



## POSUDEK VEDOUCÍHO DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE

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Studijní obor: **Anglická a americká literatura**

Název práce: **Vampirism and Queerness in Nineteenth-Century Literature**

Autorka práce: **Bc. Eva Pečenková**

Vedoucí diplomové práce: **Einat Adar, M.A., Ph.D.**

Oponentka diplomové práce: **doc. PhDr. Mariana Machová, Ph.D.**

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### Quality of Research

1) Please rate the following statements about the thesis on a scale of 1 (insufficient) to 3 (excellent)

1. The topic of the thesis is suitable for the scope and well defined: 3
2. Sets clear goals or questions for research: 3
3. Delivers significant research findings: 3
4. Demonstrates conceptual clarity and accuracy: 3
5. Demonstrates a good understanding of the literary work(s) discussed: 3
6. Demonstrates a good understanding of the critical field: 3
7. Engages with sufficient scholarship in a meaningful way: 3
8. Shows independent thinking and originality: 3

2) Comment briefly on the quality of the research presented in the thesis:

The thesis manages to introduce a new and original research within a field that has been thoroughly studied and as such presents a major achievement. The author has a good grasp of the main theories and relevant terminology and applies them in a nuanced manner to a study of the lesser known novel *The Blood of the Vampire*.

### Quality of Writing

1) Please rate the following statements about the thesis on a scale of 1 (insufficient) to 3 (excellent)

1. Has a clear and suitable structure: 3
2. Employs appropriate register and academic style: 3
3. Uses correct and relevant terminology: 3
4. Adheres to academic thesis guidelines, format and MLA style guide: 3
5. Written in correct and fluent English (both grammar and vocabulary): 3
6. Carefully edited with few typos or mistakes: 2

2) Comment briefly on the quality of the writing presented in the thesis:

The thesis is well written and follows academic style and norms. The author manages to make a broad body of knowledge accessible to the reader in a clear and fluent manner. There are some infelicities and errors that should have been corrected in editing. To mention but one – “Haefele-Thomas further discusses that some authors used the Gothic novel...” (19) instead of “Haefele-Thomas further discusses *how* some authors...”. These are quite few, however, and do not detract from the overall high standard set in this thesis.

### Overall Review and Assessment



(short description of the thesis and its findings, what has been achieved, and areas for improvement)

I would like to start by saying that working with Eva Pečerková on this thesis has been a real pleasure. Her enthusiasm for the topic is contagious and her ability to independently study complex theories and a wealth of historical detail and synthesise them into concise and nuanced reviews is impressive while her readings are highly nuanced and original. She clearly possesses advanced research skills in the discipline of literature.

This thesis contributes to the vibrant field of study in Victorian Gothic, focusing in particular on queer themes, which explore, to use the formulation of Eve Sedgwick quoted in the thesis “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically” (qtd. page 19). The first part of the thesis reviews the existing field with a focus on the theoretical and historical background that will be employed in the readings of the particular novels. It presents the Victorian attitude which censored the direct expression of sexual desire while maintaining a fascination with sexuality through indirect forms, following Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* and other foundational works in this area. Moreover, it contains an important distinction between the social attitudes regarding homosexual relationships between men, and those pertaining to those between women. This part further conceptualises vampires as inherently queer creatures whose indeterminable sexuality combines elements associated with both masculinity and femininity as well as alternative forms of pleasure in the form of bite-kiss.

The second part turns to readings of particular novels. It begins with the study of what is probably the most famous Victorian vampire novel – Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. The reading relies on existing research to highlight the queer aspects of the novel, showing how multiple characters in the novel exhibit unstable gender identities that differ from the Victorian ideals of masculinity and femininity. Not only is the famous vampire a fluid figure that moves between identities, but he also elicits a similarly fluid gender expression in his victims – Jonathan Harker, Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker, and his threat initiates multiple occasions for fluid exchange between the men in the Crew of Light, as well as with the female characters.

The most original part of the thesis is the reading of Florence Maryatt’s *The Blood of the Vampire* which had only recently began to attract more scholarly interest, which it clearly deserves. While most studies of the novel concentrate on the racial aspect of the eponymous vampire, the author chose to look more closely at her mobile desire which moves between men, women, and even children with little distinction. This reading highlights Maryatt’s ambiguity towards her protagonist which is portrayed with a high degree of sympathy and compassion, especially when contrasted with the monstrous Count Dracula imagined by Stoker.

Overall, the thesis shows how a Queer Studies approach can be profitably employed in reading the chosen novels, but it also highlights the importance of the historical conditions which necessarily cast sexually queer characters into radically different set of expectations and judgements based on their sex. In fact, the thesis leaves the reader with a desire for a more sustained comparison between male and female vampires in terms of narrative expectations, which may be pursued in a future project.



### Questions for Defence

(please provide two questions for the student to answer during their defence)

1. Do you consider the very different approach to the central figure of the vampire as at least in part attributable to gender roles, or is it simply a difference in authorial attitudes?
2. Your analysis rightly concentrates on relationships between men in *Dracula* and between women in *The Blood of the Vampire* but I'm wondering if you can also find queer relationships between women in the first novel, and between men in the second.

### Práci doporučuji k obhajobě.

Navrhovaná klasifikace: **výborně**

29. 5. 2023

Datum

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Podpis

\* Numerical assessments are provided as a guideline for recommending the final grade following an indicative scale:

over 38 "výborně"

32-38 "velmi dobře"

28-32 "dobře"

below 28 points the work is in danger of failing.

The final grade will be determined by the committee following the thesis defence.