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THE FANGED EMASCULATOR

TRADITIONAL GENDER AND SEXUALITY UNDER ATTACK IN BRAM STOKER'S *DRACULA*

> Mina looks over at her husband Jonathan "pityingly [during her attack], as if he were the injured one."
> — Bram Stoker, *Dracula,* 327

Vampirism in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) works as a metaphor for sex and procreation. Like procreative sex, vampirism involves penetration, the exchange of bodily fluids, and the creation of a new being. After becoming transformed from human to vampire, or "vamped," the newly vamped females obtain masculine traits. Vampirism changes "the ideal woman [from being] entirely or almost entirely feminine" and actually makes them a threat to men (Stoker, *Lady Athlyne* 480). Regardless of the true sexual identity of Dracula (or Stoker himself), vampirism is used in the novel to introduce shifts in sexuality and gender roles that transgresses Victorian heteronormativity. This essay focuses on vampirism as a broad metaphor for sexual transgression in *Dracula* that is used to capture the Victorian era's fear of the subjugation of traditional masculinity.

According to gender criticism of the Victorian era, the Victorian norm for masculinity involves heterosexuality, strength, and the duty of defending the household. Stoker writes in *Lady Athlyne* (1908) that "the most masculine man draws the most feminine woman" and that marriages between those with "[only] a few of the qualities of the sex" are hard to understand (480). Any sexuality outside of heterosexuality, according to Stoker, would be considered abnormal by Victorian standards—a sexual transgression. As social critic John Ruskin writes, masculinity entails "energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest" (473). The four men hunting for vampires in the novel demonstrate this masculine drive. Ruskin emphasizes men and women staying together in the household, thereby signifying a need for marriage and women as bearers of children (473–474). The males in the novel demonstrate this

ideal by protecting Mina and Lucy from the vampires.

The metaphor of blood complicates the definitions of masculinity in *Dracula*. Nineteenth century physiologist Thomas Laycock writes that women have "less perfect" blood than men, which could explain why *Dracula* uses the metaphor of vampirism for emasculation. In Stoker's novel, the pure blood of Arthur, who is declared by Van Helsing as being the most masculine man, is prized in treating the vamped Lucy (157). She becomes stronger when drinking blood, while the male characters become weaker when losing it. Dracula thus "vamps" the novel's female characters to gain revenge on men, as opposed to fully eating them like the male sailors seduced by Demeter. Vampirism, then, targets male blood. Dracula's blood seems to lack masculine purity as Mina declares herself "unclean" after drinking Dracula's blood (324). Insofar as Dracula displays contemporarily coded feminine attributes and elements of non-heteronormative desire, he does not embody the masculine ideal of strict heterosexuality and thus his blood is not ideal for the power inversion that is "vamping."

Analyzing homoeroticism, which is a transgression to Victorian ideals, clarifies the conflict between vampirism and heteronormativity. Homoeroticism is a relevant topic for Stoker to associate with vampirism because of his novel's indebtedness to Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1871–72), a previous lesbian novel of the vampire genre (Signorotti 607). Stoker is less explicit in his depiction of homosexual behavior, possibly because of the bad press it could have generated for *Dracula* (one critic called *Carmilla* "repulsive" and questioned whether it deserved publication) or because of a cultural misunderstanding of homosexuality at the time ("In a Glass Darkly"). As Christopher Craft explains, gender inversion, a blurring of masculine and feminine traits, was the commonly believed definition of homosexuality in the Victorian period (109–112). For Craft, vampires exemplify gender inversion because of their oft mentioned fanged mouths, which are both bony like a phallus and soft like a vulva (109). Through the lens of gender inversion, vampirism is an injection of the opposite sex into one's gender identity, which threatens men with the potential of becoming weaker and women becoming stronger.

Though gender inversion certainly emasculates the novel's male characters, Stoker also uses the more copulative aspects of transgressive sex to threaten the male sexual norm in addition to depicting physical features. Stoker likely knew of what Talia Schaffer calls "the love that dare not speak its name" (381–382), as Stoker interacted with contemporary writer Oscar Wilde, who received negative press for his public

indecency trials two years before *Dracula*'s publication. According to Schaffer, *Dracula* is an indictment of Stoker's own homosexuality, which Stoker considered a threat to his masculine identity. The novel's male characters express this sexual anxiety; Dracula introduces transgression into their sex lives and physically transforms them without even biting them. Schaffer's reading also clarifies how more blatant homosexuality is displayed through scenes of extra-diegetic rape and sexual humiliation.

Two scenes highlight the sexually transgressive homoeroticism that threatens Jonathan's heterosexuality. First, when Dracula interrupts Jonathan from fulfilling his heterosexual copulation with the sensual vampire sisters by declaring that "this man belongs to me!" he implies a dominance of homosexuality over heterosexuality (70). When the vampire sisters tell Dracula that he has never loved, he contests that he intends to "love" Jonathan (70). Jonathan falls unconscious and later awakes in his bed suspecting that Dracula has carried him there and undressed him (71). Here, Stoker implies the sexual assault of Jonathan at the hands of Dracula through Jonathan's "brain fever" and his reluctance to reflect on what happened to him in Dracula's lair (134). As Craft notices, Dracula's physical similarity to the vampire sisters, both having pale faces and red lips, makes it difficult to distinguish their gender by physical appearance. Jonathan also obtains the same white coloring after his experiences at Dracula's castle (Craft 109). Jonathan's "very pale" colour indicates a lack of blood that, along with his emotional reliance on Mina, implies that he has lost his masculine strength (209).

Dracula hypnotizes Jonathan and forces him to watch Mina drink Dracula's blood in a second homoerotic scene that evokes a display of sexual humiliation. The description of the attack as a "child forcing a kitten's nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink" suggests fellatio (327). Dracula also forces Jonathan to witness the attack, which implies that Jonathan is the true sexual target (322). Though Mina is the one being assaulted, her belief that Jonathan is the injured one further suggests that the purpose of vampirism is to hurt men (327). Dracula also declares that he is using the women to get a reaction out of the men (347). Jonathan's hair turns white like a "haggard old man" after the second attack, echoing the previous degeneration (342).

The novel's quest for revenge and the restoration of Jonathan's health requires the erasure of sexual transgression and a return of heterosexual tradition. Van Helsing decides that Jonathan must regain his rightful masculinity by fighting (and thereby dominating) Dracula and the other vampires that previously dominated him. Ruskin's traits and duties of masculinity are demonstrated when Van Helsing tells Jonathan

"you are young and brave and can fight [. . . and] it is your right to destroy him" (395). Jonathan's role in chopping off Dracula's head, who is the origin of vampirism, evokes castration—an act of revenge against his oppressor and a victory for the Victorian sexual norm (417).

Whereas vampirism emasculates the men of *Dracula*, vampirism empowers the women of *Dracula*. The risk of dominant women in the novel is symptomatic of Stoker's larger critique of the Victorian feminist ideal known as the "New Woman." This ideal, popularized in Victorian fiction, displays female characters that oppose patriarchy by exhibiting a heightened sexuality, participation in the workforce, and a decreased need for marriage (Stevens 27). In *Dracula*, Mina begins as a worrisome fiancée that is openly skeptical of so-called New Women and how they will change marital traditions; however, her transformation eventually allows her to become closer to the New Woman by giving her the power to be both a threat to the lives of the male characters and an important aid to them. Vampirism inverts standard Victorian gender traits and allows her to fight, thus giving her the opportunity to enter the "battle" that Ruskin asserts is exclusively for men (473). The male characters cannot conquer the vampires without Mina's ability to enter the mind of Dracula, therefore implying that she is equally important in the novel's quest. Unlike Lucy, Mina is allowed these opportunities as she never fully becomes a threat to the men. Instead of a threat, in fact, Mina's status as "unvamped" becomes an object of desire as the men seek to prevent her from becoming a vampire.

Vamped Lucy's characterization goes against femininity's typical traits of "reserve, docility, and sexual apathy" and implies that vampirism allows women to dominate men (Lombroso and Ferrero 479). Lucy demonstrates the inversion of gender traits: she is described in the text as "languorous, [and] voluptuous [in] grace" (250). These adjectives are reminiscent of the Victorian discourse on female "lunatic" criminals, who are noted for being more sexual than "lunatic" males (Lombroso and Ferrero 478–9). Female dominance is also demonstrated by Lucy's ability to put Arthur "under a spell" like the one Dracula induces in Jonathan (250). Like Lucy, the vampire sisters use hypnotism to seduce Jonathan. The interaction between the vampire sisters and Jonathan is sexually troubling for Jonathan declares "there was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear" (69). Jonathan also mentions his fear of what Mina, his fiancée at the time, would think of him for this act of adultery (69). Such anxiety, along with the later actions of the vampire sisters, acknowledges how vampirism threatens domestic fatherhood.

By targeting children and threatening marriage, vampirism attacks the male role in domestic life. As historical documents show, divorce rates were at a high during *Dracula*'s publication. Thus Stoker's production of "vampirism" speaks to the growing anxiety surrounding the dissolution marriage and new expressions of sexuality ("Release: Divorces in England and Wales, 2012"). For example, Stoker depicts the vampire sisters, as symbols of the New Woman, eating a child while Jonathan watches in horror (71). The eating of children is later repeated in the reports of the "bloofer lady." Interestingly, the female vampire often targets children who are referred to by male pronouns (214–5). By targeting male children, the female vampire feeds the anxieties of male identity insofar as virility is key to the masculine ideal.

Ruskin asserts that men and women must form a family unit in order for men to fulfill the masculine identity (473). Vampirism opposes the traditional household by preventing Arthur from getting married and allowing the creation of other beings without marriage or sex between a human man and woman. Since vampirism makes vampire women stronger than men and bypasses male sexual organs to procreate, it essentially makes males obsolete in the household. In other words, men descend figuratively and literally on the food chain. However, the defeat of the vamped Lucy asserts masculinity over femininity, a move that is accentuated by the use of a stake (a phallic symbol), which causes her to writhe as if orgasming (254). As an enforcer of heteronormativity, Christianity also helps restore the masculine ideal in *Dracula*. The male characters use Christian symbols like crosses to defeat the vampires in the novel, rendering a violent connection between Christianity and the ideological circulation of heterosexual monogamy and marriage, concepts integral to Victorian sensibilities. The novel concludes with a reaffirmation of tradition by having the married Mina give birth to a child through heterosexual means one year after Dracula's defeat (419).

The final line of *Dracula* consolidates the novel's struggle for traditional gender roles: when considering Mina and her child, Van Helsing explains that, "[a]lready [the child] knows her sweetness and loving care; later on he will understand how some men so loved her, that they did dare much for her sake" (419). Van Helsing views their quest as a struggle for Mina's return to her "sweetness and loving care" and an affirmation that men and women need each other to survive (419). Van Helsing utters this line after the characters have returned home to talk about their marriages, signifying a return to normalcy akin to Ruskin's description of the household and traditional gender roles.

The use of vampirism in *Dracula* signals the Victorian era's changing attitudes towards sexuality and gender, which competed with the masculine ideals of pure heterosexuality and patriarchy. Stoker represents these changes by portraying sexual behavior that differs from the heterosexual norm (seen in Dracula's homoerotic scenes with Jonathan) and the rise of feminism through the New Woman (represented by the threat of the novel's female vampires). That said, *Dracula* ultimately promotes the traditional gender roles and sexual behavior of its time by showing victories of male dominance over female dominance, male daring over male submission, heterosexuality over homosexuality, and domesticity over divorce.

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