The Use of Gothic Fiction as a Second Language Teaching-Learning Motivational Input for Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

It is indisputable that success in the acquisition of a second language is closely dovetailed with motivation. A direct rapport between motivation and language achievement can be traced, whereby the higher the motivation, the smoother the advances towards an effective acquisition of the target language. This process has been thoroughly explored of late in the field of Second Language Learning (SLL). Experts have rightly pinpointed that motivation dynamics greatly differ when we attend to groups of learners that tend to have a meagre and oscillating engagement with the subject matter, as it is mostly the case with adolescents. Thus, what would be at stake in this paper is the discussion of how to pair teenagers' preferences with pertinent teaching-learning tools in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context.

Given that the greatest challenge is to engage students' attention and to present contents and topics that are relevant to them, it is our contention that specific literary resources as those within the Gothic narrative genre can facilitate motivation in learner-centred experience in adolescence since they resonate with key anxieties of this period. We thus side with the growing current in SLL that, over the decades, has promoted literature and extensive reading as valuable contributions to language acquisition.

Our specific proposal is to incorporate the reading of Gothic fiction into the EFL secondary curriculum as a motivational spur. If teachers introduce narratives in English that have particularly appealing subject matters for our students, the teaching-learning strategies would be greatly improved.

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1. INTRODUCTION: WHAT DO TEENS WANT? MOTIVATION AND YOUNG EFL LEARNERS

A broad spectrum of intrinsic and extrinsic issues critically impacts any foreign language learning process. According to Stephen Krashen's "Affective Filter Hypothesis", motivation, together with self-confidence and the level of anxiety are the three building blocks upon which the success in the learning of an L2 (Second Language) rests (*Principles* 31). Consequently, the deficit of learning enthusiasm and involvement that clearly couples with the hurdles of adolescence poses a challenge to EFL teachers. For our investigation purposes, among the many factors that exert negative influence on adolescents' L2, research has consistently indicated that teacher-correlated elements are probably the most discouraging in the EFL classroom (Li et al. 67), especially curricular topics and learning activities as "[they] are selected primarily on the basis of what society believes students need to learn, not on the basis of what students would choose if given the opportunity to do so" (Dörnyei, "Attitudes" 63).

Taking into account the diversity of inspiring factors in the secondary EFL teaching-learning context, literature and extensive reading have been considered as one of the most important aspects (Lazar; Sell; O'Connell; Bobkina and Domínguez; Viana and Zyngier; Pellicer-Ortín and Romo-Mayor). Although reading contents and activities are a constitutive aspect of any coursebook design, a reading comprehension exercise does not always entail enjoyment or artistic and expressive value. The main reason for this is the prioritisation of referential language in secondary language textbooks or syllabuses, while literary discourses have the potential to bridge purely instrumental uses of language with representational, imaginative, and creative ones (Ferradas 27). Indeed, literature can represent a stepping-stone for the accomplishment of a comprehensive learning process both in its canonical and popular forms, not only for the sake of linguistic mastery, "but also for personal involvement and the cultural enrichment its use entails" (Pellicer-Ortín and Romo-Mayor 7). Moreover, literature allows EFL students to have meaningful immersive reading experiences and engage in different modes of interaction with their peers, the target language culture, and their own worldview (Miller).

It is then essential that teachers bring literature forth as a main textual resource in the secondary EFL classroom, including genres that are accessible for young audiences (Lima 112). The applicability of the language and content of these texts to activate affective and cognitive engagement in students is a pivotal factor to take into consideration (Guthrie et al. 233). However, reading is not automatically a motivating task in itself for adolescents and many are reticent and "reject literature both as class material and entertainment" (Ferradas 27). It is then necessary to consider the topics and interests that appeal to this age range and the genres and formats that maximise learners' engagement with the narrative. What will help motivate them is the choice of attractive and dynamic materials and methodologies that students can connect with their expectations and passions. And it is just as crucial to help pupils perceive that their role and preferences are considered in the educational process (Pellicer-Ortín and Romo-Mayor 9).

The most distinctive features of the Gothic genre are perfectly attuned with the adolescent sensibility, perhaps more than any other literary movement: "Gothic literature is a literary genre that combines fiction and horror, death and more often than not romance too. Gothicism easily mirrors the contradictions which teenagers go through in that delicate period of their lives" (Maggi 109). Additionally, far from what it may seem, it still remains strikingly current (Rodabaugh 68), since its contemporary expansion—in the form of cinematic and serial adaptations, comic, video games, urban legends, etc.—embodies a paradigmatic updating of a classical narrative mode. Not in vain, Gothic fiction is one of the genres *par excellence* of the English-speaking artistic canon. It underpinned the transition between two historical ages and two ways of interpreting the world that, surprisingly enough, still provide a valid commentary of today's world main concerns. All in all, it is therefore an extremely versatile genre with an enormous didactic potential that, considering the theoretical grounds of our proposal, can represent an incentive to stimulate the attention and motivation of EFL students in secondary education.

Taking the theoretical perspective of process-oriented teaching-learning strategies as a starting point, this article aims to articulate a theoretical revision and a proposal for the use of the Gothic genre fictions in the EFL classroom in secondary education syllabuses. The objective is to boost

learners' engagement with reading as a pleasure activity, as these texts present themes and topics that are in accordance with the anxieties the learners may feel. Moreover, these texts would propitiate a meaningful use of language as a vehicle for communication and expression with these motifs that harmonise with adolescence and changing identities. The work will be divided into three main sections: the role of motivation within the EFL framework; the benefits of using reading resources and extensive reading; and the advantages of incorporating the Gothic genre and its main topics as a stimulus in EFL secondary teaching-learning environments.

2. DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO INTERPRETING MOTIVATION

In view of the numerous conceptualisations of the term "motivation" it could be argued that it has become a buzzword, a catch-all notion with multiple theoretical ramifications. Dörnyei lists as many as eleven different theoretical models that account for the concept from a psychological perspective ("Attitudes" 10), a complexity that may be attributable to the motley interface of social, cognitive, psychological, and behavioural dimensions. Within the EFL framework, as Dörnyei ("Attitudes") highlights, these factors become more problematic given the cultural and social dimension of any language that deeply influences students' attitudes. Furthermore, motivation is a mutable element that fluctuates through different individual learning stages and not least given specific classroom contexts and conditions (Linnenbrink and Pintrich 314). This should not be taken to imply that motivation is inaccessible or that any attempt to systematise it must be given up. On the contrary, our intention in this context is to adjust and narrow it to our proposal of encouraging teenager students through literary reading resources and, specifically, Gothic literature in the EFL classroom. To this effect, first of all, a brief review of some of the three main scholarly trends within the motivation framework in EFL will be undertaken. Parallelisms, benefits, and drawbacks will be assessed thereafter.

- The most influential model in L2 research over several decades has been Gardner's socio-educational complementary constructs "language learning motivation" and "classroom motivation". While the term "language learning motivation" refers to the individual's willingness to communicate, not as a trait but as "a general characteristic of the individual that applies to any opportunity to learn the language" (Gardner, "Motivation" 11), "classroom motivation" refers to the educational situation. This can be summed up as the subject's motivation in the educational situation under the influence of a host of contextual factors such as the teacher, the course content, the materials, the class atmosphere, among others (Gardner, "Motivation" 11). What we can highlight as most relevant in Gardner's proposal is his inquiry into the roots of motivation within the context of formal language teaching and his emphasis on the importance of what he designates as the "cultural context". Under this umbrella concept, the author catalogues aspects such as learner's attitudes, personality, ideals, and expectations that may apply to the process of language acquisition. One of the characteristics that derives from the "cultural context" is what Gardner originally labelled as "integrativeness" (*Social Psychology*), that is, the student's openness to interact with members of the target language community or, most significantly, a purported interest in the cultural communities or systems where the L2 is used. Gardner concluded that "students with an openness to cultural identification, and/or a favourable attitude and interest in English speaking communities achieve higher grades in English that those who are less willing or less able to take on characteristics of another cultural community" ("Motivation" 16). This is important for the EFL classroom where motivation can be promoted by providing students with cultural materials that help them identify with the target culture and develop a positive attitude towards the target social community.

- Ryan and Deci proposed the dichotomy of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in their Self Determination Theory (SDT). Intrinsic motivation concerns the student's determination to acquire a new language for its own sake, for the mere enjoyment or the satisfaction of embarking on the learning process. Extrinsic motivation, on the contrary, "is a construct that pertains whenever an activity is done in order to attain some separable outcome" (Ryan and Deci 60). Considering that most young people study English not by their own will, but by the educational impositions of the system, most prescribed activities will therefore not be intrinsically motivating for them. Precisely, Self Determination Theory

(SDT) takes on special relevance on this by tackling this frequent obstacle and it proposes promoting self-regulatory procedures that foster internalisation—assuming a value or norm—and integration—transforming the norm or value into one's own (Ryan and Deci 60). This can be achieved in the EFL classroom with appropriate classroom conditions that "support the innate needs to feel connected, effective, and agentic as one is exposed to new ideas and exercises new skills" (Ryan and Deci 65).

- Dörnyei, one of the most reputed scholars in the field of motivation and motivational strategies in L2 teaching-learning context, designed a framework focused on motivation from a classroom viewpoint. It was conceptualised in three intertwined levels: the language level, the learner level, and the learning situation level. The latter was linked with specific motives in the classroom: course specific motivational components; teacher-specific motivational components, or group-specific motivational components (Dörnyei, "Motivation" 277–279; Dörnyei, *Motivational Strategies* 18–19). Subsequently, the author attempted to refine the proposal by introducing the perspective of motivation as a dynamic element, "trying to account for the changes of motivation over time" (*Motivational Strategies* 199). In other words, considering the frequent fluctuations that L2 students experience, he developed a process-oriented approach that tried to elucidate the internal and external factors that determine the ebbs and flows in students' attitudes towards the target language (*Motivational Strategies* 19–23). Dörnyei identifies three successive phases that are based on different motivational influences: first motivation must be stimulated ("choice motivation"); once stimulated, it must be sustained and protected ("executive motivation"); finally, at the end of the action, in a retrospective phase, the learner must reflect on the evolution of the whole process of motivation and learning ("motivational retrospection") (*Motivational Strategies* 21).

Regardless of the theoretical construct that is adopted, the convergences are evident as they all point to different types of motivation, arising from both the learner and the learning context. Likewise, there is unanimity in the mutable and many-sided nature of motivational factors: they are not static keystones, but pliant intersections of aspects. What distinguishes these proposals is mainly the different emphasis on some of the motivational elements at stake: while Gardner focuses on the relevance of the learner's cultural identification with the L2, Ryan and Deci draw attention to the student's self-determination process in learning. Conversely, Dörnyei, suggests working on each phase of the learning process, considering its different contextual variables.

As Ford notes, there are no specific buttons that can be pushed to make students feel motivated and want to learn (202). Therefore, we cannot magically inoculate our young learners with a certain "language learning motivation" or "intrinsic motivation", but we can pave the way to facilitate "classroom motivation", "extrinsic motivation" and, certainly, "choice motivation". Motivating students demands many different methods. It can range from trying to convince someone directly, to influencing them indirectly by creating conditions likely to result in the person choosing to act in a certain way. It is particularly rare to find major motivational events in the classroom that change the way students feel from one moment to the next. Whatever form motivation takes, however, it is usually a long-term process ("executive motivation") that requires a series of steps that ultimately lead up to a lasting effect ("motivational retrospection") (Dörnyei, *Motivational Strategies* 25).

Our proposal assumes that young learner's motivation is likely to be more easily prompted through extensive reading as a procedure that aims to promote individual reading pleasure. The combination of this didactic approach with a literary genre like the Gothic can greatly enhance the chances of capturing their interest and attention, as will be explained in the next section. Focusing on pedagogic strategies and contents that are particularly relevant and attractive to EFL young students may be a way to ensure "classroom motivation" or "extrinsic motivation", but it may also be a starting point for the promotion of more personal, intrinsic incentives.

3. EXTENSIVE READING AS A MOTIVATIONAL PRACTICE IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

Instructional practices that enhance primary and secondary students' motivation to read literature are the subject of a growing body of research (Guthrie et al.; Best) and this trend has been particularly prolific in the fields of L2 and EFL teaching-learning (Sell; Lima; O'Connell;

Bobkina and Domínguez; Viana and Zyngier; Pellicer-Ortín and Romo-Mayor). Reading literature in the EFL class has been deemed beneficial as it allows the learner: "[…] to bring their own experiences, memories and interpretation into the equation and it is this positive and essential cultural investment that allows the reader to take ownership" (O'Connell 13).

The situational motivation approach——the motivation derived from the "here and now" (Vallerand)——to L2 learning facilitated by reading resources appeals to a fluid and meaningful form of integration of language, culture and literature, more specifically to a significant pedagogical experience (O'Connell 13). But it is worth bearing in mind that, beyond its didactic scope, literature performs many motivational functions in a reader's life; it provides entertainment, an escape from routine life, a space for personal reflection, and a channel for social contact with others (Best 38). Recent findings support the design of EFL programmes that are based on the consumption of artistic texts, thereby avoiding models that are exclusively informative or functional (Viana and Zyngier 11).

According to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001 and 2020), when learning a language, learners are not only studying a syllabus of linguistic content and structures, but they are training their language use towards achieving communicative proficiency since CEFR assumes that "the language learner is in the process of becoming a language user" (Council of Europe, 2001 43). Reading narrative in a foreign language helps to promote a real interaction and enjoyment of the target language and it also allows teenagers to access expressions of the world in that language, to acquire the means to express themselves and to develop strategies for language use——interpersonal, transactional, and problem-solving language use—— and reception strategies——bottom-up/top-down processing, inferencing from content and formal schemata. The CEFR (2020) shows a correlation in its descriptor scales for "Reading as a leisure activity" between learner competency and independence and ability to understand and integrate the content and language.

The main aim of teaching a foreign language is to promote plurilingual understanding and communication, where each additional language will be "an alternative medium in which to enact new social, academic and professional roles, enlarging their self-concept, providing them with new cultural insights, and in due course allowing them to develop one or more alternative inner voices" (Little 274). Reading literature in the EFL classroom helps learners to achieve this as:

> Literary texts——novels, plays, short stories, etc.——favour the understanding of the communication processes in the target language. Though representing an imaginary world, these texts often describe vivid and detailed settings and lead readers to discover the characters' personalities and worlds. (Bobkina and Domínguez 251)

Reading practice in the EFL classroom——literature and extensive reading——has been traditionally criticized after the decline of the Translation method as it was considered it took time from "actual teaching"——that focused on linguistic structures——and it reduced the role of the teacher to simply encouraging students to read (Day et al.). However, reading in the EFL classroom has been proved to have a positive impact on language learning by helping learners increase their linguistic confidence (Scrivener 268) as it "[sharpens] linguistic and cognitive skills and enhances students' understanding of the human condition" (Bobkina and Domínguez 249). There has also been evidence that it can help learners improve their learning environment in the language classroom (Davis) and engage with the language in EFL context when actual immersion is not possible (Elturki and Harmon 2).

One of the bases to achieve the benefits of extensive reading in improving reading ability and acquiring language fluency depends directly on the exposure to interesting and appealing input. As Krashen ("Anything", "Comprehension Hypothesis") stated for his concept of "comprehensible input", "engaging in a great deal of interesting (better yet, compelling), comprehensible reading" ("Anything" 20) improves the learners' reading ability. As the purpose of extensive reading is mainly pleasure and reading is its own reward for learners (Day and Bamford 137–139), it is then necessary to take leaners' interest into account to maximise the benefits and safeguard their continuity in reading in EFL contexts, specially at adolescence. In fact, if the material students choose to read is relevant and interesting for them, it will not only fit their emotional needs and provide them with additional personal learning (Glaus), but also help them increase skills in other language areas (Scrivener 268).

When reading, the reader is able to receive knowledge and "to gain insights that will make his own life more comprehensible" (Rosenblatt 7). This experience is more meaningful when the text reflects the students' preoccupations and interests (Rosenblatt) as this allows to "construct attitudes, feelings, associations, ideas, and sensations during and after a reading event" (Del Nero, "Embracing the Other" 391). In the case of teenagers, their worldview is changing as much as their social role and physical embodiment. Reading is then for them a safe and motivating gateway to make sense of their own inner world and acquire understanding of social and personal experiences (Tatum; Wilhelm and Smith), especially when they are in many cases already facing social problems like intolerance, peer pressure, and social isolation in the school context (Francois; Miller; Pytash).

Our proposal aims to combine the promotion of aesthetic pleasure with a literary genre that is particularly appreciated by secondary school students. This is a far cry from traditional textbook reading, which, as we have already mentioned, is dominated by informative, descriptive fragments with limited artistic resonance. As we will argue in the next section, we believe that Gothic literature can be an appropriate and motivating medium for adolescent learners of English. It can provide them with effective and meaningful reading experiences that help them to connect and engage with their changing world.

4. GOTHIC INPUT AND THE ADOLESCENT READER

Some critics refer exclusively by the term "Gothic" to the literary works written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that have been traditionally identified with this genre and that portray the past as a site of terror or pending trauma and a sense of psychological disintegration (Spooner 18), while other authors may also use interchangeably the terms "Gothic", "horror fiction", and "fantasy" for the contemporary narratives that deal with these topics (James 116). However, in their contemporary forms, these texts still approach themes that resonate with the eighteenth and nineteenth century Gothic novels, but they also include anxieties that are part of the contemporary psyche, mainly: "the legacies of the past and its burdens on the present; the radically provisional or divided nature of the self; the construction of peoples or individuals as monstrous or 'other'; the preoccupation with bodies that are modified, grotesque or diseased" (Spooner 8). In the case of this article, as we focus on adolescent motivation towards literature, we use a loose definition of Gothic that may encompass Gothic narratives that are no longer confined to parameters in the canonical form, as they have crossed disciplinary boundaries and are present in mass culture.

If the Gothic narrative has any intended pedagogic function, it may be to help children to disentangle themselves from their origin family. The Gothic elements and topics present in both the traditional Gothic and the modern young adult Gothic narratives prove to be an effective way to create an atmosphere to explore the psyche and express anxieties and insecurities. In psychoanalytical analyses, the Gothic narrative helps the child to grow emotionally (Buckley, "Psychoanalysis" 75) due to its perceived positive maturational function (Buckley, "Gothic" 261) and by enabling a learning process out of a memorable unsettling experience (Leith), propitiating thus the exploration of unconscious depths (Coats, "Between Horror" 78). The Gothic visualises aspects of the inner psyche and emotional turmoil in both landscapes and characters (Hogle) and it also explores themes that are part of adolescence and transition, such as the first experiences of death and loss (Trites 118).

Thanks to the unconscious work of the fantastic elements, the gothic narrative helps young adult readers to "structure the terrors and enable assimilation and management, and have an effect on the child's developing subjectivity" (Coats, *Looking Glasses* 2) while providing a contained, safe environment to explore, acknowledge and validate the horror, anxiety and dangerous impulses that children and teenagers feel (Coats, "Between Horror" 78). At the same time that the Gothic fiction bestows some mastery over the new impulses by locating and projecting those fears in a specific setting (Coats, "Between Horror" 83), the narratives also allow to display "those scary appetites in their proper place" (78). The uncanny elements of the Gothic narratives allow readers to develop socially and grow psychologically (Jackson et al. 12–13) because the interaction and confrontation with Gothic elements propitiates a learning experience not only about the self, but also about the domestic environment that leads to a discovery that "domestic spaces can be just as terrifying as a centuries-old graveyard or a crumbling house in the middle of the woods" (Howarth 2).

The drastic change in these domestic environments resonates with adolescence, not only regarding the physical environment but also the body and identity of the emerging individuals within society. Children have to transit into the adult world by experiencing developmental change in the physical, cognitive, and social realms (Alexander and Fox 158). The Gothic also deals with in-betweenness due to its emphasis on liminal spaces and borderlands that characters inhabit as outcasts due to marginalisation for their unique traits (Farnell). There is also usually a manifest fascination and injunction with the past, where emotional absences create an interplay with the genre, by transmitting an unfocused anxiety that is part of the first trauma of separation. This provides imagery and reminiscence that allows an exploration of fear and anxiety (Spooner 30), and a scrutiny of the disturbing aspects of civilisation and society as a community (30).

In fact, the Gothic has been associated with the changes of adolescence, since it uses young characters that embody "a liminal zone between the Rousseauesque innocence of childhood and the sexual maturity of marriage" (Spooner 88). As Punter points out, the adolescence period is an interval of inversion of boundaries that is reminiscent of the Gothic itself: "What is inside finds itself outside (acne, menstrual blood, rage)" (6). Likewise, Rodabaugh identified several characteristics of adolescence that can be extrapolated to some of the key features of the Gothic genre and that would justify the suitability of the Gothic to engage teenagers' interest in reading: extremes of emotion, journey of self-revelation, individual against the unknown, rebellion against authority and sympathy with the outcast (69). They echo key themes of the Gothic that are appealing for adolescent readers, such as monstrousness, the body, metamorphosis, transgression, anxiety, sexuality, and romance (James 116).

These are the reasons why the Gothic—in both its traditional and contemporary Young Adult fiction iterations—has been identified as "the teenage genre of choice" (Spooner 29). An illustrative example of this could be Tim Burton's new retake of the Addams family *Wednesday* for Netflix and its global influence (Mac Donnell). When asked, teenagers have a clear idea of the type of story they want to read, as they "crave stories containing voices that were provocative, unexpected, imperfect, and controversial" (Del Nero, "Embracing the Other" 392) and yet they want a safe place where the scary manifestations of the development they are undergoing (emerging sexuality, bodily change, body image, extreme emotional discharges, and complex social interplay) can take place privately without the family (Hopper 118).

The usefulness of Gothic fiction has been proved as an adequate vehicle to encourage productive class discussion, reflection, and reaction about engaging topics for teenagers and link them to more complex social issues in L1 context (Rodabaugh; Del Nero, "Embracing the Other"). It is a common practice to include canonical Gothic works in graded reader form like Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat" (1843) or Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) for students' choice of reading in EFL class. However, it is still necessary to work Gothic fiction in the EFL as a motivational tool. For that, in order to maximise meaningful communication and discussion when dealing with Gothic texts, it is important to allow students to first work their individual response to the text and then participate into a shared experience of the narrative, so that they can develop their initial personal response into a collective reflection (Del Nero, "Slaying Monsters"). It is recommended also to promote meaningful text inquiry that goes beyond the linguistic elements, by proposing open-ended prompting and creative responses (Del Nero, "Slaying Monsters" and "Embracing the Other"), and even dramatic representations that would allow students to create or use the dialogue and act out a specific scene (Rodabaugh).

As teachers, we can help students read extensively with our guidance by allowing sections of our class time for students to read literature, creating a book club for learners (Scrivener 268) and providing them with adapted versions with appropriate difficulty levels to promote comprehension, engagement, and reduce reading avoidance. In this sense, the use of graded readers where the narratives have been adapted to specific levels, will facilitate learners to get exposure to English and practice extensive reading for pleasure successfully (Scrivener 268). These adapted versions have been "edited to bring down the complexity of both the vocabulary and syntax to a level where English learners can access the text without spending time looking up words and puzzling over the grammar" (Robb 1). As these edited versions reflect the students' language abilities, they will allow them to enjoy the texts (Day and Bamford 137) within standardised reference to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Considering the power of the Gothic fiction to potentially disturb the reader, it is important to give students a choice in the selection of the narratives to read, in this way they can avoid horror narratives or topics that may be triggering for them. As Petersson (2018) proposes, one solution in the EFL classroom could be to work with only certain chapters or parts of the narratives, in such a way that the teacher can not only edit the vocabulary but also remove the sections that could be most disturbing for the students. This would also enable the teacher to reduce the reading time and effort for the students to work with the text, thus making it a more manageable task for the specific level, especially when focusing on the characters' emotions and reactions to particular points in the narrative.

Notwithstanding this possible reluctance to include this type of topics to young readers, some Gothic works have already been used as effective reading materials for this age range. For example, the spectrum of works and engaging themes that can be worked with teenagers in the EFL classroom can be, among many other possibilities, Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843) to show students the dark aspects of the psyche and the difference between a public and a private persona (Del Nero, "Embracing the Other"). Some as popular and inspiring as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* (1997–2007) saga present teenagers with positive transformative personal understanding about overcoming emotional distress and obstacles (Del Nero, "Embracing the Other"). Also, canonical Gothic fiction like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) can help teenagers understand the role of society in creating a monster, and the position of the social outcast (Del Nero, "Embracing the Other"; Rodabaugh). Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) can trigger class discussion on the complexity of passionate relationships and vengeance (Pellicer-Ortín and Romo-Mayor 102). Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) would be a good option to deal with teenager-related issues of identity and the self's struggle with intense emotions and social limits (Maggi). Difficult domestic relations in narratives such as Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) or Thomas Tyron's *The Other* (1971) will certainly make students reflect upon the dilemmas of family conflicts.

It should be stressed, however, that this extensive reading proposal does not necessarily imply a recourse to the canonical texts of the Gothic or a strict adherence to the parameters of the genre. We have already referred to *Harry Potter*, which does not correspond to the most typical expectations of this artistic tradition but reflects and blends some of its features (Berndt and Steveker). It is up to each teacher, in dialogue with their students, to analyse and select the texts that are best suited to specific teaching and learning situations. In short, narratives that are on the fringes of the genre can also be a good way of stimulating students' interest, precisely because of their syncretic aspects. For example, Truman Capote's "Miriam" (1945), which plays with the ambiguity between the delusions inherent to certain mental illness and the disturbances of the fantastic is also a good platform to raise the issue of ageing and cognitive decline (Pellicer-Ortín and Romo-Mayor 76).

These are themes that are particular to the Gothic genre and that are part of the adolescent experience of life. By providing learners with this type of reading practice, EFL teachers also give them the opportunity not only to widen their personal perspectives and experiences thanks to the engagement with fictional characters and social environments (Francois; Simmons), but also to get a deeper understanding of the human experience by exploring the narratives that echo their own experiences of isolation, marginalisation due to physical or mental characteristics, and loss (Del Nero, "Embracing the Other"; James). Thus, by incorporating these reading practices with the context of the Gothic genre, the EFL classroom can be an opportunity to provide learners with meaningful linguistic content and a safe space to explore and express how they relate to their changing identities.

CONCLUSION

The present article has shown that motivation represents the backbone of any L2 teaching and learning process. For young learners, it is even more crucial to involve them effectively by means of stimulating and inspiring activities they can relate to. It is of the utmost importance that their needs and preferences are met, bearing in mind the sensitive stage of life they are in. By prioritising reading activities and, in particular, extensive reading as a key pedagogical methodology in the EFL classroom, teachers can skilfully combine language learning with cognitive and emotional engagement to make language learning more meaningful.

Thanks to the meaningful connection to the Gothic narratives, their characters and contexts, teenagers can experience comfort at realising that what they feel in their own context is not unique and crippling (Del Nero, "Slaying Monsters"; Tatum). They can gain confidence with the exploration of the characters' inner turmoil and decisions, while gaining social experience from the group discussion and interaction with the text. This exploration feels safer for them and their budding social identities due to the distance from the topic and the filter of the character's actions and words (Miller 31). In the case the textual circumstance contrasts with their own lives, students can develop their social knowledge, empathy and peer understanding when reflecting on the narratives and the context (Del Nero, "Embracing the Other"; Howard; Lewis).

Through this alignment of emotional needs and the Gothic narrative, teenager students find help for their personal contexts and needs (Del Nero, "Embracing the Other"; Becnel and Moeller; Verden, 2012), and due to the social perspective that Gothic narratives deal with they can also serve as an aid for students to build up tolerance and understanding of others and themselves (Pytash), and help them reflect in a productive way on how they feel different at this stage of their development (Del Nero, "Embracing the Other").

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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