

Sexual Sanguinity

Blood, Sex, Race, and Gender in *Dracula*

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Early on in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Jonathan Harker characterizes his diary, written in shorthand, as "the nineteenth century up-to-date with a vengeance." Megan Norland's compelling essay brings the critical understanding of the novel "up-to-date with a vengeance" via Michel Foucault's concept of biopower. She enlists a key section from volume one of *The History of Sexuality* (1976) in order to frame the novel as a Foucauldian allegory of the historical shift in how power operates. To support her theoretically astute reading, Norland outlines how contemporary scholarship addresses the topics of race and sexuality in the novel and then performs a series of brilliant close readings that highlight what is missing from these critical accounts. Spoiler alert: you will come away from this essay thoroughly convinced that "[u]ltimately" – to borrow Norland's provocative formulation – "Dracula is not the true monster in the novel: the true monster is non-conformity to the [dubious but dominant] ideals celebrated in White, Western society."

–Dr. Geordie Miller

[B]lood was a *reality with a symbolic function*. We, on the other hand, are in a society of "sex," or rather, a society "with a sexuality" [...]. Through the themes of health, progeny, race, the future of the species, the vitality of the social body, power spoke of sexuality and *to* sexuality; the latter was not a mark or a symbol, it was an object and a target.

– Michel
Foucault, "Right of Death and Power over Life"

Michel Foucault's "Right of Death and Power over Life" displays the shift from taking life to preserving life as the defining characteristic of sovereign power. Appropriately, the procedure of power also shifted: where society was once controlled through physical and symbolic associations of blood, it is now manipulated through sexuality, "a means of access both to the life of the body and life of the species" (Foucault 267). Foucault demonstrates that this shift results in an emphasis on social ideals relating to race (270-71) and heterosexuality (268, 271-72). Bram Stoker's *Dracula* allegorically enacts this transition from blood to sexuality through the separation of humans and vampires, thereby exposing racial and heteronormative ideals. Several scholars have examined race and sexuality in *Dracula*. Several scholars have examined race and sexuality in *Dracula*. Stephen D. Arata comments on *Dracula*'s illustration of the British fear of "reverse colonization," highlighting the racial elements of the novel. Similarly, David Seed also points to *Dracula*'s racial elements, but does so through analysis of the novel's structure. Patricia McKee emphasizes the presence of racism over analysis of its specific qualities. In contrast, Christopher Craft argues the sexual subtext is the main focus of *Dracula*. The enactment of Foucault's theories will be demonstrated through the way that Stoker denies the vampires a narrative voice and portrays vampires as perverting sexuality. Stoker thus ideologically structures society in *Dracula* according to specific racial and sexual ideals.

Through the narrative structure of *Dracula*, Stoker divides his characters into two distinct “races” through the separation of humans and vampires. The novel is narrated by a kaleidoscope of human voices that haphazardly fit together to convey the plot. The novel begins with Jonathan Harker’s journal, conveying his time in Dracula’s castle and how he discovered Dracula’s true nature (9-55). After Harker discovers Dracula in his coffin (55), the journal ends. The narrative shatters into many voices: excerpts from Mina Harker’s stenographic journals, Dr. Seward’s phonographic diary, Lucy Westenra’s journal entries, letters from Lord Arthur Godalming and Quincey Morris, fragments from Abraham Van Helsing, newspaper articles, and telegraphs.

The plethora of first-person voices seems to represent every facet of society. Seed notes that Dracula’s opponents represent key areas of society: “Seward and Harker are members of the medical and legal professions; Lord Arthur Godalming is the liberal aristocrat; Quincey Morris [...] is a man of action and a protector of frontiers” (72). Van Helsing is a man of research and discovery, Lucy represents decorative women, and Mina represents the modern, useful woman. By portraying these diverse facets of society, Stoker creates the illusion that *all* of society is represented, masking the lack of vampiric narrators. Dracula is never given his own voice, and Lucy loses her narrative position the moment she becomes a vampire. Lucy relays the events of the night she transforms in a letter (130-32) and never narrates again. The vampires are thus represented through their absence. Just as the speaking

characters convey their societal roles through their narration, the gaps in narration that represent the vampire's presence simultaneously qualify their role in society: they are present, but never given societal identity. This explains why Dracula casts no reflection in a mirror (31) – what identity is there to reflect back? None.

Stoker incorporates both the old and new forms of power in the vampires' social erasure. While racial manipulation is a product of emphasis on reproduction and sexuality, the vampire "race" is characterized by their relationship to blood. Blood is both the instrument of perversely converting "good" citizens to vampirism and the means by which vampires sustain their existence. Similarly, the power struggle between the humans and vampires takes place through blood's connection to life, and sexuality's symbolic associations with purity and the taboo. The struggle to preserve Lucy's life is synonymous with the struggle against her conversion to vampirism and impurity. It is battled through means of blood – Lucy's survival is a contest of who can donate blood to, or consume blood from, her body the fastest (136-38). Her sexuality indicates whether she is pure or corrupt. Upon becoming a vampire, Lucy's "purity [turns] to voluptuous wantonness" (187). After she is staked, she returns to "unequalled sweetness and purity" (192), indicating that she is free of all vampiric tinge. Even prior to Lucy's transformation, Seward expresses concern "not only for [Lucy's] health [...] but for her reputation" (89), intertwining the social importance of blood and sexuality. Along with the social erasure of the

vampiric race, Stoker constructs normalized collective disgust by manipulating ideas of purity. He characterises overt sexuality as repugnant and associates it directly with vampirism, further exiling the vampire from the realm of social acceptance.

However, the strict division between “human” and “vampire” disintegrates on close examination. As Arata notes, “[t]he “race” in which Dracula claims membership is left ambiguous [...] his vampirism is interwoven with his status as a conqueror and invader” (463). Harker’s journal relates a moment when Dracula characterises his race according to ambiguous, old-power traits: “[w]e [...] have a right to be proud, for in our veins flows the blood of many brave races who fought [...] for lordship” (33). According to this description, vampires could represent any race of conquerors – a description that especially applies to the Western tradition of colonization. Vampires further resist association with one race in particular because they are an amalgamation of plural “brave races.” Similarly, the fluidity with which Lucy and (even more so) Mina shift from human to vampire and back again dissolves the seemingly immutable divide between the races. Dracula’s ability to blend with English society (155) also illustrates the lack of inherent difference (155). There is no essential “humanness” or “vampireness” that permanently distinguishes one from the other. The two “races” are nothing more than a social construction that classifies certain behaviour as substandard.

While Seed and Arata focus their analyses on the characteristics of the human and vampire races, they fail to discuss the true issue at hand: the presence of the divide itself. McKee gestures to this flaw in their arguments, arguing that the “racializing practices in the novel [should be] read as disciplinary formations whose extensive institutional affiliations [...] expand power through productions of both difference and identity” (44). The key word in her argument is “production,” intimating the fabricated nature of racial difference. The characters demonstrate their practiced racism in their eagerness to classify vampires and Easterners as “other.” For instance, a mere train delay causes Harker to think condescendingly of the whole of “Eastern” culture (11). The confidence with which Harker judges the “other” indicates his sense of superiority resulting from his status as a White, Western male. Harker’s quick judgement indicates that he is ideologically conditioned to interpret and define the world according to a specific set of standards. It does not occur to him to question his standpoint as an “objective” observer. He is unshakable in his conviction that he is a member of the superior class. McKee states, “the fitness of a race in *Dracula* depends on its modernity” (51). *Dracula*’s enemies are the more modern of the two “races” insofar as they are more closely aligned with modern procedures of power. They are more concerned with racial purity than whether they live or die, demonstrating the characteristics of a society dominated by sexuality as opposed to blood.

Stoker also demonstrates the shift from blood to sexuality as the dominant procedure of power through his exploration of sex and desire within *Dracula*. Stoker presents a heteronormative and patriarchal worldview. The patriarchal elements are overtly present. An example is Van Helsing's description of Mina: "[s]he has man's brain - a brain that a man should have were he much gifted - and woman's heart" (207). Van Helsing's words indicate that the male sex is the one gifted with the power of thought, while women are assigned the duty of feeling. Men are thus given a role of power and control, while the woman's role is reactionary and emotional. Part of the vampire's sexual perversion is their ability to reverse this binary gender dynamic. The most conspicuous occasion of reversal occurs when the three female vampires attempt to feed on Jonathan Harker. Craft addresses this moment, saying, "virile Jonathan Harker enjoys a 'feminine' passivity and awaits a delicious penetration from a woman whose demonism is figured as the power to penetrate" (109). In his analysis, Craft focuses on Stoker's description of the female vampire's mouth: "[t]here was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive [...] 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" (Stoker 42). As the penetrative part of the mouth, the "white" of the vampire's "sharp teeth" is the white of semen, appropriate to the male organ of penetration. Similarly, the wet "red" lips are analogous to other lips that become wet with menstruation or loss of virginity. The "languorous ecstasy"

that Harker feels as he awaits penetration dually reverses his sexuality (42). Harker takes on the feminine role as the passive and receptive figure. He experiences intense emotion as the individual being penetrated. Craft argues that the vampiric “mouth equivocates, giving the lie to the easy separation of the masculine and the feminine” (109). Similar to the way in which race proved to lack definite distinction, the ease with which the female vampire reverses traditional gender roles and expose the insubstantiality of those roles. Since gender roles are easily reversed, they are exposed as tools of domination employed by a patriarchal society to encourage individuals to behave in a certain manner.

Lucy also reverses gender roles. As a vampire, she too can penetrate and her new “voluptuous wantonness” is akin to Harker’s description of the venereal vampire trio. In her case, the contrast to the earlier praises of her purity casts Lucy’s transformation in a negative light. Instead of inspiring a more intense desire in her admirers, they “shuddered with horror” upon seeing her transformation (187). Overt female sexuality and female dominance are characterised as perverse. Thus, in order to attract husbands, the women in *Dracula* are forced to conform to heteronormative standards, or else drive away all potential respectable candidates.

Further demonstrating the use of sexuality to exert power, Harker confesses, “[t]here was something about [the three vampire women] that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear” (42). His statement

directly echoes Foucault's description of how sexuality controls society by invading every aspect of existence. Foucault says sexuality "was everywhere an object of excitement and fear at the same time" (269). Harker's uneasiness is a reflection of his awareness that his situation does not conform to heteronormative ideals. His excitement originates from curiosity of the taboo and the sense of being daring, indicating that heteronormativity is not established as a reflection of a universal standard natural to society. It is a construction imposed on society.

Not only do vampires subvert traditional gender roles, they also exhibit homoerotic desire. In the same scene as Harker's near deflowering, Dracula puts a halt to events, crying, "[h]ow dare you touch him [...] This man belongs to me!" (43). From the juxtaposition of the female vampires' sexual touch and Dracula's possessive claim, Dracula's words acquire a homoerotic connotation. While Dracula never directly feeds from a man, he does consume the blood of Lord Godalming, Seward, Van Helsing, and Quincey Morris by draining Lucy of her multiple blood transfusions (138). Dracula's nutritive relationship with Lucy provides him with access to four men through one convenient, feminine vessel. Thus, Stoker presents the vampire's sexuality as so perverse that not even standard heterosexual relations are safe from the vampire's corrupting influence.

Since the vampire's sexual interactions are carried out in connection with their blood-sucking tendencies, *Dracula* again displays a transition from old power to new power. Although sexuality and blood are inseparably connected in

the novel, Dracula's enemies fear sexual corruption more than loss of blood. Seward's aforementioned fear for Lucy's reputation is as great as his fear for her life. In addition, after Dracula drinks Mina's blood, Harker notes her paleness (257) but dismisses his concerns. He is not seriously concerned until the Sacred Wafer burns her forehead (258-59), indicating her impurity. Dracula is not seriously threatening when he endangers human life; Dracula's monstrosity is seated in his contagious perversion of social norms.

The conclusion of the novel identifies vampiric perversion of social ideals as the true threat. When Harker and Morris kill Dracula, the novel does not end. Dracula's death is anticlimactic, upstaged by Mina's return to purity and by the birth of the Harkers' son (326-27). Dracula as a physical predator was the element of the novel most threatening to blood. Since the novel continues past Dracula's death, it indicates that blood was not the primary concern. Heteronormative ideals are restored in both the return of Mina's purity and in the birth of her son. Her purity indicates that all lingering traces of perversion have been eradicated from her body - the only remaining body still infected with vampirism. With the birth of their son, the Harkers correct the novel's sexual confusion and propagate the "better" race. Given that the novel is presented as a collection of documents assembled by the characters, Stoker portrays the choice to extend the ending as the characters'. In this semblance of choice, the characters demonstrate the manipulative effects of sexuality on society. In the

characters' minds, their victory was not complete until social order was restored. However, given that Mina is described as having the mind of a man and the heart of a woman, the social order is not perfectly reinstated. As a character simultaneously loved by all and representative of corruption, Mina symbolically indicates the extent to which society's perception of "perversion" is merely fabricated.

Stoker's *Dracula* is more than a frightening story. The novel allegorically enacts Foucault's arguments in "Right of Death and Power over Life," displaying the social effects of sexuality as the dominant procedure of power. The narrative structure of the novel separates humans and vampires into two "races." By endowing humans with absolute narrative power, Stoker excludes vampires from his representation of society. Vampires are characterised as "other" and alienated from society because they fail to conform to dominant social ideals. Similarly, vampires reverse typical gender roles and display homosexual desires. Since these sexual characteristics are attributed to the excluded "race," they are also portrayed negatively, thereby idealizing heterosexuality. The fact that the triumph over Dracula is established with the birth of a White, Western-European son to a heterosexual couple establishes the dominance of a very specific set of social ideals. Ultimately, Dracula is not the true monster in the novel: the true monster is non-conformity to the ideals celebrated in White, Western society.

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