

**Gender, Power, & Fear: Perverse Identities & Victorian Anxieties in Bram
Stoker's *Dracula***

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Abstract

This thesis examines how gendered portrayals of identity in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* express Victorian social anxieties. Medical journals, marriage guides, and philosophic texts provide historical attitudes on gender, religion, and sexual affinities, providing the groundwork for understanding the conservative values reflected in the text. The book's use of gender inversion conflicts with its explicit establishment of a traditional binary, thus revealing complex associations through the interdependence of its characters and their identities. Furthermore, the contrast between religious influence on human protagonists and the perversion of monstrous antagonists provides commentary on the gendered division of sex, power, purity, marriage, and parenthood. Close reading will expose how the Victorian period's driving social fears took root in this novel and, thus, how its portrayal of invasive identities expresses the looming anxieties and guiltiest pleasures of the time.

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Introduction

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* expresses the primary cultural and social anxieties surrounding the most intimate influences on Victorian identity. These influences include gender, religion, marriage, family, devotion, control, and positions of power, which are portrayed through the individual identities of the characters within this book and contrasted to create complicated dynamics.

The vampiric beings in *Dracula* represent the most feared threats to Victorian identity. Their dangerous influence has the power to destroy even the most virtuous of human victims. However, the targeted individuals within this novel are those whose innate gender expression or possession of power lies outside of socially constructed bounds. The text punishes this passive subversion with vampirism, stripping characters of their redeeming human qualities: compassion, purity, decorum, love, and family. The initiation of turning a victim reflects the central Victorian fear of perversity as the physical process of biting the neck and sharing fluid is laden with sexual connotations. This act taints the purity of their victims and, in turn, rips individuals from the safety of their loved ones and the care of God, thus forcing them to lead a sullied undead life of violence, promiscuity, and predation. This text pushes the ideology that accepting any perverse element of identity leaves individuals vulnerable to threatening situations with creatures whose perverseness consumes their entire being.

The thematic duality of eroticism and horror cast further moral judgments on sexual behaviors within this novel. This theme associates fear with an animalistic lack of control demonstrated by the appetites of demonic characters (Acton 102). The restoration or preservation of "ethical" identities despite negative influence is portrayed as the solution to this Victorian fear.

Thus, characters struggle with developing identities that allow them to stay on the righteous path, and readers witness the progression of human attempts to overcome evil influences.

The sides of good and evil portray opposing familial relationships, in which the continuation of society and achievement of generational success is entirely dependent on the ideologies of its guiding paternal figures. The result of this conflict provides a powerful conclusion that summarizes the overarching basis for Victorian emphasis on gendered identity and the influence of morality on these thematic associations.

Historical Context

Modern understandings of Victorian attitudes toward identity are as disputed as they are inconsistent. This issue is partially exacerbated by the lack of enduring resources written by or for individuals who held non-dominant identities within the period. Historical publications that discuss gender, sex, marriage, and parenthood (such as medical journals, marriage guides, and philosophic texts), are fairly limited to those written by religious, wealthy, white authors. For this reason, we cannot assume that the conservative social discourse contained in these texts will be representative of an entire society. However, they do provide information on what resonated with individuals who possessed the greatest power over the enforced cultural values. While this is a well-recognized historical issue that limits scholars' abilities to accurately generalize ideologies of most periods, it especially convolutes our discussion of Victorian identity.

Contemporary arguments have created a divide between the traditional perception of the "prudish Victorian" and a more sexually liberated opposition (Stearns 625). The extensive wealth of extreme conservative discourse places all secular examinations of the subject at odds with an established spiritual basis for sexual acts. If most of the period's literature was under religious

influence, then conservative beliefs were naturally established as defining values of the time, creating this opposition between historians. Thus, modern understandings of sexual affinities in Victorian culture are incredibly convoluted. However, because of the emphasis on the subversion of traditional values within *Dracula*, texts on perverse topics (such as sexual affinities) that placed religiosity at its core provide us with the most critical understanding of the underlying sexual anxieties presented in the novel. The metaphor of the vampire possesses a significant basis in religious perversion. In turn, fears about sex placed such a heavy emphasis on the gendered restriction that its influence dominated social identity in the Victorian era.

Steven Seidman's "The Power of Desire and the Dangers of Pleasure: Victorian Sexuality Reconsidered" provides a beneficial look at the driving forces behind the culture's sexual ambivalence. Victorians identified sex as a powerful act with the potential to overpower even the most composed individuals (Seidman 50). Seidman refers to this as the "sex instinct" and states, "To the Victorians, sex was a natural instinct whose significance for the individuals and society was far-reaching and powerful" (Seidman 50). However, with recognition of its power came the fear of falling prey to its overwhelming nature. Victorian society at large deemed that passion, eroticism, and lust were not ethical emotional states, even when occurring between betrothed lovers. Seidman goes as far as to state, "Love and eroticism were framed as antithetical" (Seidman 55).

The cultural emphasis on self-control was based on religiosity, which dictated that the only proper place for sex existed within marriage. Further, harsh expectations surrounded the quality and nature of those marital relations. Sexual pleasure, even pleasure that coincidentally resulted from "spiritual" unions, was considered threatening to the spiritual values placed on marriage. It was generally considered that "Spiritual love quells animal desire" (Fowler 20).

William Acton is an author frequently (some say overly) sourced by academics because of his applications of conservative moral ponderings to his texts on sexual biology. His most known belief was that women were void of sexual urges outside the desire to achieve maternity (Stearns 627). He also believed, “To elevate the role of sexual expression in marriage would degrade the husband and wife to “the level of an animal” (Acton 102). The orthodox society adopted restrictive mentalities to protect central values and maintain virtuous identities that preserved social status.

Gender, Subversion, & Identity

Gender lies at the core of Victorian identity and thus provides a framework for the most influential social anxieties of the period.¹ Historical emphasis on the binary divides aspects of identity into contrasting elements associated with masculinity or femininity, which strictly dictated social roles and individual expression of self. Consequently, inverting gender roles associated with one's sex was unacceptable in Victorian society and led to a vulnerable loss of power and the perceived inability to fulfill social positions. *Dracula's* characters heavily represent anxieties surrounding the subversion of these gendered associations due to the momentous shift away from the traditionally rigid binary with the emergence of the "New Woman" at the end of the period (Case 35). The New Woman challenged the limitation of gendered social positions and sought to create new independence for women free from repressive expectations. Core components included social equality, sexual liberation, and establishing a female identity defined by more than one's involvement within the domestic sphere (Case 35). Tradition remains a fierce basis for most of the values expressed through the characters in *Dracula*, but the inversive traits demonstrated by feminine individuals reflect this historical reality.

Thus, this novel's established binary of masculine and feminine traits represents traditional values. Portrayals of femininity were associated with kindness, emotional intimacy, purity, beauty, and devotion to loved ones. The conflict of femininity was the expectation of gentle passivity without inaction, attractiveness without sensuality, youthful innocence with a

¹It's important to note that my use of "gender" is deliberate, as I'm referring to the expression of identity portrayed in these texts. However, acceptable gender expression was historically divided based on one's sex, so while the concepts of sex and gender are different and cannot be used interchangeably, they have very similar associations in these contexts.

strong maternal instinct, and a simultaneous guiding devotion without presiding leadership. All emphasis on female success depended on involvement within the domestic sphere in which matriarchs were allotted complete control as long as their choices did not conflict with the dominant male figure. Men, in comparison, were expected to withhold the high standards of “manhood,” expressing unwavering strength, bravery, honesty, morality, and intelligence. Patriarchs were trusted to carry out the role of leadership but, in doing so, were expected to dedicate themselves to self-improvement and ambition, which in turn ensured financial stability. The appearance of masculine vulnerability within this text is frequently limited to occurrences relating to women. This includes emotional vulnerability exposed by loving devotion and bonds with maternal figures or physical vulnerability related to a male inability to resist female wiles. Both sides of this binary are expressed and subsequently inverted within this novel.

Jonathan Harker

The novel's beginning introduces the young Jonathan Harker through his arrival at Dracula castle. It is evident from the start that Harker fails to exhibit the strong manhood emphasized by Victorian society, as he is chronically plagued by doubt and discomfort. In a letter written by Harker's employer, Mr. Hawkins, Hawkins describes him as “discreet and silent” (Stoker 48).² He informs the Count that Harker “has grown into manhood in my service” and “shall be ready to attend on you when you will during his stay, and shall take your instructions in all matters” (48). This description immediately minimizes Harker's masculine identity and places him in a position of servitude and submission to the Count, establishing a pervasive power dynamic (Kuzmanovic 415). The influence of these words comes to fruition during an exchange

² All further references to *Dracula* appear in this thesis as page numbers in parentheses.

where the Count tells Harker he will remain his guest for an entire month, but Harker fails to submit to this demand readily. The Count replies, ““When your master, employer, what you will, engaged that someone should come on his behalf, it was understood that my needs only were to be consulted”” (63). Harker states in his letter, ““What could I do but bow acceptance?”” thus passively accepting his submissive role (63).

As he is exposed to more perversities by the Count and realizes that he is trapped within the castle, Harker takes on a more feminine submissive role as a damsel in distress. Kuzmanovic asserts that this portion of the novel ““performs a gender inversion of the generic motif shared by both gothic romances and Samuel Richardson’s epistolary novels: the heroine is kept captive by an aggressive masculine figure who proclaims to wish her well but whom she sees as a threat to her integrity. Harker even compares himself to Shahrazad by commenting that ‘this diary seems horribly like the beginning of the “Arabian Nights””” (Kuzmanovic 415). Then on May 15th, Harker wanders into an unlocked room, and readers witness a vulnerable moment where he finds comfort from his distress. He sits and writes, imagining a feminine resident writing in the same space. Harker remarks in his entry:

I found a soft quietude come over me. Here I am, sitting at a little oak table where in old times possibly some fair lady sat to pen, with much thought and many blushes, her ill-spelt love-letter, and writing in my diary in shorthand all that has happened since I closed it last. It is nineteenth century up-to-date with a vengeance. And yet, unless my senses deceive me, the old centuries had, and have, powers of their own which mere ‘modernity’ cannot kill (67).

In expressing this, Harker takes on the position of this “fair lady,” mimicking the feminine actions he envisions. He finds comfort in this fantasy, comparing “writing in my diary in

shorthand” to her writing “her ill-spelt love-letter” (67). While he boldly takes on this feminine position in the following actions, examining the implications of Harker’s “shorthand” compared to the lady’s “ill” spelling is important. I initially considered that this word choice might insinuate that Harker imagines the lady as unintelligent or childlike. In juxtaposition with her blushing love letter, these traits would place the character into the realm of a naive virginal stereotype, thus representing an acceptable, demure femininity reflectent of Victorian gender values. The vulnerable Harker finds comfort in this safe portrayal; however, mirroring this woman creates a circumstance in which he falsely portrays his own gender. This expression, in turn, would create a convoluted chain of associations in the following events. However, the issue I find with attributing the choice of words to historical stereotypes is that it lacks further support. The woman’s ability to write the letter speaks towards her education, and the inclusion that she writes the letter “with much thought” supports her intelligence. Instead of assuming complete dissonance between “shorthand” and “ill-spelt,” one could assume Harker is implying both parties are utilizing shorthand, which would align with the fact that his closest female influence, his fiancé Mina, also knows shorthand. However, if we assume the phrases represent identical choices, then Stoker choosing to utilize a phrase with negative connotations for the feminine counterpart still feels like a deliberate choice.

Harker immediately follows up by commenting on the “nineteenth century up-to-date” accuracy of his diary, which not only reveals his perception of the caliber of his account but minimizes that of the lady’s supposedly poorly written letter. If we look at this from the perspective of Harker, he imagines himself in parallel to a feminine position but still sees his actions as superior to that of this imaginary woman. Like other moments in which Harker struggles to take on a modern male identity, he contradicts himself here. He describes

comfortably mirroring the lady but immediately adjures and claims that his actions somehow differ from hers. She might write with “many blushes,” but he writes “with a vengeance.” However, there are minimal differences between the two circumstances, simultaneously demonstrating Harker’s struggle with his gender expression and the appearance of historical gender biases in this character.

Harker’s comfort in feminine spaces is further supported by his decision to stay the night in the chambers of this “fair-lady” (67). He imagines the room as a place where “of old ladies had sat and sung and lived sweet lives whilst their gentle breasts were sad for their menfolk” (68). Between the two separate mentions of multiple women residing in the room, Harker seems entirely convinced that this is the historical truth of the space. It is important to note that while Stoker includes extravagant descriptions of the view from the suite’s window, there are no distinct details of what makes the space a ladies' room. The reader is told the room is “curtainless,” the “furniture had more air of comfort,” and that there is a “small oak table” (67) and a “great couch” (68), details that barely contribute to our imagining of the room. Considering Stoker’s lack of hesitation to provide romantic descriptions, it is bizarre that he would attribute femininity to the space without giving feminine descriptors for the room or furniture inhabiting it. For example, rather than the space being “curtainless” (presumably due to “the ravages of time and the moth” (67)), Stoker could have included the remnants of moth-eaten frilly curtains, or, instead of his writing surface being a “small oak table,” it could have been a vanity. These slight inclusions would have provided evidence for the room previously being inhabited by women, but the reader is left to trust Harker’s hazy fantasies. Thus, we rely on his flowery imaginings of the women he believes once occupied the space, which functions as a heuristic for the reader to envision a feminine room instigating those daydreams. Our perception of this space

is based entirely on a self-constructed projection of femininity Harker seems intimately familiar with and comfortable within.

This brief comfort of femininity is quickly contrasted by the events that transpire after Harker falls asleep, which he records the following morning, May 16th. He recounts his choice to remain in this new location rather than return to his chambers but is awakened and preyed upon by three vampiric women who serve the Count. Harker is previously told not to sleep outside his room but states, “The Count’s warning came into my mind, but I took a pleasure in disobeying it” (68). “Disobey” in this sentence reintroduces the aforementioned dynamic of feminine submissiveness and masculine dominance. Harker places himself in a position of femininity and then expresses “pleasure” in rebelling against the Count’s orders.

However, this rebellion leaves him vulnerable to the “weird sisters” (80), creatures who may have once displayed passive femininity but are now afflicted with vampirism, making them powerful and sexually aggressive. These traits place the sisters in a position of masculinity as they are introduced as Harker’s predators to whom he readily submits. Interestingly, Harker’s subversion of gender is two-fold because his disobedience to a dominant male figure while portraying femininity subjects him to the women’s monstrous masculinity. Harker attempts to use his alignment with femininity to create a space of comfort and escapism from the horrors of the castle, but doing so only places himself in further danger.

As the text progresses, we see the maturation of Harker’s masculine identity begin to develop after taking a dominant role in his escape. Finally, he returns home, recovers, marries his fiancé Mina, and joins the fight to stop the Count’s reign of terror. In a symbolic resolution to his gender crisis, Harker is the one to plunge his knife through the Count’s throat, thus avenging the

violence afflicted on himself and his loved ones and saving the people of England as a whole (Kuzmanovic 414).

Lucy Westenra

Lucy is a fascinating character full of contradictions. She is described as a very kind, “sweet” girl with an excitable childlike nature. Her personality perfectly fulfills the damsel stereotype one might find within Gothic novels, and her virginal purity characterizes her. However, contradictions to this persona emerge in the first few letters that introduce her character. She writes to her best friend Mina about her suitors and confesses, with girlish enthusiasm, her excitement over holding the affection of three different men. Lucy immediately confesses her love for Arthur Holmwood, her future fiancé. However, she also claims that she holds affection and care for all her admirers, even questioning, “Why can’t they let a girl marry three men or as many as want her, and save all this trouble? But this is heresy, and I must not say it” (91). The obvious irony here is that she does say it, thus confessing to wandering feelings despite claiming unwavering devotion to her childhood sweetheart.

These desires continue when Quincey Morris and Dr. John Seward propose on the same day. She confesses, “I know, Mina, you will think me a horrid flirt—[but] I couldn’t help feeling a sort of exultation that he was number two in one day” (91). Lucy experiences pleasure in feeling desired and does not hesitate to share these feelings with her friend, even if she may face judgment from her very chaste friend. She even admits to kissing the saddened Quincey and laments, “Oh, why must a man like that be made unhappy when there are lots of girls about who would worship the very ground he trod on? I know I would if I were free—only I don’t want to

be free” (92). Sharing her willingness to worship another man “if she were free” and clarifying that is not what she wants without redacting her willingness reveals her true desires. These confessions add an intriguing layer of promiscuity to her otherwise feminine and innocent identity and gender expression.

Her femininity is further complicated when the Count claims her as his first English victim and infects her with vampirism after she sleepwalks into the cemetery where he is residing. This assault leaves her fragile and utterly naive to the intimate violence that has occurred. At this point in the text, Lucy’s weakness forces her into extreme passivity and submission to the male characters around her. The Count continues to take advantage of her in her most vulnerable state, entering her bedroom each night to feed and slowly draining her blood until her health fails. Dr. Seward then takes her under his care but is baffled by her illness and calls upon his former professor, Abraham Van Helsing, for guidance. By the time he arrives, she barely shows signs of life. Dr. Seward describes her as “ghastly, chalkily pale; the red seemed to have gone even from her lips and gums, and the bones of her face stood out prominently” (156). This description is hugely different from the “sweet” beauty others chronically use to describe her and thematically contrasts the innocent blush that appears when she speaks about her fiancé. Van Helsing immediately begins a series of blood transfusions. While he comes close to solving the mystery of her illness (and thus saving the damsel), Lucy inevitably dies, and with her goes her sweet spirit as the curse takes hold. In her place, a new Lucy emerges with hellish aggression, “voluptuous,” violent, and terrifying.

Lucy’s innocent nature and passivity, paired with the salacious desires that surface in her letters, create a cause and effect in which she is perversely targeted but unable to defend herself. The Count’s ability to claim her lies in the claim that she desires as many men “as want her”

(91). Her wish to accept any man has challenged his aggression and represents a Victorian lesson against heresy.

Mina Harker

Mina is presented as the foil to her dear friend Lucy because while both share an overall disposition associated with a proper Victorian lady, Mina's intelligence and assertiveness place her in a position of power, contrasting Lucy's childlike helplessness. Mina is unique because while every other character consistently falls within one side of the dominant/submissive power binary, Mina simultaneously possesses qualities of both throughout most of the novel. She also has the unique ability to socially assert her equivalence to men, which is perfectly exemplified by her introduction to Van Helsing, who immediately underestimates her intelligence:

‘I can tell you, I think, Dr. Van Helsing, all about it.’

‘Ah, then you have good memory for facts, for details? It is not always so with young ladies.’

‘No, doctor, but I wrote it all down at the time. I can show it to you if you like.’

‘Oh, Madam Mina, I will be grateful; you will do me much favour.’ I could not resist the temptation of mystifying him a bit—I suppose it is some of the taste of the original apple that remains still in our mouths—so I handed him the shorthand diary. He took it with a grateful bow, and said:—

‘May I read it?’

‘If you wish,’ I answered as demurely as I could. He opened it, and for an instant his face fell. Then he stood up and bowed.

‘Oh, you so clever woman!’ he said. ‘I long know that Mr. Jonathan was a man of much thankfulness; but see, his wife have all the good things. And will you not so much honour me and so help me as to read it for me? Alas! I know not the shorthand.’ By this time my little joke was over, and I was almost ashamed; so I took the typewritten copy from my workbasket and handed it to him (220).

As a mentor, Van Helsing praises Mina for her intellect and immediately includes her as a part of the force trying to stop the Count’s proceedings. The text allows her to assert her power without punishment despite the misalignment of Victorian gender roles. This is partially due to her high ethical character but primarily because she does not attempt to assert dominance; she only wishes to prove equivalence. Her nonaggressive intentions are supported by the feeling of shame that arises when Van Helsing admits that he does not know shorthand. Mina’s intelligence and desire for equivalence exhibit characteristics of the “New Woman” ideal while still regarding traditional Victorian values (specifically purity and wifely duties) as central to her identity (Senf 37).

Mina plays a significant role in the group plotting against the Count, so much so that Van Helsing remarks, “Ah, that wonderful Madam Mina! She has man’s brain—a brain that a man should have were he much gifted—and a woman’s heart. The good God fashioned her for a purpose, believe me, when He made that so good combination” (274). While the language in the text praises Mina for this masculine trait, it is in direct correlation to the Count’s provision of punishment:

Then he spoke to me mockingly, ‘And so you, like the others, would play your brains against mine. You would help these men to hunt me and frustrate me in my designs! ... But as yet you are to be punished for what you have done. You have aided in thwarting

me; now you shall come to my call. When my brain says “Come!” to you, you shall cross land or sea to do my bidding; and to that end this!’ (328).

The Count admits that Mina’s brains have bested him, briefly earning her a position of dominance that the Count quickly strips from her. His punishment? Infecting her with vampirism, making her weak to his “call,” and thus claiming her brains for his own under the assertion of servitude.

Lucy and Mina both display certain characteristics associated with masculinity, but the distinct difference is that Mina’s identity is not associated with perversity. This is due to her unwavering virtue, lack of promiscuity, and preservation of her humanity through her active role in thwarting the Count and freeing herself from the curse. Her closeness to the men within this novel occurs only within the bonds of marriage, chosen family, protection, or force. She exists within male spheres but as a nurturing figure, intelligent ally, and dutiful friend, managing to play an active role in their mission while not violating the most important gender boundaries set by Victorian society. Blessed as “one of God’s women,” it is no coincidence that she successfully evades the curse of vampirism and gets to live on in a pure world (226).

Eroticism, Horror, & Religiosity

Elements of unsettling perversity accompany all examples of sexually explicit or suggestive references within this text. This duality creates the thematic association of eroticism and horror, which appears throughout this novel, utilizing monstrous characters and supernatural afflictions to represent immoral sexual practices. As mentioned, Victorian attitudes towards sex were highly restrictive due to a collective fear of its all-consuming power (Seidman 50). Lorde provides an intriguing definition of the erotic that aligns with these fears originally expressed by Acton and Fowler, “The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings” (Lorde 2). The potential power in this was a terrifying concept to Victorians who struggled with end-of-the-century changes moving away from views of sex that relied on traditional gender values and religiosity (Senf 36). As mentioned previously, a common association was that lust would reduce individuals to “the level of an animal” (Acton 5). These reputations are not unlike the product of vampirism, which corrupts the human mind with sexual, animalistic, and demonic urges that consume the human identity of its host.

Because eroticism as a whole was an unacceptable concept under religious values, depictions containing gore and sexual innuendo would have been extraordinarily indecent during the period in which they were produced. Thus, they present the theme of perversity that appears consistently throughout this novel and is frequently represented within the Gothic genre. In regard to the sexual perversion exemplified by the vampiric women in this section, Primoratz relates the term to an association with “unnatural” tendencies, “This connection between the unnatural and the perverted is emphasized in particular in the traditional view of sex as bound up in procreation and marriage” (Primoratz 246). This mention of tradition is what dictates

conservative Victorian ideologies that find sex outside of religious unions “unnatural” (Primoratz 246).

Incestuous Sisters

The perfect example of characters exhibiting the theme of eroticism and horror is the three vampiric sisters previously mentioned. They share characteristics associated with masculinity and are representative antitheses of the “perfect” Victorian woman. Rather than being sweet, kind, and demure, they are powerful creatures who use their beauty to seduce and feed on men. Harker wakes to their sudden presence, noting:

All three had brilliant white teeth that shone like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips. There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips (69).

The juxtaposition of “longing” with “deadly fear” represents the simultaneously dangerous and tempting, sensual and unsettling nature of these creatures of temptation.

As mentioned previously, Harker carries out the role of passivity associated with feminine sexual dynamics, but an additional power dynamic comes into play here (Craft 109). The woman’s sexual experience places her in a position of an experienced lover. In contrast, Harker (who bears the complete absence of sexual assertiveness throughout this text) portrays her nervous virginal partner that is “looking out under [his] eyelashes in an agony of delightful anticipation” (69).

He then describes, "The fair girl advanced and bent over me till I could feel the movement of her breath upon me. "Sweet it was in one sense, honey-sweet, and sent the same tingling through the nerves as her voice, but with a bitter underlying the sweet, ... as one smells in blood" (69). The use of "sweet" in this context is fascinating, as this adjective consistently appears when describing proper femininity. Here it is contrasted with the repulsive scent of blood on a woman's breath, reflecting the recurring theme of promiscuity's deceiving allure and threatening reality. Contrasting language endures throughout their encounter to express Harker's internal conflict:

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, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white sharp teeth. Lower and lower went her head as the lips went below the range of my mouth and chin and seemed about to fasten on my throat. Then she paused, and I could hear the churning sound of her tongue as it licked her teeth and lips, and could feel the hot breath on my neck... I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the super-sensitive skin of my throat, and the hard dents of two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I closed my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited— waited with beating heart (69-70).

The explicit descriptions of the positioning between the parts of the body create a whirlwind of alluring detail and terrifying potential. Harker's fear is only overshadowed by his intense physical reaction and intense longing despite the quietly threatening animalistic nature of the encounter. They are suddenly interrupted by the Count, and Harker's desire suddenly switches to

horror as he learns of the incestuous relationship between them and watches the women drag off a bag with a child in it.

A while later, he writes in his journal, “I am alone in the castle with those awful women. Faugh! Mina is a woman, and there is nought in common. They are devils of the Pit!” (85). His disgust starkly contrasts the overwhelming desire he felt during their last encounter. However, this negativity occurs after they reveal their perversion and promiscuity, which creates a foul contrast from Mina’s pristine purity. The sister’s sexual history makes them completely undesirable to him, thus reflecting ideologies of traditional values and relating impurity to monstrous identity and gender expression.

Mina & Harker

In contrast with Lucy, Mina’s pervasive purity remains at the core of her feminine identity. Her godly focus and rejection of promiscuity mean there are very few instances within this text where she is placed in an erotic or compromising position. However, there is a graphic description of Mina’s assault by the Count:

His face was turned from us, but the instant we saw we all recognised the Count—in every way, even to the scar on his forehead. With his left hand he held both Mrs. Harker’s hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man’s bare breast which was shown by his torn-open dress. The attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten’s nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink (322).

The viewers, Dr. Seward and Van Helsing enter this scene after she has already been infected, affirmed by the “thin stream of blood” coming from her throat (322). The explicit act of forced submission and the penetrative context of the Count’s teeth in her neck create a metaphor for sexual assault.

Harker, now Mina’s husband, has been rendered unconscious and lays passively at her side before waking to her screams of terror. This is yet another example of Harker not having reached the full maturity of his masculine identity, causing him to fail his duty as a husband in protecting his wife from harm. After startling awake, he quickly exclaims to Van Helsing, “Guard her while I look for him!” to which “His wife, through her terror and horror and distress, saw some sure danger to him: instantly forgetting her own grief, she seized hold of him and cried out” (324). Harker’s reaction demonstrates that his failure is not for lack of dedication to his role as her husband. He tries to establish his capable mentor as her protector and then leaps up to venture out and avenge his partner. Mina’s affection is evident in turn, as the thought of him in jeopardy snaps her out of her torrent of grief, and she pulls him back to safety. This passage demonstrates the gendered associations of devotion integral to strong marital identity.

Vampiric infection thematically strips women of their chastity, and Mina strongly reacts to this loss of purity. She calls herself “Unclean, unclean!” and after seeing her blood on Harker, she sobs that she can “touch him or kiss him no more” (324). It is important to note that the reader remains unaware of whether Mina and Harker have consummated their marriage. However, considering the extreme religious emphasis placed on their union in addition to Victorian concepts of “spiritual love,” it would not be unreasonable to assume that she has remained a virgin thus far in their union (Fowler 20). The destruction of her virginity is represented by a large amount of blood, which is described as staining her “white nightdress”

and Harker's "white night robe" (322). The purity of the color white and the staining capacity of blood adds to the metaphor of lost virginity, and the transference to Harker's robe establishes the staining effect this is perceived to have on their union.

Helsing attempts to use a communion wafer on Mina's forehead, but she is burned and left with a mark physically representing the Count's nonconsensual "pollution" of her purity, to which she again exclaims, "'Unclean! Unclean! Even the Almighty shuns my polluted flesh! I must bear this mark of shame upon my forehead until the Judgment Day'" (336). Mina fears dying from her curse, in which case her purity would be entirely consumed by a new monstrous identity far from God. Harker privately expresses the purest sentiment of devotion:

To one thing I have made up my mind: if we find out that Mina must be a vampire in the end, then she shall not go into that unknown and terrible land alone. I suppose it is thus that in old times one vampire meant many; just as their hideous bodies could only rest in sacred earth, so the holiest love was the recruiting sergeant for their ghastly ranks (337).

Despite being everything Harker is fighting against, he would join his wife in her perverse existence. This may not align with Victorian values of religiosity in marriage, but it does represent the devotion and companionship individuals searched for in their marriages then and now. "Till death do us part."

Lucy & Her Suitors

While the portrayal of Mina's loss of purity seems to primarily stem from the expression of trauma experienced during the Count's attack, Lucy has a very different experience. With no memory of the occurrence, her passivity is so extreme that even as she lies dying, there is little

grief associated with her loss. While there is a difference in awareness, theoretically, it is as if the effects of this occurrence matter far less to Lucy than they do to Mina. Additionally, while Mina comes out of her experience completely covered in blood, Lucy only has “two little red points [on her neck] like pin-pricks, and on the band of her nightdress was a drop of blood” (127). A single drop of blood in one experience compared to being “smeared with blood” in another is a strange difference in results from the same event (322). There is no coincidence that these differences are divided between a wholly virginal character and her more promiscuous counterpart; the text creates a metaphor of virginity to which the single drop of blood provides ambiguity but certain dissent.

Lucy then goes through a series of blood transfusions, and the insertion of this blood furthers the metaphor of penetration from “four strong men” (188).³ This is a truth her caretakers keep from Arthur, who, as her fiancé, was given the right to provide for the first transfusion. He is then forced to leave to attend to his sickly father, which requires the other three men to step in. After her death, Arthur expressed the belief that the transfusion had married them “and that she was his wife in the sight of God. None of [the men] said a word of the other operations, and none of [them] ever shall” (211). This explicitly establishes associations of impurity, which Helsing relates to bigamy:

‘Said he not that the transfusion of his blood to her veins had made her truly his
bride?’

‘Yes, and it was a sweet and comforting idea for him.’

³ The inclusion of Van Helsing to this group of donors is particularly strange due to his dynamic of virtuous paternity, but Craft suggests that Helsing’s transfusion acts as a “pretty counterpoint of penetration...the blood that Dracula takes out Van Helsing then puts back” (Craft 116).

‘Quite so. But there was a difficulty, friend John. If so that, then what about the others? Ho, ho! Then this so sweet maid is a polyandrist, and me, with my poor wife dead to me, but alive by Church’s law, though no wits, all gone—even I, who am faithful husband to this now-no-wife, am bigamist’ (213).

Thus, Lucy's promiscuity elevates from flirty friendship to vampiric penetration, to sharing the blood of four men, and finally, bigamy, before passing on and losing her humanity to the metamorphosis of the vampire curse. This cause and effect clearly establish punishment for all the sexual occurrences she is involved with, but also brings in the question of autonomy and consent, as the only transgression she played an active role in was the initial innocent flirtation. This reflects the issues of the New Woman, who pushes for sexual autonomy, which Stoker mentions periodically throughout this text (Senf 37). The first time the men see her again, she is barely recognizable:

My own heart grew cold as ice, and I could hear the gasp of Arthur, as we recognised the features of Lucy Westenra. Lucy Westenra, but yet how changed. The sweetness was turned to adamant, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness...by the concentrated light that fell on Lucy’s face we could see that the lips were crimson with fresh blood, and that the stream had trickled over her chin and stained the purity of her lawn death robe (249).

This description creates a drastic divide between Lucy’s passive identity the reader is familiar with and the cruel, sexual creature she has become. The blood that stains her white robe is two-fold; it represents the shift she goes through from the beginning of the novel while also representing her brutality against the innocent child it came from. Passive no more, she immediately tries to seduce her fiancé, and, “with a languorous, voluptuous grace, said:— ‘Come

to me, Arthur... My arms are hungry for you. Come, and we can rest together. Come, my husband, come!” (250). She uses her beauty against him while calling him “husband,” demonstrating that she now possesses manipulative intelligence that was clearly not present before. Arthur is then tasked with killing her and restoring her purity, which is the first and only time he can carry out his duties as her “husband.” He drives a stake through her heart and is then permitted to kiss her, marking the acceptance of this penetration due to an established marital dynamic.

Lucy’s descent from initial infection to final death establishes strong thematic considerations of the duality of eroticism and horror while bringing to question how sexual ethics can be related to perversion. Her shift in identity and complete loss of purity contrasts the Victorian values of religious union and spiritual love, allowing her only savior to be that of death and Judgement.

Parenthood, Devotion, & Obedience

This book's portrayals of family and parenthood take an intriguing route, as very few characters possess family by blood, and the few biological parents die before the end. Close familial dynamics are formed from a need for support when persevering through traumatic experiences. The contrast of age, experience, and vulnerability at different stages of the plot dictate the development of these bonds and are established through gendered divisions of power. Then, as the characters grow closer, themes of sacrifice, devotion, and obedience emerge.

As close paternal ties began to shift at the end of the century, active roles of fatherhood moved out of the domestic sphere due to perceptions of feminity associated with it (Gordon 556). As a result, there became a greater concern for the lessening of hands guiding the next generation. The text demonstrates a perception of the limitations and strength of solitary maternal characters, the vulnerability of youth moving away from tradition, and the saving ability of righteous paternal figures.

Mothers & Wolves

This novel's first representation of motherhood is not from the mother of a primary character as one would expect. Instead, it is the mother of a child the speaker (Harker) never sees and whose presence and subsequent murder are conveyed only through the sound of “something stirring in the Count’s room, something like a sharp wail quickly suppressed; and then...silence, deep, awful silence” (77). Similar to her child, the mother's appearance in the text is gruesome and brief:

As I sat I heard a sound in the courtyard without —the agonised cry of a woman. I rushed to the window, and throwing it up, peered out between the bars. There, indeed, was a

woman with dishevelled hair, holding her hands over her heart as one distressed with running. She was leaning against a corner of the gateway. When she saw my face at the window she threw herself forward, and shouted in a voice laden with menace:—

‘Monster, give me my child!’

She threw herself on her knees, and raising up her hands, cried the same words in tones which wrung my heart. Then she tore her hair and beat her breast, and abandoned herself to all the violences of extravagant emotion. Finally, she threw herself forward, and, though I could not see her, I could hear the beating of her naked hands against the door. Somewhere high overhead, probably on the tower, I heard the voice of the Count calling in his harsh, metallic whisper. His call seemed to be answered from far and wide by the howling of wolves. Before many minutes had passed a pack of them poured, like a pent-up dam when liberated, through the wide entrance into the courtyard.

There was no cry from the woman, and the howling of the wolves was but short. Before long they streamed away singly, licking their lips. I could not pity her, for I knew now what had become of her child, and she was better dead (77-78).

Despite her limited appearance in the text, this passage provides many details regarding *Dracula*'s portrayal of maternal identity. Intriguingly, the woman exhibits an unwavering ferocity unseen within any other human character. Even Van Helsing, with his “iron nerve,” experiences terror when faced with the vampire's considerable danger (249).

The passage says she arrives “holding her hands over her heart as one distressed with running” (77). It's assumed she would be running to evade Dracula's wolves, which would certainly be an impressive physical feat but lacks realistic validity. It is likely that the Count allows her to reach the castle in a display of power. This theory is supported by the entrance of

the wolves, which Stoker describes as “a pack of them pour[ing], like a pent-up dam when liberated, through the wide entrance into the courtyard” (77-78). The word “liberated” insinuates the wolves had previously been restrained, held back by the Count until the mother had gained a sense of accomplishment, just to immediately eradicate her in Harker’s view.

In another example of unseen ferocity, she demands her child back “in a voice laden with menace” (77). No one within this novel has dared to shout or demand anything from the Count, even in the final scene where he is killed during an outright fight. It’s not as though this mother is oblivious to his powers, as she distinctly refers to him as a “monster.” Typically, the Count would use her attempt at gaining power over him as a reason to enact vengeance and target her as his next victim. However, he barely gives her a second glance before sending his wolves to wholly shred her apart.

This is not the only time the Count kills a mother with his wolves, “The window blind blew back with the wind that rushed in, and in the aperture of the broken panes there was the head of a great, gaunt grey wolf. Mother cried out in a fright...I tried to stir, but there was some spell upon me, and dear mother’s poor body, which seemed to grow cold already—for her dear heart had ceased to beat” (180). This scene describes the death of Lucy’s mother, who comes to her room in the middle of the night before the Count’s feeding. Her heart condition is what causes the actual death, but at no other time was there a wolf at Lucy’s window, so one can assume that the Count intended to kill her for getting in the way.

An important conclusion drawn from this is that these mothers are not young ladies and, more importantly, not virgins. The Count does not bother to feed from them before they are killed, as if their blood is not pure enough for his attention. This expresses the conflicting social desire for a woman to be a maternal figure while staying virginal forever. However, Stoker

evokes the power of maternal identity and sacrifice associated with parenthood. The child's mother died, without a sound of fear, while facing a terrifying and perverse paternal figure. Lucy's mother came to check on her child despite her own failing health and was able to lay with her one last time before dying at the Count's hands. The submission and dominance of maternal identity are fiercely represented within this text, but maternal strength is not portrayed as being enough to save the vulnerable youth. As these women stand alone, they are killed with ease and leave their innocent children vulnerable to evil influence.

Perverse Paternity

The novel consistently acknowledges a theoretical biological kinship between the Count and his turned victims. The text references him as “the father or furtherer of a new order of beings, whose road must lead through Death, not Life” (343). In the literal sense, the Count intricately subverts the role of parenthood through his ability to create new life that is simultaneously deceased and immortal. This is asserted through the word choices “Death” and “Life,” which Stoker emphasizes using capitalization. Ironically, the word “father” would not be emphasized through capitalization despite being just as central to the statement's importance because it would then be referencing the religious “Father,” a figure antithetical to the Count and his perverse, demonic parenthood. If the Count is established as the theoretical father of the women he turns, then the dynamics he shares with those women, both relating to power and relationship, provide a greater level of grotesquerie to examine.

The first introduction of the Count's paternity is the mention of a nickname given to the three vampiric women who reside in his castle, the “weird sisters” (80). Stoker provides this without explanation, but it is simple to assume that because the Count is the creator of the

vampiric curse and the source of the sisters' inhuman existence, it accredits paternity to him. However, their odd dynamic is established before this assertion, as Harker witnesses him violently grasp one by the neck and threaten them for disobeying his orders and trying to claim Harker for themselves (70). Even more strange, the woman's response to this is "'You yourself never loved; you never love!'" to which the Count replies, "'Yes, I too can love; you yourselves can tell it from the past. Is it not so?'" (71). This dialogue insinuates a history in which the Count had his children as lovers, which is consistent with the reappearing sexual metaphor of penetrative blood exchange, and asserts that the Count's paternity is incestuous, only furthering his identity's extraordinary layers of perversity. This dynamic again supports the notion that accepting any level of perverse identity leads to further immoral circumstances.

The Count's strange paternity is heavily represented in his declaration to Mina while turning her, "'And you, their best beloved one, are now to me, flesh of my flesh; blood of my blood; kin of my kin'" before he "pulled open his shirt, and with his long sharp nails opened a vein in his breast... and pressed [her] mouth to the wound" (328). The language here provides an expanse of things to consider. While the text does not offer an explicit basis for the established correlation between vampires and their turned victims as one of biological relation, Stoker hints toward the metaphor of blood here. He takes the concept of consanguinity and relates it to the literal fusion of blood that occurs when someone is turned, establishing a shared biological relationship. The metaphor of birth is continued in the description of the Count's actions, "with his long sharp nails opened a vein in his breast... and pressed [her] mouth to the wound" (328). Rather than feeding her through a cut made elsewhere on his body, the Count specifically slices his chest, so he has to physically hold her head against him to complete the act. This description is reminiscent of the actions taken to breastfeed. Therefore, the Count's giving of blood

fabricates their kinship and is supplied in a way that is both performative of a birthing practice and inversive to his biological sex.

Additionally, power dynamics are brought in as the Count asserts possession of Mina by claiming produced parentage. He calls her “their best beloved one,” the possessive pronoun “their” referring to the men who hunt him, namely Harker and Van Helsing. Here he acknowledges a perspective of supposed ownership these men have over Mina. Harker, because he is her husband, but Van Helsing is a paternal figure in her life. He wishes to claim ownership over every woman he has infected because he sees paternity as ownership rather than mutual devotion.

The Count’s expression of parenthood exemplifies his character’s opposition to Victorian values in every area. His biological reproduction occurs outside of marital status in a way that is extremely unnatural and, therefore, perverse. He demands obedience from those who serve him without reciprocating servitude or caring for them as a parent would. He uses force and violence to gain “possession” of these familial dynamics, and he leads every one of his children to complete destruction and death, failing to lead them into the next generation. His complete subversion of traditional values associated with manhood and paternity inevitably leads him to fail when previously unprotected youth receive ethical guidance that places them on the path toward justice.

Righteous Paternity

Moral guidance comes in the form of Van Helsing, a paternal figure antithetical to the Count. While the Count uses supernatural tricks and forces to create his perverse paternity, Van

Helsing earns loving family dynamics through hard work and moral leadership. He is a Godly man of sound body and mind who holds great wisdom, is accomplished in his multiple fields, faithful to his sickly wife, and devoted to those who see him as a paternal figure. He is established as the man every Victorian gentleman should aspire to be in their older age and the epitome of male success, and yet, Van Helsing is imperfectly human. He is an intelligent doctor, but he fails to save Lucy and struggles to process his grief. Yet, he trusts his instincts and continues to search for the truth after she passes, successfully putting her to rest, saving her future victims, and acquiring key knowledge that helps save Mina's life. At times he is harsh, prideful, and impassioned, but his unwavering love and leadership teach his chosen children how to navigate the world. He guides them to a hard-earned victory in which they are the ones who put an end to the Count's tyranny, demonstrating that struggle and imperfection do not diminish one's "manhood" if one also possesses devotion and strong ethics.

Helsing may not be the true parent of any of the characters he lends guidance to, but without him, they would have remained helpless, naive, and vulnerable to the Count's perverse paternity. His character expresses Victorian anxieties not because of his own flaws or failures but because of his unmatched guidance for the flawed youth. He represents the traditional values and paternity perceived to have the power to save a generation moving away from tradition and, instead, guide them toward an ethical path that evades evil influence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* uniquely presents the Victorian period's driving social fears about moving away from traditional values by contrasting monstrous characters with young, developing people. Tradition is meant to guide these individuals toward a future free from danger, fear, horror, and perversity, concepts that threaten the well-being of society. "Correct" values influence every facet of identity in this text but are predominantly expressed through gender. Characters with multifaceted, complicated identities invert gender roles concerning displays of power, purity, eroticism, marriage, and parenthood. The punishments resulting from these portrayals express the potential social dangers of expressing nondominant ideas. The perception is that these identities go against strong forces like religion, social roles, and traditional values, an issue that has changed so little that one could label it "contemporary."

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