, acknowledging and actively accepting the trauma of the perpetrator would allow us to transform a seemingly individual experience into a collective one, “thus healing the social order and the (ethnic) other” (Morag, *Waltzing with Bashir* 9).

Morag also contends that even if the symptoms that perpetrators experience are similar to those of the victims, the former actually lie “in the profound moral contradictions challenging the perpetrators rather than in their psychological disintegration or disturbing and intrusive memories” (*Waltzing with Bashir* 19). James has a moral contradiction throughout Season 1, as he struggles between his future business plans –that would perpetuate British colonial atrocities in his mother’s American land, Nootka Sound– and his guilty conscience for his imperial past. James’s journey started with a colonial endeavour in the service of an empire in Africa, and would likely end contributing to an emerging empire “whose history will be ridden with the horrors of slavery and extinction of indigenous population” (Mousoutzani 14).

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

Furthermore, scholars researching victim trauma have traditionally contended that perpetrators do not take responsibility for their atrocities by shifting the blame on to the victims themselves. Indeed, Herman argues that:

In order to escape accountability for his crimes, the perpetrator does everything in his power to promote forgetting [...] After every atrocity one can expect to hear the same predictable apologies: it never happened; the victim lies; the victim exaggerates; the victim brought it on herself; and in any case it is time to forget the past and move on (7-8).

James frequently returns to ‘the scene of the crime’ in his mind, where the ghosts of enslaved African prisoners haunt him. However, he confronts them without taking responsibility for his crimes: “You are not here. You are not here. You are not here. I have no fear for you and I have no guilt for you. I did as others did and as others had me do, and we are all owned, and we have all owned others... So don’t you dare stand there and judge me” (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 1, 00:39:41-00:40:07). Hence, he blames his superiors and the imperial system that ordered him to commit those atrocities and that, to some degree, even normalised them.

In the same vein, in Season 1 of *Penny Dreadful*, Sir Malcolm does not want to acknowledge his responsibility for the collapse of his nuclear family, nor for his son’s death in Africa. He blames Vanessa for Mina’s disappearance, but does not own up to his parental neglect nor to his adulterous relationship with Mrs. Ives. He devotes all his time and energy to find his missing daughter and –presumably– make up for his past mistakes, without realising that she is beyond salvation. He is even willing to sacrifice Vanessa’s life to find Mina, as he has convinced himself that she is the only guilty party in his family’s debacle. As explained in Chapter 5, it is not until the end of Season 1 that he realises that Vanessa is actually his daughter of choice and, in spite of his numerous parental mistakes with Mina, he can still be a good father to Vanessa.

It seems that most perpetrators experience a “static” or passive guilt, which is characterised by self-hatred or a numbed culpability that prevents them from contributing to make a positive social change (Morag, *Waltzing with Bashir* 18). James experiences this kind of guilt, as he ‘numbs’ his conscience by drinking alcohol profusely and focusing on his new business endeavours rather than on acknowledging his past responsibility. Nevertheless, perpetrators need to transform these passive feelings into an active guilt

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

that will allow them to produce a meaningful social change. This active guilt should be motivated by the perpetrator's empathy for their victims, a willingness to be held accountable for their atrocities and the need to look forward rather than backwards. Looking forward would involve promoting "halting policies that lead to atrocity, increasing the impact of international human rights norms [...] making reparations, [and] encouraging domestic activism" (Morag, *Waltzing with Bashir* 18).

In the case of Ethan in *Penny Dreadful*, his guilty conscience made him escape from all the violence that both his human and werewolf selves had perpetrated against Native Americans and his own family, respectively. In doing so, he is acknowledging the responsibility of the US government against indigenous tribes and trying to distance himself from that colonial violence. As Anyiwo contends: "In his desire to run from the destruction his monster has caused in The United States, we realize he is also running from the monstrosity of America's conquest against the native tribes belying the idea that the monster is a creature detached from its core self" (118). Ethan's human self wants to make reparations and prevent future atrocities like the ones he and his inner 'monster' committed by helping Vanessa and Sir Malcolm in their fight against evil. Moreover, he tries to prevent Vanessa from making his same mistakes, as when he scolds her for using her magic against Sir Geoffrey Hawkes, the man that led the witch hunt against Joan Clayton. Here, Ethan provides an accurate description of the numbed guilt he feels for the people he has killed:

Do you know what it is... to walk with someone's body tied around your neck for the rest of your goddamn life? Do you know what that is, little girl? Let me tell you about it. First time is hard. I'm sure you cried a bit, didn't you? Don't worry, that'll pass. Second time is easier. Third time, you don't blink. Then it's all just repetition. You don't cry anymore. You don't even remember when you used to cry. You're alive and they're dead (Logan, *Penny Dreadful*, Season 2, Episode 7, 00:46:51-00:47:25).

The audience eventually finds out that Ethan is actually *Lupus Dei* –the Wolf of God in Latin–, a creature sent by God to protect humanity from a potential apocalypse. However, Ethan despises his wolf side and tries to repress it, as he cannot control it and does not remember what he does when he is under its influence. When his supernatural side is unleashed, it wreaks havoc, turning Ethan into an unwilling perpetrator once again.

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

In fact, Ethan becomes a serial killer in London and is even compared to Jack the Ripper in some newspaper accounts: “a fearsome entity whom we can never know and therefore overcome” (Green 107).

Nonetheless, Ethan’s repression of his double might actually be detrimental to both his friends and himself, given that “as long as he buries and ignores it, he will never be able to control it or truly access his god given power” (Anyiwo 118). As in the case of Sir Malcolm, Ethan fails to protect the women he loves –Brona and Vanessa– precisely because of his fears and secrets. First, he trusts Frankenstein to take care of Brona, and she is actually killed and then resurrected by the doctor. In Season 3, he abandons Vanessa, who is then seduced by Dracula. His failure to control his wolf side and use it to fight against Dracula and Lucifer arguably prompts Vanessa to sacrifice herself to save humanity from evil. Moreover, Anyiwo contends that Ethan is an American monster representing the promises of the New World in contrast to the British Empire. However, in the end, “he becomes the transition of empires from Britain to the US. Modernity replaces the new but with the same monsters as the past” (119).

On a different note, traumatised victims need to share their stories with an empathetic listener, which sets their healing process in motion, as discussed in previous chapters. As the only survivor of the Cornwallis, James is asked by Mr. Chichester (played by Lucian Msmati) –the spokesperson for the Sons of Africa, a political group that advocates for the rights of Black people– to write a full statement that points to Sir Stuart Strange as the person responsible for the loading of the ship with slaves and sending it to a sugar plantation in Antigua. In exchange, Delaney would receive a full pardon for his colonial crimes (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 7). Mousoutzanis contends that Delaney attempts to come to terms with the trauma of the sinking slave ship by verbalising it in this document (7-8), where he writes: “When the Cornwallis left Cabinda and became the Influence, it was I, James Delaney, who stowed the Jack and Company flags. An East India Company ship, renamed, laden with illegal slaves and flying the stars and stripes... At the direct request of Sir Stuart Strange” (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 8, 00:06:34-00:07:10). Mousoutzanis argues that the fact that James works through this traumatic experience by confessing his crimes to Chichester is evidenced by how he perceives the latter as a double of the ghosts of Black slaves that haunt him (8). Therefore, in acknowledging his guilt to a former African slave and in helping him make reparations to the African people, James feels that can atone for his former crimes.

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

Nevertheless, it is worth underlying that the purpose of the perpetrator's confession is not to be forgiven or understood by neither society nor their victims (Morag, *Waltzing with Bashir*). This is where the victim's testimony and the perpetrator's confession greatly differ. While the victim's cathartic release requires witness's empathy, the offender's confession is characterised by its "uncathartic nature". Morag offers the term "perpetrator's empathic unsettlement",<sup>68</sup> which could be defined as an empathetic response to the victim that will motivate the perpetrator to turn any form self-pity, passive guilt or self-hatred into "self-denouncement" (*Waltzing with Bashir* 21). Despite the fact that perpetrators might have a deep longing for forgiveness during the act of confession, this "should not override their sense of guilt and shame" (Morag, *Waltzing with Bashir* 24). Thus, the main goal of their confession should not be to get society's or the victim's forgiveness and a subsequent sense of closure –as Mousoutzanis suggests that Delaney achieves when he embarks on a ship bound for America (8)– but, rather, to help society move forward. Nonetheless, I argue that Delaney does not really plan to make amends to the African people with his confession, as he is not really a repented criminal. He only wants to implicate Sir Stuart Strange and the EIC in illegal slave trade so as to secure the Nootka Sound territory for his own capitalist enterprise.

In spite of James's PTSD symptoms and his numbed guilt throughout the series, his main goal ever since he returned from Africa was to acquire a ship that would take him to the American North-West coast, where he could benefit from the strategic location of Nootka Sound for trading purposes. As he himself confesses: "I will cede sovereignty of Nootka Sound to whichever nation offers me their monopoly on the trade of furs for tea from Fort George to Canton. That's what I want. All the tea in China" (Knight, Hardy and Hardy, Season 1, Episode 3, 00:06:01-00:06:24). This business endeavour on the North American Pacific Coast is arguably a colonial appropriation of the natural resources that once belonged to the Native American Nootka tribe. As Mousoutzanis contends, "[t]his new beginning [...] represents an imperialist project that is not unlike those of the EIC: Delaney embodies both the trauma of colonialism and its very epitome" (8). Consequently, James is simultaneously replicating and subverting the imperial practices of the EIC that he was seemingly trying to denounce throughout Season 1.

Furthermore, *Taboo* portrays him as biracial traumatised perpetrator that has gone native, as he has learnt African languages and rituals. However, he is simultaneously

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<sup>68</sup> This concept is based on LaCapra's theory that witnesses need to show empathy towards the victim without fully identifying with their experience, so as not to be traumatised by it (40).

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

depicted as an English coloniser that intends to capitalise on a tea monopoly by exploiting the Natives' land. As a consequence, James –and by extension, *Taboo*– embodies the very essence of neo-Victorian postcolonial narratives on screen: they first offer a potential critique of imperial ideologies, only to ultimately perpetuate them with their conservative, stereotyped and Othering adaptation of the long nineteenth century.

In the same vein, *Penny Dreadful* fails in its attempt to denounce imperial practices through the trauma of the colonial perpetrator, given that “the series finishes with what could appear to be an affirmation of paternity and colonialist masculinity in the survival of Sir Malcolm and his adopted son Ethan” (Howell and Baker 7). In fact, they are two of few characters that survive Dracula's apocalypse. On the contrary, the female protagonists, Vanessa and Lily, are defeated in the series finale –since the former dies and the latter is ostracised. Indeed, the show ends with a dialogue between these two men, the last remnants of the show's family of choice:

Sir Malcolm: Never have I so wanted to run away. On some hunt or expedition to Africa, India. Anywhere but here.

Ethan: Will you?

Sir Malcolm: No. I must find my life without her. Miss Ives was the last link to who I was. I must find out who I am yet going to be. Oh, I will miss her to my bones. Will you stay, Ethan?

Ethan: You're my family (Logan, Season 3, Episode 8, 00:49:29-00:50:27).

In conclusion, the neo-Victorian TV series analysed in this section explore the perpetrator trauma of the male protagonists through their PTSD symptoms, their passive guilt and their (un)willingness to prevent these crimes from happening again in the future. However, in both *Taboo* and *Penny Dreadful* there is a reinforcement of male, colonial authorities, whereas the female heroines are eventually defeated or killed. The case of *Carnival Row* cannot be analysed in depth, given that the second season of the series had not been realised yet at the time of writing the present PhD thesis. Nonetheless, considering his actions and behaviour in the Season 1 finale, Philo will presumably transform his passive guilt into political activism, fighting for the rights of colonised and enslaved ethnic Others, and contributing to meaningful social improvements in Season 2.

However, none of the other series appears to fulfil the main characteristics of perpetrator trauma narratives: the offender needs to empathise with their victims and



## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

transform their guilt into self-denouncement so as to make reparations and help society move forward. Thus, I argue that, in these cases, perpetrator trauma is used to make the audience empathise with perpetrators at first, making them believe that the victims will obtain closure, visibility and emancipation. Nonetheless, in the end, these series uplift ideals of white and male superiority, frustrating the audience's desire to see the victims' suffering being acknowledged and worked through. This seems to point to the directors' hypocritical agenda to cater to an increasingly ethnic audience –who want their collective traumas to be acknowledged and represented on screen– while they simultaneously continue to elevate and glorify white, male and heteronormative characters.

### 7.2. Presenting Female Characters as Domestic and Mass Perpetrators: A Misogynistic Portrayal of Former Victims of Gendered Violence

Recent studies in the US and the EU show that perpetrators of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) are statistically more likely to be male individuals.<sup>69</sup> IPV could be defined as a form of abuse –including physical, sexual and social violence, as well as food or economic deprivation and verbal threats– from one partner to the other during or after a romantic relationship. It is worth noting that this type of violence is usually perpetrated by men against women, although not always (Rollero 749). Moreover, findings also show that contemporary mass shooters –particularly in the US– tend to be “male, unmarried, and unemployed” in comparison to the average American (Lankford, Silver and Cox 125).

Despite the fact that this statistical evidence points to an apparent genderisation of domestic, intimate partner and mass violence in real-life contexts, neo-Victorian texts on screen usually portray the main offenders as female characters. It is worth noting that the female perpetrators that feature prominently in my corpus of analysis are former victims of patriarchal abuse. This portrayal seems to corroborate, once again, Mohamed's theories on the representation of perpetrator trauma in fiction, according to which abusers are usually former victims of domestic and child abuse that perpetuate that very same violence against others in adulthood (1176).

Contrary to the male perpetrators described above, the majority of the female abusers featuring in my corpus of analysis do not appear to have any PTSD symptoms –

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<sup>69</sup> In the US, about 1 in 4 women and almost 1 in 10 men have experienced sexual abuse, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner (Rollero 749). Moreover, nearly half of all women (48.4%) have experienced a form of psychological aggression by their (former) partners (Black et al. 46). In the EU, 1 in 10 women has experienced at least one form of IPV (Eurostat 2018). Finally, nearly 40% of feminicides around the world have been committed by male partners or ex-partners (Stöckl et al. 859).

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

such as flashbacks, hallucinations, nightmares or time disruptions—, nor do they seem to display a numbed guilt that leads them to self-destructive behaviours—such as self-hatred, substance abuse or self-harm. Thus, since they do not feel guilty or repentant of their crimes, they do not intend to make any positive contributions for the common good of society.

This is the case of Lucille Sharpe in *Crimson Peak*. As discussed throughout this PhD thesis, she is a former victim of domestic abuse who, instead of breaking the cycle of violence, compulsively perpetuates it against other women. Unlike her brother Thomas—who eventually realises all the damage and suffering they have caused when he falls in love with their last target, Edith—, she does not show any sort of empathy towards her victims, since she only cares for herself and her brother. In fact, she tries to justify their atrocious behaviour on the co-dependent and toxic relationship she has with her brother: “The things we do for love like this are ugly, mad, full of sweat and regret. This love burns you and maims you and twists you inside out. It is a monstrous love and it makes monsters of us all” (Del Toro, 00:38:38-00:38:50).

According to Ellen Rees, the noun “monster” is actually “a loaded term often applied to perpetrators of particularly heinous crimes” (3), especially in “Anglo-American perpetrator narratives” (Rees 7) and mass media. However, this conceptualisation of the abuser as a monster is usually constructed by society or the structures of power, not abusers themselves. Since the nineteenth century, discussing the figure of the perpetrator has been considered “improper” and a taboo, and trauma studies have traditionally dealt with the unavoidable damage to the victim “as a result of this repression”. Moreover, this has led to the “mythologization” of the offender, since trauma studies have always “painted the victimizer as a monstrous, obscure, and undetected figure” (Morag, *Waltzing with Bashir* 12). In fact, Edward J. Ingebretsen contends that American serial killers tend to be

invariably read into a traditional grammar of the supernatural monstrous that functions in two distinct ways. As hermeneutic, the monstrous organizes a language of reference that is saturated with political implications. As a rubric, on the other hand, the monstrous *directs* otherwise unacceptable excesses of violence and passion toward sanctioned political ends (27, emphasis in original).

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

However, the fact that Lucille dehumanises both herself and her brother is more problematic than it might seem at first, especially in ethical and moral terms. In constructing themselves as ‘monsters’, Lucille seems to be justifying their atrocious behaviour on their supposedly daemonic nature. Thus, in acknowledging her argument we would be accepting that they can neither help committing those crimes nor can they be held accountable for them, since human laws and rules do not apply to them. Their evil natures –as opposed to our human one– would force them to perpetrate those aberrant crimes. As George Morgan and Scott Poynting argue: “it is important to recognize that by constructing the perpetrator as a deranged monster, one who had lost all sense of moral proportion or attachment to reality, we evade some complicated questions” (1), which are related to our passive involvement and complicity “by proxy” (Morag, *Waltzing with Bashir* 8) in mass atrocities. Indeed, serial crimes, such as the ones portrayed in *Crimson Peak*, are “far from being completely random and aberrant”, but “very much grounded in a particular conjuncture framed by acute social and cultural tensions” (Morgan and Poynting 1).

In other words, in using the terms “monsters”, “monstrous” or “demons” to describe the siblings’ nature and love, Del Toro is constructing their crimes as inevitable, isolated and caused by their evil natures. Thus, the social structures that cemented and sanctioned the domestic abuse and economic deprivation they inflicted upon their female victims through the patriarchal status quo are completely disregarded here. Moreover, this reasoning has an even more important implication in terms of the social usefulness of perpetrator trauma. Since Lucille does not feel capable of feeling guilty for her crimes – on account of her alleged monstrous nature–, she cannot empathise with her victims, nor help society prevent similar atrocities from taking place again in the future. Nonetheless, the fact that Thomas is able to change the way he perceives their victims and violent actions seems to prove that the siblings are not really monsters, but human beings that can repent, become empathetic to the suffering of others and contribute to improve society. Notwithstanding her brother’s evolution, Lucille’s violent cycle can only be stopped when Edith kills her at the end of the film, although –as discussed in previous chapters– her ghost continues to haunt Allerdale Hall for all eternity, since she is forever trapped in her domestic perpetrator narrative, completely incapable of moving forward.

Finally, it is also worth noting that Lucille’s fate in the film should be regarded in a negative light from a feminist perspective. As stated above, gender-based violence is statistically suffered by female victims in the hands of male perpetrators, yet the

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

patriarchal villain in *Crimson Peak* is a formerly abused woman. This portrayal might have a damaging impact on real-life victims of domestic violence, who might feel misrepresented –or even demonised– in Del Toro’s film. Likewise, the fact that a strong female character such as Lucille is murdered in the end, and her ghost condemned to a life of solitude in the house where she was severely abused by her mother, might be interpreted as a sombre warning for transgressive women. They either respect the social conventions ascribed to their gender and remain submissive and obedient to the patriarchal status quo, or they will be punished for their subversion. As a consequence, *Crimson Peak* displays rather misogynistic undertones in its depiction of Lucille and, to some extent, even postfeminist ones. This appears to be so, considering that she is portrayed as a strong and independent character at first, but ends up being demonised and chastised for her rebellious and transgressive nature.

In a similar vein, Sophie, who was also a victim of domestic and child abuse, does not feel guilty of the far-right policies she and her half-brother Jonah are about to implement against mythological creatures in *The Burgue*. Unlike Lucille’s demonizing discourse, Sophie justifies her and Jonah’s right to rule on class and biological privilege. As discussed in Chapter 6, she first defended her birth right to procreate with her own brother on the grounds that their ancestral noble families had created dynasties through incestuous unions. Likewise, she argues that they are entitled to use the chaos created by the confrontations between far-right collectives and creatures to fulfil their ambitious political dreams (Echevarria and Beacham, Season 1, Episode 1, 00:59:50-00:59:55).

Just like Lucille in *Crimson Peak*, Sophie is a former victim of domestic violence, who was frequently punished and oppressed by her father for her ambition. Even though her rebellious nature seems to be portrayed as a positive trait at the beginning of the series, after her father dies, she becomes a tyrant and a despot, with no regard for the life of mythological creatures. Once again, this demonising portrayal of a former victim of gendered violence might have a negative impact on the audience. Her ruthless thirst for political power might contribute to the traditional and misogynistic understanding of powerful women as castrating and wicked agents. Nonetheless, contrary to Lucille, who does not show any of the most common symptoms of perpetrator trauma throughout the film, we cannot know for certain how Sophie’s character is going to evolve, given that the second season of the series has not been released yet.

Unlike the male perpetrators described in the previous section, whose past colonial endeavours are rooted in imperial and supremacist ideologies, some of the female abusers

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

in my corpus of analysis commit crimes that can be considered a reaction against the patriarchal system. This is the case of Lily Frankenstein, who, as thoroughly discussed in previous chapters, becomes the leader of a misandrist group whose main purpose is the mass annihilation of men and the creation of a new superhuman race. Contrary to his previous lover, Ethan, who is an unwilling perpetrator, forced to kill every full moon by his supernatural double, Lily is a blood-thirsty and vengeance fuelled aggressor that feels neither guilt nor compassion towards her victims. This could be due to the fact that she and her army only target patriarchal abusers, namely rapists, domestic abusers or procurers of prostitutes. In other words: violent men that exploit and torture women for their own pleasure or economic benefit.

Thus, the audience might be encouraged to empathise with such a character who, in principle, appears to share the same goals as feminist activists: to take down patriarchy and stop gendered-based violence against women. Indeed, Lily is a conflicting character in terms of role-playing in a traumatic event. As Sarah Artt claims, “[t]he hybrid figure of Brona Croft/Lily Frankenstein occupies a range of narrative positions: victim, monster, champion, and sympathetic prisoner; she forces us to consider our position on consent (sexual or otherwise) and what it means to have real agency” (259). Consequently, she is a contradictory and challenging character for the audience, who might find themselves simultaneously empathizing with and questioning Lily’s violent actions. According to Stephanie Green, “[a]lthough the series invites viewers to revel in her bloodthirsty rebellion it also causes us to tremble at the intimations of terrorism invoked by Lily’s spectacles of violence against male presumptions of authority” (112). This is particularly relevant if we consider the series’ context of production: a contemporary globalised world where terrorism –especially after the 9/11 attacks, as well as white supremacist hate crimes against ethnic minorities in the US or Islamist terrorist attacks in several Western countries– is fresh in our collective imagination. Despite Lily’s eagerness to achieve power through violence, the series’ failure in granting her female emancipation ultimately shows “that a woman’s power cannot be sustained under patriarchy, and if she steps outside her designated role she will be deemed a dangerous, monstrous threat” (Artt 259).

It is also worth mentioning that, as in the case of both Lucille and Sophie, Lily does not experience any PTSD symptoms related to her violent perpetrations against men, only to her past experiences as a victim of sexual abuse. However, she does feel responsible for the death of her baby girl, given that she had to leave her alone in the house one freezing night, because she had to work. As analysed in Chapter 4, she asks Dr

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

Frankenstein not to erase her memories from her past life, as her guilt is the only thing that reminds her of her baby. Moreover, her daughter is also part of her identity as a woman, and the redeeming quality that saves her from being injected with Dr Frankenstein and Dr Jekyll's serum. Likewise, her guilt and self-hatred transform her back from a blood-thirsty immortal monster into a grieving human mother, which helps the audience empathise with her and momentarily forget that she has committed despicable crimes. However, her guilt is not used in a positive way here, as it only seems to increase her hatred towards her former profession as well as the patriarchal capitalist system that forced her to work that job.

Furthermore, the fact that Lily does not feel guilty for the violence she has inflicted and that she only stops her atrocities when she is subdued by patriarchal authorities –the male doctors, Jekyll and Frankenstein– problematizes her possibilities of redemption. Although she shares some common goals with the feminist cause, her means to achieve them are neither diplomatic nor executed to achieve equal gender rights. They are oppressive and discriminatory towards men, so that –as discussed in previous chapters– Lily is adopting the very same violent and alienating traits that have been traditionally ascribed to patriarchal authorities. To put it differently: Lily is committing an act of gender-based violence against men in order to get back at them for subjecting her to gender-based sexual and physical violence. Despite the fact the term 'gender-based violence' is normally used to describe atrocities perpetrated by men against women, it can also refer to abusive actions committed by women targeting men –or even cases where victim and perpetrator are both men– because of their gender.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, according to Gabrielle Ferrales:

Gender-based violence constitutes an extensive range of physical and psychological actions, including acts of penetration, sexual assault, genital mutilation, forced pregnancy, culturally inappropriate actions that sexually harass and humiliate, as well as nonsexual acts perpetrated on the basis of gender, such as sex-selective killing (567).

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<sup>70</sup> Adam Jones also uses the term "gendercide" to describe "gender-selective mass killing", which involves gender-selective atrocities inflicted upon males, especially with regard to "the genocidal killing of civilian men of 'battle age'", or "[t]he victimization of women and girls worldwide, including the structural forms of violence ('genocidal institutions') directed against them" (i).

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

Given that Lily and her misandrist army select their victims on the grounds of them being men, their mass violence is gender-based. Some scholars contend that in the case of gendered violence targeting men, “repertoires of collective violence [...] can strategically prevent men from fathering children and/or undermine them by diminishing their status” (Ferrales 567), as in the case of Lily and her acolytes, who usually torture their victims before killing them. As a consequence, Lily’s cause is intolerant towards nearly half of the world’s population –i.e., men. Thus, she fails to align with the main purposes of perpetrator trauma: to acknowledge one’s responsibility and be held accountable for one’s crimes, to empathise with the victim’s suffering and to help implement practices that might prevent such atrocities from taking place again in the future (Morag, “On the Definition of the Perpetrator” 17). In other words, Lily does not fit the definition of a traumatised perpetrator, as she is not a repented criminal whose main goal is to help society move forward, but quite the opposite. She perpetuates the very same cycle of violence that patriarchal oppressors have exerted upon her, but with a different target; men themselves.

However, it is worth stressing that mass perpetrators tend to be statistically male, and gender-based violence –both in the case of war conflicts and the domestic sphere– is usually executed by men, as I have discussed above. The fact that Logan, *Penny Dreadful*’s creator, has decided to transform this female character into a mass and gendered perpetrator with a set of twisted ‘feminist’ ideals seems to point to, once again, his postfeminist agenda. The misrepresentation of Lily’s feminist activism, who attempts to take down patriarchy through violence –rather than politics– might mislead the audience into equating feminism and misandry.

Indeed, this distorted portrayal of Lily’s vindications might contribute to an ongoing debate on contemporary feminism and the rights of women, where misogynistic stances are increasingly gaining ground. New pejorative terms, such as ‘feminazi’ or ‘breastfeeding nazi’, are being “used in mass and online media to discredit and stigmatise women whose views or behaviour are regarded as not only feminist, but moreover threateningly ‘radical’ or ‘extreme’” (Horan 2). Thus, Lily’s characterisation as a violent misandrist is more damaging to feminist activism than it might seem at first, since it can have a strong impact on a lay audience who might interpret this character’s behaviour as a graphic instance of contemporary feminism.

Another female character in *Penny Dreadful* that follows Lily’s conflicting behavioural pattern in terms of role playing in traumatic events is Vanessa Ives. She is

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

simultaneously a victim, perpetrator, witness and bystander, depending on the traumatic experience from the series to be analysed. Like Ethan, she is an unwilling perpetrator that only attacks when she is under the influence of her supernatural alter ego –e.g., when she is possessed by the Devil or the spirits of the dead. Her supernatural double also functions as an independent entity, with her own set of principles, values and purposes. Although she tries to repress it, she is not always able to resist it. When that happens, she is prone to commit sexual transgressions or be offensive towards her friends and those around her. For instance, when she is possessed by the Devil at the end of Season 1 and she verbally attacks Sir Malcolm and the rest of the team, uncovering their deepest secrets and sins (Logan, Season 1, Episodes 6 and 7). However, her most reproachable atrocity is her final alliance with Dracula, a union that fulfils the prophecy that Vanessa, Sir Malcolm and their team had been trying to prevent throughout the series. This act brings about a pestilent and lugubrious apocalypse which could potentially turn humanity into mere slaves at the service of the vampire master and his acolytes.

Nonetheless, it is worth noting that before being seduced by Dracula, Vanessa had been abandoned by her family of choice. Ethan left London at the end of Season 2 to face the criminal charges of his past crimes in the US; Dr Frankenstein is desperately trying to find a cure for Lily's alleged illness in order to make her come back to him; and Sir Malcolm has finally decided to go back to Africa. As a consequence, Vanessa becomes terribly depressed and vulnerable, an emotional weakness that the vampire master seizes to seduce her. At first, he pretends to be a zoologist called Dr Sweet, and it is not until Vanessa is infatuated with him that he reveals his true identity. Therefore, I argue that she is, once again, a victim of male manipulation and deception, rather than an evil perpetrator. She feels alone and unloved after her friends' abandonment, so that she becomes overly attached to the only person –or being– that pretends to love her and care for her.

In any event, whether we consider Vanessa a victim or a perpetrator against humanity, she redeems herself in the series finale, when she asks Ethan to kill her in order to vanquish Dracula to save the human race. Even though he tries to refuse her request, she reminds him of his fate, as the Wolf of God, to prevent the apocalypse: “You know you have a destiny. It's why we first met. It's why you're here now. You must help me defeat the forces of darkness and deny them the prize for all time [...] Please, Ethan. Let it end. With a kiss [...] With Love” (Logan, Season 3, Episode 9, 00:40:11-00:41:16).



## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

Once again, Ethan assumes the role of the unwilling perpetrator, but he fulfils his destiny and sacrifices the woman he loves for a greater good.

In conclusion, from the perspective of perpetrator trauma, Vanessa is the only ‘abuser’ –of both binary genders, male and female– that finally repents of her crimes and empathises with her victims, to the point where she sacrifices herself for the good of humanity, thus contributing to a meaningful social change. In ending her life, she is trying to prevent both Dracula and Lucifer from trying to seduce her again, doing an altruistic action to her own detriment, contrary to the other perpetrators in the screen texts analysed here. Unlike her, Lucille does not repent of her past crimes, desperately clinging to the remnants of her family’s past glory and privileges. Finally, since the case of Sophie is similar to Philo’s –as the second season of *Carnival Row* has not been released yet–, we cannot know for certain whether she will be traumatised by her perpetrations and will repent. Nonetheless, she is not likely to do so, considering the manner in which this character has been portrayed in Season 1 of the series.

Nevertheless, I believe I should further reflect on the (mis)representation of mass and domestic perpetrators in these screen narratives. As anticipated at the beginning of this section, gender-based violence is usually exerted by men against other men, or by men against their female partners in real life. Likewise, mass shooters statistically tend to be mostly male (Lankford, Silver and Cox 125), and gendered abuse –including psychological, physical and sexual– in wars and mass conflicts are usually perpetrated by men against both women and other men (Jones i). Thus, we should ask ourselves: why are female characters portrayed as domestic and mass victimisers in these neo-Victorian screen texts? Moreover, why is the only redeemed perpetrator a self-scarifying and motherly figure? The answer seems to be that neo-Victorian directors are, once again, pushing their postfeminist and misogynistic agenda on the audience. They will be (mis)led to believe that feminism equals Lily’s misandrist violence or that a subversive woman needs to repent of her gender transgressions by sacrificing her happiness for the good of others.

On a different note, it is worth mentioning that cultural representations of private and collective atrocities can help us reflect on both the institutional and individual responsibility for crimes against humanity. In depicting traumatic events related to colonial and gendered-based violence –both within and outside the confines of the nuclear family– the neo-Victorian screen texts analysed here allow us to reflect on the context where this violence takes place and the degree of responsibility of all the agents involved

## 7. Perpetrator Trauma in Neo-Victorianism on Screen

in them. That way, we can both give voice to and recognise the trauma of the victims, as well as acknowledge and work through our role as society in condoning –or in some cases, even ordering– the perpetrator’s atrocious actions.

Therefore, neo-Victorian fiction has two distinct roles when it comes to nineteenth-century trauma representation. First, it has to remind us and tell us “the truth about terrible events [...] both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims” (Herman 1). Second, it needs to interrogate past “textual and cultural representations”, as well as question “the (inherited) ideologies, institutions and practices of [...] colonialism” (Karam 83) and patriarchy. It is only then that “the traumas of the past, and present can be resolved and a peaceful, and productive nation, can emerge” (Karam 84). However, in the case of the neo-Victorian screen texts that have been analysed in this PhD thesis, they sometimes perpetuate –rather than challenge– imperial and misogynistic ideologies that gave –and still give– rise to atrocious acts against ethnic Others and women.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

The main aim of this thesis has been to scrutinise the manner in which the neo-Victorian screen texts under analysis portray and (mis)represent gendered and colonial traumas within the confines of the nuclear family. My study of the various family traumas and dysfunctionalities featuring in these screen texts has been carried out through a cross-sectional analysis of them. Thus, I have devoted each chapter of this PhD thesis to a specific aspect of family fragmentation and collapse. First, I have examined the use of heterotopias –especially in the case of heterotopias of crisis and deviation– in order to study gendered traumas within the family house or the urban space of the city, as well as colonial traumas in maritime heterotopias. Then, I have focused on the common tropes of the monstrous mother and the absent father in (neo-)Victorian fiction. Next, I have looked at the incest trope, with an especial emphasis on sibling incestuous relationships, although father-daughter incest is also examined in the case of *Penny Dreadful*. Finally, the last chapter of this PhD thesis has covered another area of research in trauma studies, that of perpetrator trauma and its genderisation in the screen texts analysed here.

In the Introduction, I questioned the seemingly inclusive portrayals of the main characters in neo-Victorianism on screen, particularly in terms of gender and racial representations in narratives of family trauma. As I have argued throughout this PhD thesis, all the screen works analysed here present a seemingly feminist and postcolonial agenda, at first. Nonetheless, gender and racial transgressions are later chastised in favour of whitewashed and misogynistic ideologies that might mislead a Western audience into accepting them as true. In other words, these screen texts could be categorised as what Primorac defines as “postfeminist” neo-Victorian fiction, where several aspects of feminism are appropriated and twisted by directors and production companies in order to present a neo-liberal ‘version’ of feminism. These postfeminist representations appeal to a female audience who wants to “have it all”: marriage, children and a professional career (Primorac 7). In addition, these neo-Victorian texts usually portray nineteenth-century society as more sexually repressive and sexist than it really was so that we see ourselves as highly liberated (Foucault, “The History of Sexuality”). As a result, their female audience might be led to believe that women’s social situation has greatly improved and the feminist fight is no longer necessary (Primorac 7).

In this PhD thesis, I have first established neo-Victorianism on screen as the most optimal genre to scrutinise the manipulation of both Victorian and contemporary gender

and racial ideologies on the part of producers and directors. I believe that, owing to the increasing popularity and proliferation of neo-Victorian films and TV series, and their influence in shaping the contemporary public's understanding of the Victorian era, they are the most suitable texts for a feminist cross-sectional analysis of neo-Victorian fiction. Furthermore, considering that these screen works explore gender-based violence and traumas within the confines of the nuclear family so as to –seemingly– give voice to historically marginalised female characters, I have decided to approach them from the perspective of trauma studies. Finally, since these texts not only focus on the trauma of the victims, but also on that of perpetrators, I have contributed to both the fields of neo-Victorianism and trauma studies by exploring perpetrator trauma –where this latter concept used to be undertheorised. In doing so, I have examined the ways in which these neo-Victorian works use this type of trauma to further manipulate the audience into uplifting male, white offenders while misrepresenting their female and ethnic counterparts.

As I have demonstrated throughout this PhD thesis, family holds a central position in neo-Victorian fiction. This is particularly true in twenty-first-century screen adaptations, which are devoted to both pinpointing the hidden dysfunctionalities of Victorian households, and reflecting the present collapse of the nuclear family. This traditional understanding of family life emerged at the turn of the eighteenth century, owing to the Industrial Revolution and the implementation of the separate spheres ideology. As explained at the beginning of this thesis, the label ‘neo-Victorian’ is here understood as fiction set in the long nineteenth century, in either England or its (former) colonies, and that adapts or appropriates typical literary tropes, characters or socio-historical events from the period with a self-reflexive and critical purpose. This broad definition justifies my decision to include the TV series *Taboo*, which is set in the 1810s –a few years before the reign of Queen Victoria– and would, thus, not qualify as a neo-Victorian screen text, according to some scholars.<sup>71</sup> However, I argue that *Taboo* explores

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<sup>71</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, there have been two polarised positions regarding the definition of the field of neo-Victorian studies ever since its inception. Heilmann and Llewellyn opt for a more exclusive definition, which would only comprise self-reflexive works that reinterpret the Victorian era (4). Other scholars, like Kohlke, suggest that the term “neo-Victorian” should include all types of fiction that revisit the long nineteenth century, whether they be adaptive, self-reflexive or nostalgic (“Mining the Neo-Victorian Vein” 27). Finally, Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss regard the emphasis on self-reflexivity as a dangerous approach, as it would lead to a canonisation of the field (3), creating a conservative division between highbrow and lowbrow literature. In this PhD thesis, I have adopted Kohlke’s and Boehm-Schnitker’s inclusive understanding of the term. Therefore, I consider *Taboo* –a TV series set in the first half of the nineteenth century– neo-Victorian.

(neo-)Victorian topics that are common to the other three screen texts that complete my corpus of analysis. First, there is a revisitation of the elements belonging to Imperial Gothic and postcolonial (mis)representations. Second, it also explores traumas and dysfunctionalities that are symptomatic of the collapse of the idealised nuclear family. These include sibling incest, the house as the locus of family trauma, a monstrous mother and absent father, and the figure of the victim of domestic violence turned perpetrator.

Thus, the fact that *Taboo*, *Penny Dreadful*, *Crimson Peak* and *Carnival Row* have all these elements in common justifies my decision to choose them as part of my corpus of analysis. Moreover, it also supports the application of a transversal or comparative analysis in this PhD thesis. Implementing a cross-sectional approach, rather than discussing each screen text separately, has allowed me to avoid possible repetitions or overlaps of common themes between the various screen works. I believe that, in this case, a comparative analysis –where each chapter is devoted to a common aspect of family trauma and dysfunctionality– is much more enriching than an independent analysis of each text. Indeed, this approach has helped me shed some light on the common patterns and misrepresentations of gender-based trauma in neo-Victorianism on screen.

Regarding the structure of my analysis, I have first started with the genderisation of spaces by applying the concept of Foucauldian heterotopias –particularly heterotopias of crisis and deviation, heterochronies and maritime heterotopias– to my corpus. This first chapter of analysis is divided into two main sections: indoor (The Neo-Victorian House of Horrors: Staging Family Traumas on Screen) and outdoor heterotopias (External Spaces Harboursing Inner Traumas), which were then subsequently subdivided into four subsections. In the first of these subsections (The House as the Locus of Family Traumas), I scrutinised domestic spaces as the sites where family traumas occur. Here, I concluded that the family houses depicted in my corpus of analysis usually appropriate the traditional Gothic tropes related to the haunted house: as both tomb and womb and as a feminised space where the female protagonist must solve the hidden mysteries. This seems to perpetuate the Victorian genderisation of spaces, where women were trapped in the domestic sphere. Moreover, the Victorian house here is portrayed as a pseudoheterotopia of deviation, where women are constrained, but not allowed to rebel. Nonetheless, some screen works attempt to subvert these Victorian and Gothic tropes, most notably *Taboo*, where the male protagonist is the one that brings to light the family secrets, or *Penny Dreadful*, where houses seemingly work as shelters for Othering characters who have been rejected by their biological families. Finally, following Curtis' theory of the house

as a palimpsest –as houses are textured with the lives of previous owners that can, in turn, influence the lives of new owners or tenants– I have concluded that haunted houses work as metaphors for neo-Victorian adaptation themselves. Thus, they could be interpreted as palimpsests of Victorian literature and culture through which we can experience an enriched version of the original text at present.

In the next subsection touching indoor heterotopias (Heterotopias of Crisis and Deviation in neo-Victorianism on Screen: The Attic, the Asylum and the Orphanage), I have showed that the neo-Victorian screen texts analysed here represent gendered and family traumas in heterotopias of crises and deviation inside and outside the domestic sphere. In doing so, they echo the Victorian tropes of female hysteria and the orphan child as a deviation of the nuclear family. Despite the fact that *Penny Dreadful* appears to feature two empowered women, Lily and Vanessa, they are eventually chastised for their rebellion and considered hysterical –the gendered stereotype *par excellence* adscribed to women who refused to conform to the “Angel of the House” archetype. Hence, the asylum would actually be a pseudoheterotopia –rather than a heterotopia of deviation– since it is a space of oppression for women, which does not allow them to subvert gender conventions. As a result, *Penny Dreadful* perpetuates Victorian narratives that chastised women who attempted to transgress patriarchal and social rules. These two female characters can only redeem themselves when they adopt a self-sacrificing and maternal stance, more in line with the Victorian gender conventions adscribed to proper womanhood. *Carnival Row* offers a more sustained critique of the Victorian nuclear family, given that its male protagonist, Philo, finally acknowledges his ethnic self and embraces the fairy community. He comes to terms with his mother’s abandonment and eventually forgives her for it. Season 1 ends in a hopeful note for Philo, as he accepts his biracial nature and the fairy folk as his family of choice, but it remains to be seen whether he will fight for equal rights in Season 2 of the series.

In subsection 4.2.1., I have discussed the presentist component of neo-Victorianism’s reimagination of urban landscapes, particularly those that echo or appropriate Victorian London. Our current ‘urban’ anxieties are reflected in this nineteenth-century cityscapes, which once more demonstrates how neo-Victorian fiction is simultaneously oriented towards our past and our present. Moreover, the neo-Victorian screen texts that make up my corpus of analysis replicate Gothic understandings of the “malefic city as a site of divisive inter-class and inter-cultural conflict, violence, and trauma” (Kohlke and Gutleben, “Neo-Victorian Cities” 36). As I have explained in this

subsection, in *Carnival Row*, *Penny Dreadful* and *Taboo*, nineteenth-century London underbelly is reimagined. Some of the main “urban” concerns that Victorian writers explored in their novels have been reprised in today’s globalised and capitalist world, such as poverty, prostitution, racial discrimination, violence and corruption. Thus, our contemporary urban anxieties are thrown back into the nineteenth century, so that our reinterpretation of Victorian cityscapes displays a dual temporary approach: a Victorian and a presentist one.

Finally, in subsection 4.2.2., I have explored how the slave trade of African individuals and nineteenth-century Irish immigration across the Atlantic are represented in both *Taboo* and *Carnival Row*. Although these two series seem to offer a postcolonial understanding of the violent origins of globalisation, *Taboo*’s ambivalent critique of imperial ideologies is accompanied by a reproduction of the tropes and stereotypes that were used to justify imperialism in Victorian England (Mousoutzanis 11). Moreover, the series fails to offer postcolonial subjects a sense of agency owing to the whitewashing involved in choosing Tom Hardy –a white actor– to play a biracial character, a conflicting casting decision that is also present in *Carnival Row*. This latter series also makes an effort to address contemporary issues, such as globalization and neo-imperialism by looking back at the Victorian period as the shorthand of our colonial past. Despite the fact that the series manages to establish a connection between Victorian forced diasporas – i.e., the Middle Passage and the Irish famine– and current refugee and migration crises, it ultimately fails to offer a solid critique of our colonial past due to the casting of white actors Orlando and Cara Delevingne to play the ethnic protagonists. Furthermore, *Carnival Row* also fails to provide a transnational understanding of colonialism, since it mainly takes place in the city of The Burgue –a fantastical reimagination of imperial London. As a result, the series does not actually move beyond Great Britain as the focus of interest, nor does it expand its ‘borders’ to include other colonial territories.

Chapter 5 is divided into two different subsections: the first one focuses on monstrous and subversive (neo-)Victorian mothers, whereas the second one examines absent and surrogate fathers. In section 5.1., I have concluded that the screen texts under analysis attempt to offer conflicting representations of (neo-)Victorian motherhood but end up replicating misogynistic portrayals of the ‘monstrous mother’ trope. These subversive mothers are, as most female characters in these screen texts, punished in the end for their gender transgressions. Furthermore, in terms of surrogate motherhood, these neo-Victorian texts also offer ambivalent representations of mother figures that contribute

to negative understandings of alternative family models in both Victorian and contemporary times. In *Penny Dreadful*, the series presents the two opposite Victorian views of surrogate motherhood –the ‘fairy godmother’ and a monstrous stepmother–, and they are both punished by the patriarchal system. While Joan Clayton is burned alive, immortal Lily is ostracised due to her female supremacist agenda.

On the other hand, in section 5.2. I have concluded that the neo-Victorian texts analysed here also replicate the Victorian archetype of fathers as absent, detached or tyrannical figures, whose involvement in their children’s life is either negative or practically non-existent. This is arguably so because the narrative focus is on the monstrous mother, the origin of the family traumas. Moreover, the father figure represents patriarchal authority and violence in these texts, therefore their negative representation justifies the protagonists’ defiance against the patriarchal system. However, TV series like *Penny Dreadful* or *Carnival Row* offer orphaned characters, such as Vanessa or Philo, a family of choice that provides them with the affection and understanding that they have always lacked. This parental surrogacy grants a positive portrayal of alternative family models –particularly for our present context, where there is an increasing number of alternative family units or ways of understanding family life. However, this positive representation of replacement fatherhood also seems to point to an elevation of patriarchal and patrilineal family models, particularly when compared to the negative portrayal of motherhood that these screen texts provide.

In Chapter 6, I have discussed the incestuous relationships present in my corpus of analysis. This chapter is divided into three subsections, namely section 6.1. Sibling Incest in neo-Victorianism on Screen, 6.2. Lesbian Sibling Incest in the neo-Victorian Family of Choice and 6.3. Father-Daughter Relations in *Penny Dreadful*. Heterosexual sibling incest is the most common form of intra-family relationships in (neo-)Victorian fiction. As I have stated in this chapter, the portrayal of these relationships follows the pattern of both Romantic –sibling-incest relations– and Gothic –parent-child relations– representations of the topic (Richardson). I have analysed these intra-family relations following a three-fold approach based on ethics, aesthetics and psychoanalysis (Llewellyn, “Perfectly Innocent”), since these are the central characteristics involved in the fictional representation of the incest taboo. The ethical aspect is related to the legal and moral rules of the period when the story takes place –in this case, the nineteenth century. The question of aesthetics is concerned with the potential voyeuristic expectations of the audience. Finally, psychoanalysis helps us understand the



psychological root of the incest taboo, and how it sometimes works as a coping mechanism for repressed traumas.

In section 6.1., I have stressed the misogynistic treatment of the female characters in the screen texts under analysis, in spite of their apparent feminist agenda. Lucille is not offered the possibility of finding love outside of her nuclear family, and her ghost is condemned to spend eternity haunting Allerdale Hall. In the same vein, Zilpha is seemingly empowered by the end of Season 1 when she murders her abusive husband, but is then rejected by her brother, who is repulsed by her apparent madness. In the end, she commits suicide because she cannot find any other way out. Finally, I have argued that Sophie is depicted as a manipulative character that uses her half-brother to attain power and perpetuate their family bloodline in *Carnival Row*, despite the fact that Jonah is as responsible as she is for engaging in an incestuous relationship.

Section 6.2. has been devoted to scrutinising lesbian incest desire between two sisters of choice in *Penny Dreadful*: Mina and Vanessa. In this section I have concluded that *Penny Dreadful* fails to offer these female characters a sense of gender emancipation through their incest love. In spite of the show's apparent feminist and LGBTIQ+ agenda, the only lesbian relationship in the story is ambiguously portrayed as the friendly and platonic love between two sisters of choice –which denies visibility and representation to the lesbian community. As a consequence, the series follows the misogynistic pattern of the other screen texts in my corpus of analysis, which can be framed in their postfeminist context of production. As explained above, in these screen texts, key aspects of feminism –including women's empowerment and emancipation– are appropriated by neo-liberal media for capitalist purposes to manipulate female viewers into believing that feminism is obsolete (Primorac *Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 4). Indeed, *Penny Dreadful* further compromises female empowerment through its ambiguous portrayal of father-daughter incest, as I have concluded in section 6.3.

This last section of Chapter 6 has also been entirely devoted to *Penny Dreadful*, as it is the only screen text in my corpus of analysis that features parent-child –more specifically, father-daughter– incest. As I have discussed in this section, *Penny Dreadful*'s depiction of father-daughter incest further contributes to construct the female protagonists as active, independent agents and perpetrators, rather than victims of gendered violence. Despite the fact that the show appears to have a feminist purpose at first, its misogynistic portrayal and its failure to offer female characters gender emancipation make it fall under the category of postfeminist neo-Victorian TV series.

Therefore, in spite of the potential that all these texts might have in subverting the nuclear family myth through the incest trope, they ultimately fail to depict their heroines as emancipated characters. Any critique against patriarchy is systematically chastised, as if they were trying to prevent their female viewers from rebelling against the status quo in real life. As a consequence, these screen texts are actually reinforcing postfeminist understandings of neo-Victorianism.

Finally, in Chapter 7 I have focused on perpetrator trauma, particularly in the case of male colonial perpetrators and female mass perpetrators. In this last chapter of analysis, I have mainly followed the ideas and theories put forward by Morag (“On the Definition of the Perpetrator”, “Perpetrator Trauma” and *Waltzing with Bashir*), Mohamed (“Of Monsters and Men: Perpetrator Trauma and Mass Atrocity”) and Karam (“The Representation of Perpetrator Trauma in *Forgiveness*”). These scholars examine the importance of bringing to the fore the trauma of the perpetrator to help society acknowledge its responsibility in condoning the perpetrator’s actions, as well as in sending them to atrocity-producing situations in the first place. Despite the fact that this chapter is the shortest one in this PhD thesis, I consider that it is one of the most important ones, as it sheds some light on a topic that has been largely neglected in academic and scholarly accounts in trauma studies –both from the perspective of cultural studies and historiography– ever since the nineteenth century.

In section 7.1., I have scrutinised the male characters’ perpetrator trauma through their PTSD symptoms, passive guilt and their willingness to prevent these crimes from happening again in the future. Nonetheless, except for the case of *Carnival Row*, the other shows present a reinforcement of masculine and colonial authorities, whilst the female characters are eventually chastised or defeated. However, I have not been able to analyse *Carnival Row* in depth, since the second season of the series had not been released yet at the time of writing this PhD thesis. Nevertheless, considering Philo’s actions and behaviour in the Season 1 finale, he will presumably transform his passive guilt into political activism in Season 2.

Unfortunately, none of the other texts fulfils one of the main characteristics of perpetrator trauma narratives, where the abuser needs to empathise with their victims and transform their guilt into self-denouncement so as to make reparations. Therefore, perpetrator trauma is used here to make the audience empathise with male offenders and uplift ideals of white and male superiority, frustrating the main goal of trauma studies: to see the victims’ suffering being redressed. Female and ethnic victims are first offered the

possibility to see themselves represented on screen and their traumas acknowledged and repaired, but these works ultimately align themselves with the dominant narrative of the patriarchal system.

Finally, in section 7.2. I have focused on female domestic and mass perpetrators –even though, statistically, IPV and mass perpetrators are more likely to be male in real-life situations. In this section, I have concluded that, from the perspective of perpetrator trauma, Vanessa is the only female ‘abuser’ in my corpus of analysis that finally repents of her crimes and empathises with her victims, to the point where she sacrifices herself for the good of humanity. Lucille, as opposed to Vanessa, does not repent of her past crimes, and desperately clings to the remnants of her family’s past glory. Lily does not regret her misandrist atrocities either, so her army is dismantled and she is condemned to spend eternity all alone. Finally, considering that the second season of *Carnival Row* is yet to be released, we cannot know for certain whether Sophie will be traumatised by her perpetrations and will try to make amends. Nevertheless, she is not likely to do so, considering the manner in which she has been constructed throughout Season 1.

I have concluded this last chapter of analysis by stressing that cultural representations of atrocities can allow us to acknowledge both the institutional and individual responsibilities for crimes against humanity. In depicting traumatic events related to colonial and gendered violence, these neo-Victorian screen texts help us reflect on the context where these examples of violence take place and the degree of responsibility of all the agents involved in them. That way, we can both recognise the trauma of the victims and acknowledge our role as society in condoning the perpetrator’s actions. This seems to be neo-Victorianism’s prime objective: to make contemporary audiences reflect on our ancestors’ responsibility for colonial and domestic violence, but also on our own responsibility for perpetuating some of these forms of violence at present.

To conclude, the four screen texts under analysis are fine examples of the inner contradictions that have been so characteristic of the field of neo-Victorianism ever since its inception, particularly in terms of their treatment of gender and (post)colonial ideologies. As a consequence, this PhD thesis has made an attempt to answer the question: why do contemporary directors and creators appropriate Victorian tropes, characters and plots to seemingly subvert the sexist and racist ideologies of the period, only to ultimately perpetuate them? By having a closer look at the personal and collective traumas within the nuclear-dysfunctional families in my corpus of analysis, I have established that, even though these neo-Victorian screen texts seemingly give voice to historically marginalised

and silenced subjects –such as women or colonial individuals–, they finally replicate their Victorian predecessors in uplifting white, male, upper-middle-class perpetrators. I have argued that this ambivalent ideology is symptomatic of these screen texts’ postfeminist context of production. The main aim of their directors and producers is to manipulate its –mainly female– audience into believing that certain gender transgressions are socially chastised –such as adultery in the case of Zilpha in *Taboo*–, and a woman’s most defining traits should be her motherly and self-sacrificing instincts –as Vanessa and Lily in *Penny Dreadful*. As I have attempted to prove in this PhD thesis, these ideological messages conveyed through popular culture should be considered dangerous for the feminist cause, as they might mislead women into believing there is little we can do to change the patriarchal status quo, or that we should be content with the rights we have achieved up to now, and give up feminist activism.

This PhD thesis contributes to an ongoing research in the fields of both neo-Victorian and trauma studies. It scrutinises the traumas and dysfunctionalities present in the nuclear family, particularly in regard to gender-based violence against women. Nonetheless, it also opens up new possibilities for questioning the postfeminist and –at times– misogynistic portrayal of neo-Victorian heroines on screen texts with a –seemingly– feminist agenda. Likewise, in this thesis I have strived to fill a scholarly gap in neo-Victorian studies regarding the trauma of the perpetrator. However, I believe that this corpus of analysis could be extended to include current and future neo-Victorian screen texts focusing on neo-Victorian family traumas and gendered violence –as in the case of *The Irregulars* or *The Nevers*. As noted in this thesis, neo-Victorianism on screen is a genre in vogue, especially thanks to its popularity in streaming platforms. Applying the same methodology of analysis and critical approach to a larger corpus of analysis would allow me, on the one hand, to confirm the soundness of my results in this thesis and, on the other hand, to expand the scope of my conclusions.

Given that both *Taboo* and *Carnival Row* are incomplete series –and their respective second seasons are likely to be released at some point around 2022 or 2023– it has not been possible to analyse some aspects of their characters’ actions and evolutions, particularly regarding the topic of Chapter 7: perpetrator trauma. As a consequence, analysing the future seasons of these two TV series would prove to be crucial to the study of their main characters’ guilt, PTSD symptoms and (un)willingness to make amends and help society move forward. Likewise, even though *Penny Dreadful* was cancelled after its third season, the series continued in the form of comic books. Despite the fact that they

are not screen texts, it could be worth including them in a cross-sectional analysis of neo-Victorian family traumas in (audio-)visual fiction, as some of these comic books further explore the TV series' concept of family of choice.

My corpus of analysis could also be expanded from the perspective of postcolonial studies. As Primorac and Pietrzak-Franger contend, neo-Victorian fiction needs to “go global to reference new contexts and geographies of Victorian texts’ and contexts’ engagement with local, inter- and transnational nineteenth-century pasts” (7, emphasis in original). Given that my corpus of analysis is made up of entirely Western productions, and that their portrayal of the ethnic Other tends to perpetuate, rather than challenge, imperial and colonial ideologies and stereotypes, this study could benefit from a cross-sectional analysis that includes non-European and non-American neo-Victorian works.

Finally, we could also open the door to other non-neo-Victorian productions on screen that explore family dysfunctionalities and gendered traumas, most notably teen dramas, supernatural TV series or historical fiction set in a period other than the nineteenth century. These screen texts could be compared to the ones analysed in this PhD thesis to pinpoint their potential postfeminist component and to see the manner in which they represent gendered traumas. This could help us scrutinise how screen texts are used to either confirm or mislead the audience’s understanding of both Victorian and contemporary feminism.



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## APPENDIX

*Crimson Peak* (2015)

<b>Directed by</b>	Guillermo del Toro
<b>Written by</b>	Guillermo del Toro, Matthew Robbins
<b>Produced by</b>	Guillermo del Toro, Callum Greene, Jon Jashni, Thomas Tull
<b>Starring</b>	Mia Wasikowska, Jessica Chastain, Tom Hiddleston, Charlie Hunnam, Jim Beaver
<b>Production companies</b>	Legendary Pictures, Double Dare You Productions
<b>Distributed by</b>	Universal Pictures
<b>Release date</b>	October 16, 2015 (United States)
<b>Running time</b>	119 minutes
<b>Countries</b>	United States, Mexico and Canada
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Budget</b>	\$55 million
<b>Box Office</b>	\$74.7 million

**Plot Summary**

*Crimson Peak* (2015) is a neo-Victorian film that tackles traumas and taboos within the dysfunctional nuclear family in the late Victorian period. The film follows Edith Cushing, an aspiring American writer that comes from a wealthy family in Buffalo, New York. After her father dies, she marries her love interest, Sir Thomas Sharpe, an impoverished British baronet that is trying to revitalise the ancestral family mines with foreign capital. Edith moves with Sir Thomas and his sister, Lady Lucille Sharpe, to their family estate in northern England, Allerdale Hall. There, she soon discovers that the ruinous family house harbours a shameful family secret: the Sharpe siblings have been involved in an incestuous relationship since they were children, as a coping mechanism for the abuse their mother inflicted upon them. Moreover, Sir Thomas had previously married other three foreign wealthy heiresses that Lucille later poisoned so as to keep their fortunes and invest them in the family business. These murdered women –who arguably represent victims of gender-based violence across history– come back from the dead as revenants and try to protect Edith from the siblings’ perfidious plans. At the end of the film, Edith is the only female survivor, and she translates all these horrifying experiences into her own trauma narrative: the film itself.

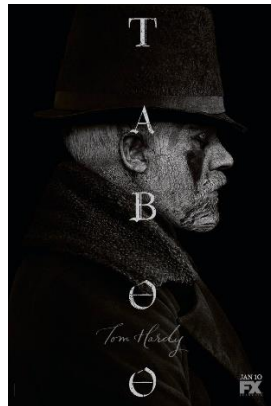
*Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016)

<b>Created by</b>	John Logan
<b>Written by</b>	John Logan, Andrew Hinderaker and Krysty Wilson-Cairns
<b>Produced by</b>	Pippa Harris, Sam Mendes, John Logan and Karen Richards
<b>Starring</b>	Eva Green, Timothy Dalton, Josh Hartnett, Billie Piper, Harry Treadaway
<b>Number of seasons/Episodes</b>	3/27
<b>Production companies</b>	Desert Wolf Productions, Neal Street Productions, Showtime Networks
<b>Original Networks</b>	Sky Atlantic (UK) and Showtime (US)
<b>Original Release</b>	May 11, 2014-June 19, 2016
<b>Related Shows</b>	Penny Dreadful: City of Angels (2020)
<b>Countries</b>	United States, United Kingdom
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Running Time</b>	47-60 minutes

**Plot Summary**

*Penny Dreadful* is a neo-Victorian TV series created as a *collage* of nineteenth-century canonical and popular literature, as well as original characters and situations. The series follows the medium Vanessa Ives (Eva Green) and Sir Malcolm Murray (Timothy Dalton), as they search for Mina Murray –an appropriation of Bram Stoker’s original character–, who has been abducted by a vampire master. In order to find her, they hire Dr Frankenstein and American ex-soldier, Ethan Chandler, forming an unlikely group of

detectives that eventually develop a strong bond. Throughout the three seasons, Vanessa has to resist her two evil pursuers, Lucifer and Dracula, as well as their subjects and minions –vampires and witches. In the season finale, she is seduced by Dracula, triggering a prophecy that announces a pestilent apocalypse for humanity. However, in the end, she sacrifices her own life to save the world from the creatures of the night, vanquishing Dracula in the process.

*Taboo* (2017-Present)

<b>Created by</b>	Steven Knight, Tom Hardy and Chips Hardy
<b>Written by</b>	Steven Knight
<b>Produced by</b>	Tim Bricknell
<b>Starring</b>	Tom Hardy, Oona Chaplin, Jonathan Pryce
<b>Number of seasons/Episodes</b>	1/8
<b>Production companies</b>	Scott Free Productions, Hardy Son & Baker, Sonar Entertainment, BBC, FX Productions
<b>Original Networks</b>	BBC (UK)
<b>Original Release</b>	January 7 2017-February 25 2017
<b>Countries</b>	United Kingdom
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Running Time</b>	56-58 minutes

**Plot Summary**

*Taboo* follows James Delaney, an English adventurer and former slave trader who, upon learning of his father's death, returns to London after twelve years in Africa. The series is set in the 1812 War between the US and the UK, and it explores the underbelly of nineteenth-century London, particularly prostitution, child exploitation, street violence, as well as political intrigues. It also touches upon the concepts of the slave trade and the Middle Passage, as well as the trauma of the perpetrator. However, Delaney is not only

traumatised by his actions as a slave trader, but also by the child abuse and neglect he experienced during his childhood, which arguably triggered the incestuous relationship he has with his sister Zilpha. Season 1 finishes with Zilpha's suicide, after she is rejected by her brother and lover, and James's ship voyage to Nootka Sound –her mother's native land in the Pacific Coast of North America– for imperialist purposes.



## *Carnival Row* (2019-Present)



<b>Created by</b>	René Echevarria and Travis Beacham
<b>Based on</b>	<i>A Killing on Carnival Row</i> by Travis Beacham
<b>Written by</b>	Travis Beacham
<b>Produced by</b>	René Echevarria, Travis Beacham, Marc Guggenheim, Jon Amiel, Orlando Bloom Gideon Amir
<b>Starring</b>	Orlando Bloom, Cara Delevingne
<b>Number of seasons/Episodes</b>	1/8
<b>Production companies</b>	Siesta Productions, Legendary Television, Amazon Studios
<b>Original Networks</b>	Amazon Prime Video
<b>Original Release</b>	August 30, 2019 –Present
<b>Countries</b>	United States
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Running Time</b>	57-67 minutes

### Plot Summary

*Carnival Row* is a fantastical TV series set in an alternative and colour-blind Victorian England, where human beings co-exist with magical and mythological creatures. In fact, the show exploits the supernatural for social critique by portraying non-human characters

as a metaphor for the racial Other in a fantastical imperial London called The Burgue. Philo, the male protagonist, is a half-blood –half human, half mythological creature or ‘Fae’– but has been passing as human his whole life. *Carnival Row* explores Philo’s search for his true identity and his struggle to fit in two opposite worlds –the human and the ‘Fae’. Likewise, the series deals with imperial conquer and colonization, as well as their consequences –e.g., racially motivated discriminatory policies and attitudes. This is the case of the fairies, who are forced to flee their country of origin, Tirnanoc, after it is invaded by foreign oppressors. Season 1 ends with mythological creatures being segregated in concentration camps in a ghettoized quarter in The Burgue –The Row–, as they are deemed dangerous for humans.

**RESUMEN**

Las películas y series de televisión de los más diversos géneros se están convirtiendo, cada vez más, en un elemento central en la cultura occidental, fundamental para entender nuestras sociedades contemporáneas, e incluso a nosotros mismos como individuos. En la actualidad, es casi impensable pasar un fin de semana en casa sin ver una película o una serie de televisión en Netflix. La mayoría de las conversaciones casuales o hilos de Twitter comienzan con una recomendación de una película, o un debate sobre los mejores y peores aspectos del último proyecto de HBO. Por consiguiente, podríamos afirmar que las películas y las series actualmente influyen en la comprensión de nuestro entorno más inmediato, pero también de otras culturas y sociedades en el extranjero. Lo mismo ocurre con las sociedades más alejadas de nosotros, no sólo en términos de espacio, sino también de tiempo, como los Románticos y los victorianos. De hecho, la mayoría de nuestras conceptualizaciones y creencias sobre el pasado angloamericano del siglo XIX están influidas por las representaciones cinematográficas de la época, empezando por la representación del sur profundo en la clásica película de Hollywood *Lo que el viento se llevó* (1939).

El siglo XXI es considerado por algunos como la nueva edad de oro de la televisión, «characterized by the emergence of highly regarded, well-crafted programs offered by a variety of providers ranging from traditional television networks to online streaming services» (Damico y Quay viii). La cultura popular —especialmente en la pequeña y la gran pantalla— es parte del periodo histórico en el que se produce, por lo que podría decirse que representa nuestras sociedades contemporáneas, así como sus ansiedades, crisis e ideologías subyacentes. Como afirman Amy M. Damico y Sara E. Quay, «[p]rograms, and television dramas particularly, can push against the status quo, explicitly (or implicitly) advocate for social change, frame challenges citizens are facing in new ways, or highlight flaws in institutions that govern viewers' lives» (x). Sin embargo, también pueden confundir a la audiencia con algunos aspectos ideológicos del texto audiovisual, o incluso tratar de impulsar su agenda política tergiversando algunos personajes o situaciones, especialmente en términos de etnia y género.

Los personajes femeninos solían ser retratados en las películas clásicas de Hollywood, bien como agentes pasivos y damiselas en apuros, o como *femmes fatales*, cuya sexualidad se consideraba inapropiada, por lo que solían ser *victim-blamed* o avergonzadas por el público y por otros personajes de la propia película. Sin embargo, en la última década, y gracias en parte al movimiento *Me Too*, cada vez se las representa

más como heroínas y personajes de carácter fuerte, no sólo en dramas televisivos, sino también en películas más comerciales, como las de superhéroes. Además, las películas y series de televisión angloamericanas también ofrecen una plataforma para denunciar la violencia doméstica y de género, de modo que las espectadoras que estén sufriendo experiencias similares puedan verse reflejadas en la pantalla. Por último, estos textos contemporáneos también representan modelos de familia alternativos —para dar cuenta de las diferentes unidades familiares que son posibles en nuestra sociedad actual—, o maneras alternativas de comprender la feminidad o la maternidad, aunque estas últimas no siempre sean positivas.

Los textos audiovisuales neovictorianos están orientados tanto al pasado decimonónico como a nuestro presente, pero también al futuro. De hecho, a veces ofrecen un retrato presentista del pasado victoriano, con el fin de imponer al público la ideología política del director o del productor. Por consiguiente, una parte de este público —sobre todo femenino— podría ser inducido a aceptar algunos de los matices antifeministas de estos textos audiovisuales. Esta tesis doctoral se centra en los traumas de género —es decir, en las situaciones traumáticas que experimentan las personas por razón de su género— que se producen dentro de los confines de la familia nuclear (neo)victoriana. Los traumas de género en la familia pueden incluir la violencia en la pareja o violencia de género, el incesto, el abuso infantil y psicológico, así como la privación del sueño o la alimentación. Lo que todos estos tipos de abuso tienen en común es que suelen tener lugar en el seno de la familia nuclear, y suelen ser ejercidos por un hombre contra su pareja femenina o sus hijos. Nuestro objetivo principal es explorar la forma en que estos traumas de género se representan en textos neovictorianos audiovisuales producidos desde la década de 2010 en adelante.

Nuestra hipótesis de partida es que estas obras neovictorianas parecen ofrecer una representación feminista de los traumas de género dentro de la familia nuclear y de cómo sus heroínas subvierten las convenciones de género victorianas. Sin embargo, estas transgresiones de género son finalmente castigadas en las obras, mostrando una ideología postfeminista que manipula a la audiencia para que adopte una postura antifeminista. De confirmarse esta hipótesis, el corpus de textos cinematográficos analizados podría ampliarse en futuras publicaciones para incluir obras similares que también hagan uso de manipulaciones postfeministas.

La familia es una institución central, tanto en la sociedad victoriana como en la contemporánea. Desde principios del siglo XVIII, el modelo «adecuado» de familia ha

sido el nuclear, formado por una pareja heteronormativa, un marido y una mujer, y sus hijos. Sin embargo, esta unidad familiar convencional ha demostrado ser defectuosa y disfuncional en ocasiones. A menudo genera madres monstruosas y padres ausentes, cuyos comportamientos violentos y tiránicos tienen un impacto decisivo en el desarrollo de sus hijos como adultos, ya que a veces no pueden evitar continuar ese mismo ciclo de violencia contra otros individuos. La casa familiar suele ser el espacio que escenifica este tipo de violencia doméstica, que suele desencadenar «desviaciones» sexuales, sobre todo en las relaciones entre hermanos, o entre padres e hijos. De hecho, los textos cinematográficos neovictorianos del siglo XXI exploran estos traumas familiares tanto para cuestionar la suposición de que la familia nuclear es la única unidad familiar natural y normal como para apoyar nuevas formas de concebir la vida en familia, sobre todo la maternidad/paternidad subrogada, la adopción, la monoparentalidad, etc.

Los textos cinematográficos seleccionados para nuestro corpus de análisis siguen el patrón anteriormente mencionado, ya que todos son obras neovictorianas que exploran los traumas de género dentro de la familia nuclear, así como su inminente colapso y fragmentación. Por ello, son textos óptimos para ser comparados y analizados desde la perspectiva de los estudios de trauma, con el fin de cuestionar el mito de la familia nuclear. Asimismo, otro aspecto que tienen en común es que todos ellos muestran un impulso feminista al principio, pero este se ve reducido al final, ya que los personajes femeninos son castigados por sus transgresiones de género.

Aunque la clasificación de *Taboo* como obra neovictoriana podría ser considerada por algunos como problemática, dado que la serie está ambientada en la década de 1810 —algunos años antes de la ascensión al trono de la reina Victoria—, en esta tesis entendemos el término «neovictorianismo» en su forma más amplia e inclusiva. Como explicamos en el Capítulo 2, algunos estudiosos sostienen que las obras neovictorianas no deberían definirse cronológicamente, sino más bien estéticamente, es decir, teniendo en cuenta los rasgos estilísticos, las tramas y los tropos comunes. Así, la ficción neovictoriana incluiría adaptaciones de «Romantic and pre-war fiction, ignoring historical data like the birth and death of the Queen» (Kirchknopf 55). Esta amplia definición justifica la decisión de incluir la serie de televisión *Taboo* en nuestro corpus de análisis. La serie explora temas (neo)victorianos que son comunes a los otros tres textos audiovisuales que completan este corpus, a saber, una revisitación del gótico imperial y de las representaciones (erróneas) postcoloniales; así como el colapso de la

familia nuclear y sus disfuncionalidades recurrentes (como el incesto, la casa como lugar del trauma familiar, una madre monstruosa y un padre ausente).

Las obras audiovisuales analizadas en esta tesis doctoral, en el orden cronológico en que fueron estrenadas, son las siguientes: *Penny Dreadful* de John Logan (2014-2016), *Crimson Peak* de Guillermo del Toro (2015), *Taboo* de Steven Knight, Tom Hardy y Chips Hardy (2017-actualidad) y *Carnival Row* de René Echevarria y Travis Beacham (2019-actualidad). Con el fin de demostrar las similitudes y los temas comunes entre estos textos cinematográficos neogóticos victorianos, vamos a resumir brevemente la trama y los principales tropos que exploran.

En primer lugar, *Crimson Peak* tiene como protagonista a Edith Cushing, una joven de clase media procedente de Buffalo (Nueva York) en 1901, el final de la era victoriana. Edith siempre ha creído en la existencia de fantasmas, desde que su madre murió de cólera y su espíritu se le apareció cuando era una niña. De adulta, Edith intenta superar el trauma de su muerte escribiendo historias de fantasmas, aunque le resulta difícil publicarlas, ya que su editor cree que una mujer sólo debería escribir historias de amor. Edith se enamora de Sir Thomas Sharpe, un empobrecido aristócrata británico que ha llegado a América con el propósito de conseguir fondos para en una máquina que le permita a modernizar sus minas.

Después de que su padre sea hallado muerto, Edith decide casarse con Sir Thomas y trasladarse con él y su hermana, Lucille, a su finca familiar en el norte de Inglaterra. Allí, Edith será perseguida por los fantasmas de las anteriores esposas de Sir Thomas, otras ricas herederas que, como ella, habían sido seducidas por el aristócrata por su dinero. Cuando ya no les resultaron útiles, Lucille las envenenó y luego escondió sus cuerpos en el sótano de la mansión. Además, Edith también descubre que los hermanos Sharpe mantienen una relación incestuosa desde que eran niños, como mecanismo de defensa a los abusos físicos y psicológicos que su madre ejercía contra ellos. Cuando la madre descubrió su romance, Lucille también la asesinó.

Cuando Edith se entera del historial de violencia doméstica de los hermanos, intenta huir de la casa con la ayuda de su amigo, el doctor Alan McMichael. Sin embargo, los hermanos se lo impiden apuñalando al doctor. Sir Thomas intenta convencer a Lucille de que se ha enamorado de Edith y de que ambos pueden crear una nueva familia con ella. Sintiéndose traicionada por su hermano, lo asesina y luego intenta hacer lo mismo con Edith. Sin embargo, con la ayuda del fantasma de Thomas, Edith finalmente la

asesina, antes de huir de la finca con un Dr. McMichael herido de muerte. El fantasma de Lucille parece estar condenado a pasar el resto de la eternidad en la casa familiar.

En segundo lugar, *Penny Dreadful* es una serie gótica neovictoriana compuesta por tres temporadas y creada por John Logan para Showtime y Sky. Está ambientada en el Londres de la década de 1890 y podría considerarse un collage adaptativo de varios intertextos victorianos, como *Drácula* (1897) de Bram Stoker, *El retrato de Dorian Gray* (1890) de Oscar Wilde, *Frankenstein o el moderno Prometeo* (1818) de Mary Shelley, *El extraño caso del Dr. Jekyll y el Sr. Hyde* (1886), de Robert Louis Stevenson, y algunos famosos *penny dreadfuls*, como *Varney the Vampire o The Feast of Blood* (1845), de James Malcolm Rymer y Thomas Peckett Prest.

La serie gira en torno a Vanessa Ives, una mujer independiente con grandes habilidades sobrenaturales, que es perseguida por dos malvados hermanos: Lucifer y Drácula. Según una profecía egipcia, si Vanessa (la reencarnación de la diosa Amunet) es seducida por alguno de estos hermanos, la humanidad estará condenada a un apocalipsis perpetuo. La primera temporada de la serie se centra en que Vanessa y Sir Malcolm Murray —un amigo de la familia— reclutan a un grupo de personas para encontrar a su hija Mina, una apropiación del personaje de Stoker en *Drácula*. Sin embargo, una vez que la encuentran, se dan cuenta de que no tiene salvación, por lo que Sir Malcolm tiene que matarla. La segunda temporada introduce nuevas criaturas sobrenaturales: las brujas, que están bajo el influjo patriarcal de Lucifer. En la tercera temporada, Vanessa es finalmente seducida por Drácula, el señor de todos los vampiros, pero decide sacrificarse por el bien de la humanidad para vencerlo. A lo largo de la serie se exploran traumas familiares y de género, y se defiende el concepto de familia de elección. Sin embargo, a pesar del aparente impulso feminista de la serie, sus principales personajes femeninos son finalmente asesinados o condenados al ostracismo.

En tercer lugar, *Taboo* es una serie de televisión británica escrita por Tom Hardy, Steven Knight y Edward John 'Chips' Hardy, y producida por Scott Free London y Hardy Son & Baker para la BBC. El reparto principal incluye a Tom Hardy como el protagonista masculino, James Delaney, Oona Chaplin como Zilpha Delaney, su hermana y amante, y Jonathan Pryce como Sir Stuart Strange, presidente de la Compañía de las Indias Orientales. En marzo de 2017 se anunció una segunda temporada de la serie, pero su producción ha sufrido continuos retrasos debido a la pandemia de COVID-19 y la apretada agenda de su protagonista, Tom Hardy, entre otros factores.

*Taboo* se centra en James Delaney, un antiguo comerciante de esclavos británico que regresa a Londres tras la muerte de su padre. La serie está ambientada durante la guerra de 1812 entre Estados Unidos y Reino Unido, y explora los bajos fondos del Londres del siglo XIX, especialmente la miseria de la clase trabajadora, la prostitución y la explotación infantil, así como las intrigas políticas. También aborda los conceptos de la trata de esclavos y el Pasaje del Medio, especialmente a través de los *flashbacks* y las alucinaciones de James.

No obstante, uno de los principales aspectos en los que nos centraremos en el caso de *Taboo* es el tropo de la maternidad monstruosa —ya que la madre nativoamericana de James intentó ahogarlo en el río cuando era sólo un niño—, el incesto entre los hermanos y, sobre todo, el concepto del trauma del perpetrador. Como explicamos en el Capítulo 7, James es retratado como un perpetrador ambivalente en la serie. Por un lado, parece mostrar síntomas de estrés postraumático como resultado de su época de traficante de esclavos y se siente responsable de sus acciones pasadas. Por otro lado, planea continuar sus expansiones imperiales en la costa del Pacífico de América del Norte.

Por último, *Carnival Row* es una serie de televisión estadounidense creada por René Echevarria y Travis Beacham para Amazon Studios. La serie se considera una «fantasía noir steampunk» (Fraser par. 2), que se apoya en la estética, la historia y la cultura victoriana. *Carnival Row* aborda de forma alegórica las precarias relaciones raciales entre los colectivos blancos y étnicos durante Imperio Británico. *Carnival Row* está ambientada en una Inglaterra victoriana fantásticamente reimaginada para ayudarnos a abordar nuestra relación ambivalente con el imperio y sus consecuencias. La serie construye criaturas mitológicas (como hadas, hombres lobo o centauros) como una metáfora del «otro» racial en un Londres victoriano conocido como «The Burgue».

La serie está protagonizada por Orlando Bloom y Cara Delevingne, que interpretan a un inspector de policía medio humano y un hada refugiada, respectivamente. Philo, el protagonista masculino, es un hombre mestizo —resultado de una relación interracial entre un humano y una criatura mitológica—, pero que ha pasado por humano toda su vida. Asimismo, la serie también explora los traumas de género y familiares a través de Philo —ya que fue abandonado de bebé en un orfanato humano y no descubre quiénes son sus padres hasta mucho más tarde—, pero también a través de otros personajes, como Sophie Longerbane (la hija de uno de los principales políticos humanos de The Burgue), o Imogen Spurnrose (una dama humana de clase media-alta empobrecida que pasa de ser el ángel de la casa a una mujer caída).



Este resumen sobre los temas y las ideas comunes que comparten los textos audiovisuales analizados justifica nuestra selección de los mismos, así como nuestra decisión de aplicar un análisis transversal o comparativo en esta tesis doctoral. Analizar transversalmente estos textos neovictorianos, en lugar de examinar cada uno de ellos en capítulos separados, nos permite evitar repeticiones innecesarias de rasgos comunes entre las diferentes obras. Hemos decidido llevar a cabo un análisis comparativo, en el que cada capítulo se centra en un aspecto común de los traumas dentro de la familia nuclear, ya que creemos que será mucho más edificante que un análisis independiente de cada texto. De hecho, organizar los diferentes capítulos y realizar el análisis comparativo de esta manera nos ayudará a revelar los patrones comunes y las representaciones (erróneas) de los traumas de género en el gótico neovictoriano en pantalla.

Esta tesis doctoral está organizada en ocho capítulos temáticos, incluyendo el que nos ocupa, en el que se presenta la motivación del estudio, así como sus hipótesis de partida, los objetivos generales, la justificación del corpus de análisis y la discusión de la estructura de la tesis. Los siete capítulos restantes reflejan todos y cada uno de los pasos de nuestra investigación sobre los traumas de género en la familia nuclear (neo)victoriana.

El Capítulo 2 se centra en los principales postulados teóricos del neovictorianismo. En primer lugar, en la sección 2.1., se ofrecen las diversas (y, en ocasiones, opuestas) definiciones que han surgido de la etiqueta «neovictorianismo» desde su creación. También se aborda el debate terminológico de esta disciplina, desde sus orígenes posmodernos hasta su posición actual en los campos de los estudios literarios y culturales. Por último, también se tratan las diferentes contextualizaciones temporales y espaciales de los textos literarios y cinematográficos neovictorianos. En la sección 2.2., exponemos las principales características del neovictorianismo audiovisual, siguiendo principalmente las ideas y conclusiones presentadas por Antonija Primorac en su monografía, *Neo-Victorianism on Screen: Postfeminism and Contemporary Adaptations of Victorian Women* (2018). En la sección 2.4., nos remontamos a los orígenes de uno de los géneros más explotados en el neovictorianismo —esto es, el género gótico— y abordamos cómo suele adaptarse en los textos audiovisuales contemporáneos. En la sección 2.4., ofrecemos una visión general del gótico neo-victoriano en pantalla, desde sus orígenes hasta la actualidad.

El capítulo 3 ofrece una explicación detallada del campo de los estudios de trauma, el enfoque crítico que hemos decidido aplicar en nuestro corpus de análisis. En la sección 3.1., se da una visión general de los estudios de trauma, incluyendo varias definiciones,

la historia y la contextualización de la disciplina, tanto en la psiquiatría como en las humanidades. Al final de esta sección, también ofrecemos una breve introducción al concepto de trauma del perpetrador. En la sección 3.2., se establece la sinergia entre los estudios neovictorianos y los estudios de trauma, que es muy común, especialmente en la ficción gótica neovictoriana. En la sección 3.3., explicamos uno de los tropos más recurrentes en las narrativas góticas neovictorianas (de trauma), el de los fantasmas y la espectralidad. Aquí se abordan las principales teorías sobre el tema, planteadas por Derrida y Abraham y Torok. Por último, la sección 4.1. introduce uno de los principales temas explorados en esta tesis doctoral: los traumas familiares (neo)victorianos, especialmente los que afectan a las mujeres en razón de su género.

El capítulo 4 es el primer capítulo de análisis de esta tesis doctoral y el más extenso. En él se explora la *genderificación* y racialización de los espacios a través del concepto de las heterotopías de Foucault. Este capítulo se divide en dos secciones principales (4.1., que se centra en las heterotopías de espacios interiores de crisis y desviación, mientras que la subsección 4.2. trata las heterotopías de espacios exteriores), que a su vez se subdividen en dos subsecciones diferentes. En el apartado 4.1.1., analizamos cómo la casa familiar suele ser representada en el neovictorianismo como un espacio de confinamiento, y como el sitio donde tienen lugar los traumas de género de la familia nuclear. En el subapartado 4.1.2., examinamos primero cómo el espacio doméstico del ático tiende a ser retratado como el lugar de encierro patriarcal en la ficción (neo)victoriana. En segundo lugar, analizamos el modo en que algunos espacios públicos (el asilo y el orfanato) actúan como lugares donde tiene lugar el trauma familiar fuera del hogar familiar. En otras palabras, se convierten en heterotopías de crisis y desviación.

En la subsección 4.2.2., exploramos el concepto de heterocronía en el neovictorianismo a través de la recurrente reimaginación de la ciudad de Londres en nuestro corpus de análisis. La apropiación de ciudades del siglo XIX y su representación como lugares de memoria y patrimonio, pero también como centro del horror gótico, se inspiran en las representaciones victorianas de la ciudad de Londres. Esto es así porque las ciudades victorianas siguen acechando a las metrópolis contemporáneas (Kohlke y Gutleben, «Neo-Victorian Cities» 1). Así, en esta subsección examinamos cómo el Londres de 1800 —y su adaptación fantástica a través de *The Burgue* en *Carnival Row*— se convierte en el espacio espectral en el que los marginados sobrenaturales encuentran su trágico destino en estas obras audiovisuales.

Por último, la subsección 4.2.2. se centra en la heterotopía del barco, que en la ficción neovictoriana adquiere nuevos significados por su íntima relación con el océano Atlántico. En efecto, las muertes masivas experimentadas por los personajes étnicos a causa de la esclavitud y la migración forzosa se encapsulan en la heterotopía del *coffin ship*, tanto en *Carnival Row* como en *Taboo*. Este concepto se examina especialmente en relación con la migración transatlántica masiva durante la Gran Hambruna de Irlanda (1845-1852), pero también con el comercio de esclavos en el Pasaje del Medio. Sin embargo, como defendemos en esta subsección, también podría mostrar una ideología presentista, ya que evoca las diásporas contemporáneas experimentadas por los individuos obligados a abandonar sus países de origen. *Taboo* y *Carnival Row* exploran los temas del racismo, la inmigración y la esclavitud, que se encarnan en la heterotopía marítima del barco, tanto como lugar de muerte como de paso de la libertad a la esclavitud.

En el capítulo 5, nos centramos en el modo en que se representan las relaciones entre padres e hijos en nuestro corpus de análisis. En la sección 5.1. se analiza el frecuente tropo (neo)victoriano de la maternidad monstruosa y subversiva. Además, aquí defendemos que los personajes femeninos presentes en los textos analizados son apropiaciones de madres e hijas de mitos clásicos y bíblicos —por ejemplo, Deméter y Perséfone, Medea o la bíblica Virgen María y su homóloga, María Magdalena—, que desafiaron las convenciones de género tradicionalmente impuestas a las mujeres. Como defendemos en esta sección, al trasladar estos personajes clásicos a un contexto neovictoriano, los creadores de estos textos audiovisuales están explorando las conexiones matrilineales entre las mujeres antiguas, victorianas y contemporáneas. En la sección 5.2., analizamos otro tropo frecuente en el (neo)victorianismo: el de los padres ausentes. También exploramos el concepto de paternidad subrogada, que pone de relieve las ansiedades contemporáneas sobre el colapso de la familia nuclear con el auge de nuevos modelos familiares, como las familias homosexuales, la maternidad/paternidad subrogada, la adopción o la familia monoparental, entre otros.

El capítulo 6 aborda el tropo del incesto, siguiendo principalmente el triple enfoque de Mark Llewellyn («Perfectly Innocent») sobre las narrativas de incesto neovictorianas, basado en la ética, la estética y el psicoanálisis. En la sección 6.1., nos centramos en el tipo de incesto más frecuente en nuestro corpus de análisis: el incesto entre hermanos, que se explora de dos maneras diferentes. En primer lugar, la relación más común es la de un (medio) hermano y una (media) hermana, ya que está presente en

todos los textos de nuestro corpus. En segundo lugar, existe una relación no heteronormativa entre dos hermanas de elección: Mina Murray y Vanessa Ives en *Penny Dreadful*. Por ello, la sección 6.2. está dedicada al incesto lésbico. Por último, *Penny Dreadful* también representa el incesto entre padre e hija, el tipo de incesto explorado en el apartado 6.3. Aunque los personajes implicados en estas relaciones incestuosas no son parientes consanguíneos, son padres e hijas sustitutos o de elección, como defendemos en el capítulo 5.

El capítulo 7 examina el concepto de trauma del perpetrador en los textos analizados. Aquí demostramos que todos los personajes que desempeñan el papel de perpetradores suelen ser antiguas víctimas de violencia infantil o doméstica, que no han podido superar ese trauma. En la sección 7.1., nos centramos en los perpetradores masculinos imperiales, especialmente en los casos de Sir Malcolm y Ethan en *Penny Dreadful*, James en *Taboo* y Philo en *Carnival Row*. Aquí defendemos que la representación ambigua de estos personajes masculinos demuestra aún más el trasfondo blanqueado y patriarcal de los textos audiovisuales analizados. En la sección 7.2. se analiza la representación misógina y postfeminista de los perpetradores femeninos de masas y domésticos, a saber, Lucille en *Crimson Peak*, Lily y Vanessa en *Penny Dreadful* y Sophie en *Carnival Row*.

Por último, el capítulo 8 resume las principales ideas, motivaciones y resultados de esta tesis doctoral. Presenta las conclusiones generales y específicas a las que se ha llegado a lo largo de los diferentes capítulos. Al final de estas conclusiones, también señalamos las posibles líneas de investigación adicionales que podrían seguir a este proyecto. En esta tesis, esperamos demostrar que los textos góticos neovictorianos en pantalla tienen un componente postfeminista, por el que las heroínas son retratadas primero como aparentemente empoderadas y transgresoras, pero finalmente son castigadas por dichas transgresiones de género.

Asimismo, la representación ambigua de los traumas de género y raciales dentro de los confines de la familia nuclear demuestra aún más la ideología antifeminista y blanqueada de los directores contemporáneos, a pesar de su aparente activismo inclusivo. Por último, también queremos demostrar que el neovictorianismo en pantalla suele mostrar un fuerte impulso presentista. Esto es particularmente notable en la forma en que explora las preocupaciones contemporáneas respecto al colapso de la familia nuclear, y su apoyo a unidades familiares alternativas. Con estas conclusiones, esperamos contribuir

a los debates actuales sobre las representaciones neovictorianas de los personajes femeninos, los modelos familiares alternativos y las ideologías de género en pantalla.