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Objectifying Anxieties: Scientific Ideologies in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and *The Lair of the White Worm*

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Romanticism on the Net

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Article

Objectifying Anxieties: Scientific Ideologies in Bram Stoker's Dracula and The Lair of the White Worm

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Abstract

Scientific ideologies swirl throughout Stoker's two most gothic novels, *Dracula* (1897) and *The Lair of the White Worm* (1911), and this essay will address those ideologies as literary manifestations of just some of the "weird science" that was permeating late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Europe. Specifically, the essay examines racial theories, physiognomy, criminology, brain science, and sexology as they appear in Stoker's two novels. Stoker owned a copy Johann Caspar Lavater's five-volume edition of *Essays on Physiognomy* (1789), and declared himself to be a "believer of the science" of physiognomy. The second major "weird science" infecting the gothic works of Stoker is the new field of criminology, or the bourgeois attempt to codify, control, and exterminate criminal elements in the human population. Stoker drew on both Havelock Ellis's *The Criminal*, published in 1890, and the Italian Cesare Lombroso's work, *Uomo Delinquente* (1876), a book that was available to Stoker in a two volume French translation published as *L'Homme Criminel* (1895). Stoker derived a number of his passages about the workings of the brain from the theories of the well-known professor of physiology, W. B. Carpenter, founder of the notion of "unconscious cerebration," a concept developed in his book *Principles of Mental Physiology* (1874). Finally, Richard von Krafft-Ebing published his pioneering text on sexuality in 1886, *Psychopathia Sexualis, with Special Reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Legal Study*, and invented the scientific study of sex. Of a piece with criminology, sexology attempted to categorize and medicalize human behaviors in such a way that all would become clear to the informed and enlightened bourgeois consciousness. As another weirdly scientific effort to "discipline and punish," sexology sought to transform crime into perversion, and the man or woman suffering from vampiric tendencies became just another case study of sexual deviancy.

Have you ever heard what some philosophers say—that men were all animals once? [...] But there is another thing that is of the greatest consequence—this: that all men, if they do not take care, go down the hill to the animals' country; that many men are actually, all their lives, going to be beasts. People knew it once, but it is long since they forgot it.

George MacDonald, *The Princess and Curdie* (1883) 69

I. The Other c'est moi

1

The era that produced the very anxious children's stories written by MacDonald, Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Kipling's "The Mark of the Beast" (1891), Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), James's "The Jolly Corner" (1906), as well as the writings of Darwin and all manner of evolutionists and anti-evolutionists, also produced the novels of Bram Stoker, perhaps the "weirdest scientist" of them all. Scientific ideologies swirl throughout Stoker's two most gothic novels, *Dracula* (1897) and *The Lair of the White Worm* (1911), and this essay will address those ideologies as literary manifestations of just some of the "weird science" that was permeating late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Europe.

2

In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Julia Kristeva has outlined how Westerners have constructed various kinds of foreigners. She argues that France—and by extension, all Western societies—have created a centripetal, compact social texture that has attempted to establish values that are sheltered from great invasions and intermixing of populations (38). But at the same time, the fascinated rejection that the foreigner arouses in us is a reflection of our infantile desires and fears of the other: the other of death, the other of woman, the other of uncontrollable drive. The foreigner is thus within us, a manifestation of the fact that we are fighting our unconscious, the otherness that is within ourselves and that is blatant whenever we reject or attack someone other than ourselves (191).

3

This tendency to other the self—or more specifically, to locate a latent beast within the human—actually forms the basis of Stoker's *Dracula* and *The Lair of the White Worm*. The first work is suffused with anxieties about empire, racial mixing, miscegenation, and women as carriers of defective genes and insatiable sexual appetites. In addition, *Dracula* presents in fairly blatant terms an intense anxiety about the weakening of Christianity as an effective controlling agent of an increasingly heterogeneous population. Fears of Eastern Europeans, dark others, and the earlier, atavistic forms of race and religion mark the text and are finally eradicated in a rabidly neo-Christian phantasmagoria that concludes the novel. As Mina Harker grows more white (through loss of blood), her status as the racially pure saviour of Western civilization increases, while the increasingly dark and desperate Count is hunted, cornered, and finally ghettoized into his coffin, exterminated so that a racially clean and Christian civilization can continue to populate and expand the boundaries of its empire. *The Lair of the White Worm* is an even more racist text as well as a sexist tome about the diabolic powers of the female to corrupt ancient British stock.

4

In addition to the compulsion to other for psychological or religious reasons, there is also a narratological impetus toward othering at work in Stoker's fictions. As Fredric Jameson has observed, the "most important [...] organizational [category of romance narratives] is the conceptual opposition between good and evil, under which all the other types of attributes and images (light and darkness, high and low, etc.) are clearly subsumed" (140). In addition, he has noted:

It is becoming increasingly clear that the concept of evil is at one with the category of Otherness itself: evil characterizes whatever is radically different from me, whatever by virtue of precisely that difference seems to constitute a very real and urgent threat to my existence. So from earliest times, the stranger from another tribe, the 'barbarian' who speaks an incomprehensible language and follows 'outlandish' customs, or, in our own day, the avenger of cumulated resentments from some oppressed class, or else that alien being—Jew or Communist—behind whose apparently human feature an intelligence of a malignant and preternatural superiority is thought to lurk—these are some of the figures in which the fundamental identity of the representative of Evil and the Other are [sic] visible. The point, however, is not that in such figures the Other is feared because he is evil; rather he is evil because he is Other, alien, different, strange, unclean, and unfamiliar.

140

Jameson speaks here of the same sort of phenomenon that Kristeva does, although his focus is political and material, but certainly there is a rabid othering of *Dracula* and *Lady Arabella* in Stoker's two novels. If the novels were nothing more than manifestations and then destructions of these powerful others, however, they would not, I think, have the power or currency that they have possessed. Instead, what begins to occur in Stoker is the queasy recognition that the Other c'est moi. The animal within Jonathan Harker, Lucy Westenra, and finally Mina herself, who laps at the breast of the monster like a babe gulping her mother's milk: these are the horrific images that we take from a reading of *Dracula*. And when we try to imagine the beautiful and sophisticated *Lady Arabella* as a monstrous white worm devouring her victims in a feeding frenzy that has lasted for centuries, we are confronted with the power of the masculine dread of the vagina dentata, the vagina with teeth.

5

In addition to the layer of psychic and emotional othering in these texts, there is also a pervasive political and social othering that is just as powerful. As an Irishman, Stoker was caught between the conflicted attitudes of the English toward the Irish, not to mention the hostility and suspicion of the Irish toward the English. But Stoker's racial position is considerably more complicated than any simplistic notion of "Irish" might imply. As Joseph Valente has recently shown, Stoker was Anglo-Celtic rather than Anglo-Irish, being descended through his mother from the O Blathnhaics, a native Irish-Celtic family from the rural West of Ireland (16). Although numerous critics have claimed that Stoker was particularly anxious about the issue of race because of his own status as a mixed race Anglo-Irishman, Valente has claimed otherwise. [1] Instead, he asserts that Stoker was the proud inheritor of his mother's narratives about growing up in Ireland and surviving the potato famine, the 1832 cholera epidemic, and the horrors of the Banshee, whose wail accompanied the death of her Celtic mother (Stoker's grandmother). Stoker's father, in contrast, told him tales of English ambition and success, tinged with aggressive and dominating masculine vigour, so that according to Valente, Stoker grew up split "between a manly John Bull and a hyperfeminine Erin": "against this discursive background, the splitting of Stoker's identification between dissonant racial and cultural legacies could not but acquire considerable sexual energy and assume greater unconscious power on that basis" (17).

6

Recent critical studies of Stoker's works have tended to privilege the racial and political othering that occurs in his works, claiming that his "Irishness" constituted a racial category from which he ambivalently fled. And certainly there was strong anti-Irish activity in England, and certainly Stoker was aware of

it. But he seems in both *Dracula* and *The Lair* to endorse the mixing of the races, even suggesting that the infusion of Celtic and Irish blood has regenerated the tired English stock he saw in London. In *The Framework of Home Rule*, published the same year as *Lair*, Erskine Childers argued that Ireland should not be politically subordinated to England because doing so was a betrayal of the principle of trusting white races to manage their own affairs. He went on to note that the Irish were a "civilized native race, not a coloured, savage, heathen, nomadic people incapable of fusion with the whites" (qtd. in Glover, "Why White" 358). Stoker's intention in *Lair* seems to have been to indict or at least to complicate idealizations of whiteness as a racial and cultural category.[2] A strange and ultimately ideologically confused novel, *The Lair* was Stoker's last work and his final attempt to solve the riddle of race or othering that had plagued British society.

Figure 1



[Image pleine grandeur](#)

Figure 2



[Image pleine grandeur](#)

Figure 3



[Image pleine grandeur](#)

II. Physiognomy

By way of introducing the specifically “weird” scientific ideologies that pervade these two novels, let me highlight the drawings of the Frenchman Charles Le Brun (1619-90), who produced a series of “Physiognomic Heads” in 1668. These renderings of human heads were positioned against their probable animal predecessors in order to suggest the lines of ancestry that were operating in the evolution of human character (see figures 1-3). Le Brun’s heads were so well known throughout Europe that they were engraved by Andre LeGrand and published by Morel d’Arleux in 1806. We can assume, I think, that Erasmus Darwin would have been familiar with the engravings and that they would certainly have had currency in British intellectual circles. [3] With Le Brun’s illustrations in mind, then, we can begin to examine the way that popular scientific ideologies pervaded not simply Victorian British culture, but Stoker’s two novels as microcosms of the society in which they were composed. The anxiety that animated this culture was motivated by the breakdown of the traditional Christian explanation for the origin of the human race, and the nagging, residual awareness of animalistic or even cannibalistic elements within the human character. MacDonald’s “The Princess and Curdie,” as well as the popularity of native fairy tales that stressed the blurring of the animal and human realms, expressed a wider anxiety about the identity of self and other. If the human was actually a higher, more evolved form of animal, then there was no soul. Human inventions of immortality were pathetic and futile attempts to aggrandize the finite and limited ego. *Dracula* and *Lair* are both ultimately dark and desperate spiritual works, which is another way of saying that they are suffused with a variety of nineteenth-century examples of “weird science.”

8

In addition to the popularity of Le Brun’s *Têtes physiognomoniques*, physiognomy became a widespread system of ideology and eventually one of the most pervasive “weird sciences” in England, although its history reaches well back into the ancient world. The most influential source on the subject was Johann Caspar Lavater’s five-volume edition of *Essays on Physiognomy* (1789), a work that Stoker owned. In fact, Stoker declared himself a “believer of the science” of physiognomy (Glover, *Vampires* 72). What was peculiar to the nineteenth century, however, was physiognomy’s alliance with the new “science” of anthropology and its attempt to categorize and institutionalize the category of “race.” John Beddoe published *The Races of Britain* in 1885, an extremely influential book that argued that hair color and shape of skull could be used to trace lines of human descent, charting patterns of assimilation and migration. Suffused with anti-Irish sentiments, the work claimed that the peoples of Western Ireland were “the swarthiest people I have ever seen,” and that with their “flat foreheads, concave noses and prognathous jaws” they were quite possibly descended from Africans (qtd. in Glover, *Vampires* 37). The Western Irish, he notes, are people of low intelligence but “great cunning” who would “never submit to measurement” by his supposedly disinterested hands (qtd. in Glover, *Vampires* 37). Such pseudo-scientific discourse legitimized Charles Kingsley’s description of the Irish as “human chimpanzees” or Thomas Carlyle’s attitude toward the Irish as “white Negroes” (qtd. in Glover, *Vampires* 37).

9

Other leading nineteenth-century racial scientists, including N. C. Macnamara and Francis Galton, as well as the members of the British Anthropological Institute, had by the late 1880s begun to discuss “ethnological physiognomies” as a stable category of racial identity. For this group, race could clearly be identified by examining the appearance of someone’s face and skull, while from those same external characteristics one could then draw conclusions about a group’s moral or ethical nature. For David Glover, *Dracula*—with its talk of “polyglot” states and “the blood of many brave races”—is “very much” written in a world that has been permeated by the beliefs of ethnological physiognomy (*Vampires* 73). But for Daniel Pick, *Dracula*’s investigation of physiognomy is ultimately problematic: “Good and evil are sometimes written in the features, sometimes erased by them. Distance and perspective alter the nature of what is seen [...]. Physiognomy is seen to be an enigmatic and potentially counterproductive study; the face is at once a camouflage and a symptom” (172).

10

But if the Irish fare badly in English “scientific” studies, the African fares even worse. One need not look far for examples of racism in Stoker’s work, but what is most interesting is the way that he merges the human, the sub-human, and the animal in his characterizations. For instance, Edgar Caswall’s black servant Oolanga in *Lair of the White Worm* is treated with the sort of contempt that is reserved for beasts of burden or worse. Called a “lost, devil-ridden child of the forest and the swamp” (354), he is less than fully human; in fact, he is depicted as an ape masquerading as a man. When he appears wearing a top hat, the narrator can barely restrain his laughter, as if he were witnessing the antics of an ape in a coat and tails. He tells us that Oolanga looked “like a horrible distortion of a gentleman’s servant,” and that he is a “negroid of the lowest type; hideously ugly, with the animal instincts developed as in the lowest brutes, cruel, wanting in all the mental and moral faculties—in fact, so brutal as to be hardly human” (355). The engravings by Le Brun spring to mind, as do the many newspaper illustrations lampooning the Irish as well as the theories of Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*. Later we are told that “Monsters such as he is belong to an earlier and more rudimentary stage of barbarism” (372). Finally, when Oolanga offers his sexual services to Lady Arabella she laughs in his face: “no man or woman born with the usual risible faculties of the white race could have checked the laughter which rose spontaneously to her lips” (403).

11

There can be no doubt that *Lair of the White Worm* is very much full of the sort of racial crankiness that one sees in the early anthropologists, although in this

text the lowest race is not the African man, who after all is easily disposed of, dumped like some garbage refuse in a bin behind the house. For Stoker, the real threat of devolutionary power is clearly represented in the separate creation of the monstrous female, an immortal lamia who feeds on the whole bodies of her victims, not just their blood. Consider how Sir Nathaniel describes Lady Arabella March: "a woman, with all a woman's wisdom and wit, combined with the heartlessness of a cocotte and the want of principle of a suffragette" but with the "reserved strength and impregnability of a diplodocus" (448). Apparently, the woman demanding equality was an evolutionary aberration, a freak of nature, so monstrous that she could only be represented by a sickeningly immortal white worm who swallows her victims whole.

12

Lair is set in the ancient area of Mercia, now known as Derbyshire, in the central area of England on the large ancestral holding of Sir Nathaniel de Salis. Sir Nathaniel's good friend, Richard Salton welcomes home his great-nephew Adam Salton, who has returned from western Australia to find himself thrust into a strange duel with the woman-worm next door, Lady Arabella. When people begin to disappear, the suspicion falls on this mysterious woman, who is finally unmasked not simply as a "suffragette" but as an antediluvian worm who has been consuming good British stock for centuries, apparently taking long naps in between her feeding frenzies. The narrator helpfully informs us that Arabella "has been in the habit of sleeping for a thousand years at a time [...] However, be all that as it may, her ladyship is now nightly on the prowl [...] in her own proper shape that she used before the time of the Romans" (218). In another particularly strange line, Adam muses to de Salis, "I never thought this fighting an antediluvian monster was such a complicated job," to which de Salis advises, "being of the feminine species, she probably will over-reach herself" (448). But if de Salis is confident about the nature and identity of Arabella, Mimi is not: "The more Mimi thought [...] the more puzzled she was. Adam had actually seen Lady Arabella coming from her own house on the Brow, yet he—and she too—had last seen the monster [...] wallowing in the Irish Sea. What did it all mean—what could it mean? [...] On either side of her was a belief impossible of reception [...]. And yet in old days there had been monsters and certainly some people had believed in just such mysterious changes of identity" (245).

13

This compulsion to turn human beings back into animals or monsters is at the core of most of Stoker's fictions. As Punter (using Deleuze and Guattari) has observed about the text, all of the main characters are in the grip of "becoming-animal": Arabella becomes snake, Lilla becomes dove, Caswall becomes hawk, and the whole of the book is concerned with "mysterious trackings, huntings, pursuits, in an intricate silent tracery around the great centers of power that structure the landscape of the text" (Punter 176). The novel concerns the struggle for control of the five houses in the text—Caswall's Castra Regis, Arabella's Diana's Grove, Mimi and Lilla's Mercy Farm, the elder Salton's Lesser Hill, and Sir Nathaniel's Doom Tower—and, clearly, the houses are meant to suggest stages in Britain's historical evolution, from Celtic to Roman to Christian to Capitalist. Stoker uses physiognomy to represent the fact that historical change mirrors human evolutionary adaptations, or in some novelistic way, ontology recapitulates phylogeny.

14

The "pure race" theme is not so clear in either *Dracula* or *Lair*, for in both texts a sort of advocacy of racial intermingling and mixed breeding seems to dominate. The child that Mina and Jonathan Harker give birth to also possesses the blood of Dracula, which he introduced into Mina's veins during the famous nursing scene. And the marriage that survives in *The Lair* is between Adam, a British man who has been raised in Australia, and Mimi, whose mother was Burmese. Lilla, the fair embodiment of "old Saxon stock" (358) and Mimi's half sister, is eliminated from the novel and not allowed to reproduce with Adam, while Caswall, the Roman type, is also eliminated as a suitor for Lilla. The colonies have been brought into, absorbed, and domesticated by the empire in such a way that assimilation of the other is no longer threatening, but actually contributes to the hardness of the racial stock. As Glover points out, by the time Stoker wrote this last novel he could no longer believe in "whiteness" at all, so both Arabella and Lilla as doubles of each other ("old" and "new" Saxon stock), as well as Caswell and Oolonga (the Roman and the African), have to be eradicated so that a new and improved racial mix can regenerate the stagnant stock of central England ("Why White" 356).

III. Criminology

15

The second major "weird science" infecting the gothic works of Stoker is the new field of criminology, or the bourgeois attempt to codify, control, and exterminate criminal elements in the human population. A species of what Foucault has labeled the medicalization of society, criminology is one of the practical aspects of sociology, a field that arose to bring the secularized tenets of physiognomy to the masses. One of the most influential British works on the subject was Havelock Ellis's *The Criminal*, published in 1890. Ellis drew heavily on the Italian Cesare Lombroso's work, *Uomo Delinquente* (1876), a book that

was available to Stoker in a two volume French translation published as *L'homme criminel* (1895). [4] Ellis also depicts Lombroso's notion of "the born criminal," a person who can be identified by physical, facial, bodily characteristics. Dracula, we are told, has an "aquiline nose," "massive" eyebrows, and "pointed" ears (D 42-43), all of which cause him to resemble Le Brun's men-birds of prey. But Dracula also conforms uncannily to Lombroso's description of the criminal: "the nose is often aquiline like the beak of a bird of prey" (15); "the eyebrows are generally bushy in murderers and violators of women" (236); there is "a protuberance on the upper part of the posterior margin of the ear, a relic of the pointed ear characteristic of apes" (14-5).

16

Lombroso (1835-1909) is credited with being the Italian founder of positivistic criminology, a field that asserted that crime was a form of devolution or evolutionary atavism:

[the criminal is] an atavistic being who reproduces in his person the ferocious instincts of primitive humanity and the inferior animals. Thus were explained anatomically the enormous jaws, high cheek-bones, prominent superciliary arches, solitary lines in the palms, extreme size of the orbits, handle-shaped or sessile ears found in criminals, savages, and apes, insensibility to pain, extremely acute sight, tattooing, excessive idleness, love of orgies, and the irresistible craving for evil for its own sakes, the desire not only to extinguish life in the victim, but to mutilate the corpse, tear its flesh, and drink its blood.

135-36

Mina at one point helpfully suggests that Lombroso would diagnose Dracula's criminal activity as being caused by his "child-brain," while Van Helsing assures the band of brothers that it is Dracula's intention to become the father of "a new order of beings, whose road must lead through Death, not Life" (D 300). As such, Dracula would then be the embodiment of anti-evolutionary forces, a creature who could find immortal life, not by living and then dying, but by dying and then living forever, feeding forever on the blood of the expendable, those who will never have immortal death-in-life. Such a desire is clearly criminal, for it seeks to rob others of their lives as well as their life-force. But such a desire is also strangely anti-scientific, a bold defiance of the findings of Darwin, an atavistic throw-back to the magical thinking of primitive tribes, clans who rallied around the totemic father for his promises of eternal life.

17

Lombroso's work also greatly influenced the German physician Max Nordau (1849-1923), whose book *Entartung* (1893) was translated and published as *Degeneration* in 1895. [5] Nordau and Stoker shared the same publisher, William Heinemann, and there is no doubt that Nordau's theories find themselves transplanted into a number of Stoker's later works. In fact, Mina Harker reveals that she has read criminology tracts when she pronounces the diagnosis on Count Dracula and says, "The Count is a criminal and of criminal type. Nordau and Lombroso would so classify him, and qua criminal he is of imperfectly formed mind" (D 336). Nordau defines degeneracy as "a morbid deviation from an original type," going on to blame the current decline in humanity on "noxious influences" such as symbolist art and Wagner (391; 390). Apart from reactionary tendencies, Nordau couches his "weirdly scientific" theories in a smattering of biological field-speak:

In the mental development of degenerates, we meet with the same irregularity that we have observed in their physical growth. The asymmetry of face and cranium finds, as it were, its counterpart in their mental faculties. Some of the latter are completely stunted, others morbidly exaggerated. That which nearly all degenerates lack is the sense of morality and of right and wrong. For them there exists no law, no decency, no modesty. In order to satisfy any momentary impulse, or inclination, or caprice, they commit crimes and trespasses with the great calmness and self-complacency, and do not comprehend that other persons take offence thereat [...]. The two psychological roots of moral insanity are firstly, unbounded egoism, and, secondly, impulsiveness.

393

But the criminal is not simply suffering from a defective mind; he is also both animal and child-like in his lack of moral development. Van Helsing tells his disciples that Dracula "be of child-brain in much [...] and it is of the child to do what he have done" (D 336). And so just as the Irish or Africans were sub-human, childish, incapable of abstract thought, so were Stoker's villains. In fact, Stoker's fictions can be read as extended attempts to novelize the popular "weird science" of his day in an attempt to justify imperialism and the anti-suffragette movements that Stoker strongly supported. In a bid to shore up the superiority and privileges of Anglo-Saxon white and male racial stock, Stoker "others" the foreign and the female, placing both groups below the fully human, the "man-brain" of Van Helsing. Stoker in his worst moments, like Lombroso, seems to have believed that "only we White people have reached the most perfect symmetry of bodily form [...]. Only we have created true nationalism [... and] freedom of thought" (qtd. in Glover, *Vampires* 166).

18

In addition to Dracula as a criminal type, we are presented with his obsessive disciple, Renfield, inhabitant of the mental asylum run by Dr. Seward, one of the many voices of positivism and "weird science" in the novel. Seward sounds as if he also had recently been reading Nordau when he describes Renfield for his visitors: "My homicidal maniac is of a peculiar kind. I shall have to invent a new classification for him, and call him a zoöphagous (life-eating) maniac; what he desires is to absorb as many lives as he can, and he has laid himself out to achieve it in a cumulative way. He gave many flies to the spider and many spiders to one bird, and then wanted a cat to eat the many birds" (D 92). As Burton Hatlen has pointed out, Renfield himself is a sort of mad scientist run amuck; he "represents a mechanistic materialism gone mad—a materialism that would treat life, not as a process which results from certain functional relationships among the parts of an organism, but rather as one part of that organism" (127).

19

The most frightening aspect of all of these attempts to categorize "race" or "evil" was the shockingly obvious fact that there was often a lack of correspondence between the external and internal. Lady Arabella, after all, is described as "a girl of the Caucasion type, beautiful, Saxon blonde, with a complexion of milk and roses, high-bred, clever, serene of nature" (LWW 36). In short, in novels as well as in life, beautiful, blond, tall and strong people could be morally corrupt, rapacious, evil demons, and therefore all the systems of the intelligentsia were ultimately powerless to predict who could be trusted and who could not. Such moral uncertainty was uncomfortable at best for a society that wanted desperately to believe that scientific positivism could answer all questions, solve all problems.

IV. Brain Science

20

At one point in Dracula, Dr. Seward notes in the diary he is keeping on his strange patient Renfield that

Men sneered at vivisection, and yet look at its results to-day! Why not advance science in its most difficult and vital aspect—the knowledge of the brain? Had I even the secret of one such mind—did I hold the key to the fancy of even one lunatic—I might advance my own branch of science to a pitch compared with which Burdon-Sanderson's physiology or Ferrier's brain-knowledge would be as nothing. If only there were a sufficient cause! I must not think too much of this, or I may be tempted; a good cause might turn the scale with me, for may not I too be of an exceptional brain, congenitally?

92

Another "weird science" employed by Stoker is the burgeoning attempt to study the brain as the seat of the soul, the origin of our unique capacity for language, and the base of our identity. Brain science goes back to the late eighteenth century, but it was taking on new urgency in the late nineteenth century, as brain scientists feuded with mind scientists, a conflict that could be compared to Skinner versus Freud today. Those scientists who saw the brain as physical and material were aligned with physiologists or biologists in their understanding of human behavior. Another school focused instead on what we might call a metaphysical approach to human actions, stressing unconscious forces at work, irrational, buried, animalist impulses deep in some unknown and unknowable strata of the mind. Stoker was clearly drawn to the second group, and he derives a number of his passages about the workings of the brain from the theories of the well-known professor of physiology, W. B. Carpenter, founder of the notion of "unconscious cerebration," a concept developed in his book *Principles of Mental Physiology* (1874). "Unconscious cerebration" is used by Dr. Seward to diagnose his manic patient Renfield, and can be identified as unconscious psychic energy, what Freud would later label Ucs. When Seward tries to understand Renfield's obsessions, he despairs and notes that their solution "is growing from a rudimentary idea in my mind" by "unconscious cerebration" and that it will soon grow into a fully conscious "whole idea" (D 90). Glover notes that Carpenter was concerned with demonstrating "that the mental faculty was embodied in an economy of nerves and muscles, so that he often used the term mind as a synonym for brain" (*Vampires* 77). For Carpenter, thought was a series of impressions that moved along the "nerves of the internal senses from the Cerebrum to the Sensorium," or the center of consciousness, from "which point they could excite muscular movements" (qtd. in Glover 77).

21

In addition to Carpenter, whose work Stoker knew, another "weird scientist" who was influential during the period and specifically influential on Stoker was Jean-Martin Charcot, the French practitioner of hypnotism, a medical tool that both Van Helsing and Seward use on Mina in order to gain information about Dracula's movements. Mina's hysteria, which allows her direct psychic connection to Dracula, is caused because his blood now runs in her veins. Her hysteria also suggests what Freud and Josef Breuer's *Studies in Hysteria* called "dual life" or "double consciousness" (Valente 85). For the psychoanalysts, hypnosis allowed the split in the unconscious mind to emerge and articulate its position. Like Charcot, Freud and Breuer, Carpenter saw hypnotism as a form of

"artificial somnambulism," a means of sending sensory impressions or commands for bodily movements that would bypass the conscious mind (qtd. in Glover, Vampires 78). And in *Lair* the villain Edgar Caswall has strange hypnotic powers, a family trait that he has further developed by the contents of a trunk left to his grandfather by the Austrian physician Friedrich Anton Mesmer (1734-1815), who had trained the *paterfamilias* in Paris. Of course, Stoker himself had no high opinion of Mesmer, even writing a brief expose about Mesmer's quakery for a collection of essays on historical personages whom he considered to be frauds or liars, *Famous Impostors* (1910). Stoker particularly objected to Mesmer's *baquet magique*, or magic tub, in which patients were supposedly to receive electrical currents by running a tube from the water. Such charlatanism sounds slightly reminiscent of Edgar's own electrical experiments with his kite:

He took a personal interest in the keeping of the great kite flying. He had a vast coil of string which worked on a roller fixed on the parapet of the tower. There was a winch for the pulling in of the slack of the string; the outgoing line was controlled by a racket [...] Edgar began to attribute to it, in his own mind, almost human qualities. It became to him a separate entity, with a mind and a soul of its own.

LWW 107

The diabolic Lady Arabella unrolls a spool of magnesium cord and connects *Castra Regis* to her *Diana's Grove*. When a great bolt of lightning hits the kite, both houses and their inhabitants are destroyed in a spectacular conflagration, an allegorical scene in which the power of nature—aided and abetted by humans—triumphs finally over the corrupt vestiges of the past.

22

But there is also what Charcot called "ambulatory somnambulism" in the text of *Dracula* when Lucy walks at night, compelled by Dracula to leave her boudoir and seek his consuming embrace in the churchyard at Whitby. Clearly the text suggests that Lucy would not be vulnerable to such sleepwalking episodes if there were not some responsive voice already within her. Dracula serves, then, as her dark double within, the other that she responds to the way she has not responded to any of her other suitors. And Stoker also uses hypnotism in *Lair* in an attempt to track the great white worm, Lady Arabella.

23

The brain science that Stoker explores has something to do with the reptilian residue at the base of the human brain, what contemporary neurologists like Jaak Panksepp and Mark Solms have now labeled the ventral tegmental area, lying just above the hairline. Without knowing the contents of the brain, Stoker explores the dark, hidden place out of which libido, drives, and "seeking" emerge. Dracula is clearly an atavistic relic, and so is the white worm that menaces the heart of England. When the worm is finally described, we know we are in strange territory: "It was now at the summit of what seemed to be a long white pole, near the top of which were two pendant white masses" (LWW 457). As Seed observes about the description, "the worm resembles an enormous penis seen from a distance" (198), and as we know the worm is a woman, we are initially puzzled. The association of Lady Arabella with the feared suffragette and coquette, however, allows us to make sense of the contradictory nature of the representation. Lady Arabella is a manifestation of Stoker's most feared and diabolical enemy, the phallic mother who consumes her young, as well as the vagina dentata, the heartless seductress who devours her amorous victims. Stoker's brain science led him to this dark conclusion: that at the base of the human brain was sexual inversion and perversion. The human-animal female brain was the most unnatural of all, for there he located Lady Arabella, the woman with a penis, the woman who found the male expendable. And at the base of the human-animal male brain was also some horrific substance: there he found Dracula, the ever insatiable, consuming male with breasts, ready to feed his young, a parodic version of the mother.

V. Sexology

24

When Richard von Krafft-Ebing published his pioneering text on sexuality in 1886, *Psychopathia Sexualis, with Special Reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Legal Study*, he invented the scientific study of sex. Of a piece with criminology, sexology attempted to categorize and medicalize human behaviors in such a way that all would become clear to the informed and enlightened bourgeois consciousness. As another weirdly scientific effort to "discipline and punish," sexology sought to transform crime into perversion, and the man or woman suffering from vampiric tendencies became just another case study of sexual deviancy. The most infamous case study of vampirism was Sergeant Francois Bertrand, a French soldier who had the unfortunate habit—between February 1847 and March 1849—of digging up dead bodies and hacking them to pieces while he "covered [them] with kisses and pressed [them] wildly to my heart" (Krafft-Ebing qtd. in Stoker, ed. Riquelme 395). His story became "Case 23" of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*, and the quest was on to turn his monstrous behavior into a species of activity that could be scientifically understood and then controlled. The French alienists who studied him debated endlessly about the motives for his crimes, disputing between themselves as to whether he was an "erotomaniac" or a criminal "monomaniac." As Robert Mighall observes about the early attempts to analyze his case, Bertrand could not be understood until Krafft-Ebing coined the category of "sadist" (214) and

the French adapted it to label Bertrand a “necro-sadist”: a process that reveals “that the inexplicable and the monstrous could be made meaningful through this process of sexological reorientation” (216). For Mighall, what the sexologists like Krafft-Ebing and the French alienists were attempting to do was not to demonize unconventional sexuality, but to eroticize the monstrous: “through this process a ‘vampire’ is transformed into a sexual deviant” (217). If evil can be displaced by illness, then the bourgeois scientific impulse triumphs once again. If there are no mysteries surrounding human behavior, no matter how aberrant that behavior is, then there can be no supernatural or animalistic residues to contend with, only sicknesses that can be diagnosed and cured by the advances of modern science.

25

Whether Stoker would or could have written Dracula without knowing about the Bertrand case is the subject of a fair amount of speculation. It is certain that he was familiar with the texts that were generated by the case, most notably G. W. M. Reynolds's *Mysteries of the Court of London*, sequel to the *Mysteries of London* (1847-56), both fictionalizations of the Bertrand story and set in a London plagued by the activities of “Melmoth the Monster Man.” Another popular adaptation of the event could be found in Sabine Baring-Gould's *Book of Were-Wolves* (1865) in the chapter devoted to “An Anomalous Case—The Human Hyaena,” which concluded that “it is quite possible for a human being to be possessed of a depraved appetite for rending corpses [...] the case scarcely bears the character of insanity, but seems to point rather to a species of diabolical possession” (Baring-Gould 259). The goal of modern sexology, however, was to transform just such attitudes so that what was once viewed as demon-possession would now be understood as an aspect of psychological pathology, “the nosological fact of sexual sadism” (Mighall 224).

26

Sexual dysfunction became a category of meaning within late nineteenth-century European culture, and what had previously been explained by recourse to mythic, folkloric, or literary tropes could now be understood within the medico-scientific community as disease. Vampirism or cannibalism, avatars of primitive animalistic-human behavior, now were simply aberrant variations on a basic human drive that could be controlled through socialization and medicalization. As Robert Tracy has noted, vampire fiction emerged as one manifestation of the intense desire to talk about sex in the Victorian age. If death was a central concern in the period and endlessly talked about and debated in literary texts, sex was the silent signifier, a tabooed subject that was always lurking in the background, but never directly addressed: “sex could not be talked about at all, except by combining it with death and so disguising it [...]. As the vampire emerges from beneath his or her lying tombstone so does sexuality emerge from beneath the supernatural terrors which are the ostensible business of vampire fictions” (35). So if the vampire marks the spot of both death and sexuality, what does his emergence suggest about the culture's anxieties? Obviously, death cannot be scientifically explained away nor can it be eradicated no matter how hard scientists work at the task. The control and medicalization of sex, however, functions as a stand-in for the intensely frustrating desire to stave off death. If the scientific community can dissect, label, and categorize sexual impulses, thereby controlling them, then somehow—through a substitutive leap—death has also been relieved of some of its terrors.

Notes

[1]

For an attempt to explain the political anxiety in Dracula as “Irish,” see Schmitt 135-55. He writes, “Consider Dracula's own resemblance to a nightmare vision of the native, unhyphenated Irish. The savagery of his vampiric attacks combined with the aristocratic hauteur of his manner suggests the peculiarly Irish double threat of Fenianism—regularly depicted in the English press as the hallmark of bestial violence—and Catholic feudalism” (147). For a critique of Schmitt's position, see Valente. Other works on Stoker's vexed Irish identity include Moses and Arata. For an account of popular representations of the Irish, see Curtis.

[2]

Riquelme's edition helpfully reprints the most exhaustive contextual background to the text, including contemporary illustrations and excerpts from Lombroso, Nordau, and Krafft-Ebing.

[3]

See the catalogue prepared for an exhibit sponsored by the Louvre and housed at Versailles: Charles Le Brun: Peintre et Dessinateur 133-35. These “Têtes

Physiognomonique" are reproduced courtesy of the Department of Graphic Arts, the Louvre (see figures 1, 2, and 3).

[\[4\]](#)

For a detailed application of Lombroso's theories to the novel, see Fontana. David Glover has summarized the many uses of Stoker's interest in the contemporary scientific ideologies of his day and labeled them as a "highly syncretistic amalgam of conflicting accounts of human behavior" (Vampires 80), but to a large extent, he claims, Stoker used "scientific discoveries as a springboard for metaphysical conjecture, bring[ing] questions of immortality or reincarnation into the world of radium and X-rays" (Vampires 81). Another survey of scientific theories in Stoker, specifically in *The Lair*, can be found in Senf.

[\[5\]](#)

This is the first English translation of Nordau's book, but by the end of 1895 the book had gone through seven more printings. For an overview of the topic within this historical context, see Kershner and Stocking. For discussion of some of the debates about scientific themes in the text of *Dracula*, see Greenway, Jann, and Hekma.

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