

Crossing Borders: Hospitality in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Florence Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire*

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In his essay on hospitality ([1969] 1973), Emile Benveniste shows how welcoming and reciprocity have their roots in words such as “guest”, “host”, “stranger” and “enemy”.¹ Jacques Derrida’s work *Of Hospitality* (2000) uses Benveniste’s study to reconsider a variety of political and ethical situations. Derrida raises the issue of what it means to welcome a guest and conceptualises hospitality as a question of what happens at the border, focusing on what marks the contact with the Other, the stranger and the foreigner. He maintains that hospitality signifies an *aporia* and demonstrates how the host’s identity is established at the very moment it dissolves. The law which governs the concept of hospitality, Derrida argues, appears as “paradoxical ... pervertible or perverting. It seems to dictate that absolute hospitality should break with the law of hospitality as right or duty” (2000, 25). Absolute hospitality requires that the host opens up their home and gives their place to the “Other”. In Derridean terms, this creates a bond that calls into question the very idea of guest

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and host as two distinct roles, and points to the “threshold” as a space that both unifies and separates them, simultaneously marking a passage and a boundary. Such an issue consequently raises the question: to whom does the threshold belong? This space which delineates the outside from the inside features a coming to terms between in-dwellers and out-dwellers, and becomes a metaphor for negotiation as well as for the state of uncertainty. This in-between space poses the issue of the margin and recalls the notion of liminality, a term first used by French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in *Rites of Passage* ([1909] 1960) and later theorised by British anthropologist Victor Turner (1969). Turner focused on the liminal stage in rites of passage, in which the initiates are removed and secluded from the rest of society, and become socially invisible entities who are “neither here nor there, they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial” (1969, 95).

The two novels analysed in this chapter, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and Florence Marryat’s *The Blood of the Vampire* (both published in 1897), question the concept of liminality and in-between spaces. They concentrate on vampires who constantly negotiate with people and places, transforming and being transformed by the rules and roles of hospitality. Both *Dracula* and *The Blood of the Vampire* offer an insight into the dynamics of hospitality and show how space, language, food and eating rituals play an important role in the interaction between guest and host. Through the focus on the vampires’ physical and metaphorical movements among different spaces and social communities, a migrant figure emerges—one who lives in endless tension between separation and aggregation.

“WELCOME TO MY HOUSE”

In his study of *Dracula*, Mark M. Hennelly Jr. (2005) discusses the idea of liminality. By reading Stoker’s novel through the works of van Gennep and Turner, Hennelly shows how Dracula’s liminal body, the one that literally stands “in the gap” when the door slowly opens at his castle (Stoker [1897] 2002, 72),² is the “border patroller” which “functions somewhere betwixt and between a blocking agent and a bridge” (Hennelly 2005).³ My analysis of Stoker’s novel draws on this reading but provides a more thorough examination of the complex bond between Jonathan and Dracula as guest and host.

Situated on the borders of three states, Dracula's castle highlights both the owner's and its own liminality (Davies 2004). To Englishman Jonathan Harker, the eager traveller to the country about which he has read so much, Transylvania represents a sort of "imaginative whirlpool" where every known superstition in the world "is gathered" (28). But as he gradually approaches the castle, this perception changes and the visitor's enthusiasm starts waning as he understands that there is something mysterious about his destination. "Must you go? ... Do you know what day it is?" (30), the lady at the hotel asks the puzzled traveller, making Jonathan feel that he is clearly in the wrong place at the wrong time. But although prelude to the castle is not comforting, Dracula's guest ignores the warning and ventures into the "vampire" space, encouraged by the unequivocal friendly words of his host's letter, which mark the first of a series of invitations *to come in*: "Welcome to the Carpathians. I am anxiously expecting you" (29).

The boundary between inside and outside is emphasised upon the arrival of Jonathan who, at the end of his journey in a calèche, is left in front of "a great door" (39), one of many—both open and closed—he will find along his way. Before he actually sees the inside of the castle, it is the exterior which strikes him: a ruined building, whose black windows project no light, and on whose broken walls runs "a jagged line against the moonlit sky" (39). Through Jonathan's gaze on the wall, the reader is given a close-up view of the entrance: "I stood close to a great door, old and studded with large iron nails, and set in a projecting doorway of massive stone. ... the stone was massively carved, but ... the carving had been much worn by time and weather" (38). The most disquieting aspect, however, is not that Jonathan is left all by himself but that he is unable to announce his presence. "Of bell or knocker there was no sign; through these frowning walls and dark window openings it was not likely that my voice could penetrate" (40). If the expected devices used to announce an outsider's arrival are missing, the newcomer cannot but become disoriented and disconcerted.

Jonathan's wait in front of Dracula's door seems endlessly protracted, raising fear and uncertainty about the kind of dwelling to which he has come. When the Englishman realises that he has reached an utterly unfamiliar place, his confidence—so far unwavering—starts to weaken. To emphasise this threshold moment, the process of opening the door takes an extensive amount of time: "I heard ... the sound of rattling chains and the clanking of massive bolts drawn back. A key was turned with

the loud grating noise of long disuse, and the great door swung back” (40).⁴ In his study of the kinaesthetic signs of the key, Gaston Bachelard observes that “the gesture of closing is always sharper, firmer and briefer than that of opening” (1994, 73). Such is the case with the castle Dracula’s door: the narrative pausing on the effort required to unlock it, an action which, we are given to understand, had not been performed for a long time. Nevertheless, for his expected guest, Count Dracula reinstates the function, and by opening the door, eliminates the partition that separates his domestic sphere from the outside world.

Entry into Dracula’s castle only occurs after negotiating with a physical embodiment of the host. What the guest first encounters is not the inside of the house but a full view of its owner. “Within, stood a tall old man, clean shaven save for a long white moustache, and clad in black from head to foot, without a single speck of colour about him anywhere” (40). In this speechless black and white picture, communication between guest and host first takes place by means of body language. Dracula motions his guest in “with a courtly gesture” of his hand and after this eloquent kinetic greeting, he speaks: “Welcome to my house! Enter freely and of your own will!” (40). Dracula’s act of welcoming requires more than simply letting someone in. The vampire’s invitation offers hospitality and wishes his guest well but makes it clear that entry is Jonathan’s free choice.

Significantly, by performing his welcoming in English, Dracula the host parts from his native tongue and adopts the language of his guest. In so doing, he surrenders part of his familiar identity in order to facilitate his guest’s entry, the result being inevitably “strange”, for the host’s few words immediately strike Jonathan, who notices that they are pronounced “in excellent English, but with a strange intonation” (40), Dracula the host making himself, in a rather uncanny way, the foreigner in his own house. In a reversal of roles, the narration here seems to answer the question of hospitality which Derrida argues is posed to a guest: “[M]ust we ask the foreigner to understand us, to speak our language?” (2000, 15). Dracula the host welcomes the foreigner without hesitation and offers him back his own language.

However, despite Count Dracula’s welcoming words, Jonathan perceives the sequence of ritual greeting acts expected of the host as lacking: “He made no motion of stepping to meet me, but stood like a statue, as though his gesture of welcome had fixed him into stone” (40–41). Indeed, it will take the guest’s crossing of the threshold,

a rite of passage in itself, to animate the “stone”: “The instant, however, that I had stepped over the threshold, he moved impulsively forward” (40). Although in *Dracula*, the reciprocal actions make possible the identities of the characters as guest and host, the successful negotiation of these identities does not lessen the Gothic atmosphere of the text. If Jonathan’s presence brings life to the “statue”, the animation of the Count’s body is distressing, for when the two shake hands (a further ritual gesture) the guest experiences both a vital “strength which made me wince” and a mortal touch: “it seemed as cold as ice—more like the hand of a dead than a living man” (40–41). The two similes in this early part of the novel prepare the reader for the story of the undead, and remind us that the Gothic happens when figures of speech (similes, metaphors, synecdoche) are taken literally.⁵

Having established physical contact, Dracula and Jonathan engage in further verbal interaction: “Welcome to my house. Come freely. Go safely; and leave some of the happiness you bring” (41). It sounds as if the Count’s guest, the invited stranger, is there to save the master. In Derridean terms, the master of the house who waits anxiously on the threshold for the guest to arrive expects his guest to be his “liberator” (2000, 121). Yet, although hospitality is given before the Other is identified, Jonathan’s actual entrance to the building is delayed by his revealing illocutionary speech act: “I said interrogatively:—‘Count Dracula?’” (41). In what may be read as a Derridean reversal, here the host, and not the guest, is requested to identify himself first, a requirement promptly fulfilled by both bodily and linguistic means: “He bowed in a courtly way as he replied:—‘I am Dracula; and bid you welcome, Mr. Harker, to my house’” (41). After the fourth pronouncement of the word “welcome”, a verbal interaction follows and, in a remarkable doubling of performative acts, the host and the guest exchange their names. At this point, the host should let his guest in, but Dracula’s body remains beyond the threshold and on “hold” as it were. Only Jonathan’s stepping over the threshold transforms Dracula, proving how much the host needs the guest. As Derrida asserts, the stranger saves the master and liberates the power of his host. “It is as if the master ... were prisoner of his place and power, of his ipseity, of his subjectivity” (2000, 123). Once animated, Dracula shows an ostensible commitment towards Jonathan:

“Come in; the night air is chill, and you must need to eat and rest.” ...
As he was speaking ... stepping out, took my luggage; he had carried it in

before I could forestall him. ... I protested but he insisted:—"Nay, sir, you are my guest. It is late and my people are not available. Let me see to your comfort myself." (41)

Dracula collects his guest's bags, guaranteeing that both the body and its belongings enter his space. He also makes sure that once invited in, the guest receives proper care. At this stage, the host's interaction with his guest remains ritualistic, as he "motions" Jonathan into a big, well-lit bedroom with a fireplace which the guest describes as "a welcome sight". Thus, the offer of a place to sleep, refreshment and food soon dissipates the guest's initial "doubts and fears" at the threshold, and as Jonathan notes, light, warmth and the Count's "courteous welcome" (41) lift the guest's uneasiness.

Although puzzled by Dracula's declining to eat with him, Jonathan is quickly restored and greedily seduced by the service and the food: "The Count himself came forward and took off the cover of a dish, and I fell to at once on an excellent roast chicken" (42). Franco Moretti's interpretation of the novel focuses on this detail (and on Dracula's making of the beds) and points out that Dracula's serving of food suggests that he lacks servants, a feature which makes him an anomalous aristocrat (1982, 73). I argue that the table manners reveal more than Dracula's material circumstances: his refusal to eat with Jonathan questions the rules of hospitality, rules that make it customary for hosts to not only offer but to share a meal with guests.

Initially, the guest's relationship with the house follows the set of codified hospitality rules. "I did not like to go about the castle until I asked the Count's permission" (44). After all, Dracula makes it clear that Jonathan is allowed to go anywhere he wishes, except where the doors are locked. Thus, despite the warm welcome, within the house the guest's movements are restricted. Like Harriet in *The Blood of the Vampire*, when Jonathan understands that as a guest he is required to follow the code of the host, his relationship with the host and the house alters. Although warned (or because of that), when Jonathan starts exploring the castle he is shocked to find that there are "doors, doors, doors everywhere and all locked and bolted" (51). Once Jonathan no longer feels at ease in his host's home, he expresses his wish to leave. Significantly, the Count does not stop him:

You English have a saying which is close to my heart, for its spirit is that which rules our boyars: "Welcome the coming, speed the parting guest." Come with me, my dear friend. Not an hour shall you wait in my home against your will, though sad am I at your going, and that you so suddenly desire it. Come! (72–73)

If the host underlines that both British and Eastern European hospitality requirements follow the same rules, based on the assumption that no imposition to stay is due on the guest as such, the sequence of Dracula's words here, a sort of echo of "will" and "come", functions as a significant reminder that Jonathan's decision to enter and exit the vampire's home is a free choice. In other words, Dracula allegedly offers his guest an option out. Yet, when the vampire shows the open door to his guest, the howling wolves outside convince Jonathan that he is not given real permission to leave. In a remarkable sequence of opening and closing of doors, grinding of keys and creaking of locks and bolts, the guest finally understands that he is a prisoner in the castle. But Jonathan's attempted trespass beyond the assigned territory forces Dracula to adapt and react to his unwilling guest. In fact, both characters are transformed by the presence of the other and along the narration they even change into, overlap and resemble each other. Dracula, for example, will use Jonathan's clothes and Jonathan will imitate Dracula and crawl down the castle in his attempt to escape.

"COME IN, MASTER!"

Significant reversal of roles occurs when Dracula arrives in England and himself becomes a stranger. Although the vampire manages to enter the country, he initially moves within limited spaces such as the cemetery (in Whitby) and the zoo (in London), the reason being, as Van Helsing explains, that a vampire cannot enter any private space "unless there be some one of the household who bid him to come; though afterwards he can come as he please" (244). Only when *he is called in* is the vampire allowed to enter.

But who calls the vampire in? In *Dracula*, the ambivalent role and function of the caller poses the question of who is responsible for the vampire's entrance. Jennifer Wicke (1992) convincingly argues that "women are the ones who ineluctably let Dracula in" (477). Although female characters are often shown as opening the door to the invading

vampire, gender is not the only mark of the vulnerability of the host. I believe that the problematic relationship between host and guest is also demonstrated through the complex character of Renfield, the zoophagous patient in the asylum, the madman “hosted” in Dr. Seward’s house. Renfield is the one who waits for Dracula to arrive, the one who gives him both authority and authorisation by means of a verbal pronouncement: “Come in, Lord and Master!” (281). Yet, when Dracula does come in, Renfield is upset, for he immediately realises that admitting the vampire brings unwanted consequences. Dracula’s entrance is an infringement of ritual acts (the vampire comes in without knocking) and a cause of identity disruption. What most irritates Renfield is that Dracula enters and acts as if “he owned the whole place, and I was no one” (281). Renfield feels that the presence of the vampire downgrades his position in the asylum where, despite the forced hospitality, he believes he is “someone”. Furthermore, Renfield discovers that the master he has called in has been radically transformed through the act of entering the house. “He didn’t even smell the same as he went by me. I couldn’t hold him” (281). Thus, the vampire *inside* is different from the one *outside*, a transformation which occurs after crossing the threshold. Moreover, once inside, the presence of the vampire changes those who inhabit the house. As Renfield notices, when Mina comes into the room, she does not look the same, evidence being that she is paler, a trait which unquestionably is due to the presence of the guest in the house, one who, in Renfield’s words, “ha[s] been taking the life out of her” (281).

It is worth noting that while the non-human vampire and the sub-human patient perform the ritual act of asking and giving authorisation of hospitality, the humans enter Dracula’s houses uninvited, and open, loot and destroy them. Indeed, once he settles in England, the property owner Count Dracula has to cope with a number of intruders, the team of vampire hunters who gradually penetrate all his dwellings. Significantly, their breaking into the building is, by their own admission, a profanation which recalls their earlier opening of Lucy’s tomb. The team of vampire hunters violates the laws of property by literally taking possession of Dracula’s houses in London, which they enter and “minutely examine” from basement to attic, going through his personal effects, disrupting his “orderly disorder”, and taking the keys to the other houses. The team also violates the laws of hospitality by waiting, uninvited, for the host to arrive in his own house, and then readily attacking him. In a sort of military aggression, the men strategically place

themselves so as to block the entrance, their bodies standing “between the incomer and the door” (303). Thus, Count Dracula, the owner and potential host, is assaulted in his own house, he himself being made a hostage.

After usurping the houses in London, the vampire hunters aim at Dracula’s home in Transylvania. When Van Helsing arrives at the castle the doors are all open and no obstruction prevents him from entering the building. Nonetheless, he takes great care to permanently dismantle the material barrier: “I broke [the doors] off the rusty hinges, lest some ill-intent or ill-chance should close them, so that being entered I might not get out” (360). It is clear that, even though they outnumber their host, the uninvited “guests” do not feel safe within the walls of their declared enemy and thus make sure that an open space, not a door, lies between them and the outside. Yet, although a removed door guarantees openness, the space it leaves is a rather uncanny one. If a door is supposed to separate an inside from the outside, once removed, the concept of inside versus outside becomes indistinct. In that case, no host can claim the right to offer hospitality to any guest, as entrance is made possible at any time and without any contact. Stoker’s *Dracula* elucidates that hospitality is a complex interaction between individuals which requires a negotiation and a constant transformation of roles. It also reminds us that absolute hospitality—hospitality that requires opening one’s home completely to “the absolute, unknown, anonymous other” (Derrida 2000, 25)—is an *aporia*, a paradox, which nevertheless Gothic literature comfortably inhabits.

IN/HOSPITABLE HOTELS

Florence Marryat’s *The Blood of the Vampire* was published in 1897, “perfectly in tune with the late Victorian Gothic revival” which included Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (Depledge 2012, 317). Yet, unlike *Dracula*, the novel was neglected for over a century, until the Valancourt Books reprint in 2009 brought it back to public attention.⁶ The story of a mixed-race female vampire doomed by a hereditary curse to cause the death of her acquaintances has been given different interpretations ranging from a narrative about eugenics evoking the fear of contamination by an occult agency to a representation of vampiric female figures whose bodies and manners question cultural and social codes (see e.g. Zieger 2008; Davis 2007; Depledge 2010). By focusing on the female vampire as

a stranger in search of an identity, this section analyses the anti-heroine's marginalisation and emancipation. When Harriet Brandt, a young and wealthy mixed-race Caribbean, arrives at a Belgian seaside resort, she disrupts the ordered routine of the visitors, a provincial community of mostly British holidaymakers, stuck in fixed middle-class gender roles: male guests flirting with young women, and female guests reluctantly taking part in any kind of public entertainment, and all ridiculously prejudiced against foreigners. Not surprisingly, the lively young Harriet, the multi-lingual stranger who joyfully and spontaneously befriends men and women, is both an attraction and a shock to the community at the hotel.

A hotel is supposed to be by definition a place where guests—strangers of any kind—are all equally welcomed and welcoming (Telfer 2000). Yet the strangers at the Belgian resort are not all equal: some are stranger than others. Harriet's unusual social behaviour and mysterious family history raise suspicion about her real identity. One of the most striking features of her unusual manners is her voracity—horrifying eating habits, which the holidaymakers in the dining room cannot help noticing: "It was not so much that she ate rapidly and with evident appetite, but that she kept her eyes fixed upon her food, as if she feared someone might deprive her of it. As soon as her plate was empty, she called ... the waiter ... and ordered him to get some more" (5). Harriet's animal-like hunger displays a scandalous image of a woman expected to behave with Victorian middle-class female moderation and decorum. The heroine's excessive way of eating even outdoes the other noticeable guest at the hotel, the "very coarse feeder" (4) Baroness Gobelli, an "enormous woman of the elephant build" (5). Both stigmatised as voracious eaters, the two women, however, are juxtaposed: whereas the Baroness displays plebeian traits, ill-treats her son Bobby and her husband, and is obese, Harriet is upper class, amiable, well educated and—surprisingly—slim. Yet, constantly under scrutiny, Harriet's body bears the features of a hybrid creature, a disquieting human-animal being with some grotesque characteristics. What strikes people most is her enormous mouth, one that goes "from ear to ear" (10), a monstrous and threatening orifice which makes the stranger a demonised character, "voracious" in terms of both food and friends, her mouth opening to ingest the world around her.⁷ Among the several occasions when the narrative pauses on Harriet's mouth, there are some in which the account serves to highlight the vampire-like traits of the character. When Harriet is described kissing an English holidaymaker with whom she falls in love, for example, the young

woman's spontaneous act is immediately Gothicised: "[H]er red full lips met his own, in a long-drawn kiss, that seemed to sap his vitality" (75).

In fact, unlike the holidaymakers at the resort, cosmopolitan Harriet is in search of social interaction and affection, a stranger *asking to be let in*; but her access to the community is overshadowed by her mysterious past. The few and fragmented elements of Harriet's early life tell of a character who has "migrated" in and out of communities of different sorts, all equally inhospitable: first an evil family killed by servants, and then a convent of nuns forcing a Roman Catholic education upon orphan children. For the young woman who has moved away—geographically and psychologically—from such hostile aggregations of humans, the accommodation at the hotel represents a safe place, one she can occupy while in transition, although there seems to be no direction as to where she is heading. What is deeply engrained in this visitor with dark origins, however, is her sense of acquired independence, such liberty offering a feeling of joy she can hardly hide. As Harriet explains to some surprised Englishwomen, "I am my own mistress now. I can be what I like" (12), an expression which resonates with the language of the late nineteenth-century New Woman. On the other hand, the image of the foreigner who is free of ties and deprived of others recalls the condition of the stranger whose complete freedom, in Julia Kristeva's terms (1991), resonates with "free solitude" (12).

Despite—or because of—her self-claimed emancipation, Harriet's conduct turns out to be so incompatible with the order of the resort that when one holidaymaker's daughter mysteriously dies, the lively and impetuous young woman is blamed for the tragic event. Harriet is accused of being a "psychic vampire", one who kills people by sapping their vital energy, an allegation provided by Dr. Phillips who alerts the holidaymakers of the young woman's "evil power". The hereditary curse that she has received from her diabolical parents—an English doctor who experimented with vivisection on his slaves in Jamaica and a Caribbean mother with a reputation as a witch whose mother had been bitten by a vampire bat—inevitably stigmatises the heroine. But Harriet is not aware of her family history and is not told of her own past: she is a stranger to herself. No longer acceptable, the woman is excluded from the community and marginalised. Thus, when she is offered a place by the other *stranger* in the resort—the odd Baroness Gobelli—she accepts and moves to London, a guest invited to accommodate herself within

the house and the family unit. What the invitation foreshadows here is a typical *topos* of vampire stories, a perverted suggestion that the victims consent to and are responsible for their own abuse (Warwick 1995, 207).

UN/HOMELIKE FEELING

Hospitality is from the very beginning ambivalent, as the Baroness's insistence on receiving Harriet in her home seems to be due to her "violent fancies" rather than to any feeling of affection towards the girl. Nevertheless, when Harriet enters the house, the host welcomes her guest with the ritual words of hospitality:

You must make the Red 'Ouse your 'ome. Liberty 'All, as I call it! Get up and go to bed; go out and come in, just when you see fit—do what you like, see what you like, and invite your friends, as if the 'ouse was your own. ... You're the daughter of the 'ouse, remember, and free to do as you choose! (113)

Unlike Dracula, who speaks the language of his guest, the Baroness expresses herself in her heavy Cockney accent. Nevertheless, after such an apparently unconditional offer, Harriet feels welcomed. But the Baroness's generous hospitality is a host's formula whose many offers of "liberty" ("do what you like ... invite your friends") in reality assign the guest a fixed role, "the daughter of the house". Whether or not Harriet wants to be adopted, the Baroness imposes her "motherhood" on her. Indeed, the Baroness's hospitality is based on *inhospitable* motives, the host wishing to have her guest socialise with her aristocratic friends in order to arrange a marriage which she believes might be profitable for herself. What the host does not know is that the presence of the guest will subvert not only her plans but the very roles and rules of hospitality.

The first disruption that occurs when Harriet arrives at the house, significantly called Liberty Hall, is the shifting of the narrative point of view. Whereas in the first ten chapters of the novel, Harriet is mainly and meticulously looked at from outside, the moment she enters the house the reader is told what *she* sees and feels. As soon as she is let in, the guest-observer provides a long and detailed inspection of rooms, furniture and objects, an accurate scrutiny of a new space which, despite her expectations, triggers an "unhomelike feeling" (116). Although

one wonders what idea of “home” Harriet may have at this point of the story, Marryat’s use of the term *unhomelike* gives the feeling an emotional meaning, one which resonates with what several years later Sigmund Freud will discuss in his essay “Das Unheimlich” (1919). Despite the first disoriented impact, however, Harriet gradually accommodates herself to the house, socialising with the governess and receiving the visits of the young writer Mr. Pennell, who, contrary to his expectations, not only is positively impressed by the Baroness’s guest but soon falls in love with her. The ensuing sentimental bond with Mr. Pennell not only strengthens Harriet’s confidence but changes her relationship with Baroness Gobelli and soon the guest begins to feel “less at home” in her hostess’s presence. An unmistakable non-verbal signal of the altered hospitality comes not only from the lack of food and drink but of “everything nice from the table” (181), which Harriet disappointingly notices. As for Jonathan at Dracula’s castle, dwelling at Liberty Hall gradually transforms Harriet, who not only loses some of her stigmatised features (she is no longer depicted as a voracious eater) but emancipates herself. As Mr. Pennell reminds her, Harriet does not need to stay in a place where she feels unwelcomed since she is no longer “dependent on these people or their hospitality” (181).

Unaware that her love for Mr. Pennell arouses the jealousy of the Baroness’s young and fragile son, Harriet does not hide her feelings towards her suitor. But when one day, soon after seeing her kiss Mr. Pennell, Bobby is found dead, Baroness Gobelli blames Harriet for the tragic event:

It’s your poisonous breath that ’as sapped ’is. I should ’ave seen it from the very beginning. Do you suppose I don’t know your ’istory? Do you think ... I don’t know that you’re a common bastard, and that your mother was a devilish negress, and your father a murderer? Why didn’t I listen to my friends and forbid you the ’ouse? (187)

When the Baroness realises that she has *let the wrong one in*, she regrets having offered hospitality to Harriet. The guest has disrupted the host’s family order, causing the death of the son and at the same time destroying the role of the Baroness, an unmotherly mother left without any child to ill-treat. Yet Harriet’s alleged “evil power” in a way frees her of the maternal figure, an unintentional revenge against her *own* evil mother.

Sent away from her foster family, Harriet finds herself once again in need of a place to stay. After declining the invitation to move in with the man who has proposed to her, she decides to lodge before her marriage in a hotel room, a makeshift place. In his study on rites of passages, van Gennep (1960) defines the period before marriage as a moment of ritual margination, a period of transition of considerable importance (116). Harriet's choice of an engagement time fits into the representation of a transitory stage, a moment in-between which coincides with an existential crisis and serves the purpose of reconsidering one's identity. Hence, before entering her marital status, the young woman literally and metaphorically occupies a space from where to search for an explanation about her past. She finds Dr. Phillips, consults him and eventually is informed about herself:

I should certainly say that your temperament was more of the *drawing* than the *yielding* order, Miss Brandt, but that is not your fault. ... You will always exert a weakening and debilitating effect upon [those with whom you associate], so that after a while, having sapped their brains, and lowered the tone of their bodies, you will find their affection, or friendship for you visibly decrease. You will have, in fact, sucked them dry. (195)

Although Dr. Phillips's conception of race, gender and inheritance shows a reasoning not based on a scientific approach but rather on superstitious belief in the malign powers of witchcraft (Macfie 1991, 62), his explanation provides the psychic vampire with the "truth" about herself. The woman is no longer "a stranger to herself". Knowledge of her identity and the burden of the hereditary curse, however, does not discourage Harriet and, despite the doctor's warning, she marries Mr. Pennell and travels with him to Italy. But if in the early stage of her married life she experiences for the first time the pleasure of a joyful family unit, soon afterwards the psychic vampire's strong determination to overcome herself is abated. As Dr. Phillips has predicted, Harriet cannot escape from her hereditary curse and one night, while still honeymooning in their hotel in Florence, her husband dies. Undergoing once again another change in her life, the young psychic vampire is eventually left a widow.

After the death of her husband, Harriet receives an offer to move to a convent, where, she is promised, the "agony of her loss will be overcome" (225). If the Catholic convent of her early life had long been impressed in Harriet's mind as a prison, at the end of the narration the

same place changes connotation and is presented as a refuge. Having freed herself from her anger at her childhood experience—a sort of rite of passage—Harriet seems inclined to accept the hospitality so generously offered. But she never enters the convent: Harriet commits suicide in her hotel room, the last of the liminal spaces she occupies before crossing the final threshold between life and death. Unlike Dracula, this fangless vampire destroys herself, her suicide, appalling though it may be in terms of conventional morality, being a kind of moral choice, a way of cheating her fate.

Harriet Brandt, the vampire in search of hospitality dies after constantly having crossed geographical, social, cultural and religious borders. This multi-lingual foreigner, this slim voracious eater who unintentionally sucks the vital energy out of those she loves by no means proves to be a guest to whom one should offer hospitality. Constrained in the restricted boundaries of her hereditary curse, however, the female vampire, initially a passive and naïve character, gradually develops agency and becomes an active and mature subject, perpetually attempting to disentangle herself from two mother figures: the biological one—a sinful Jamaican woman and the foster one—the wicked Baroness Gobelli. Yet, when the emancipated Harriet realises that her search for a place of her own where she can neutralise her threatening presence is impossible to inhabit, she surrenders to self-destruction.

Both mixed-race Harriet Brandt and Dracula—vampires with (too) many national identities—embody the eternal migrant, one constantly crossing borders yet questioning those very same borders, insistently asking *to be let in* yet inhabiting the threshold. What these vampire stories reveal to us is the irresistible urge for vampiric creatures to cross borders, gain consent and occupy a place. But despite their strong will, vampires are doomed to perpetual wandering and ongoing negotiation. In the chapter entitled “Toccata and Fugue for the Foreigner” in her book *Strangers to Ourselves*, Kristeva writes: “the foreigner ... is never simply torn between here and elsewhere, now and before. Those who believe they are crucified in such a fashion forget that nothing ties them there anymore, and, so far, nothing binds them there” (1991, 10). Even if not dealing directly with fiction, this passage seems full of echoes of vampire novels. Perhaps, paraphrasing Kristeva’s representation of the foreigner, we may convince ourselves that “[a]lways elsewhere, the [vampire] belongs nowhere” (1991, 10).

NOTES

1. Benveniste explains that the word “hospitality” comes from the Latin *hospes*, which, in turn, is rooted in the word *hostis*. *Hostis* means “a stranger” who is recognised as having equal rights—an act that implies a relationship of reciprocity and presupposes an agreement. *Guest* and *hostis* both derive their meaning from “stranger” (Benveniste 1973).
2. Subsequent references are from the edition of Bedford/St. Martin’s Press, 2002.
3. Cf. Hayes (2008) for a deconstructionist interpretation of thresholds.
4. Cf. Watkiss (2012), whose study on hospitality runs parallel with my analysis. The main difference is that while Watkiss reads Jonathan as an invited guest who becomes a usurper, in this chapter I discuss the interaction between Jonathan and Dracula as representative of guest/host negotiation.
5. I owe this idea to the discussions with David Punter, who was the supervisor of my Ph.D. dissertation on nineteenth-century Gothic literature (University of Bristol, 2009–2013).
6. Subsequent references are from the edition of Valancourt Books, 2009.
7. See Costantini (2013, 96).

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