Re-imagining the Gothic in Contemporary Serialised Media: 
An Intertextual and Intermedial Study of Neo-Victorian Monstrous Afterlives

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Introduction

“We live in Gothic times” (Carter 122) : with this lapidary statement, back in the 1970s, Angela Carter concisely pronounced her verdict on the unsettled and unsettling state of affairs in postmodern society. It cannot be denied that models and modes of Gothic fiction pervasively haunt the twentieth and the twenty-first century collective imagination. The Gothic’s on-going popular appeal paved the way for its commodification and its ensuing revival in literature, cinema, television, comics and visual arts in general. Confronted with such an unrelenting success, both in terms of popular response and of constant revitalisation of Gothic models, some questions arise naturally. What role does the Gothic flame (Varma The Gothic Flame), kindled at the sunset of the Enlightenment and on the threshold of the Romantic age, play in the postmodern era? How has it evolved throughout the centuries and why does it pervade contemporary popular culture? In an attempt to answer these questions, this thesis proposes to contextualise the never-ending appeal of the Gothic by identifying traces of continuity from its literary origins to its current manifestations.

The increasing productivity of the Gothic has attracted a growing interest in the academic arena towards this field of study. In particular, over the past few decades Victorian fiction and its Gothic manifestations have undergone a renewed phase of vitality, as demonstrated by the recent foundation of a new academic journal, Neo-Victorian Studies, launched in 2008 with the purpose of exploring the interrelation between postmodernism and Victorian era, and by the even more recent publication of the volume Neo-Victorian Gothic (2012). While plentiful academic endeavours have been devoted to the exploration of the Gothic’s resurgence in canonical art forms, such as David Skal’s Hollywood Gothic: The Tangled Web of Dracula from Novel to Stage to Screen or Lisa Hopkins’ Screening the Gothic, the presence of neo-Victorian Gothic themes in contemporary serialised media is yet to be fully explored. As a result, this research will focus on the graphic novel The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen (1999-2012), written by Alan Moore and illustrated by Kevin O’Neill, and on John Logan’s Penny Dreadful TV series (2014-) as case-studies, both featuring archetypal Gothic characters who live and interact with each other in a fictional Victorian London at the end of the nineteenth century.

Penny Dreadful is a Showtime/Sky Atlantic co-production which appropriates motifs and characters from Victorian Gothic novels and penny fiction. The series includes two complete seasons, on which this thesis will focus, and a currently on-going third season. The League consists of three separate volumes and The Black Dossier, which offers further details on the past and future of the series. The League’s third volume is structured into three sections that are set respectively in 1910, 1969 and 2009. The first and second volumes are divided into six separate issues set in Victorian England and consequently are chiefly relevant for the purposes of this thesis.

The narratological and aesthetic features of these neo-Victorian products will be analysed by exploring their intersection with the Gothic as a genre and by disclosing the emergence of the Gothic as a mode in the TV medium and in the graphic novel. The graphic novel is a particularly interesting medium to analyse, as it is an intrinsically hybrid genre, “a narrative where word and image are bound in indissoluble cooperation” (Di Liddo 20). Graphic literature, as the employment of the elevated term ‘literature’ suggests, has lately achieved a more respectable status in academia. Similarly, television series, despite having been frequently denigrated as cultural products unworthy of academic study, can now finally be approached as “expressive works of art, replete with significant aesthetic properties” (Cardwell 72-80).

Both Moore’s graphic novel and Logan’s TV series deconstruct and reassemble nineteenth-century Gothic iconic characters and narratives, in an endless echo of intertextual and intermedial references. The fact that Gothic landmarks such as Shelley’s Frankenstein (1818), Stevenson’s Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1886), Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891), Stoker’s Dracula (1897), continue to inspire a vast array of cultural products and keep capturing academic attention worldwide partially justifies the
purpose of this research. Such a lively interest demonstrates that these literary works have not exhausted their imaginative power: if they still speak to our time, we can then still speak of them without fear of running short of critical arguments. The aforesaid Gothic classics have been therefore included in the corpus of primary sources of this dissertation as it is my contention to link The League and Penny Dreadful back to the Gothic tales of spectacular transgression and monstrous excess as a form of mass entertainment and popular consumption, unveiling their cultural heritage and exploring the ways in which, as well as the reasons why, they engage with a Victorian past to mesmerise a twenty-first-century audience.

Starting from the assumption that the adaptability of the Gothic and its tendency to surpass the verbal margins of literature is determined by the intrinsic intertextual and intermedial quality of this genre, this research hinges on an interdisciplinary approach that draws on the theoretical frameworks of intertextuality and intermediality, comics and television studies, genre and gender theories. This multi-perspective approach has helped to frame the complex literary and non-literary phenomenon of the Gothic in contemporary popular culture, without overlooking the manifold nuances and implications of its continuous re-imaginings.

In terms of methodology, it has been deemed essential to undertake multiple perspectives of analysis as it would be impossible or at the very least restrictive to investigate the appropriation of Gothic classics in The League and Penny Dreadful exclusively from the point of view of the theories of adaptation and intertextuality without considering the specificity of the media they have been transcoded to or, vice versa, to focus on the medium by putting aside a closer textual analysis. The choice of concentrating on these specific monster narratives will be explicitly addressed with reference to their peculiar generic features of ‘steampunk’ and ‘monster drama’ and their textual nature of ‘literary mashups’. Thus, The League and Penny Dreadful will be subjected to a comparative critical assessment, firstly considering the ways in which models and themes of Gothic seminal texts have been transposed into different media, secondly reflecting on the phenomena of intertextuality and intermediality, and finally carrying out a close reading of these neo-Victorian Gothic monstrous afterlives.

In Chapter One, a concise excursus on how the Gothic was perceived at the time of its full blooming and how it has evolved thereafter will help identify key concerns and motifs of this literary genre, providing a springboard for the ensuing critical study of the neo-Victorian texts under investigation. After defining the Gothic both as a genre and as a mode, connections will be drawn between nineteenth-century forms of serialisation, the so-called ‘penny dreadfuls’, and twenty-first-century strategies of serialisation. In Chapter Two, the theories of intertextuality and intermediality will be employed to demonstrate the intertextual and intermedial quality of Gothic narratives. Finally, Chapter Three will delve into an examination of Gothic monstrosity, with particular attention to the depictions of grotesque excess and monstrous femininity.

The intertextual and intermedial crossings in The League and Penny Dreadful are so rich and various that it could be possible to approach them from different perspectives. A further critical outlook could have entailed a potential postcolonial reading of these works by focusing on their British “imperial legacy” (Di Liddo 103). Although this is a promising topic, it has been deemed necessary to delimit the subject of the dissertation. However, it cannot be overlooked that the concept of ‘otherness’ is deeply embedded in the Gothic since its foundation as genre. As Tabish Khair argues in The Gothic, Postcolonialism and Otherness, “the Gothic and the postcolonial are obviously linked by a common preoccupation with the Other” (3). Therefore, this aspect will be implicitly explored when approaching the theme of Gothic monstrosity. Another perspective which could have been employed is the psychoanalytical one. Yet, this is by tradition a very popular research ramification in the field of Gothic studies (Wright Gothic Fiction 97-124), which has already produced a conspicuous amount of criticism. Moreover, such a heavy-handed approach would entail stepping outside of the realm of popular culture in order to apply a given psychoanalytical theory to the literary and non-literary works under investigation and would consequently go beyond the scope of this thesis, which is rather concerned with the exploration of the evolution of the Gothic in popular culture in terms of narrative modalities, media and thematic concerns.

The 2015 Symposium ‘Reimagining the Gothic’ organised by the University of Sheffield opened up with the question: “To what extent has the Gothic changed?” (Nixon). In line with this inquiry, this dissertation puts forward a critical reflection on the reappearance of the Gothic not solely as a transgressive mode expressing a nostalgic yearning for a faraway past but also as an enduring popular phenomenon able to (re)present and (re)interpret the irrational forces at work in times of cultural crisis. In this sense, this research seeks to contribute to the fields of Gothic and neo-Victorian Studies, critically exploring the intersection of these academic areas with those of nineteenth-century popular culture and contemporary intermedia studies, and hopefully shedding further light on the works under investigation.
Chapter One

Retracing the evolution of the Gothic in contemporary popular culture

An adaptation is not vampiric: it does not draw the life-blood from its source and leave it dying or dead, nor is it paler than the adapted work. It may, on the contrary, keep that prior work alive, giving it an afterlife it would never have had otherwise.

—Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*

Linda Hutcheon, in her conclusion to *A Theory of Adaptation*, completed her fascinating excursus on adaptation both as a process and as a product by resorting to a parasitical metaphor, distinctly Gothic in its overtones, which denies the degenerative status that adapted works are often encumbered with. “An adaptation is not vampiric” (*A Theory of Adaptation* 176), she states. And yet adaptations and appropriations inevitably bring about a storm of criticism related to their greater or lesser degree of adherence and fidelity to their original source(s). As derivative forms, they often tend to be considered as minor, flawed works, a tendency which raises interesting questions in terms of authorship, intertextuality and creative processes at work. The vampiric association is even more eloquent if one considers that some of the most prolific literary texts that have been constantly readapted and repurposed across various media and throughout the centuries are precisely the Gothic classics from the long nineteenth century, embracing a periodic arch that goes from Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) to Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897).

As the primary objective of this thesis is to delineate and interpret the reappearance and transformation of the Gothic in serialised media, in this first chapter I will establish a relationship between the Gothic literary genre and the contemporary media under consideration through an examination of nineteenth-century Gothic strategies of popular consumption and twenty-first-century serial aesthetics. Before delving into a detailed analysis of *The League and Penny Dreadful*, the manifold facets of the Gothic as a literary genre and as a liminal mode of artistic expression and cultural production will be contextualised from its literary origins to its contemporary offspring. Finally, in the third and fourth sections of this chapter, the generic features of these neo-Victorian products and the historical and cultural returns of the Gothic will be explored, paving the way for the second chapter of this thesis, which will examine the role played by intertextuality and intermediality in Gothic narratives.

1.1 The Gothic as a genre and as a mode

At the end of the eighteenth century, while the supremacy of reason was being questioned and the ‘enlightened’ repression of feelings and emotions was becoming more and more ineffective, an unusual literary interest towards haunted castles and gloomy abbeys, damsels in distress and melancholic villains, inexplicable noises and supernatural events led to the growth of the Gothic genre. A new popular interest towards medieval legends, art and architecture triggered this literary trend, which re-evaluated the Middle Ages as an era of fascinating mysteries and overwhelming irrationality, as opposed to one of barbarism and savagery.

Yet the Gothic cannot be restrained within a set of pre-established recurring elements: as Robert Miles puts it, “‘Gothic’ is a more ambiguous, shifting term” (4) which reflects the ambiguity of the “textual phenomena” (4) it displays. The birth of the Gothic is traditionally acknowledged as being in the year 1764, when the anonymous publication of Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* was greeted with great favour by readers and critics alike. The paratextual insertion of the term ‘gothic’ in the title stood for a reference to the medieval setting of the story, a purposely blurred pseudo-historical dimension that allowed the readers’ imagination to fly into outlandish places. The merit of this work was, according to H. P. Lovecraft, “to create a novel type of scene, puppet-characters, and incidents [that] is by no means extinct even today, though subtler techniques now forces it to assume a less naive and obvious form” (25-26).

The Gothic’s preoccupation with the reader’s expectations becomes evident from its inception as a genre. Indeed, in his preface to the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, with reference to the fictitious author of his own work, Walpole wrote: “Whatever [the author’s] views were, or whatever effects the execution of them might have, his work can only be laid before the public at present as a matter of entertainment” (6). Walpole explicitly emphasises the function of Gothic fiction as a means to entertain the audience, whilst implicitly recognising the self-awareness embedded in the writing of this genre, which corresponds to mindful choices aimed at achieving precise effects on the readers.
As the nineteenth century dawns, a significant transition in the history of Gothic fiction takes place. Nineteenth-century Gothic classics follow and build on the irrational path traced by the first Gothic romances of terror and horror, enriching it with new subtleties derived from the scientific experimentations, evolutionary theories and technological developments of the Victorian era while simultaneously giving voice to an insatiable curiosity towards fin-de-siècle psychoanalytical theories, criminology, occultism and supernatural phenomena.

In her computational analysis of the evolution of the Gothic genre, based on a scientific approach that hinges on digital humanities to carry out a quantitative study of all the novels that fall under this category, Federica Perazzini concisely sums up the multiplicities of Gothic criticism. According to her interpretation, whether the approach adopted is aesthetic, poetical, psychoanalytical, symbolical or narratological, the point of convergence between all these valuable readings is:

the manner in which each of these critical stances conceives the Gothic as a code of contradiction and transformation; a composite and unstable genre arising from time to time to account for the intangible space of tension between fear and desire, and more specifically, between the anxiety of chaos derived from the destruction of the old order and the enlivening drive of change (Perazzini 38). 2

Building on Michael Gamer’s conception of the Gothic as a complex reaction to “economic, historical, and technological changes” (28), Perazzini emphasises the transformative nature of the Gothic, its paradoxical elusiveness and capability to reappear in times of crisis. Although her “distant reading” (Moretti) methodology prevents a deeper interpretation of the nuances of each single artistic work in order to privilege an analysis of Gothic literature as a system, her view ultimately confirms the conception of the Gothic as a bearer of an undeniable cultural force.

Gothic genre and its derivations, despite being often dismissed as escapist and therefore minor literature, wield a timeless charm on past and present readers for their capability to reflect the deepest anxieties of their age as well as for the sense of mystery and suspense that pervades their narratives. Legions of writers and scholars have attempted to distinguish the Gothic novel from the horror novel and other supernatural genres, revealing one of the distinctive traits of this literary production: its obsessive self-reflexive concern with generic categorisations and literary status (C. Bloom 155-166; Schneider 36-37). However, it would be perhaps more fruitful to regard the Gothic as a subtle fictional mode which has been adapted into different strands – including horror, science fiction and weird fiction – rather than as a fixed generic thread. Such approach is purported by Hogle’s conception of the Gothic as an “unstable genre” (Hogle The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction 1) and “highly mixed mode” (Hogle The Cambridge Companion to the Modern Gothic 3), and by Botting’s definition of the Gothic “as a mode that exceeds genre and categories” (Gothic 14).

Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the Gothic mode resurfaced not just in literature and cinema but also in graphic novels and television, under countless, shimmering masks. The latest examples of this proliferation on TV are the series – frequently based on previous literary or graphic works which engaged, in turn, with the Gothic genre – Jekyll (2007), True Blood (2008-2014), The Vampire Diaries (2009-), The Walking Dead (2010-), Ripper Street (2012-), among many others, and the even more recent adaptation for the big screen Victor Frankenstein (2015), the last of a conspicuous sequence which started in 1910 with the first 16-minute-long motion picture of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein realised by Edison Studios. As for the realm of the graphic novels, suffice it to mention Neil Gaiman’s masterpiece Sandman (1989-1996), replete with Gothic tropes, and the entire production of Alan Moore, whose visual aesthetic and thematic concerns show numerous affinities with the so-called “Gothic tradition” (Green). While acknowledging the pervasiveness of Gothic incessant displacements and the potential for a wider research into the plentiful transformations of this literary genre, this thesis will focus specifically on The League and Penny Dreadful as these two works are symptomatic of the postmodern malleability of the Gothic both as a genre and as a mode. Moreover, they exemplify the sense of continuity that can be traced from the dawn of the Gothic to its current popular ubiquity, not just from a thematic point of view but also from a diegetic and structural perspective of analysis.

As the title suggests, The League, set in Victorian London in 1898, is composed of quite a curious assemblage of literary characters whose mission is to save the British Empire from a chemical threat, a Martian invasion and other terrifying dangers: Mina Murray, ex-wife of Jonathan Harker from Stoker’s Dracula (1897), a truly independent and strong-willed woman, who always mysteriously wears a red scarf around her neck; the emotionally unstable Dr Jekyll from the eponymous masterpiece by R.L. Stevenson; the mischievous Hawley Griffin, from H.G. Wells’s The Invisible Man (1897); the anti-imperialist Captain Nemo now at the service of the British Empire, from Jules Verne’s Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the
Similarly and yet differently, Penny Dreadful joins Gothic canonical works, namely Shelley's Frankenstein, Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray, Stoker's Dracula and Stevenson's Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, in an all-encompassing plotline. Its multiple narratives revolve around the story of Doctor Frankenstein's scientific experiments and consequent monstrous creations; Dorian Gray's attempts to rediscover the pleasures of a life so full of excesses; Ethan Talbot, a lonely American man who is fleeing from a mysterious past and engages in a relationship with the prostitute Brona; the black servant Sembene; Sir Malcolm Murray, who plays concurrently the archetypal figure of the British explorer and the father of Mina Murray; and Vanessa Ives, the seductive leading figure of the series, who will be closely examined in the last chapter of this thesis.

Admittedly, approaching non-literary works such as a comic and a TV series by looking back at their literary origins is not a straightforward task, especially because both media configure themselves as hybrid forms, derivative of their higher literary and cinematic matrixes. As such, they traditionally occupy a lower status in the hierarchy of cultural expressions, as they are usually "designed to gratify an audience lacking in what Bourdieu calls 'cultural capital', an audience which prefers the cotton candy of entertainment to the gourmet delights of literature" (Stam 7). Starting from this awareness, this thesis aims at embracing, rather than fighting, the persistent tendency to disregard any manifestation of popular culture as consumable mass entertainment.

Spooner’s recent study on the Gothic’s contemporary commodification, from the teens’ passion for esoteric tattoos to the recurrence of Gothic iconography in art, cinema and photography, allows for a reflection on the renewed convergence between the Gothic and globalised consumerist culture, devoted to the exploitation of this genre’s transgressions and excesses for commercial ends. In Spooner’s view, the Gothic emerges as “a perfect product, readily available and simply adapted to the needs and purposes of a wide variety of consumers” (Contemporary Gothic 156). However, recognising the consumerist facet of the Gothic does not provide an exhaustive answer to the reasons behind this cyclically recurring appeal. As Hutcheon puts it, “the appeal of adaptation cannot simply be explained or explained away by economic gain” (A Theory of Adaptation 175).

In his reflections on mass culture gathered in Mythologies, Roland Barthes demonstrated back in 1957 that even the most ordinary mass media products such as advertisements, magazines, children's toys, soaps and powders are charged with deep layers of meaning and therefore deserve critical attention. As Gothic monsters threaten to swallow the contemporary pop-cultural world, it seems necessary to interpret this tendency and make sense of it, by looking back at what can be defined as a distinctly Gothic typology of popular consumption, that dates back to the mid-nineteenth century.

### 1.2 Gothic popular consumption and seriality strategies

The roots of the enduring fascination for the Gothic as a popular phenomenon can be located in the emergence in the mid-nineteenth century of the serialised penny dreadfuls, previously called penny bloods, a derogatory term under which were classified all those cheap stories, both in paper quality and in price, which were inspired by the most gruesome eighteenth-century Gothic romances. According to Killeen, “one crucial ingredient of a great deal of this pulp fiction is a focus on violence, torture, blood and gore” (46). Among the most popular penny dreadfuls Ella the Outcast; or, The Gipsy of Rosemary Dell (1841), Varney the Vampyre; or, the Feast of Blood (1847), Wagner the Wehr-Wolf (1847), The String of Pearls; or, the Barber of Fleet Street (1850) were some of the most evocative titles that achieved a huge success and exerted a strong influence on the subsequent Victorian Gothic literary production (James and Smith). For instance, G. W. M. Reynolds’s Varney the Vampyre (1847) was an acknowledged source of inspiration for Stoker’s Dracula and one of the earlier narratives revolving around a vampire, while James Malcolm Rymer’s Wagner the Wehr-Wolf (1847) contributed to invigorating the popularity of the wolf-myth in Victorian Britain.

The boom of the penny-dreadful phenomenon is closely linked to the removal of the paper duty in 1861. After this amendment, magazines were able to circulate on a larger scale with a considerable decrease in price. As Gorman and McLean note, this abrogation, together with the previous abolition of the advertisement duty and the stamp duty respectively in 1853 and 1855, triggered the appearance of new forms of mass-media press aimed at satisfying a larger and more diversified audience (Gorman and McLean 9). Because of their low-priced consumption, these stories were able to meet the increasing demand of an emerging category of working-class readers: as such, this inexpensive fiction determined the shift of the Gothic narratives from the margins of a non-canonical and highly transgressive literary strand to the footlights of the mainstream publishing sensations of the Victorian press.
The plots of these ghastly tales, released in weekly instalments, were intentionally sensational and overly intricate. Heroines in distress, ruthless criminals, supernatural horrors, terrifying revelations were but some of the recurring characters and themes that populated the grotesque imagery of this serialised fiction, which was “a mass-media equivalent of the earlier Gothic blue books” (Hughes 215). Overtly emotional, frivolous and melodramatic in content, from a diegetic point of view these sensational narratives capitivated the readership by inserting sub-plots within the main narrative and introducing spectacular cliff-hangers aimed at establishing a sense of continuity with the next item in the series. Several devices were employed to arouse the readers’ desire to frantically continue the reading: it was a recurring strategy to leave sentences purposefully uncompleted at the end of the page in order to enhance the urgency of the narrative; similarly, words hanging at the edge of the page would often be broken by a hyphen not as much for typographical reasons but rather to compel the readers to hastily turn the page. As a result, despite their blatant narrative incoherence, extraordinary coincidences and clichéd protagonists, penny dreadfuls succeeded in keeping the readers’ interest alive by creating an intense suspense.

In “A Defence of Penny Dreadfuls” (1901), Gilbert Keith Chesterton, vigorously defending the realm of popular literature, challenged the common assumption that these sensational narratives would corrupt the mind of their young readers:

One of the strangest examples of the degree to which ordinary life is undervalued is the example of popular literature, the vast mass of which we contentedly describe as vulgar. The boy’s novelette may be ignorant in a literary sense, which is only like saying that the modern novel is ignorant in the chemical sense, or the economic sense, or the astronomical sense: but it is not vulgar intrinsically—it is the actual centre of a million flaming imaginations.

Such a non-canonical position expresses Chesterton’s maverick attempt to legitimate the cultural value of the penny-dreadful craze by calling into question the purist distinction between low-brow and high-brow, between the tasteful appreciation of canonical fiction and the conventional “denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile – in a word, natural – enjoyment” (Bourdieu 6-7) of popular literature. Admittedly, the reading practice of popular fiction responds to what Umberto Eco considers a “gastronomical consolation […] in putting forward stories that always say the same thing” (“Interpreting Serials” 98).

The Gothic was born as a popular genre, set aside from the high-brow fiction of its time, and in its Victorian derivations remains faithful to its original purpose: entertaining the audience. Yet what is striking about the penny dreadful narratives is not the hyperbolic and often repetitive vortex of supernatural crimes and passions which frequently falls into stereotypical and bi-dimensional characterizations, but rather, on a structural level, the insertion of illustrations as a mirror of the events described in the main body of the text. These images aimed at charging the tales with further sensational pathos in order to tantalise the readers, to the point that the London-based penny dreadful publisher Edward Lloyd famously gave very precise instructions to one of his illustrators: “The eyes must be larger; and there must be more blood – much more blood!” (White 229). The insertion of illustrations allows the penny dreadfuls to be considered as the popular antecedent of today’s comics as Carpenter argues, “there is a clear line of descent from the penny dreadfuls […] to modern adventure comics for boys” (6), while Julia Round, in her ground-breaking study on the convergence between Gothic and comics, goes as far back as the “fifteenth-century woodcuts sold in the streets that showed gruesome scenes of executions” (11) to identify the harbinger of contemporary horror comics.

Commenting on the penny-dreadful craze, Mario Praz reached a radically different conclusion from Chesterton, which reflects the same conservative traditional approach in vogue in Victorian times: “The Victorian comics could educate a generation of hypocrites, the modern comics nurture a generation of criminals” (522). Whether or not cultural value is recognised in this serialised cheap fiction, what is intriguing in these divergent opinions is the constant tendency either to denigrate or legitimate popular fiction, a tendency which is crucial to a study that takes as a starting point of discussion everything that has been traditionally considered as low-brow and therefore culturally inferior, such as Gothic fiction, comics and TV series.

The astonishing popular response provoked by the penny dreadfuls together with the techniques employed therein to engage the readership allows us to draw parallels between this nineteenth-century phenomenon and the resurgence of the Gothic in the twenty-first-century media under consideration. In The League, Moore consciously plays with and mocks Victorian popular culture. Such a conscious engagement with a previous popular tradition becomes apparent in the continuous intra-textual references inserted by Moore at the end of each issue and volume of the comic series. The author ironically
converges the reader’s attention to these vignettes, which bring back to mind the advertising techniques aimed to build suspense in the penny dreadfuls and intentionally create a sense of continuity with Victorian periodicals published in serial format. As a result, the intertextual and intermedial qualities of the comics manifest themselves not just in its thematic concerns, as will be shown in the second chapter of this thesis, but also in its structural features.

It can be immediately noticed that *Penny Dreadful* TV series also repurposes the serial format of the penny dreadfuls, a widespread strategy of popular consumption. The plot unfolds between multiple story arcs that end up intertwining and dissolving themselves in the final episode, following a semi-circular trajectory that maintains itself open to subsequent seasonal developments. *Penny Dreadful* has recently started to draw the attention of audience and scholars alike for its imaginative interpretation of Victorian Gothic literary works and popular themes. In his recent article on this series, Benjamin Poore insightfully explores the relationship between the TV show and the penny-dreadful phenomenon, starting from a detailed analysis of “the semantics of ‘penny dreadful’” (63). However, Poore ultimately disengages himself from venturing further into the parallels that can be drawn between the two cultural products in terms of suspense patterns and narrative devices. The screenplay writer and creator of *Penny Dreadful*, John Logan, has repeatedly stressed his embrace of the penny dreadful tradition: “It was the first time that the mass media was able to bring horror in the people’s living room and so I thought, that’s exactly what I am doing with *Penny Dreadful* in television” (*Penny Dreadful: The Complete First Season*). Not only is the TV series title a clear allusion to the penny dreadfuls, but also its narrative unfolding reveals affinities with the narratological features of its gruesome nineteenth-century antecedent.

This remark is supported by John Caughey’s reflection on serials such as the soap opera and the sitcom as fictional forms indebted to “the multi-character, multi-plot, temporally extended, interrupted narratives of the nineteenth-century serialised novel” (55). Indeed, one should keep in mind that in the Victorian age novels were also released in serial format, a publishing fashion inaugurated by Charles Dickens’ *The Pickwick Papers* (1836), which had important literary antecedents in the eighteenth century (Law 3-7) and became widely popular across and beyond Europe during the nineteenth century. This was also the case with Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which was firstly published in serial format in 1890 and then in book form in 1891, although, as Denisoff notes, “the shorter version serialised in *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine* in 1890 is more explicit about same-sex desire, while the 1891 novel version removes many of these immoral insinuations and builds up a heterosexual subplot” (40). This censored revision may suggest that the serial format is more apt to explore sensational and scandalous plotlines than the book form, an aspect that nowadays is perpetuated by the tendency of contemporary TV series, and of the television medium in general, to portray overtly sexualised plots in comparison to the less pervasive presence of these themes on the big screen.

In their narratological study of television series, Allrath and Gymnich explore how this relatively new audio-visual format constructs meaning through the employment of a set of formal features, such as time, space and plot structures, lack of definitive closure, creation of suspense, characters’ gradual development. This study encourages a deeper understanding of this serialised genre and helps to better frame *Penny Dreadful* in the light of narrative theories. By keeping in mind Allrath and Gymnich’s conception of time and space categories in television series (32), it becomes clear that in *Penny Dreadful* the narrative continuity is guaranteed by the exploration of the characters’ past: in other words, their development does not merely follow a ‘moving forward’ trajectory but is rather presented as a mechanism that moves backward and inward, a regressive dynamic that enhances the Gothic temporal dimension of the series.

Putting momentarily aside their Gothic features and evidently entertaining quality, what bonds together very different cultural products such as the weekly-issued nineteenth-century penny dreadfuls, Alan Moore’s comic series (which is divided in separate instalments), and Logan’s episode-structured TV series, is their *seriality*, the fragmented nature of their story accompanied by a set of repetitive narrative frames often mixed with a distinctly Gothic non-linear unfolding of the plot through the interpolation of dreams and flashbacks. Umberto Eco puts forward a theory of seriality aimed to interpret the relationship between innovation and repetition in the serials on the basis of the spectator/reader’s recognition of the repetitive models that take place. Eco identifies three key typologies of the serial format: the retake, the remake, and the series, where the retake is intended as a continuation of a previous story, the remake as an explicit reformulation of it and the series as an on-going narrative marked by an episodic structure (“Interpreting Serials” 83-100). Even though none of these typologies is able to enclose the series under consideration in their entirety, as to a certain extent it could be argued that both Logan’s and Moore’s series simultaneously fall under all the three categories, Eco’s interpretation allows us to reflect on the manifold facets of contemporary cultural creation and distribution of artistic works and suggests the potential of considering seriality as a constitutive principle of a new, commodified, and intrinsically postmodern form of art, which he defines “a new aesthetics of the serial” (“Interpreting Serials” 98). If in *Penny Dreadful* the episodic and seasonal unfolding of the narrative is an inherent marketing strategy identifiable in all TV series as part of
what Eco describes as an industrial process aimed at establishing a hold on the audience, in The League it can be regarded as a self-reflexive and markedly ironic critique on the ever-present commodification of popular culture.

As readers, we are in front of an artistic endeavour which sheds a critical light on itself, in Eco’s words “a mass media capable of self-irony”, an ability that blurs the ‘thin line between ‘high-brow’ arts and ‘low-brow’ arts” (“Interpreting Serials” 90-91). Such textual strategies share a common feature with the incessant cliff-hangers employed at the end of each episode in Penny Dreadful, albeit deprived of The League’s satirical flavour. They titillate the public’s almost bodily urges to devour fiction, whether it is in the form of a comic series or as an audio-visual serialised product, encouraging the consumerist desire to discover what will happen in the next episode and/or acquire the next item in a series.

The addictive pleasure of reading/watching turns therefore into a sort of ‘fast food’ practice aimed at satisfying, although temporarily, the audience’s voracious curiosity. As a result, the multiple etymological meanings of the act of ‘consuming’ from the Latin consumere, “to use up, to eat, to waste” (Etymonline.com), conflate in the act of Gothic serialised consumption, in a potentially infinite process of re-utilisation and re-consumption which, in the case of Penny Dreadful and The League, often coincides with the literal bodily consumption of the Gothic characters on stage, shockingly turned into beasts, possessed by demons and occasionally even torn into pieces. As Denise Gigante notes in her literary and historically grounded study on taste, “[b]y the turn of the nineteenth century, the dialectical counterpart to taste was not only bodily appetite but also the wider sphere of material desires fed by consumer culture” (3). Hence, these twenty-first-century cultural products can be considered as part of an enduring Gothic popular consumption which finds its root in the nineteenth century and which is symptomatic of the persistent material desire to possess, collect and consume popular fiction.

1.3 Steampunk and monster drama as neo-Victorian Gothic generic hybrids

Although it has been demonstrated that a sense of continuity can be traced between the nineteenth-century and the twenty-first-century Gothic forms of serialised fiction, it cannot be denied that there are also considerable differences between them, in particular with regard to their aesthetic sensibility and academic status. The League and Penny Dreadful have been respectively classified as “steampunk” and “monster drama” (Goldberg) narratives, two fuzzy generic categories that intertwine on multiple levels with the Gothic tradition. While there is still a mild reluctance to approach the penny dreadfuls as cultural expressions worthy of scholarly attention, the growing artistic value which is attributed nowadays to neo-Victorian steampunk fiction and monster media in academia is undoubtedly unprecedented. Whereas the ‘monster drama’ label is self-explanatory, the definition of ‘steampunk’ and its relation to the Gothic genre needs to be unravelled.

As Sebastian Domsch observes, “[s]teampunk indicates a use of outdated images of a future as seen from the past, […] a narrative mode that thrives on anachronism and incongruity and creates visual hybrids” (98). The notion of ‘hybridity’, arising from nineteenth-century evolutionary studies, has recently encountered a renewed application and extensive usage in the field of postcolonial studies and genre theory (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 227). This concept is relevant to the analysis of The League and Penny Dreadful, as it enables the limits of generic categorization and permits to consider the multiple components that concur to define these non-literary works.

Steampunk fiction entails a sophisticated re-interpretation of the Victorian era through a combination of a nostalgic view of the past with the technological advancements of the future. The inherently anachronistic nature of this fiction is at the very heart of the term ‘steampunk’, which joins together two apparently unrelated words that belong to separate historical and cultural spheres: indeed, ‘steam’ alludes to the scientific progress of the Victorian period, while ‘punk’ refers to a contemporary fashionable phenomenon. Conventionally considered as a literary sub-genre, nowadays steampunk also permeates fashion shows, musical performances, art galleries, as the plethora of neo-Victorian steampunk artefacts and cultural exhibitions illustrated in the anthology 1000 Steampunk Creation demonstrates (Marsocci).

Steampunk narratives reject the traditional view of past and future as fixed temporal categories: in Bowser and Croxall’s words, steampunk involves “a past that is borrowing from the future or a future borrowing from the past” (2). As a result, in the steampunk world, the past does not merely include the events that have happened, but also the events that might have occurred if contemporary scientific discoveries had taken place earlier; likewise, the future does not entail simply what will happen but rather comprises the infinite possibilities of what might occur if crucial historical events were to happen or not, paving the way for the creation of parallel universes, as is the case in The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen. The readers are then confronted with a fictional world where temporal frames are blurred and intermingled with each other. As a result, steampunk presents several affinities with the generic thread of “Gothic science
The steampunk spirit of *The League* is palpable from the very first few pages of Volume I and becomes prominently Gothic as the series progresses. The opening page of the first issue conjures up the temporal and spatial setting of the narrative: England, year 1898. Yet the expectations raised by this specific historical reference are subverted by the magnificent vision of the ‘Channel Causeway’ on the second page, where a massive bridge that links England and France outshines the characters’ point of view and dominates the readers’ perspective, unveiling the alternative nature of *The League*’s universe by means of superimposition of a futuristic dimension onto Victorian England (Moore and O’Neill *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen: Volume I*, Issue I: “Empire Dreams” 8). *10*

As Jones notes, “the scale of the project, the steam stacks on the heavy equipment, as well as their ornate pistons, tubes, and so forth, mark this situation as steampunk” (116). Nevins reports that “the idea of connecting France and England goes back at least to 1750, when the Academy of Amiens held a competition for the best way to improve cross-Channel travel” (*Heroes & Monsters* 25-26). Although there have been attempts and suggestions in the previous centuries to build such a colossal infrastructure, the project did not actually succeed. Therefore, its existence in *The League*’s world inaugurates its anachronistic historical dimension. Not only does this panel set the mood for the entire graphic novel, but it also introduces one of its key visual cues: the personified figure of Britannia, symbol of the *grandeur* of British Empire, paradoxically still under construction. It is no coincidence that this issue is entitled “Empire dreams”: as Domsch underlines, this title stands out as an ironic remark “both on the utopian dreams of the Victorian Empire and the actual construction of the channel tunnel in the late twentieth century” (111).

In the second volume of *The League*, the setting of the narrative is once again Victorian England, now under a Martian attack. The fear of foreign invasion, a recurrent preoccupation of Victorian Gothic novels, is visually magnified at the beginning of the fifth issue (Moore and O’Neill *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen: Volume II*, Issue V: “Red in Tooth and Claw” 104-105). The first panel displays the river Thames contaminated by terrifying “red-coloured growths” (Wells 168-169), which threaten to infiltrate the whole city. The apocalyptic scenario provoked by the ‘red weed’ is an allusion to H. G. Wells’s *The War of the Worlds*, a prototypical science fiction novel with a distinct Gothic feeling, further emphasised by O’Neill’s vivid depiction. Moore aptly entitled this issue “Red in Tooth and Claw”, an intertextual reference to Alfred Tennyson’s *In Memoriam A.H.H.* (1850). With these words, Tennyson famously invoked Nature: “Tho’ Nature, red in tooth and claw” (Canto 56, p.80), a line which has been frequently re-employed to describe the Darwinian concept of natural selection. In Moore’s rewriting, the Victorian anxiety towards the fear of degeneration provoked by nineteenth-century evolutionary theories is repeatedly mocked and exercised, the case of the Martian invasion and ensuing contamination of the river Thames being a key example.

The narrative unfolding of the fifth issue culminates with the disquieting discovery of Hawley Griffin’s murder at the hands of Mr Hyde, in a truly horrific scene where Moore and O’Neill’s steampunk spirit acquires pronounced Gothic overtones. It is then once more imperative to consider the Gothic not merely as a literary genre but as a mode capable of irrupting in different media and genres, bearing in mind Jacques Derrida’s conception of the impossibility of genre purity, for “lodged within the heart of the law [of genre] itself [there is] a law of impurity or a principle of contamination” (57).

In *Penny Dreadful* TV series, Victorian England functions less as a constitutive component of the narration than as a background, complementing the *mise-en-scène* in order to bring to the foreground the nineteenth-century urban atmosphere of degeneration and decay. In the first episode, the “grey, monstrous London […] with its myriads of people, its sordid sinners, and its splendid sins” (Wilde 44), is masterfully delineated, providing the perfectly dark and mysterious setting for its even more monstrous inhabitants.

In the official companion to *Penny Dreadful*, Sharon Gosling retraces the steps of the TV series’ first season, exploring its characters and locations. This book represents a tribute to the TV series, as well as a confirmation of its commodified nature and its commercial success in terms of popularity. While *The Art and Making of Penny Dreadful* can be critically evaluated as an integral component of the Gothic consumer culture, symptomatic of what Spooner defined as the contemporary tendency for the Gothic to reach further “levels of mass production, distribution and audience awareness” (*Contemporary Gothic* 23), this book also provides noteworthy insights on the creative stages behind the show production.
Interestingly, Gosling mentions that in re-creating the atmosphere of squalor, poverty and ravaging crime of London’s docklands and Shad Thames in Dublin, where the series was filmed, Logan was inspired by Blanchard Jerrold’s accounts of London’s East End and Gustave Doré’s engravings in the 1872 publication of London: A Pilgrimage (Gosling 31). Moreover, Logan himself acknowledged as one of his sources of inspiration Matthew Sweet’s Inventing the Victorians, a provocative study on the contemporary misconceptions and common assumptions on the Victorians. Hence, despite the pervasive presence of supernatural events and otherworldly creatures, Logan’s aesthetic approach to the design and re-creation of nineteenth-century Victorian England is essentially realistic, very close in spirit to a Dickensian portrait of London, whose shadowy and decadent docklands are counterpoised to the imperial splendour of the British Museum, the Explorer’s Club, Sir Malcolm Murray’s Victorian mansion, Dorian Gray’s gallery, all key locations where most of the action in Penny Dreadful takes place.

Although Logan does not attempt to represent a truthful and accurate portrait of Victorian history, as anachronisms abound throughout the series, he nonetheless seeks to guarantee a plausible and convincing re-interpretation of the Victorian world, shaped in line with the general atmosphere summoned by the literary and historical accounts of the time. As a consequence, the frequent historical inaccuracies that occur in the series should not be regarded as flaws, but precisely as peculiar neo-Victorian traits. As Heilmann and Llewellyn remark, the neo-Victorian “is more than historical fiction set in the nineteenth century. To be part of the neo-Victorianism […] texts (literary, filmic, audio/visual) must […] be self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians” (4).

1.4 Historical and cultural returns of the Gothic

In light of the previous remarks, it becomes evident that there is a strong relationship between the Gothic mode, the Victorian past, and Moore’s and Logan’s series. Yet this relationship is not univocal, as the very different nature of The League’s and Penny Dreadful’s re-imagined Victorian settings shows, and is worth exploring further. Marshall McLuhan once wrote : “When faced with a totally new situation, we tend always to attach ourselves […] to the flavor of the most recent past. We look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march backwards into the future” (74-75). Simon Joyce, re-employing McLuhan’s fascinating metaphor of the rear-view mirror, argues that in neo-Victorian fiction

We never really encounter ‘the Victorians’ themselves but instead a mediated image like the one we get when we glance into our rearview mirrors while driving. The image usefully condenses the paradoxical sense of looking forward to see what is behind us, which is the opposite of what we do when we read history in order to figure out the future (4).

By observing the Victorians retrospectively in a rear-view mirror, both The League and Penny Dreadful, albeit with diverse aesthetic traits, fall into the broader category of neo-Victorian Gothic narratives. In Neo-Victorian Gothic, Kohlke and Gutleben draw together a collection of essays organized around postcolonial, feminist and generic concerns, each of them extensively discussing and analysing the re-interpretations of Victorian and Gothic literature in new hybrid forms. According to Kohlke and Gutleben, Victorianism is “quintessentially Gothic”: these “two fashionable phenomena”, they argue, “were doomed to converge” (Neo-Victorian Gothic 2). This volume highlights the “generic and ontological kinship” (Kohlke and Gutleben Neo-Victorian Gothic 4) between these two categories, which display a similar conception of the past as a haunting presence.

If the Gothic as a genre and as a mode has evolved in new directions and infiltrated new media, it is also true that it maintains recurring leitmotifs. The Gothic, like the neo-Victorian, is preoccupied with historical, psychological, cultural returns: the return to a medieval past in the first wave of Gothic novels, where this cliché temporal displacement went hand in hand with a geographical dislocation, providing a vantage point to explore the debaucheries of the Gothic fantasies (Wright Gothic Fiction 74-96); the return of the repressed ‘self’ in the Victorian urban Gothic literary strand, in which the conventional historical and geographical detachment is substituted by an exploration of the inner depths of contemporary human vices and degeneracies, in line with the decadent self-reflexive spirit of the fin de siècle; and, finally, the more recent and still on-going return of the Victorian Gothic past in the twenty-first-century imagination.

These persistent historical and cultural returns evoke fears of an atavistic regression to a primitive stage, suggesting the haunting presence of irrational forces which transcend historical circumstances and temporal boundaries. The Gothic’s refusal of positivist conceptions of human progress discloses the impossibility of dealing with contemporary anxieties except by regressing to previous traumatic times, already settled in the collective imagery. Nevertheless, as Botting reminds us, “Gothic narratives never escaped the concerns of their own times, despite the heavy historical trappings” (Gothic 2).
This cyclical conception of the past may then to some extent explain why, as Marie Beville postulates, the Gothic is “the clearest mode of expression [...] for voicing the terrors of postmodernity” (8). Undeniably, the Gothic’s obsession with the past shows affinities with what Hutcheon defines as the “postmodern concept of ‘the presence of the past” (A Poetics of Postmodernism 4), which implies “a re-evaluation of and a dialogue with the past in the light of the present” (Poetics 19). In this dialogic relationship between old and new perspectives, “a nostalgic yearning for a previous age and past aesthetic forms” (Bowler and Cox 3) can be found. Indeed, nostalgia in its Greek etymology designates precisely the melancholic return ‘home’, to the long-gone pleasures of old times. In its neo-Victorian Gothic manifestations, this nostalgic feeling is at times self-indulgent and at times painful, as it regularly evokes the phantasms of loss, death and trauma. Yet the question remains as to whether this nostalgia is triggered by a contemporary lack of truly creative impulse or by a genuine fascination with the ghosts from the past. Clearly, both alternatives are not mutually exclusive and the answer inevitably entails a critical involvement with the conundra and intricacies of intertextuality and intermediality as central (Gothic) postmodern practices, which will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Two

Intertextual labyrinths and intermedial mirrors

Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place, be afforded: it can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself.

–Mary Shelley, Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus (8)

In this chapter, the historicity of the Gothic and its preoccupation with cultural returns will be connected to the postmodern theories of intertextuality and intermediality. The creative practices involved in the process of adapting Gothic classics in contemporary media will be examined in an attempt to determine in which ways and to what extent the neo-Victorian non-literary works under investigation can be considered truly ‘new’. After defining the peculiar features of ‘Gothic intertextuality’ and the labyrinthine characterisation of The League and Penny Dreadful, the intrinsic visual and filmic quality of Gothic narratives will be explored. Consequently, by shifting the focus to the medium, the intermediality of these neo-Victorian Gothic texts will be unveiled by identifying their most significant intermedial crossings, which function as a mirror to their overarching narratives and create a bridge with their Gothic fictional and theatrical antecedents.

2.1 Repetition versus creativity: a definition of ‘literary mashup’

Having established the generic hybrid nature of The League and Penny Dreadful, it is now necessary to examine more closely their textual features. Although the premise from which both Alan Moore and John Logan start is similar – that is to say, they both intended to bring back to life emblematic characters of Victorian literature and join them into a single narrative – the results achieved are quite different and worth comparing. Critics and fans have repeatedly hinted at the superficial similarities between the two texts. However, none attempted to explore in depth to what extent these neo-Victorian narratives mirror each other and in particular, how and why they repurpose Victorian Gothic classic characters. In her concise evaluation of Penny Dreadful and The League, Megen de Bruin-Molé comments that “despite drawing in many cases from the same pre-existing material, each recombined product is distinct and creatively unique” (angelsandapes.com). The decision to focus on these specific works is precisely motivated by their intrinsic ‘polyphonic’ quality:

Such miscegenatory strategies offer a more subtly nuanced textual landscape than that of the ‘single-source’ adaptation, especially regarding notions of textual fidelity, authenticity and originality […] [T]he polyphonic text generates a radically innovative and arguably ‘original’ work for consumption, while simultaneously generating a multiplicity of new and illuminating perspectives on its antecedents (Bowler and Cox 8).

Their hybrid generic and textual nature is reflected by their combination of different nineteenth-century stories together by means of pastiche and parody and by resorting to allusion and appropriation. As a matter of fact, The League and Penny Dreadful resist any straightforward categorisation: from a textual point of view, it would be reductive to label them as mere adaptations of Gothic literary works. Indeed, the creative practices put in place by Moore and Logan transcend the definition of literary adaptation and it is precisely this impossibility to easily classify the adapting processes at stake that render these series
intriguing to analyse. Perhaps the most appropriate term under which it is possible to classify both Moore’s and Logan’s works from a textual point of view is that of ‘literary mashup’. In his study on remix cultures, Eduardo Navas provides a useful definition of literary mashup which immediately links it to the theories of intertextuality. Navas claims that intertextuality in the literary tradition is understood as the act of embedding a text within another text […]. An intertextual work is, in essence, a literary mashup (a direct juxtaposition) of concepts […] in which the material recycled is a source with cultural value, which can be used for both economic interests as well as critical reflection (123).

Navas’ definition helps identify two key-features of these neo-Victorian products: their tendency to blend previous literary works and consequently charge them with further cultural value, and their authors’ intention to do so not just for the sake of commercial gain but also to critically engage with the specific historical and spatial period they choose to repurpose, in this case Victorian England. As a result, both Penny Dreadful and The League fluctuate in a hybrid dimension, suspended between the recognition as independent works of (audio-)visual fiction and their inherent nature of critical commentary with respect to the original fictitious worlds they derive from. This intrinsically liminal status allows them to provide new perspectives on old literary works, seemingly exhausted by traditional critical approaches. Furthermore, the textual ambiguity of The League and Penny Dreadful reflects the ontological liminal status of their characters, as their fictional identity belongs at the same time to the Victorian literary works they derive from and to the contemporary media narratives they now inhabit. In other words, the neo-Victorian afterlives that reappear in Moore’s and Logan’s re-interpretations act in a fictional limbo of sorts, a space in between their original Victorian novels and their new retellings.

As Hutcheon observes, “this ongoing dialogue with the past […] creates the doubled pleasure of the palimpsest: more than one text is experienced – and knowingly so” (A Theory of Adaptation 116). Yet this palimpsestic effect is not achieved through what Navas describes as a “direct juxtaposition” (123) of previous texts. Indeed, not only does this cyclical regression to the monsters of the past avoid coinciding with a mere repetition of the same story, but the mixing strategies implemented therein often determine a radical rewriting of the original sources. The afterlife that is granted to the Gothic literary characters allows them to step outside the boundaries of the fictional works they originated in, either following a life of their own or often doomed to be transformed into pale shadows and cryptic intertextual echoes.

2.2 Gothic intertextuality

The ubiquitous repetition of Gothic literary motifs in contemporary culture may be considered as a cause, or an effect, of the postmodern anxiety related to the impossibility of artistic creation. In other words, as observed by Graham Allen with reference to Barthes’s conception of intertextuality, in the postmodern age it is impossible “to speak of originality or the uniqueness of the artistic object, be it a painting or a novel, since every artistic object is so clearly assembled from bits and pieces of already existent art” (5). In an age in which imitation and reproduction substitute genuine artistic creation, intertextuality can be found in an infinite array of literary and non-literary artistic forms, functioning as an intrinsically postmodern practice often linked to parody and pastiche. Julia Kristeva, drawing on the Bakhtinian concept of “dialogism” (The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays 279), postulated that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Desire in Language 66). Hence, intertexts are not mere sources of inspiration but also hidden reminiscences, more or less explicit allusions, intentional or unintentional suggestions that belong to a wider, encyclopaedic knowledge of diverse cultural discourses. As Barthes stated, the network of citations that “go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read: they are quotations without inverted commas” (Image – Music – Text 160). Yet the intertextuality of Gothic narratives can acquire even deeper, more intriguing, and markedly Gothic, connotations.

In the Gothic Glossary accessible online as part of the digital database The Gothic Archive, a revelatory entry stands out: ‘Gothic intertextuality’, thereby described as

a vampiric form of drawing elements from other texts, of sucking key ideas and characteristics into its own narrative body to nourish and enrich itself. Intertextuality exists everywhere in all literary genres, but Gothic intertextuality stands apart from the usual usage as it both subverts and perverts the meanings and intentions of the original text, in a bid to overturn, question and invert its significance (Fall and Poh epublications.marquette.edu).
A prime example of Gothic intertextuality, intended to question and turn upside down the significance of the original text, is the usage of Biblical allegories in *Frankenstein*, to the point that the Bible can be considered as one of the main intertexts of this Gothic narrative of creation and destruction. Robert Ryan goes as far as to read the novel “as much as a parody of Job as of Genesis” (153). The Biblical allusions in *Frankenstein*, often mediated by John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667), are plentiful: analogies can be drawn between the creator as God and the creature as Adam; between the Satanic monster and the fallen angel, rejected and cast away from the Paradise; between Victor and Cain, the oldest son of Adam and Eve who assassinated his guiltless brother Abel.

Maggie Kilgour pushes this idea even further by defining the Gothic genre in its entirety as “a Frankenstein’s monster, assembled out of the bits and pieces of the past” (4). Indeed, it should be kept in mind that the intertextuality of the Gothic can be retracted also retrospectively and reflects the cannibalistic nature of the whole Gothic tradition, which drew fully from popular ballads, folklore, Shakespeare and Milton’s masterpieces, the pre-Romantic melancholic meditations of the graveyard poets, eighteenth and nineteenth century melodrama. Such a perspective is particularly relevant to the analysis of the neo-Victorian Gothic works under consideration: as the Gothic classics were built on “the bits and pieces of the past” (Kilgour 4), in the same way their neo-Gothic descendants are built on the bits and pieces of Gothic classics, questioning and subverting their significance in a process of inherited pastiche. If “Gothic creation […] suggests a view of the imagination not as an originating faculty that creates *ex nihilo*, but as a power of combination” (4, emphasis added), then *The League* and *Penny Dreadful* can be rightly considered as exemplary neo-Victorian Gothic mashups.

Undeniably, it is impossible to read the graphic novel *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* or to watch John Logan's TV series *Penny Dreadful* without coming to terms with the countless intertextual references to Gothic seminal texts and the cultural legacy of the Victorian age. As hinted at in the first chapter, the reasons behind this fascination with the Victorian past are manifold: in many cases the nostalgia is reduced to an attempt to ironize the contemporary view of the Victorian world; in other stances it becomes a pretext to repurpose, destabilize and critically question the Victorian values, by bringing to the foreground their darker, subversive potential.

*Penny Dreadful’s* approach to the source texts is at the same time provocative and reverential. As previously mentioned, the main intertexts of *Penny Dreadful* are Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Stoker’s *Dracula* and Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. The latter three novels constitute what Kilgour defined as “the Gothic literary triptych” (229), a blending strategy already experimented in film parodies such as the American horror comedy *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948). However, the mashup of these texts in *Penny Dreadful* does not manifest itself as a parody but rather as a thoughtful engagement with the existential issues raised by these Gothic landmarks.

The interviews with the creator and writer John Logan help develop further the questions of authorship, intertextuality and creativity raised by the TV series. Logan aligns his affection for Gothic monsters to his homosexual orientation and to his own personal fight to “embrace the ‘monster’ within” (Gosling 6). As a result, *Penny Dreadful* has its roots in the poetry of the Romantic movement and in the Gothic horror of Shelley, Stoker and Wilde, but also in the personal struggles of a playwright born in the twentieth century, in whose mind their beautiful words – and beautiful monsters – combined to spin a new narrative from their eternally recognizable themes (Gosling 10, emphasis added).

Despite acknowledging his authorial debt and artistic admiration towards the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic novels, Logan strives to reinforce the originality of his own creation. This effort is palpable in the way Logan envisions the storyline of Victor Frankenstein and his Creature(s). In this regard, Poore defined Logan’s re-interpretation as “a liberating discontinuity” (71), employing Harold Bloom’s terminology, which determines a series of deliberate inconsistencies between the TV series and its source texts. Examples of this tendency are the slaughter of Van Helsing and Mina Murray’s fatal vampiric transformation. These rewritings aim “to demonstrate that [Logan] is not in thrall to his precursor texts” (Poore 71), although he does not either diverge too radically from them. Indeed, the emphasis on the recognisability of the series’ subjects is a key feature of both *The League* and *Penny Dreadful*, especially in terms of audience reception.

The intertextual and intermedial network that Logan and Moore interlace can transpire to the eyes of the attentive reader/viewer but can equally remain a mystery if the audience approaching these narratives is less familiar with these cultural references. In any case, this twofold open attitude to the reading/watching
of these series does not hinder the reception of the texts, which can be still appreciated at different levels. In other words, precisely because of their mix of familiarity and novelty, both The League and Penny Dreadful are able to address concurrently a “naïve spectator” and a “critical spectator” (Eco The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts). This may partially explain why as well as being acclaimed by their respective fandoms they also keep arousing scholarly critical attention. This tendency enhances the tension between high-brow and low-brow artistic forms in these series, even though in The League this precarious balance is often compromised by the overwhelming amount of intertextual hints, which creates frustration in the less knowledgeable reader.

Moore’s graphic novel has a labyrinthine intertextual configuration: the empirical readers easily get lost when attempting to find their own way throughout the myriad of literary allusions intentionally dispersed by the authors, either in form of written words, iconic images or a combination of both. In the first book-length study of Moore’s work, Annalisa Di Liddo interprets Moore’s “sculpting” practices by means of deconstruction and manipulation of narrative forms drawn from English literature and culture into the comic medium. Although Di Liddo aptly identifies the use of intertextuality in The League and provides significant insights on Moore’s political agenda in relation to the British imperialist legacy, she ultimately retreats from speculating further on the significance of this practice. Indeed, much more can be said about Moore’s intertextual strategies in relation to the above-mentioned concept of Gothic intertextuality.

Every main and secondary character, event and location in The League pre-exist in the realm of fiction: Moore and O’Neill purposefully aimed to create a fictional world based on former literary, filmic, theatrical, popular references. The Gothic intertextuality in this graphic novel consequently turns into as a subversive postmodern exercise that “manifests itself in the form of generic debris” (D’Haen 292), through which previous works of fiction are scattered into pieces to give shape to a new product.

Jess Nevins remarkably undertook the endeavor of tracing and gathering all these allusions to canonical literature and popular culture in his annotated companions with the support of The League’s fandom, identifying panel per panel many of the visual hints, quotations and references to previous works of fiction (A Blazing World; Impossible Territories). Nevins’ annotations became an integral part of The League, to the point that Moore and O’Neill, appalled by Nevins’ ability to track down the sources of their graphic works, intentionally overcomplicated the amount of intertextual allusions as the comic series progressed. It could be argued that in any case Nevins’ project, for as much as it shows an admirable devotion to The League, is inevitably doomed, “since both writer and reader exist and work within an intertextual field of cultural codes and meanings which can never be contained within an analysis” (Allen 89). In other words, the suggestions and allusions that can be found in The League are virtually endless and in many cases are the fruit of the readers’ imagination rather than an expression of the authors’ will.

Such an intertextual and experimental effort reaches its peak in “The New Traveller’s Almanac” (Moore and O’Neill The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen: Volume II 159-208), a detailed account of the League’s adventures through the legendary places of human imagination, a journey that allows Moore and O’Neill to reach “a deeper and richer level of creative complexity” (Moore, Introduction to Nevins’ A Blazing World 13). Rather than revisiting the fabled dwellings of literature in an erudite tour of sorts as Umberto Eco does in The Book of Legendary Lands (2013), Moore and O’Neill embed this fictional journey within the narrative landscape of The League. The effect obtained is an extraordinary intertextual combination of imagined geographies: within this macrocosmic fictional landscape, the island of Ogygia, Lilliput, the Castle of Otranto, Calvino’s invisible cities, among innumerable imaginary locations, can coexist in the same story. Despite its “dark and cynical narrative trajectories” (Hilton “The Steampunk Graphic Novel” 192), The League’s narrative is not entirely deprived of a yearning for a simultaneously sublime and satirized revision of the past, here represented as an overtly artificial construction. In other words, as suggested by Di Liddo (62), The League blends into the comic medium Hutcheon’s postmodern notion of “historiographic metafiction”, which exposes the postmodern “theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs” (A Poetics of Postmodernism 5).

In The Death of Literature, Alvin B. Kernan claims that literature “began to lose its authority [when] audiovisual images, film, television, and computer screen, were replacing the printed book as the most efficient and preferred source of entertainment and knowledge” (9). To some degree, the cultural manifestations examined in this thesis suggest that this statement is flawed. The authoritative force of Shelley’s Frankenstein is at once evoked by Logan’s decision to repurpose the scientist’s story in Penny Dreadful. Similarly, the sardonic homage by Moore to Victorian popular culture and literature demonstrates the author’s intention to bring that era back to life in a different light for the critical engagement and amusement of contemporary readers. In the context of the Gothic revival, the literary roots do not lose their authority: rather, stances of continuity can be identified. Moreover, The League and Penny Dreadful are not deprived of subtle forms of acknowledgement of this Gothic legacy within their narrative unfolding, forms that take the shape of “intermedial references” (Rajewsky 53).
2.3 Intermedial crossings: audio-visual features of Gothic narratives

Intermediality can be regarded as “a sadly neglected but vastly important subdivision of intertextuality” (Wagner 17). In her article published in the multidisciplinary journal Intermédialités, Rajewsky offers a thorough methodology to analyse intermedial practices, examining their entanglements with the notion of intertextuality and proposing a literary conception of this phenomenon (43-64). The fundamental approaches to intermediality thereby enounced (medial transposition, media combination and intermedial references) endorse a systematic study of the different media products under examination. Rajewsky draws attention to the illusory quality “that potentially solicits in the recipient of a literary text […] a sense of a visual or acoustic presence” (55). If we consider literature as “a medium that shares transmedial features with other media” (Wolf 4), as Wolf invites us to do, then the intrinsic intermediality of Gothic novels visibly emerges: employing the medium-specific means of literature, and therefore inevitably remaining within the verbal limits of the written page, Gothic writers have frequently used strategies that nowadays pertain to other media.

A key example of usage of filmic techniques can be found in a prototypical Female Gothic novel, Ann Radcliffe’s The Mysteries of Udolpho: from a stylistic point of view, Radcliffe is capable of describing the characters’ surroundings by resorting to a powerful narrative strategy. The contrast between lights and shadows is masterfully rendered in the description of Emily’s entrance into an old chamber while holding a lamp, which became thereafter a staple of Gothic literature:

[T]he gusts of wind, that whistled round the portal, would not allow her to hear distinctly any other sound. Still, however, she listened, and, perceiving no step in the room above […] her anxiety increased. […] When her spirits had overcome the first shock of her situation, she held up the lamp to examine, if the chamber afforded a possibility of an escape. […] The feeble rays of the lamp, however, did not allow her to see at once its full extent (Radcliffe 347-348).

This suspenseful passage is followed by a frightening account of the torture instruments that Emily glimpses at through the “feeble rays of the lamp” (Radcliffe 347), which determine a further intensification of her inner anguish. At this point of the narrative, the torture instruments seem to be increasing in size as the narrator’s eye comes closer, a narrative strategy that brings back to mind the zooming movement of the camera in a film.

The audio-visual quality of Gothic novels is heightened by their nature of romances of sensations. The sensational descriptions rapidly escalate into all-involving insights, where the deep auditory and visual sensibility of the writer reawakens the perceptual senses of the readers in all their nuances. In this sense, the emphasis on mysterious and abrupt noises and on the contrast between light and darkness becomes not only an ingenious ploy to arouse feelings of persistent fear and tension in the reader but also, going beyond the merely narrative artifice, a means through which Gothic writers explored and pushed the limits of the written words in order to incorporate an audio-visual dimension within the verbal boundaries of language. For instance, this is the case in Oscar Wilde’s poignant description of Basil Hallward’s murder at the hands of Dorian Gray, in a sequence where the dim light of the candle preannounces and intensifies the ensuing visual and aural account of the homicide:

An exclamation of horror broke from the painter’s lips as he saw in the dim light the hideous face on the canvas grinning at him. […] Dorian Gray glanced at the picture, and suddenly an uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward came over him […]. There was a stifled groan, and the horrible sound of some one choking with blood. […] He could hear nothing, but the drip, drip on the threadbare carpet. […] The house was absolutely quiet. No one was about. For a few seconds he stood bending over the balustrade, and peering down into the black seething well of darkness (130-133).

The visual quality of Gothic narratives is transposed to great effect in Moore and O’Neill’s graphic narrative, in which the readers imagine sounds and movements by interpreting pictures, while the acoustic dimension is naturally more explicitly conveyed in Penny Dreadful TV series. As Rajewsky emphasises, “[just as a literary text can evoke or imitate specific elements or structures of film, music, theatre, etc., so films, theatrical performances, or other media products can constitute themselves in various complex ways in relation to another medium” (57). This aspect is crucial to identify the ways in which Penny Dreadful and The League position themselves in relation to the Gothic tradition.
Interestingly, at the end of the first volume of *The League*, Moore and O'Neill inserted a story within a story entitled “Allan and the Sundered Veil”, which focuses on Allan Quatermain’s vicissitudes before joining the crew of Victorian anti-heroes (155). From a diegetic point of view, the presence of this fairly common literary device acquires a further allusive meaning as it distinguishes itself from the rest of *The League* while establishing a parallel with the overarching narrative of the comic series. As remarked by Grünkemeier, this black and white story stands “apart from the rest of the graphic novel, which is printed in colour and organised as sequential art” (262) and serves simultaneously as a sort of prequel to the League’s adventures and as a prophetic insight into their subsequent quests. The interpolation of this story accentuates the blurred temporal frames of this graphic novel: in Jones’ words, such a digression provides the readers with a “‘mise-en-abyme’, in which we read Allan encountering a prophecy information that actually belongs to the reader’s reading past” (117). This temporal displacement underscores the generic features of *The League* and charges the series with a Gothic sense of predestination and doom, foreshadowing the Martian invasion of the following volume and underlining the inevitability of this prophetic vision.

Above and beyond this aspect, what is striking from a strictly visual point of view is the similarity between the first page of ‘Allan and the Sundered Veil’ and *Varney the Vampire; or, the Feast of Blood*, with regard to the collocation of the illustration and the overall arrangement of the page, a visual prompt which corroborates Moore and O'Neill’s intention to repurpose the structure of nineteenth-century serialised fiction and to combine it with a sumptuous writing style, reminiscent of Arthur Machen’s suspenseful prose. Furthermore, this story is preceded by the insertion of an authentic penny-dreadful advertisement on the previous page, which further highlights Moore and O'Neill’s deliberate process of media combination (Nevin Heroes & Monsters 99). Not coincidentally, then, this six-part narrative mimics the layout of Victorian penny dreadfuls and boys’ periodicals in terms of design and serial structure, working as an outstanding intermedial reference and functioning as a penny-dreadful mirror to *The League's* narrative as a whole.

The feature of the Gothic as a self-aware “writing of excess” (Botting Gothic 1) marked by what Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik defined as an “emphasis on fakery in the representation of extremes of feeling and experience” (11), can be easily retraced in the fourth and in the final episodes of *Penny Dreadful*’s first season. The presence of intermedial references such as the “Grand Guignol Britannia” in *Penny Dreadful* allows for a consideration of its melodramatic derivative features and for a broader discussion on the role of theatre as a form of mainstream entertainment in the Victorian society.

The Grand Guignol is an explicit reference to the Parisian ‘Theatre of Horror’ founded in 1897, so-called for its spectacularised prominence of “explicit violence and blood-curdling terror” (Hand and Wilson “The Grand-Guignol: Aspects of Theory and Practice” 266). Sarah Winter, in her insightful discussion on “the explorative […] depiction of Victorian theatre” in *Penny Dreadful*, interprets the presence of the Grand Guignol as a “historical inaccuracy” (Sky's Penny Dreadful and the Victorian Theatre). If it is true that this reference within the London setting of *Penny Dreadful* stands out as a blatant anachronism, as the Grand Guignol actually made its debut in London only in the following decades, reaching its climax in the 1920s (Hand and Wilson London's Grand Guignol and the Theatre of Horror), it should nonetheless be underlined that this presence in Logan’s re-imagined nineteenth century reflects the tendency of neo-Victorian fiction to appropriate past circumstances in a non-chronological fashion. Besides this neo-Victorian trait, it is interesting to note that the presence of the Grand Guignol within the TV series functions as a nod not solely to the countless theatrical adaptations of Gothic novels in the nineteenth century but also to the consumerist and escapist habit of viewing overtly melodramatic and gruesome performances on stage.

Martha Vicinus observes that melodrama “refers pejoratively to an excess of emotion [and] excessively simplified characters who appeal to each other and the audience by means of [...] remarkable and improbable coincidences” (127). The melodramatic mode in *Penny Dreadful* is epitomised by the “improbable coincidence” (Vicus 127) that allows several of its main characters to appear at the same time in the same place in the act of watching a theatrical performance in the Grand Guignol Britannia, entitled *The Transformed Beast* (Logan “Demi-Monde” *Penny Dreadful: The Complete First Season* 33:44-36:09). By joining together characters of diverse social classes, this plot digression echoes the “range and diversity” (of the theatre’s audience in Victorian times and its function as “a great leveller” (Gosling 154) for its spectatorship, in that it was able to spark the imagination of its viewers regardless of their origins. This performance is exaggeratedly dramatic because it rebounds the excesses of feeling typical of Victorian melodrama and it enhances the awareness of the artificiality of *Penny Dreadful’s* narrative. In other words, in a manner similar to Moore’s “Allan and the Sundered Veil”, the episode of the Grand Guignol creates a distorted *mise en abyme*: the off-stage characters witness a horrific spectacle that simulates the contemporary audience’s act of watching their frightening stories in the television medium, in a theatrical triumph of exaggerated violence and hyperbolic “emotional responses” (Howells...
23) which are transposed from page to stage and from stage to scream (Logan "Demi-Monde" min. 36:09 Penny Dreadful: The Complete First Season).

This narrative artifice implicitly draws attention to the infinite capacity of Gothic stories to resurface across the centuries in various media, and creates an effect of "palimpsestuous intermediality", that is to say, "a multiplication of media layers" (Borbála 13-14) through which the audience can observe simultaneously the presence of more than one media. Moreover, this multi-layered intermediality produces uncanny nuances: as Borbála convincingly argues, the doubling of the medium in which the narrative takes place is the "major source of intermedial uncanniness: it suddenly emerges, obstructs the medium in question, and apparently vanishes to return even more intensely. It generates a sense of déjà vu [...] since it reminds [the readers/spectators] of the medium referred to"(14).

Such a theoretical discussion perfectly encapsulates the effects achieved by the insertion of the Grand Guignol Britannia theatre in Penny Dreadful, as this intermedial reference suddenly suspends the audience's tension and at the same time exposes the constructedness of the TV series. Furthermore, the main characters of the show will actually physically return to this location in a literal coup de théâtre in the final episode of the series, in which one of the leading characters, Ethan, reveals himself to be a werewolf, exactly as the murderous protagonist of 'The Transformed Beast' that Ethan himself was watching on the Grand Guignol's stage. The conclusive words of the play, then, eerily preannounce the werewolf's carnage at the end of the first season: "there cannot be a happy end, for claw will slash and tooth will rend" (Logan "Demi-Monde" min. 36:09; "Grand Guignol" min. 48:10 Penny Dreadful: The Complete First Season).

The concepts of Gothic intertextuality and intermediality in Penny Dreadful and in The League emerge preponderantly in the fictional development of their main characters. It does not come unnoticed that the "central protagonists of the stories are extraordinary and therefore marginalised figures, social outsiders [...] or Gothic monsters" (Domsch 98). Yet in The League their monstrosity is subverted by the combination of their stories with the overarching superhero narrative, a distinctive convention of the comic medium. This combination is fascinating as well as paradoxical and determines the often-ironic flavour of the narrative. As will be shown in the following chapter, a similar subversion interestingly takes place in Penny Dreadful, a monster drama brimming with sensationalism and Gothic tropes.

Chapter Three

Gothic monstrosity: (re)visions of excess and trauma

The monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment – of a time, a feeling, and a place. [...] The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read.

--J. J. Cohen, Monster Theory: Reading Culture (4)

Monsters have constantly haunted Gothic narratives and their contemporary retellings and Logan’s and Moore’s series are no exception: indeed, both narratives are plagued with symbols of death, monstrous deformities and grotesque excess. Almost echoing Angela Carter’s claim mentioned at the very beginning of this study, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen starts his captivating Monster Theory by stating: “We live in a time of monsters” (vii). Gathering a collection of essays on vampires, aliens, dinosaurs, cripples, hermaphrodites and drawing on Kristeva’s notion of “abjection” (Powers of Horror), Cohen proposes a convincing reading of monsters as “a mode of cultural discourse” (viii) and expression of repressed anxieties.

In line with Cohen’s theory, in this final chapter the Gothic monstrosity embroiled in The League and Penny Dreadful will be further explored by revisiting the fictional development of their Gothic characters. Firstly, the monsters that populate these series will be dissected and linked to the Gothic as a literary tradition of monstrous excess. Secondly, by exploring the centrality of the female characters, the concept of monstrous femininity will be examined in relation to the Female Gothic tradition and the Victorian twofold representation of women either as femmes fatales or “angel[s] in the house” (Fantina 132), symbols of “innocent and unchallenging womanhood” (Brantlinger 12).

3.1 Super-heroic villains and depictions of monstrous excess

If the conjunction of the monsters and heroes’ narratives constitutes a shared element between the graphic novel and the TV series, what is the function embodied by these marginalised monsters, brought to the foreground to play the part of heroes? The term ‘monster’ works as a particularly allusive word, if one considers the possible implications of its Latin etymology from the verbs monstrare, ‘to show’, and
monere, ‘to warn’. Yet do these deconstructed heroic monsters continue to perform this warning function? And if they still do, what anxieties do they forebode and what dangers are they trying to warn of?

Poore suggests that there are affinities between Logan’s and Moore’s series “in the unifying concept of a team of Victorian anti-heroes with supernatural powers brought together for a special purpose” (67). However, rather than commenting further on the nature of these similarities, Poore goes on claiming that parallels can be drawn between Penny Dreadful and The Addams Family (1991) for their mutual emphasis on a family plot. Such a comparison seems rather far-fetched, since Penny Dreadful’s solemn approach to Gothic classics can barely be aligned with the purely humourist eccentricity of Morticia and Gomez’s family. Moreover, besides the evident similarities, there are also substantial differences between Logan’s and Moore’s approaches to the representations of monstrosity and heroism in the two media.

The monstrous body is conventionally represented as a site of radical otherness, of physical as well as psychological deterioration, by tradition counterpoised to the ideal of extreme beauty and perfection of the hero, “a creature gifted with superhuman intellectual and physical powers” (Eco “The Myth of Superman” 14-22). In Logan’s and Moore’s series the superhero’s powers are entrenched in the monster’s extreme otherness. The villainess is then projected onto other wicked characters, a shift that allows the iconic monsters to gain a heroic status.

The super-heroic monstrosity of Penny Dreadful’s characters is at once summarized in the words pronounced by Logan’s Dorian Gray: “To be different. To be powerful. Is that not a divine gift?” (Logan “What Death can Join Together” Penny Dreadful : First Season, emphasis added). In its original narrative Frankenstein’s creature is frequently addressed as a “daemon” (Shelley 25): undoubtedly, this recurring epithet is not a casual word-choice, since the term ‘daemon’, while evoking the modern acceptance of devilish creature, etymologically underpins the divine nature of this creation. Frankenstein’s creature is, in other words, at the same time evil and good, diabolical and divine. Logan’s re-interpretation of Victor Frankenstein brings to the foreground the torments of Shelley’s doctor, a man who tragically attempts to play God, while the Creature becomes a simultaneously romanticized and disillusioned product of nineteenth-century scientific experimentations. Ironically, in season one and season two of Penny Dreadful the Creature will end up working in a theatre and in a wax museum, both illusory and artificial small-scale representations of the world that mirror the artificiality of his own nature.

The presence of key Gothic features such as the “doubling, a psychoanalytic perspective, and an emphasis on family tension” (Hopkins 148), are easily identifiable in Penny Dreadful. Indeed, the “special purpose” (Poore 67) that prompts the main plot of the first season is the attempt to save Mr Murray’s daughter, Mina, from vampiric forces. The efforts of the Victorian monstrous team converge to this aim. The afterlife of iconic Gothic monsters, such as the vampire, the werewolf and the demon, turns the protagonists of Penny Dreadful into extremely alluring creatures with hidden skeletons in the closet, giving way to a modern tendency well-identified by Botting:

Monstrous figures are now less often terrifying objects of animosity expelled in the return to social and symbolic equilibrium. Instead, they retain a fascinating, attractive appeal: no longer objects of hate or fear, monstrous others become sites of identification, sympathy, desire, and self-recognition (“Aftergothic: Consumption, Machines, and Black Holes” 286).

Yet, despite this sympathetic portrayal, their otherness is not emptied of its outrageous burden, and it is precisely this peculiar characterisation that renders Penny Dreadful’s team alluring, albeit with various and questionable levels of compelling representation. For instance, the philosophic depth of The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891) is hardly preserved in Logan’s delineation of the eponymous protagonist, a portrayal which seems chiefly concerned with the exploitation and spectacleization of Dorian’s deadly sins. Repurposing the fin-de-siècle cult of individuality, Logan’s Dorian decidedly seems less a Victorian dandy than a twenty-first-century “unaging playboy” (Gosling 111) and appears to be more in line with Oliver Parker’s recent film adaptation Dorian Gray (2009) than with Oscar Wilde’s original text, whose subtle wit seems to get lost in the process of appropriation.

Moore and O’Neill’s approach to The Picture of Dorian Gray is entirely different. Indeed, although film director Stephen Norrington decided to include Dorian Gray in the unsuccessful film adaptation of the graphic novel released in 2003, The League did not feature originally Dorian Gray as one of its leading members. Nonetheless, Wilde’s novel makes its appearance in the comic series in the form of two humorous paintings at the end of The League: Volume I, both entitled “Basil Hallward’s Painting by Numbers No.1 Dorian Gray” (Moore and O’Neill 186-187). Moore and O’Neill subvert the ultimately ephemeral ideal of eternal youth rooted in Wilde’s novel by reducing Dorian’s portrait to a mere ‘painting by numbers’. Grünkemeier, referring to the first illustration, commented that “[b]ecause of the paint-by-
numbers technique, the portrait becomes a reproducible and commercial piece of art” which leads to “confront the relationship between fine art and mass print culture” (263). In other words, readers are invited to reflect once more on the contraposition between creativity and repetition, high-brow and low-brow. Moreover, it can be noted that the painting-by-number game is followed by specific humorous instructions on how to colour each space, including indications such as “light anemia”, “human flesh (smoked),” “pustule yellow” (Moore and O’Neill *The League: Volume I* 189) which clearly suggest an intertextual sarcastic engagement with Wilde’s narrative of mental and corporeal deformation, for Dorian’s “very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead” (Wilde 119). Likewise, O'Neill’s second illustration mimics the *fin-de-siècle* paranoia related to the contemporary ideas of psychological corruption and subsequent physical decay, albeit ironically deconstructing and reframing it.

*The League’s* playful vein converges in Moore and O’Neill’s interest in depicting figures of monstrous excess, as in their delineation of Mr Hyde. The *alter ego* of Dr Jekyll presents clear caricatural connotations: the ape-man allusion to Darwinian (d)evolutionary anxiety which is inspired by its literary source is visually hyperbolised by his massive, uncontrollable gorilla-proportions, while the character’s fragile and literally explosive nature is narratively rendered by stressing the instability of his unpredictable transformations (*The League: Volume I*, Issue III: “Mysteries of the East” 67). This depiction brings to the foreground the subtext of its original novel, in a frenzy of ferocity that “[breaks] out of all bounds” and almost exceeds the page frame:

> And then all of a sudden he broke out in a great flame of anger, stamping with his foot, brandishing the cane, and carrying on (as the maid described it) like a madman. [...] Mr Hyde broke out of all bounds and clubbed him to the earth. And next moment, with ape-like fury, he was trampling his victim under foot [...]. At the horror of these sights and sounds, the maid fainted (Stevenson 20-21, emphasis added).

Moore’s Hyde is suspended between the horrid and the laughable, aimed at simultaneously shocking and amazing, and therefore reflecting “the emotions of terror and laughter” (Miles 2) typical of Gothic fiction. The gorilla-characterisation of Mr Hyde seems an ingenious nod to Faustin Bettbeder’s satirical illustration (1874) which shows an animalised Darwin sitting on a rock next to an ape while holding a mirror. This cartoon, in Sam George’s words, “is symptomatic [...] of wider anxieties around our kinship with the soulless ‘Other’” (62), an anxiety which was deeply felt in Stevenson’s novel.

In this triumph of bodily excess, Hyde’s representation falls into the description of the grotesque as postulated by Bakhtin: “[t]he grotesque is looking for that which protrudes from the body, all that seeks to go out beyond the body’s confines” (*Rabelais and His World* 316). Bakhtin’s emphasis on “protruding eyes” (*Rabelais and His World* 316) in the creation of the grotesque effect tangibly emerges in the way O’Neill’s graphic imagination obscures part of Jekyll’s face and zooms on one of his bulging eyes in the moment of his metamorphosis (Moore and O’Neill *The League: Volume I*, Issue IV: “Gods of Annihilation” 88), a visual cue that recurs throughout the comic series and that graphically expresses the traditional psychological dualism at the heart of Victorian Gothic novels. Halberstam argues that “the grotesque effect of Gothic is achieved through a kind of transvestism, a dressing up that reveals itself as costume” (60). This is apparent as much in Stevenson’s original novel, where the doctor “was able to wear the countenance of Jekyll” (64, emphasis added) as in O’Neill’s graphic afterlife, where, turning upside down the human-monster dichotomy, Mr Hyde is dressed like a gentleman in his last march towards death (Moore and O’Neill *The League: Volume II*, Issue VI: “You Should See Me Dance the Polka...” 142).

If “the hybrid status is an evolutionary leap forward that challenges the stasis of class ad social structures” (Graham), then Mr Hyde as a monster and as a hero questions the concept of hybridity as a source of social corruption, since in the fictional dimension of *The League* it is actually his beastly force to save the establishment of the British Empire. As a result, his portrayal subverts the original meaning of the term ‘gentleman’, which Moore draws from Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885), and corresponds to a twenty-first-century ruthless version of what Burrow defines as “the gentleman barbarian” (74). The Manichaean opposition between civilized versus barbarian that marks Haggard’s novel is brought to its extreme in this monstrous character that, despite being brute and beastly, is still capable of self-sacrifice: indeed, he will die fighting against the Martians to prevent the apocalyptic climax of their invasion.

Significantly, before his physical disintegration, Mr Hyde is depicted while humming the song “You Should See Me Dance the Polka” (Moore and O’Neill *The League: Volume II* 142), an intermedial allusion to Victor Fleming’s film adaptation *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1941). Nevins underlines how Dr Jekyll, played in the film by Spencer Tracy, sings this song before his metamorphosis into Mr Hyde (*A Blazing World* 73). In a similar way, the name chosen for the werewolf character in *Penny Dreadful*, Ethan Lawrence Talbot, is an intermedial hint at George Waggner’s *The Wolf Man* (1941), a film produced by Universal Horror, whose
protagonist was named Larry Talbot. His physical transformation into a werewolf reveals visual similarities with its filmic antecedent and its subsequent prolific adaptations, such as the latest The Wolfman (2010) by Joe Johnston.

In a manner similar to Dr Jekyll, the werewolf’s curse stands for a metaphor of “descent into degeneracy and doom” (Hand “Paradigms of Metamorphosis and Transmutation”). Ethan’s dissoluteness is explicitly rendered in Logan’s interpretation, which heightens his homosexual instincts in a twist that aims at being transgressive but inevitably falls into the stereotypical depiction of homosexuality as a perversion. Nonetheless, it cannot be excluded that such a depiction might be deliberately consistent with the recreation of the nineteenth-century spirit, as in this period “all pleasures that [did] not lead directly to the propagation of the species […] were labeled perversions” (Gigante 19-20).

3.2 Monstrous femininity and traumatic pasts

An effective way to connect the satirical representations of monstrous excess to the last perspective of analysis is by observing James Gillray’s Tales of Wonder. As reported in the epigraph, the painting is an “attempt to describe the effects of the Sublime & Wonderful […] dedicated to M. G. Lewis”. This caricatural portrait recalls at once several crucial features of the Gothic genre: firstly, Gothic narratives aimed to provoke their readers with an escalation of emotions, from wonder to indignation, shocking them with political, religious, social transgressions; secondly, the Gothic immediately attracted since its origins a satirical response, which allows for an identification of stances of continuity with the parodist practices witnessed in Moore’s graphic novel; thirdly, it can be noticed that in the early nineteenth century the reading of Gothic lurid tales was a social practice involving mainly women.

The role of the female audience is particularly interesting as “women were not simply consumers of Gothic fiction, but also the producers of it” (Wright Gothic Fiction 126). At the core of Becker’s Gothic Forms of Feminine Fictions lies the idea that the Gothic is “so powerful because it is so feminine” (2). Although Becker’s discourse on Gothic and gender does not draw on the traditional distinction between Male and Female Gothic and tends to be unclear when it comes to define the spectrum of neo-Gothic generic forms, her gendered reading of classic and postmodern Gothic texts through the key terms of ‘transgression’ and ‘excess’ proves to be particularly illuminating when contextualising The League and Penny Dreadful through a gender perspective. Fin-de-siècle Gothic classics were chiefly male-centred novels, where women often were secondary characters, silenced, mistreated or even totally absent, as in Stevenson’s Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, where the lack of female characters prompted convincing queer readings of the text (Ruddick 191). By contrast, the early nineteenth-century Female Gothic literary thread mainly revolved around the vicissitudes of fictional women, who were nonetheless “constantly threatened by emotional and physical assault” (Howells 9). In the Female Gothic, a term coined by Ellen Moers with reference to Ann Radcliffe’s passive heroines (Moers 99-110), women were conventionally wedged between the pure and the demoniacal: if they did not conform to the ideals of purity and innocence, then they were evil and pernicious. This contrast corresponds to the tendency of the Gothic genre “to create polarities: extreme good is opposed to extreme evil, extreme innocence to extreme power” (Hopkins xii). Gothic classics dealt, in the end, with this forced bipolarity which, as the nineteenth century progressed, incorporated the “Victorian gender ideology [as] a site of internal contradiction”, where women were either “dangerously defined by their bodies [or] ethereal, essentially disembodied creatures” (Hurley 10).

This dichotomy is simultaneously reflected and challenged by the centrality of Mina Murray and Vanessa Ives in Moore’s and Logan’s series. Their portrayals present strong visual and fictional resemblances and stimulates a reflection on the (neo-)Victorian representations of female sexuality and monstrosity. The stories of Moore’s Mina and Logan’s Vanessa are unsurprisingly intermingled with plotlines derived from Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1897), as vampires, among all monsters, are the ones that most effectively incarnate the “nocturnal glamour of transgressive sexuality” (Ruddick 200). However, while at the end of Dracula the Victorian societal norm is restored through the marriage between Mina and Jonathan Harker, neither Moore’s Mina nor Logan’s Vanessa are represented as socially and sexually normative, in that they both fail to adhere to the roles that Victorian society would have expected them to perform. Moore’s Mina joins the League after her divorce from Harker, therefore disclaiming the indispensability of marriage and embodying a scornful denial of what Gorsky calls the “patriarchal domesticity” (18) in fin-de-siècle literature. Vanessa’s portrayal condenses the repressed nineteenth-century ideas concerning sexuality and gender, which Foucault notably theorised in his speculation on repression as the “fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality” (5).

As Murphy caustically notes, it seems that “Logan has just finished working his way through a beginner’s guide to the female gothic” (145). Yet Vanessa, played by the actress Eva Green, is not a mere damsel in distress, although the TV show consciously plays with this literary tradition. She is the most tormented character, suspended between good and evil, sensual and sexualised. Vanessa’s storyline is chiefly
concerned with the exploration of her inner past. In a long flashback in the season two episode “The Nightcomers”, her complex relationship with the Cut-Wife (Logan Penny Dreadful : The Complete Second Season), a witch, discloses how at the core of Vanessa’s monstrosity lies the lurking presence of a hidden trauma. Vanessa unleashes the weight of this transgression in an impetus of rage towards the patriarchal figure of the series, the British explorer Lord Malcolm:

An unforgivable transgression has marked me for life. You think you’ve suffered. […] You think you’ve walked on corpses. Spread them from here to the horizon and I have walked further! You weak, foul, lustful, vainglorious man. How dare you presume to speak to me of death? (Logan “Closer than Sisters” Penny Dreadful: The Complete First Season)

The episode “Closer than Sisters” begins with Vanessa reading the letters that she never sent to her friend Mina, rekindling the memory of how she discovered the adulterous relationship between her own mother and Mina’s father, Lord Malcolm. The adulterous twist and the presence of a primordial sin perpetrated by an unfaithful mother is a recurrent trope of Gothic novels such as Charlotte Dacre’s Zofloya; or The Moor (1806), where the inherited sin prepares the ground for a crescendo of transgressions that lead up to the inexorable downfall of the female protagonist. In Penny Dreadful, this shocking discovery causes the rupture between the two friends, as Vanessa consequently betrays Mina and engages in a sexual intercourse with her fiancé. The idea of feminine duplicity is plainly encoded onto the screen, where the two female characters are explicitly counterposed: the contrast between darkness and purity is enhanced by the blatant symbolism of their respective costumes (Logan “Closer than Sisters” 45:20). It becomes clear that Logan is providing a scathing revision of the traditional Female Gothic opposition between the chaste virginal made and the inherently evil woman, who lacks self-control and is driven by erotic impulses. However, the protagonist of the narrative is the latter, rather than the former.

Curiously, both Logan’s Vanessa and Moore’s Mina are frequently portrayed while holding a cigarette, a social practice which was a transgressive “emblem of the New Woman” (Richardson and Willis 22), a term which became popular in the late nineteenth century to define an emerging type of woman with distinctly proto-feminist values, who rapidly became a social “construct” (Pykett 137) and “a body and a fashion system” (Pykett 138). Laura Hilton convincingly argues that Stoker’s female vampires can be interpreted as a “negative representation of the […] sexual equality sought by the New Woman” (“Reincarnating Mina Murray” 198), while Stoker’s Mina works simultaneously as a traditional and progressive representation of Victorian womanhood. Such a paradoxically positive and misogynist view is summarised in the praise words pronounced by Van Helsing in Dracula: “Ah, that wonderful Madam Mina! She has man’s brain—a brain that a man should have were he much gifted—and woman’s heart” (Stoker 207). Interestingly, every time Moore’s Mina exchanges contacts with other characters in the comic series, the frame of the speech bubbles is presented in the form of letters (Moore and O’Neill The League: Volume I, Issue I: “Empire Dreams” 31), a visual and narrative ploy that stresses the intertextual and intermedial relationship between The League and Dracula, a novel which is intrinsically intermedial as it is entirely built on various narratives and media, such as letters, telegrams, transcripts, journals, which project onto this supernatural story a deeper sense of veracity.

Hilton, commenting on Moore’s Mina, alludes to “the suggestion of transgression through her scarf and the scars it hides” (“Reincarnating Mina Murray” 200). This observation, however, does not recognise fully the symbolism behind the scarf as a distinctly Gothic object, as it both conceals and reveals a deeper truth about Mina’s character and her traumatic past. Indeed, her scarf covers the wounds left on her neck by Dracula (Moore and O’Neill The League: Volume II, Issue V: “Red in Tooth and Claw” 108) and consequently presents palpable affinities with Gothic objects such as the mask and the veil, in that they “may reveal by concealing”, emphasising the “problematic relationship between surface and depth” (Smith, Warwick, and Cavallaro 133). Her scarf symbolically encapsulates the Freudian concept of unheimlich, the unfamiliar and thus uncanny. This term contains within itself the word heimlich, something which is ‘concealed’, kept away from sight (Freud 76-86). As such, the uncanny delineates what was once recognisable and then elapsed, re-emerging from the forgotten paths of the unconscious and therefore harking back to the concept of unresolved trauma. The suspense built around Mina’s mysterious scarf will be released once she concedes herself to Allan Quatermain, who craves to see her hideous wounds: this scene summons the “latent paradox of a vision that is attracted to what is unbearably repulsive”, an idiosyncratic feature of “Gothic visuality” (McCarty 341).

Both Moore’s Mina and Logan’s Vanessa attempt to repress their sexual instincts but fail to do so and bear the marks of their transgressions. They are concurrently femmes fatales and sexual objects, tragic victims of their own destiny and monstrous predators. In this sense, Moore’s and Logan’s modern re-interpretations paradoxically disrupt and perpetuate the irreconcilable contrast at the heart of Female Gothic novels and the stereotypical Victorian representations of womanhood.
The analysis of Gothic monstrosity in The League and Penny Dreadful has demonstrated how these series re-appropriate nineteenth-century Gothic monsters in order to re-model the concept of monstrosity as a powerful vehicle to convey controversial cultural discourses on sexual transgression, psychological duplicity and social deviance. Gothic classic monsters occupy a liminal space not only because they keep reappearing in different media but also because they are constantly on the verge of crossing a threshold between different binary categories. The sexualised vampiric femmes fatales are both victims and predators of their male counterparts, Dr Jekyll is a man and yet a beast, Frankenstein is alive and yet dead, the werewolf is an inextricable amalgam of humanity and animality.

Schneider argues that “[t]he other, the monster, the villain, is frequently found within the Gothic subject, an irrepressible part of one self, which is nevertheless alien and threatening” (59). If this statement holds true with reference to the original stories of nineteenth-century Gothic doppelgängers, a significant shift takes place in their retellings. Indeed, monsters are no longer aliens to themselves, they are the self. Rather than performing the function of antagonists, they become the subjects of the narrative. In blurring the eerie line dividing hero from monster, prey from predator, these neo-Gothic narratives suggest that monstrosity lies within every single subject and emerges as “the hybrid image of our current crisis” (Gibson 244), the contemporary unfathomable fragmentation of the self, therefore perfectly enclosing what Kohl and Gutleben defined as the “omnipresent traumatised and (self-)alienated subject of postmodernity — a subject radically ‘othered’ and ‘other’ even to itself” (Neo-Victorian Tropes of Trauma 2).

The intermedial layers that conflate into the portrayal of The League’s and Penny Dreadful’s Gothic characters prove that these monstrous afterlives are the result of a continuous process of adaptation of Gothic classics which took place throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, involving various media. In this sense, filmic adaptations of Gothic novels undeniably constituted a portentous “cultural echo chamber” (King 56), as they reverberated and amplified the silent sounds of their written pages, influencing the process of remediation of these iconic figures into subsequent Gothic cultural products. Thus, The League’s and Penny Dreadful’s monsters “refashion older media” (Bolter and Grusin 15) to serve the styles and conventions of their own media. In light of these remarks, it can be posited that Shelley’s Frankenstein, Stevenson’s Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Gray, Stoker’s Dracula “hide in the layers of memory disguised as the individual’s or the collective unconscious” (Calvino 4). In other words, Gothic classics have entered a mythical sphere and their ensuing proliferation in graphic novels and TV series is the result of their cultural impact on contemporary mass-media culture.

**Conclusion**

The merging of the Gothic tradition with the narratological and aesthetic features of the graphic novel as a sequential art and of the television series as an on-going narrative form in The League and Penny Dreadful has demonstrated how the Gothic exceeded the verbal limits of its canonical literary forms to contaminate the contemporary serialised media. The neo-Victorian Gothic monsters in The League and Penny Dreadful are, for all intents and purposes, intertextual and intermedial monsters. Their intrinsic hybridity conflates into their cultural liminality and in their capability to resurface in different narratives, re-proposing the anxieties of the Victorian era through a postmodern perspective.

Despite displaying distinct aesthetic approaches and inhabiting different media, The League and Penny Dreadful capitalise in a similar way on previous low-brow Gothic forms such as penny dreadfuls, melodrama and twentieth-century horror movies in order to dismantle and recompose them into new hybrid products. In this blending process, both series share the tendency to mix low-brow entertaining pleasures with high-brow literary references, and by doing so they are able to captivate simultaneously a mainstream readership/spectatorship and a more sophisticated audience.

The term intermediality “stresses the idea of a message perpetually crossing the boundaries separating media [...], never attaining an ultimate shape, and living as many lives as the number of the media crossed” (Punzi 10). The multiple intermedial and intertextual references to their original Gothic novels, as well as to the subsequent filmic adaptations, demonstrate that the neo-Victorian Gothic monstrous afterlives in The League and Penny Dreadful have lived “as many lives as the number of the media” (Punzi 10) they have crossed. In other words, nineteenth-century Gothic archetypal characters have undergone a process of continuous and unstoppable “mediamorphosis”, borrowing Fidler’s neologism, because they are particularly inclined to adapt to the current consumerist desires and postmodern fears, with all the Darwinian metaphoric implications that the term brings about.

After the publication of Matthew Lewis’s The Monk (1796), a Gothic novel followed by a storm of criticism not only for its overtly scandalous subject but also because of its deliberate appropriations of earlier French and German romances, a reviewer commented:
The great art of writing consists in selecting what is most stimulant from the works of our predecessors, and in uniting the gathered beauties in a new whole, more interesting than the tributary models. [...] All invention is but new combination. To invent well is to combine the impressive (Wright “European Disruptions of the Idealized Woman” 39)

In a manner similar to the bombastic descriptions of sensational depravities in The Monk which were inspired by previous literary models, the League and Penny Dreadful “combine the impressive” (Wright “European Disruptions” 39) capital of nineteenth-century Gothic landmarks by recurring respectively to satirised visual depictions of monstrous excess, as Dr Jekyll’s gargantuan proportions and Dorian Gray’s reduction to a painting by numbers have demonstrated, and by putting into play a more solemn romantised and sexually charged performance of Gothic monsters, as in the case of Logan’s re-interpretation of Shelley’s, Wilde’s and Stoker’s classics.

Ultimately, what renders The League and Penny Dreadful neo-Victorian Gothic mashups is their cannibalistic appropriation of, and subversive engagement with, a Gothic polarised imagery, combined with a nostalgic view of the Victorian past. The cultural heritage and mythical resonance of Gothic classics allow their monstrous figures to reappear in diverse forms without ceasing to entertain the audience. Despite their clear consumerist nature, the imaginative artistic expressions inspired by Gothic classics attract, and deserve, scholarly critical attention. Although the scope of this study has been delimited to two contemporary media products, further lines of research could be developed. By narrowing down the spectrum of critical analysis, the role of specific objects within original and derivative Gothic narratives may be further explored through the lenses of nineteenth-century and contemporary material cultures. Additionally, a wider investigation on the Gothic’s textual strategies of cannibalisation may lead to a more in-depth study on the evolution of Gothic fiction, including in this research the earlier Gothic chapbooks and blue books and less well-known literary and non-literary works that fall under this unstable generic category.

It can be concluded that the endless repetition of Gothic characters, themes and clichés witnessed in The League and Penny Dreadful does not decree the creative death of this genre but rather represents a return to life of the Gothic towards new, intriguing and distinctly postmodern directions, proving once again its richness and fertility, for “there remains much to be excavated from Gothic romances of the past, and much to be discovered in the Gothic’s continued displacements and transformations” (Wright Gothic Fiction 151).

Notes

1 The term ‘graphic novel’ brings forth a lively debate on the current attempts to dignify comics by aligning them to the ‘high-brow’ flavour of the novel. Scholars address the The League alternatively as a ‘comic series’ and a ‘graphic novel’, since the first three volumes were originally released in serial format, while The Black Dossier was published as a single book. Thus, there is no agreement with regard to the most appropriate terminology to adopt. Going beyond the efforts to legitimate comics, in this dissertation I will employ the term ‘graphic novel’ when considering The League in its entirety. However, when emphasis is placed on its serial format, I will use the term ‘comic series’. For the debate on comics and graphic novels, see Chute (452-465).

2 Original text: ‘[…] il modo in cui ognuna delle posizioni critiche presentate concepisca il gotico come cifra della contraddizione e della trasformazione; un genere composto ed instabile sorto di volta in volta per dar conto dell’intangibile spazio di tensione tra paura e desiderio e più specificamente, tra l’ansia per il caos derivato dalla distruzione del vecchio ordine e la pulsione di rinascita del cambiamento.’ My translation.

3 The storyline of Stevenson’s Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde has been added to this Gothic mashup in the third season of Penny Dreadful, which is still on-going at the time of writing.


5 “I fumetti vittoriani potevano educare una generazione di ipocriti, quelli moderni alimentano una generazione di delinquenti.” My translation.
6 I am grateful to Benjamin Poore for having kindly given me access to the version of his article stored in the University of Sheffield, Leeds and York White Rose Research Repository <http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>.

7 Suffice it to mention the special issue devoted to steampunk fiction released in 2010, Steampunk, Science, and (Neo)Victorian Technologies, ed. by Rachel A. Bowser and Brian Croxall, in Neo-Victorian Studies 3.1 (2010). This journal is also currently curating the publication of another special issue on neo-Victorian films and TV series, Screening the Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, due 2017. Furthermore, at the time of writing, the editors of the upcoming volume Monster Media in their Historical Contexts are seeking to explore the interrelation between history and monster narratives, proving once again the ever-growing academic interest towards these subjects.

8 Sian MacArthur defines this generic thread as “a sub-genre of the Gothic, recognisable by its specific interest in science, industry and technology within a Gothic structure” (2).

9 For instance, William Hughes notes that “the Martians who figure in The War of the Worlds (1898) consume blood in a manner reminiscent of vampires” (219-220).

10 Since the graphic novel does not feature page numbers, I adopted Jess Nevins’ criteria for referencing purposes, counting the page numbers accordingly starting from the frontispiece.

11 In H. G. Wells’s words, “[T]he seeds which the Martians […] brought with them gave rise in all cases to red-coloured growths. […] I found it broadcast throughout the country, and especially wherever there was a stream of water” (168-169).

12 Although In Memoriam A.H.H. preceded the publication of Charles Darwin’s On the Origins of the Species (1859), Tennyson was deeply influenced by a previous work of natural history, Robert Chambers’ Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation (1844) (Birch 208).

13 A conspicuous amount of earlier Gothic novels are set outside Britain: to mention a few, Matthew Lewis’s The Monk (1796) is set in Spain, while Ann Radcliffe’s A Sicilian Romance (1790) and The Italian (1797) are set in Italy. This dislocation allowed the writers of the aforesaid novels to explore the exotic flavour of geographical areas commonly associated with dominant Catholicism and superstitious beliefs.

14 See the frontispiece and first page of Varney the Vampire; or the Feast of Blood in Humphrey Liu, The Varney Image Page: Images and Illustrations from Varney the Vampyre, “Cover Page” and “Chapter 1, Page 1.”

15 See Faustin Betbeder, ‘Charles Robert Darwin, as an ape, holds a mirror up to another ape’, originally published in The London Sketch Book (April 1874), Vol. 1. No. 4.

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