

From count to prince: Reimagining the vampire in *Dracula* and *Blacula*

Yahya Kemal YILDIRIM¹

ATIF / CITATION: Yıldırım, Y. K. (2026). From count to prince: Reimagining the vampire in *Dracula* and *Blacula*. IYYU MOZAİKA Journal of Language, Literature, Culture and Translation, 2(1), 51-65. <https://izlik.org/JA64LD44RU>. <https://doi.org/10.66011/mozaiika.2026.4>

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the cultural and ideological reworking of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* through a cinematic adaptation as *Blacula*, which was released in 1972. This study is taking place within the frame of Julie Sanders' theory of adaptation and appropriation, in which the adaptation is not considered a mere process of simple repetition, but a deliberate act of cultural and temporal recontextualization that uses the vampire myth to address different racial, political, and historical realities of America in the 1970s. At the same time, *Dracula* speculates on late Victorian anxieties surrounding the British Imperial decline, such as a foreign invasion or racial contamination. *Blacula*, on the other hand, and in a different context, reframes the classical vampire figure as a tragic and racialized subject shaped by slavery, colonial violence, and systemic oppression. Through a comparative analysis of narrative structure, origins of vampirism, gender dynamics, characterization, and spatial settings, the article demonstrates how shared motifs such as immortality, victim transformation, and tragic romance are preserved throughout the adaptation process. Such original human motifs keep erupting and appearing within different ideological frameworks, as well as across different places and cultures. The shift from Gothic horror in Victorian England to American Blaxploitation cinema allows *Blacula* to act as a proper simultaneous example of the adaptation and appropriation theory suggested by Sander. By pointing up adaptation as an active process, this study contributes to broader debates on intertextuality and the capacity of the myth to be reshaped across media, genres, and different historical contexts.

Keywords: Adaptation, *Blacula*, blaxploitation, cultural recontextualization, *Dracula*

Konttan prenze: *Dracula* ve *Blacula*'da vampir imgesinin yeniden kurgulanışı

ÖZ

Bu makale, Bram Stoker'ın *Dracula* adlı eserinin 1972'de gösterime giren sinema uyarlaması *Blacula* üzerinden kültürel ve ideolojik olarak nasıl yeniden işlendiğini incelemektedir. Çalışma, uyarlamayı basit bir tekrar süreci olarak değil, vampir mitini kullanarak 1970'ler Amerika'sının farklı ırksal, politik ve tarihsel gerçekliklerini ele alan, bilinçli bir kültürel ve zamansal yeniden bağlamlandırma eylemi olarak değerlendiren Julie Sanders'in uyarlama ve temellik (appropriation) kuramı çerçevesinde yürütülmektedir. Bu bağlamda *Dracula*, Britanya İmparatorluğu'nun gerilemesine ilişkin geç Viktorya dönemi kaygılarını yabancı istilası ya da ırksal kirlenme korkusu gibi yansıtırken, *Blacula* ise farklı bir tarihsel ve toplumsal bağlamda, klasik vampir figürünü kölelik, sömürgeci şiddet ve sistematik baskı tarafından şekillendirilmiş trajik ve ırksallaştırılmış bir özne olarak yeniden kurgular. Anlatı yapısı, vampirliğin kökenleri, toplumsal cinsiyet dinamikleri, karakter inşası ve mekânsal düzenlemeler üzerinden yapılan karşılaştırmalı analiz yoluyla makale, ölümsüzlük, kurbanın dönüşümü ve trajik romantizm gibi ortak motiflerin nasıl güçlü biçimde korunduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bu temel insani motifler, farklı zamanlarda, mekânlarda ve ideolojik çerçeveler içinde sürekli olarak yeniden ortaya çıkmaktadır. Viktorya dönemi İngiltere'sinin Gotik korku geleneğinden Amerikan Blaxploitation sinemasına geçiş, *Blacula*'nın Sanders'in ileri sürdüğü uyarlama ve temellik kuramları için eş zamanlı ve uygun bir örnek olarak değerlendirilmesini mümkün kılmaktadır. Uyarlamayı etkin ve üretken bir süreç olarak ele alan bu çalışma, metinler arası tartışmalarına ve mitlerin farklı medya, türler ve tarihsel bağlamlar boyunca yeniden şekillendirilebilme kapasitesine katkı sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Uyarlama, *Blacula*, blaxploitation, kültürel yeniden bağlamlandırma, *Dracula*

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

Sisteme yüklenme tarihi / Submitted on: 09.02.2026

Yayına kabul tarihi / Accepted for publication on: 25.06.2026

¹Lecturer, İstanbul Beykent University, İstanbul - Türkiye

e-posta: kemalyildirim@beykent.edu.tr

ORCID: 0000-0003-3849-7078

1. Introduction

The Vampire as a figure has served as a symbolic myth that represents the surrounding anxieties in its connecting society. *Dracula* is a seminal work that presents the vampire in a Gothic atmosphere that serves the concerns of the late Victorian age about imperial decline, racial degeneration, and fear of others. On the contrary, *Blacula* is an American horror film that belongs to the Blaxploitation trend that spread in Hollywood during the 1970s; a trend that was framed due to the civil rights era in America. *Blacula*, through its sociopolitical context, acts as a call for Black American rights, and the monster figure in this narration comes as a result of this abuse. Thus, it makes the text a good example of adaptation since it serves a different message from the original text, which guarantees the continuity of the myth but with a contemporary focus.

This study examines the relationship between Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and the film *Blacula* through the lens of adaptation, drawing mainly on the work of Julie Sanders. Sanders explains that adaptation and appropriation involve the reworking of earlier texts within new cultural and historical contexts, allowing familiar narratives to gain different meanings over time. In this sense, adaptations do not simply repeat the original work but reinterpret it according to the concerns of a different moment or culture. This idea also relates to Linda Hutcheon's observation that adaptations are "repetition without replication", meaning that they revisit earlier stories while producing something new (Hutcheon, 2013, p. 7). Within this framework, the article looks at both the similarities and the differences between *Dracula* and *Blacula*. It considers shared elements such as immortality, bloodlust, the transformation of victims, and the conflict with authority that shape the vampire narrative. At the same time, the study examines how *Blacula* introduces important cultural changes, including the origins of vampirism, gender dynamics, and the different temporal and spatial settings of the two works. Through this comparison, the article argues that *Blacula* can be read as a sociopolitical reinterpretation of *Dracula*, reshaping the familiar vampire narrative in relation to questions of race, history, and cultural identity.

According to Julie Sanders, adaptation is a "specific process involving the transition from one genre to another: novels into film; drama into musical" (Sanders, 2006, p. 19). She believes that a good adaptation should be based on intertextuality. Thus, adaptation always refers to the source text, yet always reconfigures its meaning. *Blacula*, as an example, establishes such a connection with *Dracula* by keeping the iconic vampire character, immortality, and cursed figures, yet reframing these ideas through an African American lens, which has its own cultural background and historical trauma. So, while keeping the protagonist a vampire, the character is no longer presented as a foreign invader, as in *Dracula*, but as a racialized victim of discrimination.

Sanders also distinguishes adaptation that includes structural or narrative transformation from appropriation, which is "a more decisive journey away from the informing text into a wholly new cultural product and domain" (Sanders, 2006, p. 2). *Blacula* works as a clear example of appropriation according to Sander's explanation, since it not only re-narrates *Dracula*, but it also creates a new ideological purpose and its own framework. By showing Count *Dracula* as a white European enslaver and Prince Mamuwale as an African noble, the film shifts the

thematic axis into a critique of slavery and racial discrimination. The act of vampirism becomes a metaphor for white dominance and the destruction of Black identity.

Sanders notes the genre shifts that take place in the appropriation process. She explains that this genre shift enables the adapted work to “make texts ‘relevant’ or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships” (Sanders, 2006, p. 19). In order to explain this further, *Blacula* proves to be a good example as it shifted the story from a Gothic horror to the Blaxploitation genre that matched the socio-cultural atmosphere in America during the 1970s. This swift change in genre focus is required as the text is set in a different time and place, and is introduced to different audiences.

The appropriation can also serve as an act of resistance if it challenges the dominant ideology presented originally in the source text. Sanders highlights this point by stating that “a number of these reworkings offer a conscious critique of the ideologies and politics of the original” (Sanders, 2006, p. 106). *Dracula*, for example, was a representation of a racial threat to British whiteness or to the more civilized part of Europe. Even though Count *Dracula* is white and European, he is not equal to the Western whiteness and is portrayed as evil and a mere medieval character that might contaminate the noble British blood. Thus, *Dracula*, at its core, has a racial discrimination embedded within itself; while *Blacula*, on the contrary, is against such discriminatory ideology. Julie Sanders argues that appropriation often reflects the collective memories and traumas of specific communities, and she supports her points with a range of vivid examples. She especially highlights the post-colonial period as she notes how the effects of the Great War, colonization, and racism appear as recurring motifs across the appropriation process of many adapted works. She discusses “such tales were a means of working through traumatic experiences caused by the social visitations of plague, famine, and warfare, or by the sexual and social pressures” (Sanders, 2006, p. 86). The appropriation of the vampire figure exemplifies this dynamic, as it reflects the cultural trauma of African Americans bound together by a collective memory of systemic marginalization and historical racial injustice.

2. Immortality and Bloodlust

The main idea and similarity between *Dracula* and *Blacula* are their respective vampire character's dependence on the consumption of human blood to keep their power and existence. They both revolve around the idea of eternity and the resistance of death and illness. In the original text, *Dracula*, Bram Stoker creates Count Dracula as an immortal predator. He could be described as a parasite whose power relies on draining said power from others by sucking their blood. Nina Auerbach, in her book *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, argues that the Vampire idea in general, or Dracula's thirst for others' blood, is just an allegory for anxieties of losing power. His immortality serves as a desire to keep power and dominance for those who possess it. She says that “his estranged rage for dominance” is the main drive for all his actions. (Auerbach, 1995, p. 147). This same allegorical drive for dominance reappears in *Blacula*, where the vampire figure retains the pattern of bloodlust but recontextualizes it within the historical trauma of racial oppression.

In *Blacula*, the bloodlust is a central element, however it is motivated by different concerns relevant to the period, including social unrest, racial tension, and the cultural anxieties of post–

civil rights America. Feeding on others' blood serves as a source of power for Prince Mamuwalde —not in an abusive or gratuitous sense, but rather as a form of revenge and a way to stop those who threaten or disturb him. *Blacula*'s first victims, the two interior decorators, Billy and Bobby, represent the self-serving, careless segment of society who prioritize money and personal gain over respect for others, often creating harm through their thoughtless actions. Similarly, Nancy, the photographer who exposed his vampiric nature by taking pictures in the nightclub, is killed to prevent the disclosure of his reality and to assert control over his environment. A very important scene shows the idea of immortality according to *Blacula* when he turns Tina into a vampire. He tries to save her from death after being shot by the police at the end of the film. Here, the sucking of blood is not connected to abuse or rage; on the contrary, Prince Mamuwalde transfers his power to her so as not to lose his love for the second time, as Count Dracula did to his first love, Luva. Thus, Prince Mamuwalde transfers his power to preserve and protect Tina. Julie Sanders' theory of adaptation and appropriation can help to understand the dynamics of such little changes to contextualize any literary work appropriately. She quotes Attridge, saying that texts should "locate themselves within an established literary culture, rather than presenting themselves as an assault on that culture" (Attridge as quoted in Sanders, 2006, p. 9). Thus, the appropriation should reinterpret an existing work through a new ideological perspective. For example, while Dracula's bloodlust is the same as in *Blacula*, the drive behind that thirst would change to adapt to each protagonist's background, as well as their respective societies. Count Dracula, who represents the old aristocratic class, would tend to abuse the others to keep his power, while Mina's hunger for blood is one of Count Dracula's abuses. Count Dracula views immortality as sustaining his heritage of ancient power, while *Blacula* views immortality as a way to reunite with his beloved woman. Ken Gelder observes that "Vampire fiction, however, can play with these two positions and locate each one in particular ways. That is, to believe or not to believe in vampires means something in the cultural marketplace – something which is, essentially, ideological." (Gelder, 1994, p. 11) This observation helps to understand the different motives behind the same action taken by both vampire figures. Mamuwalde's bloodlust cannot be solely understood as an act of evil or domination but as a result of his experiences of loss, displacement, and historical injustice, while Dracula's immortality reinforces his desire for control. This would not be a contrast but a mere adaptation, according to Sanders, as "adaptation can also be oppositional, even subversive (Sanders, 2006, p. 9). Sanders helps us see that adaptation does not betray the original narrative, yet reanimates it with contemporary meaning. In *Blacula*, the same bloodlust beats with the pulse of racial trauma and discrimination rather than just aristocratic dominance.

3. Transformation of Victims

The real horror in Vampire narration is transforming victims into neither dead nor alive creatures. After the transformation, they become slaves to the main vampire who transformed them into their state. This would be similar in core to all vampire narrations and adaptations. Hence, it shows the loss of control and a helpless surrender to exterior influence. This idea is represented in Stoker's *Dracula*, which was written during the colonization era and the subsequent decline of the great powers, such as the British Empire. This historical context can show the symbolism behind victimizing others to regain power. Stephen D. Arata, for example, in his article "The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization", suggests that Dracula, while sucking victims' blood to regain power, would represent biological

imperialism. It is an example of a metaphor for England's anxiety about losing its power and youth, therefore compensating by sucking other nations' wealth. Arata suggests that vampirism is "marking the intersection of racial strife, political upheaval and the fall of empire" (Arata, 1990, p.629). Similarly, Prince Mamuwalde in *Blacula* transforms his victims into vampires, just as it happened to him when Count Dracula had transformed him into one. For this reason, *Blacula* transforming others into vampires cannot be seen as inherently evil like Dracula, but could be seen as historical trauma or inherited corruption from long ages of subjugation. Novotny Lawrence, in his book *Blaxploitation Films of the 1970s: Blackness and Genre*, confirms the same as he writes: "Indeed, *Blacula* emerges as a victim of circumstance who succumbs to European vampirism that he did not even realize existed. Although he possesses the same bloodlust as his antecedents, it manifests itself as a curse" (Lawrence, 2008, p. 51). He also adds that his behavior towards the heroine is different. He does not try to control her using his sharp gaze as he does with others. Even, he avoids passing that curse to her until the end when he does for her own sake (Lawrence, 2008, p. 52). This portrayal, therefore, shifts the meaning of vampirism in *Blacula* from a sign of natural innate evil into a symbol of imposed suffering, suggesting that Mamuwalde's actions do not stem from personal cruelty but from a tragic curse shaped by long-standing oppression. Judith Halberstam similarly argues that "the monster itself is an economic form in that it condenses various racial and sexual threats to nation, capitalism, and the bourgeoisie in one body." (Halberstam, 1995, p. 3) This observation is particularly relevant to Mamuwalde, whose vampirism embodies the racial and historical depression resulting from slavery that finally shaped the Black identity.

Moreover, in *Blacula*, Prince Mamuwalde transforms others into vampires, but the meaning behind this act is very different from Dracula's. Unlike Dracula, whose curse reflects aristocratic dominance, Mamuwalde's infection of others is an unintentional reenactment of historical trauma. Having suffered European oppression himself—cursed after trying to negotiate an end to the slave trade—he does not exercise power with predatory intent. Instead, the transformations he imposes are tragic, mirroring the forced subjugation endured by enslaved Africans. This dynamic deserves closer attention. As noted, blaxploitation films present "blacks in a variety of three-dimensional roles" (Lawrence, 2008, p. 19). Mamuwalde is far from a one-dimensional monster; he is a deeply tragic figure. Black horror has long used the genre to "plead our own cause" (Coleman, 2022, p. 4). Mamuwalde's "noble African background positions him as the Other amongst contemporary black Americans" (Jenkins, 2023, p. 6). This double othering—alienated both from whites and Black Americans—intensifies his tragedy. The film suggests that what connects Africans and African Americans is not simply shared heritage, but "a shared history of oppression defined by skin color" (Jenkins, 2023, p. 6). In this way, Mamuwalde embodies that collective wound. Those who endure systemic violence may, unintentionally, pass it on to others. Caught in a cycle he never chose, Mamuwalde makes *Blacula* a poignant reflection on how historical trauma can reverberate across generations. Sanders draws attention to such factors that can reinterpret the same themes but in a different context. She warns that "we must, as readers and spectators, remain alert to the specific contexts, political, cultural, and aesthetic, of each new version" (Sanders, 2006, p. 74). Sanders also gives a similar example of adaptation when he mentions Black Orpheus as an example of being reworked in a Brazilian film. She adds that, "The love-story of Orpheus and Eurydice is 'universal', then, and yet the threats to this particular Orpheus and Eurydice on the Rio streets are deliberately, and shockingly, (re)contextualized (Sanders, 2006, p. 74). This

observation helps explain why *Blacula* should be viewed as more than a simple retelling of the story of *Dracula*. By relocating a familiar narrative into different sociopolitical contexts of African American experience, the film demonstrates how adaptation can transform the ideology of inherited myths while preserving their fundamental narrative structures.

4. Tragic Romanticism

Both *Dracula* and *Blacula* infuse their respective narratives with elements of tragic romance, adding a layer of complexity to their protagonists and distinguishing them from mere monstrous antagonists. It serves to complicate both narratives while transcending both protagonists from mere classical monsters into more complex characters with multiple different aspects and layers. In *Dracula*, his love and desire for Mina is far deeper than a normal love for a woman; in fact, it represents his longing for his former life prior to being cursed. This search for restoration adds the romantic element that ought to show the human aspect of Dracula. Count Dracula is a vampire; he is between life and death, thus in between humanization and dehumanization, and that is what raises the conflict in the narration. Christopher Craft, a scholar who has studied Dracula's passion for Mina in his work "Kiss Me with those Red Lips: Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*", asserts that Dracula's desire for Mina is far from being just a sexual desire. He relates this passion to other themes such as rebirth, death, and the search for eternity (Craft, 1984). This aspect of Dracula's character echoes the Gothic tradition, in which the vampire's romantic needs are always used as a vehicle for discovering the loss of innocence or referring to other deeper meanings. As in the Gothic tradition, romantic desire most of the time does not stand alone; it becomes intertwined with other anxieties about moral corruption, the inevitability of death, and the human longing for transcendence, or it paves the way for bigger questions around identity.

In *Blacula*, Prince Mamuwalde's passion towards Tina shares many characteristics and is close to the original text. This parallel begins with the choice of the name Tina, whose phonetic similarity to Mina in the original text subtly signals the intertextual connection. This indicates that the audience ought to expect a similar sentiment as in the original text. Tina herself comes as an extension of a previous loss of love, Mamuwalde's old wife, which exactly matches the original text for Dracula's chase for Mina, and a reflection of his pure, dead wife. Further similarities are observed when both women remind both vampires respectively of their previous love loss, despite being from different countries of the previously lost beloved. That might suggest that the search for such women's love resembles a deeper psychological need rather than a physical one. This element does humanize Mamuwalde, making his portrayal more sympathetic compared to the traditional images of the vampire as an antagonist. Supporting this interpretation, Novotny Lawrence comments about *Blacula*'s human emotion towards Tina by saying "He has no ill intentions toward Tina, who fills the void left by his late wife. He treats her with a great deal of love and respect" (Lawrence, 2009, p. 51). He claims that this sentiment underscores the racialized burden he carries because of the injustice that his wife had suffered in the past; thus, Tina for Mamuwalde is the woman "who bears a striking resemblance to his late wife" (Lawrence, 2009, p. 50). The tragic dimension of this romance extends beyond the simple loss of a beloved woman. In both narratives, the cursed heroes pursue women who symbolize a return to their irrecoverable past, making their desire ultimately unattainable. Dracula's attachment to Mina is not merely connected to desire but to his longing for restoration, while Mamuwalde's devotion to Tina reflects his attempt to recover his lost wife and his own pure life that was taken from him through slavery, colonial suppression, and

vampirism. In Gothic literature, such an unattainable desire frequently transforms love into a form of mourning. Fred Botting explains that Gothic narratives are usually characterized by “Haunting, engaging a sense of loss and dislocation, of history, culture, identity and autonomy. Also tells the suppressed stories of colonisation, of its terrors, trauma and violence, and offers a path, in the telling, to recovery.” (Botting, 2014, p. 18) This narration, where the characters are haunted by what can never be fully regained, suggests that both *Dracula* and *Mamuwalde* are tragic figures as their romantic quests are directed toward an impossible recovery of identity, humanity, and belonging. Therefore, their love stories do not function as conventional romances but as expressions of permanent loss, which plays a central role as tragic romanticism in both narratives.

This relationship symbolizes the tragic loss of Mina’s humanity caused by Count *Dracula*, who can also be read as representing the broader forces of Western colonial domination. Sanders, in her theory, emphasizes the flexibility with which themes can be reinterpreted across different contexts, particularly when one narrative meaning comes to reinforce or reshape another. Sanders, in her theory, understands the flexibility of interpretation of a theme that underscores another, especially “Mythical literature depends upon, incites even, perpetual acts of reinterpretation in new contexts, a process that embodies the very idea of appropriation” (Sanders, 2006, p. 63). That would interpret how a mythical figure, such as a vampire, could be twisted into a tragic hero who seeks high transcendental aims such as freedom, justice, and loyalty. This is precisely what occurs in *Blacula*. The film takes the mythical vampire figure — traditionally a symbol of predatory evil in European Gothic literature— and reinterprets it within a new context of 1970s Black America and the legacy of slavery. Prince *Mamuwalde* is not a villainous monster like *Dracula*; instead, he is a tragic hero whose curse stems from his attempt to fight the slave trade. His quest for love and freedom repositions the vampire as a figure of pathos rather than pure terror.

5. Conflict with Authority Figures

The struggle against authority is evident in both *Dracula* and *Blacula*, regardless of whether these figures are perceived as morally good or evil from different perspectives. In each case, however, these authority figures consistently function as antagonists, shaping the narrative tension. Professor Abraham Van Helsing, who is considered a rational figure representing Western civilization’s intellectuality and European technological superiority, acts in fact as the authority figure in *Dracula*. Helsing, who is presented as a vampire hunter, mirrors the domination of the Enlightenment era that had authority in that age. His chase of vampires and *Dracula* himself represents a combat against evil just on the surface. However, the real combat is the defining of evil itself. It is just a combat between rationalism and science against the supernatural elements and the irrational forces that are embodied in *Dracula*. This conflict can also be understood through Michel Foucault’s argument that power and knowledge are inseparable, since those who possess authority also possess the ability to define what counts as truth (Foucault, 1980). In this sense, Van Helsing’s authority not only derives from his scientific expertise but also from having the power to classify *Dracula* as a threat that must be eliminated, while the others follow his judgment. That also shows the Victorian anxieties towards the unknown and the questionable ability of science. In his book *The Monster Show*, David J. Skal has argued that *Dracula* is a representation of Western anxieties that became the enemy of authority in its extended meaning, including the prevailing beliefs of the

Enlightenment era represented by powerful figures in literary works (Skal, 1998). A clear example of this tension can be seen in the struggle between Count Dracula and Van Helsing.

Blacula introduces a similar conflict, but one that is deeply embedded in a postcolonial and racial context. Prince Mamuwalde clashes with Dr Gordon Thomas, an African American scientist-detective who embodies a blend of scientific knowledge and cultural specificity. Dr Thomas, unlike Van Helsing, is a Black character working within a predominantly white societal structure. He represents the rational, scientific approach to combating the supernatural forces embodied by Mamuwalde, but his position is also deeply connected to African American identity and the lived experiences of racial oppression. Scholars like Novotny Lawrence (2008) have suggested that Dr Thomas's character works not only as a rational figure combating the supernatural but also as a representation of African American intellectualism and resistance against racial and cultural domination. This contrast between Dr Thomas and Mamuwalde underscores the historical tensions of race, power, and knowledge, where science and rationality are positioned not only as tools of combating evil but also as instruments of cultural struggle and self-assertion.

Meanwhile, in *Blacula*, the conflict with authority takes on a postcolonial dimension. Dr Gordon Thomas, like Mamuwalde, is of African descent, but unlike the vampire prince, he operates within societal and institutional structures. As a scientific detective, he embodies rationality and knowledge, reflecting both the struggle against supernatural forces and the emerging presence of Black authority figures in a postcolonial context. Novotny Lawrence's words can assist the same as he writes "Dr Gordon Thomas represents the wise elder in *Blacula*. Like *Dracula* and Van Helsing, *Blacula* and Dr Thomas's origins can be traced to the same Continent —Africa. Moreover, Dr Thomas is also the first black wise elder to appear in the horror genre, which marks a significant revision to the archetype" (Lawrence, 2008, p. 52). This emphasizes how *Blacula* revises traditional roles by positioning Dr Thomas as a wise elder; the film challenges established archetypes and reflects a broader rethinking of power and representation in postcolonial contexts. Julie Sanders' quoting from Steven Connor "If rewriting of this kind compromises the cultural authority of the original text, then this never amounts to a simple denial of it; in its attention to its rewritten original, its fidelity-in-betrayal, the rewritten text must always submit to the authority of an imperative that is at once ethical and historical" (Connor as quoted in Sanders, 2006, p. 51). In the sense that twisting any theme or idea in an adaptation does not mean it would be a new idea. The ethical and human struggles have been universal throughout history. Thus, while appropriating a specific theme, we should keep in mind the contextual difference and work on it, not rejecting or breaking the core message of the original text. That makes sense, since if we reject the concept of fighting the authoritarian figure conflict in *Dracula* as an example, then why would we reinterpret and reshape it to be properly accepted when reworked? Both *Dracula* and *Blacula* explore the everlasting struggle between the supernatural and rationality, but how it is represented here lies in the successful adaptation.

6. Victorian Anxiety and Blaxploitation Politics

Understanding the cultural contexts in which *Dracula* and *Blacula* were produced is essential for interpreting the ideological transformation that occurs in the adaptation. Since adaptations frequently reinterpret earlier narratives through new historical and political frameworks, the shift from Victorian Britain to the sociopolitical climate of 1970s America significantly reshapes

the meaning of the vampire figure. The original text was published at the end of the nineteenth century in England, which reflects the Victorian fears about colonial expansion and foreign invasion. *Dracula* embodies the fear of other races and cultures that might threaten the British social order. Stephen Arada suggests (1990) that *Dracula* is a manifestation of a fear of racial contamination that dominated at the time. England, which is represented in the original text as the land of opportunities and civilization against the barbarian savage invasion coming from far eastern Europe, is represented in *Count Dracula of Transylvania*. William Hughes, in his book *Bram Stoker: Psychoanalysis and the Gothic*, writes “*Dracula* itself, though, establishes a link between medieval continuity and identity, albeit one in which the ultimate survival from the Middle Ages, *Dracula* himself, is a threat to the English present” (Hughes & Smith, 1998, p. 32). Thus, the transformation of *Dracula* into *Blacula* cannot be understood merely as a narrative adaptation; it represents a cultural reinterpretation in which the vampire myth is reconfigured to reflect the racial politics and historical consciousness of 1970s America. As Homi Bhabha observes, “the menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority.” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 88) This explains why the colonial discourse is never completely stable or fixed, since it is continually challenged and even reinterpreted by those whom it seeks to marginalize.

In a different historical and cultural context, *Blacula* emerged at the peak of what is known as the Blaxploitation movement that took place through the 1970s. This movement challenged the hegemonic white-centered narratives of Hollywood, which had historically confined African Americans to marginalized roles. This movement tried to give a voice to the marginalized African American race in America. Lawrence suggests that the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, and a host of other events transposed the national attitude, leading to the eventual emergence of 'black exploitation' or 'blaxploitation films' (Lawrence, 2008, p. 17). *Blacula*, in this context, belongs to this genre and shares its ideological concerns. Thus, the film criticizes the historical oppression of Black people represented in an African prince, Mamuwalde, who is cursed and turned into a vampire by an aristocratic White man, who is Count *Dracula*. This difference between *Dracula* and *Blacula* is normal according to Sander's adaptation theory. According to Sanders (2006), the adaptation should not be passive and mere imitation. Sanders believes that “In turn, the persistently adaptable and malleable myth is given a newly relevant social and cultural geography” (Sanders, 2006, p. 69). In this sense, adapting changes that do not affect the core message of the myth but recrystallize it in a new form within the targeted historical and cultural context is needed in a successful adaptation. That allows the audience in that different geographical and cultural context to be familiar with the main idea passed from the original text.

7. Origins of Vampirism

The origins of vampirism are not mentioned in *Dracula* to add to the mystery of this darkness. It seems to be something universal, a struggle between evil and good, light and darkness. Count *Dracula* is represented as an ancient figure passing through extended centuries, consuming human blood for his immortality and continuity. An aspect that seems to be timeless and is innate in Count *Dracula* himself. This notion of the gothic element is what makes *Dracula* a masterpiece and a universal text that is flexible to be adapted and recontextualized many times through different decades and geographical spots. According to David Punter “Gothic has been, over the last 200 years, a mode of history and a mode of memory ... and the phantoms, vampires and monsters of the Gothic are for the most part recognisable

embodiments of psychological features.” (Punter as quoted in Hughes & Smith, 1998, p. 17). Having this psychological feature is the magical tool that can touch and affect any reader, if it is well adapted and presented according to the targeted audience who has the same notions of anxiety and fear that correspond to the time and geographical sphere in which they live.

In contrast, *Blacula* has a different narration about the origins of the protagonist’s vampirism. A narration that could be called a trauma originated in the European colonialism era and the white civilization’s abuse of Africans. Prince Mamuwalde, as the protagonist in the adapted *Blacula*, was a noble African prince. Vampirism is not innate in him as Count Dracula; this transformation is imposed on him by the European cruelty represented in Count Dracula, who is a real, inherently evil being. His curse is linked to the colonial exploitation of African people. Scholars such as Jerry Rafiki Jenkins argue that the transformation of *Blacula* to a vampire is a metaphor of the historical violence they suffered for centuries at the hands of Europeans (Jenkins, 2013). Also, Frantz Fanon’s analysis of colonialism’s impact that leads to such transformation would be more sufficient. As he argues, “Violence in the colonies does not only have for its aim the keeping of these enslaved men at arm’s length; it seeks to dehumanize them” (Fanon, 1963, p. 15). In this sense, *Blacula*’s vampirism can be interpreted as a symbolic manifestation of this long-term process of dehumanization. Julie Sanders finds these changes in the adaptation acceptable and even needed for highlighting the role of literature in shaping and reflecting the societal consciousness and needs. She writes “Many appropriations have a joint political and literary investment in giving voice to those characters or subject-positions they perceive to have been oppressed or repressed in the original” (Sanders, 2006, p. 98). According to this, changing the cause of vampirism from an eternal Gothic curse in *Dracula* to a curse of African abuse by aristocratic white men provides a good portrayal of the case that Africans suffered for a long time.

8. Gender Roles and Power in *Dracula* versus *Blacula*

The gender approach in *Dracula* and *Blacula* has different contexts, as each one of the texts is a reflection of its own historical and social anxieties, therefore each has a distinctive way to shed light on that tension. For example, *Dracula* is affected by the Victorian era and its concerns at the time, which brings on questions about women’s purity and autonomy. Valentina Kovac argues that *Dracula* reflects Victorian fears about “change of traditional values and gender roles and the appearance of the so-called New Woman – an opponent to the patriarchal society” (Kovac, 2015, p. 2). *Dracula*’s control over Lucy and the three vampire women acts as a clear example of patriarchal power domination over women’s bodies and souls. While the origins of the three vampire women are not known, Lucy’s transformation from a pure girl to a half-dead body reflects the destructive effect of *Dracula*’s seduction and what he represents as a patriarchal figure in victimizing her. Their dramatic transformation from her innocent status into a sexualized prey mirrors the Victorian call to protect women from being contaminated by men’s desire. Thus, the three vampire women, on the other hand, and their rape of Jonathan set an alarm for men to realize how women would feel if they were in the same position. Kovac describes Jonathan’s mixed feelings as she says:

He enjoys and fears the sexual aggression of the three vampire women, which shows how uncomfortable he is with the 12 possibility of women being more assertive concerning their own sexual needs, as opposed to the expected notion of a woman simply satisfying her husband’s sexual needs. (Kovac, 2015, p. 2)

This is to break the classical notion and inflict a shock on the male reader so they could potentially understand the women's complicated psychology. Also, shaking the classical imagination about women's expectations and that they just have to wait and accept submissively what men offer them.

On the other hand, *Blacula* came in a context that does not have the same anxieties as in *Dracula*. The victimized part in this narration could be the black masculinity itself. The adaptation here shows the struggle of black masculinity in an oppressive society, and it's trying to prove itself. The black male identity in *Blacula* is shaped through trauma and a very long history of oppression. Lawrence notes that such trauma would result in a "desire to acquire wealth and power, which he views as a viable means of overcoming racial oppression (Lawrence, 2008, p. 70). This would explain the dramatic change from Prince Mamuwalde into the vampire referred to as *Blacula*. Not only his nature but even his name is changed against his will; this reflects his identity loss and questions his masculinity. His persistent pursuit of Luva, together with his displays of power and brutality, can thus be understood as attempts to recover the identity that was stripped from him through racism and degradation, which transformed him into *Blacula*. In this sense, the film's use of the vampire figure reflects what Julie Sanders describes as mythical appropriation, where monstrous figures are used to expose historical violence and injustice. She explains such representation "mythical appropriation the dehumanized behaviour of those who perpetrate racial violence - hybrid beasts, such as minotaurs, satyrs, and centaurs, is evoked not as an abstract 'world elsewhere' but as a means of addressing the brutalities and injustices" (Sanders, 2006, p. 69). Thus, such a monster adaptation can carry deeper meanings of depression as well as repression that would be effectively highlighted once it is portrayed this way.

9. Setting and Atmosphere in *Dracula* and *Blacula*

The settings and atmosphere in *Dracula* play an important role in establishing the dark, mysterious tone and thematic elements of the novel. The narration shifts between two distinct locations, which are both mysterious; the reader always feels that there is something hidden somewhere. The gloomy and mysterious ancient castle in Transylvania and the foggy streets of London. These settings match the gothic horror genre, which carries fears and stress from the unknown and supernatural power. These settings reinforce the gothic horror genre, which thrives on fears of the unknown and supernatural power. As Hughes notes, "the Gothic uses medieval elements in its stylistic creation of atmosphere" (Hughes & Smith, 1998, p. 30), a technique that intensifies the reader's sense of unease and conveys meaning beyond words. The isolated, foreboding environment of *Dracula*'s castle metaphorically reflects the uncertainty and decline of the European aristocracy, while London's foggy streets echo the anxieties about the future that were prevalent in Victorian society.

On the other hand, the settings in *Blacula* are more modern, taking place in Los Angeles during the 1970s. This shift in place and time speaks to its era as well, as it was the peak of the Blaxploitation genre. A genre that is meant to challenge the traditional narrative in Hollywood that merely focuses on the white protagonists and their interests and heroism, such as in the western film genre. Thus, Blaxploitation came to give a voice to the marginalized African Americans who suffered for a long time from marginalization and oppression. Novotny Lawrence, in his book *Blaxploitation films of the 1970s: Blackness and genre*, discusses this development in the film industry and how African Americans were able to express themselves.

He writes “Blaxploitation films feature a black hero or heroine who is both socially and politically conscious. They also illustrate that blacks are not monolithic by depicting the films’ protagonists in the roles of police detectives, vigilantes, and pimps, among others (Lawrence, 2008, p. 18). That is so clear in *Blacula*’s settings, as you rarely see white people in common places, labs, pubs, or even police stations; all the places are chosen to be full of black Americans as the core focus of the film. Lawrence draws attention to the careful choice of settings in the Blaxploitation genre as he notices that “Blaxploitation films replace the traditional Southern settings with urban locales in cities” (Lawrence, 2008, p. 19). This choice of urban settings emphasizes that *Blacula* centers Black characters and their daily life struggles and concerns. It also shows how the film makes their experiences its main focus, rather than leaving them in the background as in traditional Hollywood works. Within this framework of adaptation, Julie Sanders notes that relocating an original text to a new cultural or temporal setting is an acceptable strategy when it serves the work’s reception, even if it involves a generic shift. She says we are often working with reinterpretations of established texts in new generic contexts or perhaps with relocations of an ‘original’ or source text’s cultural and/or temporal setting, which may or may not involve a generic shift (Sanders, 2006, p. 19). So, it is acceptable to move Prince Mamuwalde from Transylvania, where he witnessed Count Dracula, to Los Angeles in the 1970s to fit in a new contextual adaptation.

10. Reframing the Vampire Myth through Cultural Adaptation

The comparative study approach to *Dracula* and *Blacula* shows the power of adaptation and its flexibility in twisting the incidents and certain details to create a timeless power in texts, leaving a lifelong impact. The theory of adaptation and appropriation takes the adaptation far beyond a mere replication of the original texts. Instead, appropriation should first take into consideration the different cultural and historical aspects of the adapted work, which was exemplified clearly in the cultural recontextualization of *Blacula* to appropriate the geographical context, which is the United States, as well as the historical context of the 1970s.

Count Dracula is represented as an original ancient evil. Jonathan Harker initially feels stress and suspicion: “I am all in a sea of wonders. I doubt; I fear; I think strange things, which I dare not confess to my soul” (Stoker, 1986, p. 20). The description shows the supernatural nature that surrounds Count Dracula. Another aspect of his character is the isolation, as described living in “a veritable prison”. The whole description of Dracula intends to hide all clues to his origins and asserts his mythical, old nature. He cannot be connected to any specific historical origin of how this curse had begun as a universal extension of mere evil. On the other hand, a flashback in *Blacula* reveals how the protagonist became cursed, tracing the origins of the evil that has impacted African Americans. The long history of abuse, colonization, and slavery is the starting point of all evil in the black narration. Dracula’s words: “You shall pay, black Prince. I shall place a curse of suffering on you that will doom you to a living Hell... I curse you with my name. You shall be... *Blacula*!” (*Blacula*, 1972). This shows the contamination that fell upon Prince Mamuwalde as a representation of the African race and subjection to the white man’s abuse.

The identity dilemma in both texts reflects the anxiety prevailing at their time. Dracula’s three female vampires represent the widespread Victorian portrayal of women with a connection to sexual oppression. Jonathan Harker describes his impression about them as he says “I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips” (Stoker, 1986,

p. 41). Portraying them as monsters hiding in shades behind closed doors and walls should bring to mind Bertha Mason in Jane Eyre who was imprisoned and described almost as a monster or vampire with gothic effects as well. This highlights the common portrayal of female characters in the Victorian age and how their desires are repressed. Not only the three female vampires, but also Lucy, who plays an important role in *Dracula*'s narration. When she is victimized and becomes a vampire herself, her description changes dramatically in the novel from a funny, playful young girl to being described as almost a monster as well. Dr Helsing, for example, describes her as "She is not the Lucy you know. The sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty... the purity to voluptuous wantonness" (Stoker, 1986, p. 226). Such portrayals illustrate how Victorian Gothic narratives frequently construct female sexuality as a source of social anxiety, transforming women who go astray from accepted norms into figures of horror.

However, in *Blacula*, the film shifts the focus toward another identity crisis, the identity crisis of Black masculinity. As it is, the oppressed identity that the film tackles is contextualized. Mamuwalde's change into a vampire deprives him even of his name and his ability to show his own identity. His background as an African prince symbolizes the great free origins of Africans before being enslaved by the white man. He laments when he loses Tina, "I have lived again to lose you twice" (*Blacula*, 1972, 00:51:00), reflecting the deep pain of loss, not for his love, but it carries a deeper meaning of his loss of freedom and identity. The whole film is a spectacle of the emotional and psychological trauma of subjugation, slavery, and racial discrimination. Sanders comments "Many appropriations have a joint political and literary investment in giving voice to those characters or subject-positions they perceive to have been oppressed or repressed in the original" (Sanders, 2006, p. 98). *Blacula*, in this sense, is not a supernatural myth but a more metaphorical representation of African oppressions and lost identity.

The settings in *Dracula*, from the Transylvanian castle to the foggy streets of London, reinforce the gothic tone of the novel and highlight the mysterious atmosphere. Harker's realization that he is not a guest but a prisoner in Dracula's castle sheds light on the danger and evil surroundings: "The castle is a veritable prison, and I am a prisoner!" (Stoker, 1986, p. 29). The isolation of the castle and the mysterious prevailing aura act as a symbol of the power that Dracula has over incidents and the fear of any unknown surprise that can take place. When Count Dracula moves to London, his mysterious, evil aura follows him there as well. The foggy streets of London also represent the effect of the foreign evil that is not original in the English land but imported from abroad. Thus, the settings and background atmosphere help the theme of the novel and evoke some aspects and feelings in the reader's perception, such as the fear of the others who represent the unknown, which was one of the prevailing anxieties in the Victorian era.

11. Conclusion

At the end, this comparative study of *Dracula* and *Blacula* has shown some aspects of adaptation and appropriation's capacity to rebuild narratives in accordance with the targeted cultural and historical contexts. Ken Gelder comments on the vampire's nature by saying that "it never stops doing what it does; but culturally, this creature may be highly adaptable. Therefore, it can be made to appeal to or generate fundamental urges located somehow 'beyond' culture (desire, anxiety, fear), while simultaneously, it can stand for a range of meanings and positions in culture." (Gelder, 1994, p. 139) In this sense, while *Dracula*

represents the Victorian anxieties about gender roles and foreign threats, *Blacula*, on the other hand, repositions its narration within the sociopolitical landscape of 1970s America, reflecting Black identity and the historical trauma of being discriminated against and marginalized. This study demonstrates how Sanders' theory of appropriation helps explain the reinterpretation of the vampire myth in a modern context. For example, the gender dynamics in *Dracula* reflect the fear, or to be precise, anxiety, about the construction of the New Modern Woman, her needs, rights, and society's impression of her. Thus, we can see an aspect of demonization of female sexuality as a seductive or weak point in the original text, whereas in *Blacula*, the gender focus shifts towards Black male identity since it sheds light on the Black man's needs, rights, and role in 1970s America. At the core, the main idea is the same, which is questioning the role and the needs of the marginalized gender or race within society, and how this society reacts toward this marginalized group. Thus, gender serves as a symbolic tool for delving into deeper themes of oppression, identity loss, and autonomy, whether it is for the Victorian woman or the African American of the 1970s. The shift in atmosphere and setting between the two texts is not only a geographic or temporal relocation, but it is an appropriation mechanism to also serve the ideological and genre shift. Whereas the Gothic atmosphere of a medieval castle in a remote area in Eastern Europe would be a barrier to carrying the needed impact to someone who lives in America in the 1970s, the urban and vibrant atmosphere of Los Angeles can be more effective and reasonable for that purpose. As Sanders explains, this is not only a "cross-cultural and cross-historical object, but it also becomes loaded with localized and particularized meaning according to its 'social geography.'" (Sanders, 2006, p. 63). This helps the core message to survive and evolve as it is "persistently relocated in a new social and cultural geography at each occasion of adaptation and appropriation." (Sanders, 2006, p. 63). Ultimately, this study examines how the potential of adaptation and appropriation reflects and responds to a specific cultural and historical moment in which a new work is created. *Blacula* is not a mere borrowing from *Dracula*; it interrogates and transforms it into a new work. Sanders reminds us that adaptation is not a passive imitation and that a good adaptation should reinterpret and recreate new meaning. Thus, *Blacula* is considered a powerful artefact that carries its message that is proper to its time and geographical setting.

References

- Arata, S. D. (1990). The occidental tourist: *Dracula* and the anxiety of reverse colonization. *Victorian Studies*, 33(4), 621–645.
- Auerbach, N. (1995). *Our Vampires, Ourselves*. University of Chicago Press.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. Routledge.
- Botting, F. (2014). *Gothic*. Routledge.
- Craft, C. (1984). "Kiss me with those red lips": Gender and inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. *Representations*, 8, 107–133. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928560>
- Crain, W. (Director). (1972). *Blacula* [Film]. American International Pictures.
- Fanon, F. (1963). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*. The Harvester Press.

- Gelder, K. (1994). *Reading the Vampire*. Routledge.
- Halberstam, J. (1995). *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*. Duke University Press.
- Hughes, W., & Smith, A. (Eds.). (1998). *Bram Stoker: History, Psychoanalysis and the Gothic*. Macmillan Press.
- Hutcheon, L. (2013). *A Theory of Adaptation* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Jenkins, J. R. (2023). Black vampires and blaxploitation. In J. A. McFarland & C. A. Klein (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of the Vampire* (pp. 1–18). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-82301-6_42-1
- Jenkins, J. R. (2013). Race, freedom, and the Black vampire in Jewelle Gomez's "The Gilda Stories." *African American Review*, 46(2/3), 313–328.
- Kovac, V. (2015). *Bram Stoker's Dracula: Fears and Anxieties in the Victorian Society* [Master's thesis]. Strossmayer University, CORE.
- Lawrence, N. (2008). *Blaxploitation Films of the 1970s: Blackness and Genre*. Routledge.
- Means Coleman, R. R. (2022). *Horror Noire: A history of Black American Horror from the 1890s to Present* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Sanders, J. (2006). *Adaptation and Appropriation*. Routledge.
- Skal, D. J. (1990). *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror*. Faber & Faber.
- Stoker, B. (1986). *Dracula*. Signet Classics.