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“Life Swarms with Innocent Monsters” : the Monstrosity of Gender Inversion in Bram stoker’s Dracula

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Abstract

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) has elicited a range of different interpretations from critics over the years. Readings range from covering issues of race and colonization to science and religion, and everything in between. These interpretations all feature different anxieties relevant to *fin de siècle* culture, a title given to the period of transition at the end of the nineteenth century wrought with anxiety and conspiracy about what might come next. One of the sources of this unease stemmed from the rapid change in what constituted women's social roles, as well as developing definitions of gender and sexuality. This socio-cultural concern is highlighted in the characters who Stoker chooses to portray as monsters: five women, and a foreigner man who exists outside of the strict gender stereotypes of Victorian England. To destroy these monsters, patriarchal order must be restored by any means necessary.

Lucy Westenra, beloved companion of several of the novel's most important characters, transforms into a monstrous femme fatale as a result of Dracula's virile bite. Framed loosely as a castration narrative, she is rightfully eliminated by Arthur Holmwood, he who would have been her betrothed in life. Driven through her chest is the wooden stake, an image of the phallus meant to restore her intended into the dominant role. Stepping into the realm of the Female Gothic, the three vampire women who haunt Dracula's castle invert the paradigm on the helpless Jonathan Harker. Jonathan navigates his stay at Castle Dracula through the lens of the brave - yet frightened - heroine in a tale reminiscent of that of the tyrannical Bluebeard.

Mina Harker and Count Dracula, the final two subjects, exist as equals in a space outside of strict gender roles. To Stoker and his fellow late Victorians, this makes them the most monstrous creatures in the whole novel. Their presentation of masculine and feminine traits is

constantly changing within the novel. This transition is only righted when Dracula is staked as a proxy for Mina at the end of the novel. Only then is she allowed to settle into her intended role as beloved wife to Jonathan and nurturing mother to their son, Quincy, by the novel's close.

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

“Life Swarms With Innocent Monsters”:

The Monstrosity of Gender Inversion in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*

by

Natalie Cottrill

A Master’s Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

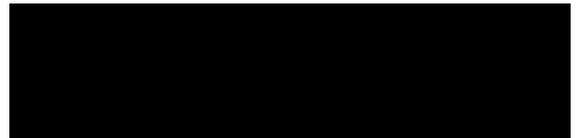
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A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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2020

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Introduction

One of the most enjoyable aspects of sitting down with a piece of Gothic fiction is the exhilaration of knowing that we are going to be afraid. Sometimes the monster is introduced in a surprising, breathtaking moment of terror. In other instances, the text dips carefully into the realm of mystery, where the fated antagonist is revealed just at the moment we least expect. Whoever - or whatever - the monster may be, readers are meant to enjoy being afraid of this monstrous creation; the hairs on the backs of our necks are meant to raise along with those of the protagonists onto whom we project ourselves. In her important work on late-nineteenth-century Gothic, Kelly Hurley writes of late Gothic fiction that “working in the negative register of horror, [it] brought [a] sense of trauma to vivid life, supernaturalizing both the specific content of scientific theories and scientific activity in general. In this sense it can be said to manage the anxieties engendered in scientific innovations by reframing these within the non-realistic, and thus more easily distanced, mode of gothicity” (6). Such “reframing” is one of the most enjoyable things about the return of the Gothic fiction in the later nineteenth century. It takes a real life horror - perhaps scientific innovations, as Hurley mentions, or the threat of war, or issues of race, even issues of gender - and turns it into a supernatural creature, often a monster, as a coping mechanism. The most frightening characters in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) - those portrayed as monsters, or in danger of becoming monsters - are the ones who transcend Victorian gender stereotypes. To say that gender roles are blended throughout the novel would be an understatement. Many characters take on multiple roles at once, and some exist in the space between gender identity altogether. Of the monstrous characters in the novel, most are women: Mina Harker, Lucy Westenra, and the three vampire women who reside in Castle

Dracula. Though the main antagonist of the novel is a man, Count Dracula himself does not strictly adhere to the image of the stereotypical Victorian man. He is a foreigner who encroaches on and attempts to colonize British space. The main thing that these characters all have in common is that they are all by nature societal Others.

Rosi Braidotti defines a monster as “the bodily incarnation of difference from the basic human norm; it is a deviant, an a-nomaly; it is abnormal” (62). This definition is followed by her discussion of Aristotle’s idea that the concept of the human norm should be based solely on the male model, in which case the female is a mutation from her very conception. It is this concept which will serve as the basis for an important part of my argument: that the villainized women in the novel - Lucy, Mina, and the vampire brides - are portrayed as far more frightening creatures than Dracula himself. This is a result of centuries of incorporating Aristotle’s philosophy into Western thought, and using it to project inferiority onto those who are so often described to be of the fairer sex (63). Mina, Lucy, and the vampire brides are *already* othered by their sex, and by deviating further from societal expectations in the inherent dominance and overt sexuality that the vampiric form entails, they become even more abnormal. In comparison to the women, many of Dracula’s most vivid scenes are written with him in a passive state. In his journal, Jonathan Harker describes him lying in his coffin as “an awful creature...simply gorged with blood...like a filthy leech” (Stoker 83). Even when he is discovered by Dr. Seward and Van Helsing in the act of drinking Mina’s blood, he is a comparatively passive figure in the scene. He is described as “hold[ing] both Mrs. Harker’s hands...at full tension” and “grip[ping] her by the back of the neck” (375), but it is Mina who is the aggressor with her face in Dracula’s chest, drinking his

blood from a gaping wound along his sternum¹. In fact, all the male characters in this tableau are passive. Dr. Seward and Van Helsing both serve as observers. Jonathan Harker spends the whole scene entirely unconscious. He is described as laying “on the bed [...] his face flushed and breathing heavily as though in a stupor” (375). Jonathan appears to be in a swoon, a position which has effeminate associations. In fact, this scene is reminiscent of the knight in Keats’s “La Belle Dame sans Merci,” his brow “With anguish moist and fever-dew, / and on thy cheeks a fading rose” (Lines 10-11). Stoker makes it pretty clear that we should assume it is Dracula and not Mina who put Jonathan into this stupor, but the scene still provides an interesting gendered role reversal with Jonathan in such an effeminate position.

The scenes involving the vampire women in the novel are far more frightening, and far more aggressive, than the ones that portray Dracula. Every scene portraying vampire women are conveyed through the writing of male characters in the novel, a factor that contributes to what exactly it is that makes the female vampires so terrifying. When encountering these monstrous women, the men of the novel are moved to inaction by the dominating female, at times even to the point of helplessness. By using the male point of view in such instances, Stoker really shows the impact of this gender inversion. *Dracula* was both written and set in the 1890’s, and it was wrought with *fin de siècle* anxieties. Rapid changes in women’s social roles produces one of these anxieties, with a push for feminism beginning with the figure of the New Woman - a concept Mina in fact mentions in one of her journal entries. Vampirism gives the women in this novel who are infected with it extraordinary powers that seem in step with these (to Stoker)

¹ A footnote in the Ignatius Critical Edition of *Dracula* prompts readers with the question “Whose blood is it?” in reference to the blood Stoker indicates is smeared on Mina’s nightgown in this scene. Considering the vigor with which she is drinking from Dracula’s wound, I would argue that it is the Count’s blood smeared down her front, and not her own, something that adds an even deeper level of monstrosity to Mina aggressively gripping Dracula in this scene.

disturbingly changing times - inhuman strength, the power of seduction, and the role of the predator, among them,

Lucy's Death

Lucy's death scene is one of the most discussed scenes in the novel. It has been read as everything from a group sex encounter to a gang rape. A particularly interesting approach is to read it as a female castration narrative. Lucy's audacious sexuality places her as one of two extremes along the Virgin/Whore dichotomy, an ancient cultural mode analyzed by Wyman and Dionisopoulous: "While some whores are depicted as powerful - using sexuality to gain advantage - they are strongly associated with evil and viewed as a threat to those around them. The depiction of the powerful whore as a 'problem that has to be solved' negates the legitimacy of any power she displays" (213). Lucy's sexuality poses a threat to a group of men whose existence already lies outside of the norm of masculine Victorian heroism. Both on the night of her vampiric transition and again on the eve of her death, Lucy is prevented from kissing Arthur, her betrothed, on the fear that she might unsex him by doing so. Van Helsing explains: "Friend Arthur, if you had met that kiss which you know of before poor Lucy die; or again, last night when you open your arms to her, you would in time, when you had died, become a *nosferatu*" (292). Lucy's vampirism has given her the ability to reproduce without the necessity of heteronormative sexual intercourse, placing her in an unrivaled position of dominance over Arthur. Van Helsing, vigilant here as he is throughout the rest of the novel, preserves the phallic heteronormative structure in preventing Arthur from being unsexed by Lucy, who has turned femme fatale in her vampirism. In a footnote in "The Laugh of the Medusa," Helene Cixous writes "One can understand how man, confusing himself with his penis and rushing in for the

attack, might feel resentment and fear of being ‘taken’ by the woman, of being lost in her, absorbed, or alone” (877). This fear of being taken and dominated is what makes this scene between Lucy and Arthur so terrifying. Lucy, already othered by her sex, is now transcending societal expectations by taking the dominant role.

Stoker also makes sure we know that she is at her most beautiful after she has become a vampire. It is noted several times after her death that her lips have grown increasingly more red, and there is something far more sexual about her. The descriptions change from revering her gentility to emphasizing her “voluptuous” and “wanton”² demeanor. Much attention is also paid to the intensity of Lucy’s gaze during this encounter with Arthur in the graveyard: “As she looked, her eyes blazed with unholy light, and the face became wreathed with a voluptuous smile” (288). This scene of seduction shows Lucy at her most monstrous. Though the scene in which she is staked is grotesque, it is nothing compared to this moment where she is mobile and full of agency. Playing on the weakness of Arthur’s attraction to her, and in conjunction with the intense speed and strength that comes along with her vampiric form, it is plausible that Lucy could in fact dominate and unsex Arthur. Frozen in place by her gaze, a gaze which Braidotti describes as an “expression of female desire ... always perceived as a dangerous, if not deadly, thing” (69), it is clear that he would have succumbed to her seductive demands if Van Helsing had not been present as always to preserve the heteronormative dynamic.

For Van Helsing and his following of heteronormative men of significant status, the best solution to the problem of Lucy is to eliminate this threat of active female sexuality by castrating it, using the image of the phallus itself. *Hélène Cixous* discusses the correlation of beheading and

²“Voluptuous” is used three times in the seven pages that describe the climax to - and completion of - Lucy’s true death; “wanton” is used twice in differing variations throughout this span as well. The repetition of these two words emphasizes the threat of Lucy’s sexuality.

female castration in terms of the Chinese tale of General Sun Tse and the king's hundred and eighty wives. In the tale, the king asks Sun Tse to make soldiers out of all of his wives. The wives do not take this exercise seriously, talking and laughing with one another instead of performing the assigned drills. As punishment, the two wives who had been assigned the roles of commander are beheaded (42). Cixous then comments:

Women have no choice other than to be decapitated, and in any case the moral is that if they don't actually lose their heads by the sword, *they only keep them on the condition that they lose them* - lose them, that is to complete silence, turned into automatons. [...] If man operates under the threat of castration, if masculinity is culturally ordered by the castration complex, it might be said that the backlash, the return, on women of this castration anxiety is its displacement as decapitation, execution of women, as loss of her head (42-43)

It is worth noting that the women in the tale of Sun Tse are decapitated with a sword, a metallic projection of the phallus silencing them into eternal submission. In the same vein, Lucy is silenced first by driving the phallic wooden stake through her, resulting in a grotesque reaction tantamount to an orgasm: "The Thing in the coffin writhed; and a hideous, blood-curdling screech came from the opened red lips. The body shook and quivered and twisted in wild contortions" (293). The dominating stake is not enough, however. Lucy returns to her original countenance, "her face of unequalled sweetness and purity" (294). It is only once Lucy has been subdued by the phallus, evidence of her threatening sexuality gone, that Van Helsing allows Arthur to bend and kiss her: "For she is not a grinning devil now - not any more a foul Thing for all eternity" (295). It is no coincidence that Arthur, her intended, is the one to stake her back into the submission. In doing so, he restores heteronormative sexual dominance over the woman who would have been his wife. "The male protagonist," Wyman and Dionisopoulos write, "uses her own body to put 'her in her place,' thus removing her control and leaving her powerless" (214). The task is not over until our heroes have cut off her head and stuffed her mouth with garlic,

eternally silencing her. It is worth mentioning in this connection that Dr. Seward refers to Lucy throughout his narration of this scene as “The Thing³,” stripping her of her identity. It is only once she has been put back in her proper place, after being turned into the silent automaton of Cixous’s narrative, that he once more refers to her by her given name.

There are suggestive parallels between the myth of Medusa and Lucy’s fate in the novel. Like the end of Lucy’s narrative, Medusa’s tale is also a parable of castration in Cixous’s terms. Everything that is monstrous about Medusa - her head of snakes and her gaze that turns men to stone - are bestowed upon her as a means of protection after she is raped in the temple of her goddess. She has to bear the sins of the man who raped her by being turned into something monstrous. Likewise, Lucy has to bear the sins not only of her attacker - Dracula - but also of the men who fail to save her. As a result of their failure, she is turned into a monster. Stoker writes, “the brows [on Lucy’s face] were wrinkled as though the folds of the flesh were coils of Medusa’s snakes” (Stoker 289). In this case, her monstrosity is not for her own protection as it was for Medusa, but like Medusa it is something that is bestowed upon her outside of her control. Christopher Craft comments on this memorable scene: “Here is the novel’s real - and the woman’s only - climax, its most violent and misogynistic moment [...] the murderous phallicism of this passage clearly punishes Lucy for her transgression of Van Helsing’s gender code [...] Violence against the sexual woman here is intense, sensually imagined, ferocious in detail” (122). Another parallel between their stories is that it is sins of the flesh that turn both Medusa and Lucy into monsters. By the time of her death, Lucy has the blood of five men in her veins:

³ From Hurley, also, in her discussion of the abhuman: “[...] bodies are without integrity or stability; they are instead composite and changeable. Nothing is left but Things: forms rent from within by their own heterogeneity, and always in the process of becoming-Other” (9). Becoming even more Othered in her monstrosity, Lucy’s body is so removed from its integrity by Dr. Seward that he refuses to acknowledge her identity until Arthur has returned her to her rightful submissive state.

Dracula, Dr. Seward, Quincy Adams, Van Helsing, and finally her fiance, Arthur Holmwood.

There is an intimacy that comes with all of these men sharing their blood with her, and in it there is a degree of sexual intermingling. This can be read in one way as sexual infidelity - her being promised to Arthur, but experiencing the intimacy of exchanging blood with four other men. In another way, it can be read in terms of Lucy being open in her sexuality, therefore othering herself by not conforming to the gender norms established for her sex in Stoker's time.

"Bluebeard" in Transylvania

For almost two-thirds of the novel, Jonathan often seems to find himself in the submissive role: for example, when he falls ill after fleeing from Dracula's castle and is detained in the hospital in Buda-Pesth, it is Mina who is left to take the leadership role and facilitate all of the affairs pertaining to their swiftly-arranged marriage. Before this, while in the hospital, Jonathan was not even able to commune with Mina at all. It is one of the nuns - a woman - who has to write to Mina and inform her of her fiance's condition. His earlier encounter with Dracula's brides - not one, but three femme fatale figures - had him in an especially abject position. He says, "There is nothing more dreadful than those awful women, who were - who *are* - waiting to suck my blood" (69). This encounter, in fact, leads to his falling ill and having to be hospitalized in the first place.

One of the things that seems to make this encounter so horrifying for Jonathan is that it occurs in a domestic space. Instead of heeding Dracula's warning not to fall asleep outside the apartments designated for his stay, Jonathan decides to trespass to one of the towers of the castle accessible to him through a broken door. Though the room is described as dilapidated - there is a "wealth of dust which lay over all and disguised in some measure the ravages of time and the

month” (63) - Jonathan feels a certain safety in being there because it is a woman’s space. He writes, “I determined not to return to-night to the gloom-haunted rooms, but to sleep here, where, of old, ladies had sat and sung and lived sweet lives whilst their gentle breasts were sad for their menfolk away in the midst of remorseless wars” (64-65). By this point in his stay, it has become clear to Jonathan that Dracula has malevolent intent, and he is beginning to fear for his life. He seeks solace and comfort by invading a space that is designated as a woman’s space, as, following the “Angel in the House” motif popularized by Coventry Patmore’s 1854 poem, it should have been a proper space of repose for him.

That he is in this domestic space is what makes his encounter with Dracula’s brides terrifying to the point that he loses consciousness afterward. As Mina herself writes later, “I suppose there is something in woman’s nature that makes a man free to break down before her and express his feelings on the tender or emotional side without feeling it derogatory to his manhood” (310). This is the comfort which Jonathan seeks, and much to his displeasure it is this comfort which he does not get. When the brides first appear, Jonathan finds himself problematically both attracted to and revolted by them: “I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips” (66). These women are described as “ladies by their dress and manner” (65). Jonathan is certainly far from home, but his observation of the women before him as “ladies” carries with it certain societal expectations. When these expectations are not met, and in fact, are entirely inverted, it adds another layer to the sense of horror Jonathan is already experiencing. As the scene continues, Stoker makes it clear that Jonathan is indubitably in the submissive role. Jonathan describes the women bending over him twice. He is no longer a figure of sexual dominance, something that should have been guaranteed

by his sex alone. The women's demeanor is not quite described as monstrous, but they are certainly eral: "There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal" (66). Not only is this behavior outside of their rank - being described as "ladies," it is understood that they should have behaved with a certain set of manners - but far outside of what is expected of their sex as well. The bride that approaches Jonathan "licking her lips" contributes to the reading of the vampire as a predator - she has Jonathan cornered and has plans to devour him. The predatory dominance in this scene can also be read as part of the sexual dominance that is associated with the vampire as well. Within the correlation of the vampire bite as symbolic of oral sex, the vampiress licking her lips as she approaches Jonathan has an air of seduction as well. Unlike Dracula in his most monstrous scenes, the brides are mobile: they are bending over Jonathan, putting their lips on his neck, and nearly sinking their teeth into his skin. Though they appear to be women, they are othered by their sexual potency and predatory instinct. This othering makes them monstrous, and particularly terrifying to a man such as Jonathan Harker who adheres to - but does not necessarily exemplify - the strict gender norms of the nineteenth century.

In fact, Jonathan's narrative of his time at Castle Dracula exhibits quite a few elements of the Female Gothic, an inversion that persists - though on a much smaller scale once we are back in the rational, lawful world of England - for the remainder of the novel. One of the main characteristics of the Female Gothic is that the story often takes place in the domestic space. Heroines such as Anne Radcliffe's Emily St. Aubert find themselves exploring ancient castles, and the story "typically features a fearful representation of a male, who is so cruelly dangerous as to appear inhuman" (Anolik 11). Jonathan Harker finds himself in a similar situation. He is

kept virtually a prisoner at Castle Dracula after his arrival which, in itself, is anything but conventional. As exemplified above in the discussion of his experience with the brides, all of the horror of his time at Castle Dracula takes place within the domestic space where he is being guarded - and also preyed upon - by a fearful monstrous male, much like the one Anolik describes. Though, again, it seems like the most directly threatening monsters of Castle Dracula are not necessarily the Count himself, but the ravenous women who inhabit the castle with him. Unlike them, he makes no move to directly threaten Jonathan during his stay. Instead, the Count intimidates Jonathan into doing as he says by dropping cryptic warnings about the things that he would not want to do. He tells Jonathan, "You may go anywhere you wish in the castle, except where the doors are locked, where of course you will not wish to go" (Stoker 42). This is an interesting parallel to a constitutive early narrative for the Female Gothic, the story of Bluebeard as written by Charles Perrault. After his marriage to a young woman, Bluebeard presents her with the keys to the house before leaving to take care of some business affairs. Before leaving, he tells her that she is welcome to venture into any room in the house, with the exception of one. Struck by curiosity, the woman ventures into the room anyway, only to find that it was full of the dead bodies of his previous wives. The young woman drops the key in a puddle of blood in the room and is unable to get the blood off, so when her husband returns home, he is able to see that she had ventured into the room he told her not to. He sentences her to death, but she is saved by her brothers, who manage to slay Bluebeard just in time.

Venturing back to *Dracula* and Jonathan's adventures in the realm of the Female Gothic, the Count posits him with a similar proposition in the aforementioned quote. Jonathan, like Bluebeard's young wife, has the freedom to range over Castle Dracula, with the exception of the

doors which are locked. The Count offers Jonathan further instruction: "...let me warn you with all seriousness, that should you leave these rooms you will not by any chance go to sleep in any other part of the castle. It is old, and has many memories, and there are bad dreams for those who sleep unwisely. Be warned!" (60). Before his encounter with the brides, Jonathan breaks both of Dracula's rules: he ventures into a room that is locked - the door to the tower "seemed to be locked, [but] gave a little under pressure" (62) - and falls asleep in there after writing in his journal. Like the heroine of "Bluebeard," Jonathan also discovers something better left unseen: the three vampire women who intend to "unsex" him. Blood is a necessary component in this narrative as well: even as the heroine drops her key in the puddle of blood leaking from the Iron Maiden, Jonathan is discovered by Dracula just as the women are about to sink their teeth into Jonathan's neck. This marks Jonathan's transgression, as the blood on the key marks the transgression of the heroine in the fairy tale.

In fact, Dracula plays a dual role in this scene and in its parallels to the "Bluebeard" narrative. He is at once Bluebeard, keeping Jonathan prisoner in his castle and discovering his transgression, and the brother who saves him from the chilling bite of his female aggressors. "This man belongs to me!" he says, "Beware how you meddle with him or you will have to deal with me" (67). Dracula admits a sense of ownership over Jonathan, mirroring the way that Bluebeard would have ownership over his wife. It is not marriage, but a business transaction that sends Jonathan to Castle Dracula. However, due to the nature of marriage even at the end of the nineteenth century, an argument could be made that there is not much difference between the two. Through Jonathan's eyes we see Dracula at his most aggressive, and furthermore the most monstrous. He is intimidating by description alone: "His eyes were positively blazing. The red

light in them was lurid, as the flames of hell-fire blazed behind them. His face was deathly pale, and the lines of it were hard like drawn wires; the thick eyebrows that met over the nose now seemed like a heaving bar of white-hot metal” (67). The action which follows - “hurl[ing] the woman from him” (67) - is underwhelming in comparison to the “wrath and fury” (67) he displays when he first arrives at the scene.

Another major element of the Female Gothic which Anolik highlights is “the tyrannical and monstrously inhuman husband [who] is the source of horror for the woman” (13). With the recurring theme of gender inversion throughout the novel - and especially in this scene - I would argue the brides better represent this tyrannical, inhuman figure. They alone are described in bestial terms: the vampire woman at first “lick[s] her lips like an animal” and then her tongue is described as “lapp[ing] at her sharp white teeth” (66). The Count, on the other hand, lacks any similar description - his eyes blaze with “hell-fire” and the lines of his face are compared to “white-hot metal” (67), neither anywhere near as impactful as the animalistic descriptions of the vampire woman on the previous page. The vampire brides in the role of the tyrannical spouse presents an interesting parallel to the latter half of the novel, where Jonathan’s *actual* wife begins to turn into a vampire. Once Mina begins her transformation, there is a turn in Jonathan’s character toward the role of a typical male hero. As Craft notes, “Dracula, after all, kisses these women out of their passivity and so endangers the stability of Van Helsing’s symbolic system” (119). For Jonathan, the threat of his wife turning into a woman who would “unsex” him awakens his own masculinity.

Mina Harker: A Hero

Mina, like Dracula, occupies the space between gender. Van Helsing, the principal force of maintaining (hetero)normativity on the novel, even says of her: "She has man's brain - a brain that a man should have were he much gifted - and a woman's heart" (316). Mina is second only to Dracula in the way that she blurs the lines between gender binaries; this connection is further evidence of that solidarity. Quincy Morris may be the one that sacrifices himself for the cause, but Mina becomes the true hero of her own deliverance. This passage exhibits part of Wyman and Dionisopoulos's argument. While Lucy exhibits one extreme of the Virgin/Whore dichotomy, Mina exhibits the other: the pious virgin. Of the virgin archetype, they write: "This is also a powerless label in that the virgin is often described as needing protection from men and the 'dangers' of sexuality" (215). I would argue that this statement is only half-true of Mina, considering that she, more than any of the men in the novel, becomes the most vital player in the quest to destroy the Count. In fact, Van Helsing attempts to exclude her from the ordeal altogether: "We men are determined - nay, are we not pledged? - to destroy this monster, but it is no part for a woman" (Stoker 316-317). Van Helsing changes his plans once it is discovered that Mina's mind is connected with Dracula's, and his male collaborators are able to put this discovery to use in keeping track of Dracula's location during the high stakes race to return to Castle Dracula that serves as the narrative climax of the novel. This presents a paradox worth considering. Mina is the only other character in the novel who is able to connect with Dracula to this degree. Though he completes the same exchange with Lucy earlier in the novel - he drains her of her blood, and the other way around - and successfully turns her into a vampire, Stoker

provides no evidence that the two were able to commune to the same degree. Lucy's sleepwalking can easily be considered a form of mind control, as it is influenced by Dracula's hold on her, but Mina exhibits a certain agency of this mental connection that Lucy does not. Dracula has complete control over Lucy; he does not have that over Mina. Mina is only able to access this connection at certain times of the day, but he is unable to completely keep her from utilizing it. Though the characters speculate that Dracula may be able to see into Mina's mind the same way she is able to access his, Stoker does not resolve this question for certain. Being so intimately connected by the mind presents the idea that Mina and Dracula exist on a more equal ground, whereas he exhibited complete dominance over Lucy.

However, Mina's inherent ability to lead is a characteristic she exhibits even before she knows of the Count. She serves as both a voice of reason and grounding force not only for her dear friend Lucy, but for her husband Jonathan as well. Masquerading in the position of the caretaker while Jonathan is hospitalized in Buda-Pesth, Mina is left to navigate her place in the domestic sphere as well as engage with the public sphere in Jonathan's place. She also exhibits a desire for knowledge long before she encounters Dracula. This desire of course reminds us of the story of Eve in the Garden, enticed by the serpent to a knowledge which is not meant to belong to her, and is further illustrated in fables and fairy tales such as the aforementioned "Bluebeard." Braidotti claims that "Knowledge is always the desire to know about desire, that is to say about things of the body as a sexual entity" (73). Her curiosity is clearly piqued in the hospital in Buda-Pesth when she spies Jonathan's journal, and even more so when he later entrusts it to her: "Are you willing, Wilhelmina, to share my ignorance? Here is the book. Take it and keep it, read it if you will, but never let me know" (156). In a clear inversion of the roles of husband and wife,

the bedridden Jonathan entrusts Mina with horrific knowledge of the public sphere. In fact, he submits to her entirely in asking *her* to keep *him* in ignorance, exercising a fragility typical of the “fairer” sex.

This trust is not maintained throughout the novel, however, for once Mina begins to transform into a vampire, when she threatens to become something that will actually unsex him, Jonathan moves to correct the heteronormative dynamic. This shift occurs after two noteworthy things have happened, both of which occur in the same scene. First, another man, in this case Dracula, has colonized his space and, in turning her into a vampire, has colonized his wife. Secondly, seeing Mina taking a position of sexual dominance in the oral sexual exchange between her and Dracula, and seeing the consequences of such appear on her forehead with the mark of the sacred wafer, he finally views the agency his wife has been taking as a threat. When Jonathan finally awakes from his trance after Dracula vanishes from the scene, he “jump[s] from the bed, and beg[ins] to pull on his clothes, all the man in him awake” (377). Mina, like the terrifying brides in the castle, like the horrifying specter of Lucy in the graveyard, is now *something*⁴ who can unsex him, and that in turn awakens this masculinity that seemed to be hibernating since his first encounter at Castle Dracula. As he awakens, he also cries: “Mina, dear, what is it? What does that blood mean? My God, my God! Has it come to this!” (377). The blood forces Jonathan to recall his own journey through the Bluebeard narrative at Castle Dracula, a narrative he has no desire to relive. Instead of the submissive wife, Jonathan is now Bluebeard. As Bluebeard sees the blood on the key that his wife dropped, so Jonathan sees the blood on Mina’s nightgown and recognizes that she has transgressed against him in her recent

⁴ I choose to refer to Mina as *something* here to reflect the language Dr. Seward uses as he describes Lucy in her fully vampiric form. In that form, Lucy loses her identity as Mina is in danger of doing here.

quasi-sexual encounter with Dracula. Her desire for knowledge has strayed too far into Braidotti's realm of a desire for sexual knowledge, and Jonathan must obtain dominance before he, like Arthur, is castrating his wife in her grave. Instead, Jonathan must castrate he who sired her. Though he is not the one to deliver the killing blow in the phallic plunge of the stake - that is reserved for Quincy, the pinnacle of masculinity - he is the one who beheads Dracula with the kukri knife, another phallic object. Of course, Mina is present to witness the elimination of her proxy. Though she is not on the receiving end of the brutality as Lucy is, she must bear witness to her husband restoring his inherent dominance in their marriage. Significantly, Mina "shriek[s] as she [sees] it shear through the throat" (491), as if it is she who is wounded and not Dracula. The end note provides the the final step of necessary closure: despite the fact that she was once in danger of becoming a monster that would unsex him, Jonathan has effectively made his wife a mother, restoring the heteronormative balance in his marriage in full.

Dracula's Gender Fluidity

Van Helsing famously states at one point that Mina possesses "a man's brain [...] and a woman's heart" (316) and we might make the same claim of the Count himself. Dracula performs the role of the Victorian educated gentlemen well: more than once in Jonathan's account, he makes it clear that the Count is an educated man, well-versed not only in the customs of his own country, but in those of England as well. However, we cannot ignore the Count's typically effeminate passivity, nor can we neglect his interest in the necessity of child-rearing. Such an idea is of course of interest to a man as well, driven by the necessity for a male heir to succeed him, but Dracula preys on no other men in the novel. Once he comes to England, he only preys upon women. Additionally, the Count takes a far more active role in the nurturing of

his vampire daughters than a typical man might. Mina and Lucy are gifted with (eternal) life through the transformative, albeit damning, effects of his bite, and in an exclusively maternal role, he nurses them with the fruit of his own life as well. We see Dracula at his most feminine during the scene in the Harker's bedroom, where he nurses his monstrous protege at his bloody breast.

Braidotti describes what she terms the fantasy of the male-born child, as a result of “a paroxysm of hatred for the feminine; it inaugurated a flight from the female body in a desire to master the woman's generative powers” (70). She discusses this concept in terms of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, where Victor Frankenstein bypasses sexual reproduction in reanimating dead flesh. The concept of the male mother is framed in her article solely in terms of proto-science. Braidotti discusses the figure of the alchemist, and the necessity for an artificial uterus: “the appropriation of the womb” (71), as she calls it. These figures are “men of science but men of the male kind, capable of producing new monsters and fascinated by their power” (71). Though it is clear that Dracula is both a learned and cunning man, he does not exhibit any of the skills of these “men of the male kind,” though he is able to do within his own body that which they are all striving to do: reproduce. There is plenty of discourse equating the virility of the blood of the vampire bite to semen; the figure of the vampire cannot be at all divorced from the sexuality that comes along with it, especially since his preferred victim is the young, virtuous woman. However, few critics have paid attention to the ways that vampire blood can be equated to elements of female reproduction, namely breast milk and menstrual blood.

Christopher Craft mentions the idea of the vampire's blood as breast milk in his discussion of the aforementioned scene where Mina is caught drinking from an open wound in

Dracula's chest. He writes, "We are at the Count's breast, encouraged once again to substitute white for red as the blood becomes milk: 'the attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten's nose into a saucer of milk'" (125). This tableau is a perversion of the image of the infant nursing at the mother's breast, one that is corrected at the end of the novel when Jonathan mentions seeing Mina nursing their son Quincy at her own breast in his closing note. This closing scene represents Mina's final correction, a last purging of her vampirism. She cannot become a creature capable of unsexing her husband now that she has submitted to the role of motherhood. However, the image of the nursing infant cannot necessarily be divorced from the idea of the woman as the monstrous other. Braidotti, in fact, shows the way that women are othered *because* of this ability: "The woman's body can change shape in pregnancy and childbearing; it is therefore capable of defeating the notion of fixed *bodily form*. [...] The fact that the female body can change shape so drastically is troublesome in the eyes of the logocentric economy within which to see is the primary act of knowledge and *the gaze* is the basis of all epistemic awareness" (64). The othering continues even after the child is born, as the child vampirizes her by drinking sustenance from her breast.

Craft discusses throughout his piece the substitution of red for white to support his claim that vampire blood symbolizes both semen and breast milk. However, I would ask - what if we simply allowed red to remain *red*? Vampires reproduce through blood, and the powerful, direct associations of blood with fertility are too pervasive to ignore. Returning once again to the scene where Mina is at Dracula's breast, Craft once more draws attention to the open wound from which she drinks: "We are back in the genital region, this time a woman's, and we have the suggestion of a bleeding vagina. The image of red and voluptuous lips, with their slow trickle of

blood, has, of course, always harbored this potential” (125). Dracula, existing along the gender binary, is occupying three roles at once: the phallic conqueror, the nursing mother, and the menstruating maid. Menstruation is often the indicator that an adolescent woman has reached sexual maturity. Societal norms aside, her body has attained the ability to reproduce. There is a fascinating correlation Sophie Sexon draws in her analysis of early Christian art between Christ’s wounds and their yonic image, applicable here to the wound in Dracula’s chest as well:

In commonly used medieval prayer books [...] there are images of Christ’s wound that float, disembodied, like giant vulvas [...] the wound appears vertically in a mandorla shape, undoubtedly signifying as a large vaginal symbol that takes up most of the page. Sometimes these images appear close to [...] the prayer for Matins that begins ‘Domine *labia* mea aperies’ (Lord, open my lips) (1)

Stoker gives us little information about the shape of the wound on Dracula’s chest, but it must be at least the size of Mina’s mouth. We get only that “a thin stream trickled down the man’s bare breast which was shown by his torn open dress” (376). It would be a stretch to assume a shape on the wound such as the one Sexon describes in her analysis. The trickle of blood is one indicator, but there are further clues in the latent sexuality of the scene. The torn clothes of both Mina and the Count are another. The Count’s orgasmic disposition is what makes the sexuality of this scene most apparent: “His eyes flamed red with devilish *passion*; the great nostrils of the white aquiline nose opened wide and quivered at the edge; and the white sharp teeth, behind the full lips of the blood-dripping mouth, clamped together like those of a wild beast” (376, emphasis mine). The Count is here about to reach a pinnacle of pleasure at which the phallic arrival of the heteronormative male heroes brings to an infuriating halt. Van Helsing, chief preserver of heteronormativity, diffuses the scene by raising his hand which contains the Sacred Wafer, which leaves the Count cowering. The wafer, of course, is cause for the Count’s retreat, but what

if it is not the only thing? It is this flourish of the hand that causes Dracula to release Mina, bringing an end to their pseudo-sexual copulation. This gesture is apparently a popular motif in lesbian literature, as Terry Castle writes, “We recognize this flourish, of course, exactly that waving off or exorcism gesture [...] the uncanny movement of the hand that at once blocks and obscures the embodiment of female-female eros” (41). The positions of both Mina and Dracula in this scene fail to evoke any sort of image of the phallus. Mina’s mouth is pressed directly onto the wound in Dracula’s chest, lips to lips, an image of oral-vaginal sex. This presents an additional tier to Jonathan’s fear of being “kiss[ed] with those red lips” (68), especially when those lips belong to a formidable vampire who straddles the line of gender fluidity.

This bedroom scene comes with a particular sense of horror for the male audience who discovers it, rendering them unable to immediately rescue Mina, something that should have been a critical priority. Dr. Seward writes, “What I saw appalled me. I felt my hair rise like bristles on the back of my neck, and my heart seemed to stand still” (375). The scene before him is a carnal performance of oral sex without the presence of a phallus, and is therefore sex for sex’s sake. “All sexual practices other than those leading to healthy reproduction are suspected to be conducive to monstrous events” (69). Of course, this scene is the catalyst to Mina’s vampiric transformation. Though there is clear evidence that Dracula has been taking her blood for several pages prior, Mina has reached the point of no return as she wails, in clearly religious language, that she is “Unclean! Unclean!” (378).

Christina Rossetti’s 1862 poem “Goblin Market” boasts a scene similar to the one in the Harkers’ bedroom. Rossetti’s poem exhibits clear implications of pleasure in female-female desire, also interrupted at its conclusion by a latent heteronormativity. Like Mina, the women of

Rossetti's poem resume their rightful places as mothers in the realm of heteronormativity after straying into the forbidden realm of lesbian desire. Main characters Laura and Lizzie are sisters. Laura, out of an inherent desire for knowledge much like the one Mina possesses, visits the forbidden realm of the goblin men and indulges in the sumptuous fruits they sell. After this indulgence, however, Laura begins to wither away, and the only way to save her is for her sister Lizzie to also enter the forbidden market and bring her the same juices of the goblin fruits that ailed her as an antidote. In a clearly homoerotic scene at the climax of the text, Lizzie returns home and cries: "Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices / squeezed from goblin fruits for you / [...] Eat me, drink me, love me" (Lines), and Laura, "clung about her sister / Kiss'd and kiss'd and kiss'd her" (Lines). The image of Laura fervently clinging to her sister as she hungrily drinks the juices of the goblin fruits from her mouth mirrors the monstrous image of Mina devilishly clinging to Dracula as she hungrily drinks the blood from the vulvic open wound in his chest. Welter, quoting Carpenter, writes "*Goblin Market* suggests that female erotic pleasure cannot be imagined without pain" (142), a statement true for the scene between Dracula and Mina as well. Mina leaves the scene with a "thin open wound in her neck" (378) that is still leaking blood when she comes out of her own trance and Dracula, in a carnal, masochistic pleasure, wounds himself to create a vulva through which he can experience this distinctly female pleasure. Each party further bears the punishment of such an event: Mina bears the mark of her vampirism on her forehead even after she has been cured of it and Dracula is eliminated at the novel's close.

Noteworthy also is Van Helsing's weapon of choice for this scene: an envelope with a Sacred Wafer inside, the missing half of Mina's perverse sacrament. We cannot analyze the vampire with satisfaction without considering the way that the Eucharistic sacrament weighs in,

as the image of drinking of the blood of Christ is evoked by the idea of the vampire drinking the blood of its human victims. Or, in the case of the scene with Mina and Dracula in the Harkers' bedroom, the vampire and the victim drinking one another's blood. The Eucharist is a commonality shared with Rossetti's poem as well, best identified in the aforementioned scene where Laura drinks the juice from her sister's mouth and resurrects her from a passive state of undeath. Recounting the scene from her point of view, Mina recalls Dracula as he says "And you, their best beloved one, are now to me, flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood; kin of my kin; my bountiful wine-press for awhile; and shall be later on my companion and my helper" (383). Dracula calling Mina the flesh of his flesh and blood of his blood is not only a reference to Adam's speech in Genesis, as it noted in the footnotes of the Ignatius critical edition, but it can also be read as a reference to the sacrament itself: eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ. In a religious sense, the taking of the Eucharistic sacrament is one of passion; by drinking the wine and eating the wafer, the Catholic believer is said to be consuming Christ himself. Associating this with the image of the vampire transforms it into a directly erotic act. As Paulina Palmer writes, "The vampire, on account of her connections with blood and oral sex, is explicitly sexual in significance, carrying associations of a perverse eroticism that violates accepted taboos" (205). Mina is effectively punished for this transgression, as, significantly, she is seared by a Sacred Wafer meant for her protection. Again, she laments that she is "Unclean! Unclean! [...] I must bear this mark of shame upon my forehead until the Judgment Day" (394). Significantly, Dracula is also branded by a wound on the forehead, as Jonathan attempts to bludgeon him to death in his coffin with a shovel but "merely [makes] a deep gash above the forehead" (84).

Dracula's liminal existence in the space between gender identities made him a potent enemy for his Victorian readers. As a foreigner, Dracula is already Othered, and the further he strays from the Victorian male stereotype, the more Othered he becomes. As the primary antagonist of the novel, he exists closest to the dividing line between gender binaries, and this fluidity is what makes him so evil. Like the woman, he can reproduce, and like the man, he can colonize. Dracula colonizes Jonathan's bedroom, emasculating him into a swoon, and has sexual relations which result in reproduction with his wife. In fact, in a near-perfect fluidity of these two archetypal characteristics, he colonizes *through* reproduction. Craft notes, "Dracula's mission in England is the creation of a race of monstrous women, feminine demons equipped with masculine devices" (111). Typical of the vampire archetype, Dracula's choice victims when he comes to England are young, beautiful, ostensibly virginal women, with Lucy being a possible exception to that final category due to her multiple suitors, thus exemplified in the blood-letting scenes when she at once consumes the blood of four men and Dracula himself. These women are meant to be more frightening inversions of his status as - to use Craft's terms - a male demon equipped with feminine devices. This proposed race would be made up entirely of women like the brides in Dracula's castle, a race of women threatening to unsex and colonize the men of England. This is a particularly compelling fear considering the tumultuous changes in gender roles that were happening at the turn of the century when Dracula was written. As Craft notes, "His [Dracula's] sexualized women are men, too" (120). With feminism gaining traction under the image of the New Woman along with other superstitions about the turn of the century, there are few forecasts more frightening than a slew of predatory women, already othered by their sex

and othered even further in their monstrosity, empowered by an othered outsider from the Orient who exists between gender roles himself?

Conclusion

The late Victorian Gothic may, as Hurley says, supernaturalize real threats into monsters as coping mechanisms, but these monsters are usually properly disposed of by the end of the tale. Ghosts are revealed to be nothing more than uncanny tricks of the light; the brave heroine of the Female Gothic escapes her domineering husband just in the nick of time. This genre provided pleasure to its readers in part *because* it presented a resolution to monstrous forces that were not available in the real world. Mina is an outlier in the sense that instead of destruction she receives what amounts to an antidote to her vampirism with the elimination of her sire. Yet outlier though she may be, she remains part of a larger trope. Kimberly Lau discusses “the double standard that promises [...] a constant return to patriarchal order for female vampires” (18). Patriarchal order is exacted upon Lucy’s body as she is staked back into submission by her would-be husband; it is restored to Mina as she resumes her stereotypically female role in her marriage once Dracula is staked in her stead. She is no longer a monster because she closes the novel adhering to the roles expected of her sex, as observed by the gaze of her husband. Though she embarks on a terrible journey through the horrors of gender exploration - one that leaves the scar of the Sacred Wafer on her forehead as penance for her sins - the novel closes with disturbing quietude.

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