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A Vampire in the Mirror: The Sexuality of *Dracula*

NEAR THE END of *Dracula*, as the band of vampire hunters is tracking the count to his Carpathian lair, Mina Harker implores her husband to kill her if her partial transformation into a vampire should become complete. Her demand for this “euthanasia” (the phrase is Dr. Seward’s [340]) is itself extraordinary, but equally interesting is the way she defines her position and the duty of the men around her: “Think, dear, that there have been times when brave men have killed their wives and womenkind, to keep them from falling into the hands of the enemy. . . . It is men’s duty towards those whom they love, in such times of sore trial!” (336). Why is this “duty” incumbent on “brave men”? Why are “wives and womenkind” a treasure better destroyed than lost to the “enemy”? In the context of Bram Stoker’s novel, it is evident that the mercy implied by such euthanasia is not salvation from the loathsome embraces of a lewd foreigner. It is too late for that. Mina, after all, has already been the object of Dracula’s attention. The problem is one of loyalty: the danger is not that she will be captured but that she will go willingly. She makes this clear: “this time, if it ever come, may come quickly . . . and . . . you must lose no time in using your opportunity. At such a time, I myself might be—nay! if the time ever comes, *shall be*—leagued with your enemy against you” (337). Kill me, she says, before I can betray you.

That *Dracula* concerns competition between men for women can hardly be questioned—passages like these can be multiplied almost indefinitely. But what is the nature of that competition? Certainly, a number of readers have agreed on one interpretation. As they would have it, the horror we feel in contemplating Dracula is that his actions, when stripped of displacement and disguise, are fundamentally incestuous and that Stoker’s novel is finally a rather transparent version of the “primal horde” theory Freud advanced—only about fifteen years after publication of the novel—in *Totem and Taboo*.¹ According to this interpretation (as one adherent has it, “almost a *donnée* of *Dracula* criticism” [Twitchell, *Living Dead* 135]), the count, undeniably long in the tooth, attempts to hoard all the available women, leaving the younger generation,

his “sons,” no recourse but to rise up and kill the wicked “father,” thus freeing the women for themselves. The novel does concern how one old man (“centuries-old,” he tells us) struggles with four young men (and another old, but good, man, Dr. Van Helsing) for the bodies and souls of two young women. But to call that strife intrafamilial (Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasures* 139) or to say that all the characters, including Dracula, are linked “as members of one family” (Richardson 428) seems to be more of a tribute to the authority psychoanalysis enjoys among literary critics than it is an illuminating description of Stoker’s narrative.

I would like to rethink the way sexual competition works in *Dracula* from the perspective of that frequent antagonist of psychoanalysis, anthropology. Nowhere is the gulf between these universalizing disciplines greater, perhaps, than it is on the subject that obsesses them both, incest.² A good deal of recent anthropological work argues that, as one prominent scholar puts it, “human beings [do] not *want* to commit incest all that much” (Fox, *Red Lamp* 7). My intention in this essay is to apply this anti-incestuous model of human desire to *Dracula* in the place of the more customary Freudian model. As Mina’s remarks above indicate, the novel insistently—indeed, obsessively—defines the vampire not as a monstrous father but as a foreigner, as someone who threatens and terrifies precisely because he is an outsider. In other words, it may be fruitful to reconsider Stoker’s compelling and frequently retold story in terms of interracial sexual competition rather than as intrafamilial strife. Dracula’s pursuit of Lucy and Mina is motivated, not by the incestuous greed at the heart of Freud’s scenario, but by an omnivorous appetite for difference, for novelty. His crime is not the hoarding of incest but a sexual theft, a sin we can term excessive exogamy. Although the old count has women of his own, he is exclusively interested in the women who belong to someone else. This reconsideration can yield a fresh appreciation of the appeal of Stoker’s story and can suggest ways in which the novel embodies a quite powerful imagining of the nature of cultural and racial difference.

Before explaining how *Dracula* represents this kind of exogamous threat, I want to review briefly

some basic anthropological ideas about marriage customs, particularly as they relate to the incest taboo.³ While not, as was once imagined, an absolute universal of human behavior, the taboo is very common, and various benefits—genetic diversity, family peace, social stability, the existence of society itself—have been ascribed to it. More relevant to *Dracula* than the origin of the taboo, however, is the so-called rule of exogamy that is one result. Sex and marriage, of course, are not the same thing, but since sex is typically a part of the marital relation, the taboo's injunction against sex within the family means that people must “marry out.” Anthropology has devoted considerable energy to discovering the remarkable and often arbitrary rules humanity has established to govern just which women are “inside” the family and hence forbidden and which are “outside” and therefore available. But the word *exogamy* is also somewhat misleading, because most cultures place significant limitations on how far out a mate may be sought. As Robin Fox says, “Of course, [exogamy] had to have some boundaries. . . . Groups speaking the same language and being alike in other ways might well exchange wives among themselves—but the connubium stopped at the boundaries of the language, territory, or colour, or whatever marked ‘us’ off from ‘them’” (*Kinship* 78). The exchange of women that is the essence of exogamy has its limits. If most cultures have forbidden marriage within the family, they have also wanted to maintain the integrity of the group. *Group* is, admittedly, a vague term, an inherently cultural construct encompassing all manner of classifications: tribe, caste, class, race, religion, nation, and so on. But its vagueness does not diminish the importance of the distinction Fox speaks of, that boundary between “us” and “them,” however artificially that line might be drawn. And according to these lights, marriage, or even a sexual relation, that crosses that boundary ceases to be a social act that simultaneously denies incest and affirms the group and becomes instead a threat, what I earlier called excessive exogamy. This was the problem worrying the Deuteronomist when he cautioned the Jews that intermarriage would “turn away thy sons . . . that they may serve other gods” (7.3), and this was the kind of exogamy the great pioneer of the anthropology of marriage, Edward Westermarck, was thinking about when he coined the memorable phrase “social adultery” (2: 51). Here, then, is the real horror of *Dracula*, for he is the ultimate social adulterer, whose purpose is

nothing if it is not to turn good Englishwomen like Lucy and Mina away from their own kind and customs. Mina's fear, we recall, is that she “*shall be . . . leagued with your enemy against you.*”

What sort of enemy, foreigner, stranger is Count Dracula? I have claimed that interracial sexual competition is fundamental to the energies that motivate this novel, but in what way are vampires another “race”? As a rigorous scientific concept, race enjoys little credence today, despite the many attempts—particularly as part of the nineteenth-century zeal for classification—to elevate it to a science involving physical criteria like jaws, cheekbones, cranial capacities, and so on. It is, however, a convenient metaphor to describe the undeniable human tendency to separate “us” from “them.” An idea like race helps us grapple with human otherness—the fact that we do not all look alike or believe alike or act alike. *Dracula* is, above all, strange to those he encounters—strange in his habits, strange in his appearance, strange in his physiology. At one point, Van Helsing calls him “the other” (297), and the competition for women in the novel reflects a conflict between groups that define themselves as foreign to each other. My use of the term *interracial*, then, is a way to speak of what happens when any two groups set themselves at odds on the basis of what they see as differences in their fundamental identity, be that “racial,” ethnic, tribal, religious, national, or whatever.⁴

The problem of interracial competition would have probably had an especial resonance in 1897, the year *Dracula* appeared. For several decades, Great Britain had been engaged in an unprecedented program of colonial expansion: four and one quarter million square miles were added to the empire in the last thirty years of the century alone (Seaman 332). British imperialism, of course, was not new, nor was suspicion of foreigners a novelty in a country where, as one eighteenth-century wit put it, “Before they learn there is a God to be worshipped, they learn there are Frenchmen to be detested” (qtd. in Porter 21). Yet the late nineteenth century saw the rise of that great vulgarization of evolution (and powerful racist rationalization), social Darwinism, and heard Disraeli say, “All is race; there is no other truth” (qtd. in Faber 59). *Dracula*'s insistence on the terror and necessity of racial struggle in an imperialist context (the count, after all, has invaded England and plans to take it over) must reflect that historical frame. My emphasis in this essay, however, is on Stoker's novel as a representation

of fears that are more universal than a specific focus on the Victorian background would allow. Westermarck's comment about exogamy as social adultery is indeed contemporary with *Dracula* (his *History of Human Marriage* was first published in 1891), but the anthropologist was expressing nothing not on the mind of the Deuteronomist millennia before. And the difficulty facing the men who fight the vampire is not unlike that expressed by Roderigo to Brabantio, in lines first spoken at a much earlier time in British imperial history: Desdemona, he says, has made "a gross revolt, / Tying her duty, beauty, wit, and fortunes / In an extravagant and wheeling stranger . . ." (1.1.131–33). Let us look more specifically, then, at this stranger, Count Dracula.

First, appearances. Dracula is described repeatedly, always in the same way, with the same peculiar features emphasized. Take Mina's first sight of him:

I knew him at once from the description of the others. The waxen face; the high aquiline nose, on which the light fell in a thin, white line; the parted red lips, with the sharp white teeth showing between; and the red eyes that I had seemed to see in the sunset on the windows of St. Mary's Church at Whitby. I knew, too, the red scar on his forehead where Jonathan had struck him. (292–93)

Dracula is remarkable looking for his nose, for the color of his lips and eyes and skin, for the shape of his teeth, for the mark on his forehead; elsewhere, we learn also that he has a strange smell (257). Color, in fact, which is commonly used in attempts at racial classification, is a key element in Stoker's creation of Dracula's foreignness. Here, and throughout the novel, the emphasis is on redness and whiteness. In a brief description, each color is mentioned three times (I count "waxen" as white), and the combination of the two colors is one of the count's most distinguishing racial features. That it is racial, and not personal, becomes clear when we note how Stoker consistently uses a combination of red and white to indicate either incipient or completed vampirism. The women Harker encounters at Castle Dracula, while one is blond and two are dark, are all primarily red and white ("All three had brilliant white teeth that shone like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips" [46]). More significant, Lucy and Mina take on this coloration as Dracula works his will on them. There is first of all the reiterated image of red blood on a white night-

gown (103, 288), a signature that Dracula leaves behind after one of his visits (and a traditional emblem of defloration). Even more striking is the scar left when Van Helsing, in a futile attempt at inoculation, presses the host into Mina's forehead to protect Mina against renewed attack. Harker calls it the "red scar on my poor darling's white forehead" (321). The scar, a concentration of red and white that closely resembles the mark on Dracula's own forehead (cf. esp. 312), thus becomes a kind of caste mark, a sign of membership in a homogeneous group—and a group that is foreign to the men to whom Mina supposedly belongs.

The scar shared by Dracula and Mina, one of the richest details in the novel, has a significance even beyond its function as a caste mark. After all, the wounds are not self-inflicted but given by members of the group of vampire hunters (Dracula's by Harker, Mina's by Van Helsing), so that they represent an attempt by the nonvampires to "mark off" the vampires—much as God puts a mark on Cain, the original type of an alien breed. But the caste mark is also a kind of venereal scar, not only because it results from the count's seduction of Mina but also because the echo of Hamlet's accusation against Gertrude is far too strong to be accidental: "Such an act / That blurs the grace and blush of modesty, / Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose / From the fair forehead of an innocent love, / And sets a blister there . . ." (3.4.41–45).⁵ The scar is thus a sign of defilement (seeing it, Mina cries out, "Unclean! Unclean!" [302]), of sexual possession by the outsider. Finally, it is curious to think of a scar on Dracula at all. He is remarkably protean, able to change his form (he leaves the shipwreck at Whitby as a dog) or even involve himself in rising mist. Why should he allow this disfigurement to remain? John Freccero, discussing the scar Dante describes on the purgatorial form of Manfred, insists that a mark like this on a supernatural being must be seen, not as literal and physical, but as a text, as something meant especially to be *read*. In that sense, the scars on the vampires serve a dense semiotic function, marking Dracula and Mina (potentially, anyway) as simultaneously untouchable, defiled, and damned—above all, different.

Red and white are, of course, the colors we associate with the typically "English" complexion, and I want to emphasize that vampire coloration is something different; at the same time, however, the coincidence of coloration is meaningful. On the one hand, a "rosy" English complexion is created by the

perception of red *through* white—blood coursing beneath pale skin. The vampire inverts this order. He or she displays red *on* white, as with the scars or the effect of ruby lips against waxen skin. The result is rather like a mortician's makeup—a parody of what we expect and, as with a corpse, an effect that finally signals difference and not similarity. That is, the vampire has no rosy glow but presents what looks like dead flesh stained with blood (or drained flesh indicating the food it requires)—a grotesque inversion of good health. On the other hand, the vampire and his English competitors may have more in common than they wish to acknowledge. As we explore vampire sexuality, we will encounter a series of traits that initially assert themselves as foreign or strange but that are revealed as inversions (as in the coloration example), parodies, exaggerations, or even literalizations. Thus, the perception of otherness can be an accurate response to difference and, at the same time, an act that conceals or represses deeper connections.

The allies against the count are not described in comparable detail, and their descriptions tend to be moral rather than physical. Three of their qualities recur almost formulaically—*good*, *brave*, and *strong*. “Oh, thank God for good, brave men!” says Mina, and Van Helsing insists later, “You men are brave and strong” (316, 332). *Good* is also often attached to the women in their unvamped condition: “there are good women left still to make life happy” (190). The distinction between the moral excellence of the insiders and the physical peculiarity of the foreigner underlines the outsider's inherent danger. As Mina puts it, “[T]he world seems full of good men—even if there *are* monsters in it” (230). The familiar is the image of the good, while foreignness merges with monstrosity.

But looks are only one way to construct our images of the foreign, and, as we might expect, Dracula's habits are as bizarre as his appearance. The introductory section of the novel—Harker's diary account of his journey to Transylvania and of his stay at Castle Dracula—gradually reveals Dracula's distinctive customs, moving from the merely odd to the unequivocally horrifying. So, we learn early that Dracula lacks servants, that he is nocturnal, that he likes to eat alone, and that he despises mirrors, and only later do we watch him crawl down walls head first, feed small children to his women, and sleep in his coffin. All Dracula's peculiarities, however, reflect fundamental differences in the most basic hu-

man activities that signal group identity. Dracula is strange to Harker—and to us—because of what food he eats and how he obtains and prepares it, because of where and when he sleeps, because of his burial customs. To Harker as to so many, what is foreign is monstrous, even if it is only a matter of table manners.

In the structure of group identity, the regulation of sexuality has an especially privileged place, and *Dracula* is most fundamentally concerned with both distinguishing the differences between the way vampire “monsters” and “good, brave men” reproduce and identifying the threat those differences pose to Van Helsing and the other men. Our introduction to Dracula in the novel's first six chapters—what Christopher Craft calls the “admission” to monstrosity (108)—establishes the count's foreignness; after that, the novel primarily shows us Dracula's attempts to reproduce and the struggle of the band of young men under Van Helsing to stop him. The tale horrifies because the vampire's manner of reproduction appears radically different and because it requires the women who already belong to these men.

Although the vampire reproduces differently, the ironic thing about vampire sexuality is that, for all its overt peculiarity, it is in many ways very like human sexuality, but human sexuality in which the psychological or metaphoric becomes physical or literal. It initially looks strange but quite often presents a distorted image of human tendencies and behavior. What is frightening about Dracula, then, is that his sexuality is simultaneously different and a parodic mirror. This seeming paradox probably reflects the full complexity of the way one group responds to the sexual customs of another.

We note first the remarkable economy at the heart of the vampire's survival instinct. Like human beings, Dracula has the need for self-preservation, which asserts itself in the drive to preserve both the life of the individual and the life of the species. The difference, of course, is that the vampire can satisfy the two needs simultaneously—the same action, vamping, answers the need for nourishment and procreation. But that equation of eating and sexual intercourse literalized by the vampire is a connection we all make metaphorically and one that, as Lévi-Strauss is fond of pointing out, a number of primitive tribes acknowledge by making the same verb do service for both actions (*Raw and Cooked* 269, *Savage Mind* 105). Dracula says he needs new women so that he can “feed” (312), but

we know that is not all he means.

While the physiology of vampire sexuality literalizes a connection between sex and eating that, for human beings, operates metaphorically, the expression of that sexuality grotesquely exaggerates the typical human pattern of incest avoidance and exogamy. The vampire's "marriage" laws are first suggested when Harker is almost seduced by the three vampire women he encounters at Castle Dracula. Critical opinion about these women differs considerably, betraying how badly vampire sexuality has been misunderstood. The problem arises in part because the text does not explicitly define the women's relation to Dracula—who are they? Both Craft and Maurice Richardson call them Dracula's "daughters" (110, 427); Carol Frye terms them "wives" (21); Leonard Wolf the count's "beautiful brides" (249); and C. F. Bentley says that "they are either Dracula's daughters or his sisters" but insists that an "incestuous" relation existed between them in the past (29). The difficulty here is a false either/or: these women must either be kin or be wives. What these readers ignore is the possibility that Dracula's relation to these women has, quite simply, changed, that they have occupied both roles—not simultaneously, as in incest, but sequentially, because of the way vampire reproduction works.

A speech Dracula makes to Mina late in the novel clarifies his relation to the women at the castle: "And you, their best beloved one, are now to me, flesh of my flesh; blood of my blood; kin of my kin; my bountiful wine-press for a while; and shall be later on my companion and helper" (293). According to the count's description, he and Mina are like husband and wife (he uses the "flesh of my flesh" from Genesis and the marriage ceremony), but through the very fact of their union, they are also becoming "kin." Thus, because of the vampire's incest taboo, she can be his "wine-press" only for a "while," and in time, when her transformation from "good" Englishwoman to vampire is complete, she will become a daughterly "companion and helper." The vampire women at the castle have undergone a similar change. When one of them reproaches Dracula with the accusation, "You yourself never loved; you never love!" he can answer, "Yes, I too can love; you yourselves can tell it from the past. Is it not so?" (47).

Dracula's relation to his women changes in this way because of another economy in vampire sexuality. Not only do vampires combine feeding with reproduction, they collapse the distinction between

sexual partners and offspring. "Wives," that is, become daughters in an extraordinarily condensed procedure in which penetration, intercourse, conception, gestation, and parturition represent, not discrete stages, but one undifferentiated action.⁶ Dracula re-creates in his own image the being that he is simultaneously ravishing. But the transformation, once complete, is irreversible—Dracula makes it clear that once Mina becomes his daughter, his "companion and helper," she can never again be his "wine-press."⁷ We confront here one large inadequacy of the *Totem and Taboo* reading. In the primal horde, as female offspring mature, they fall under the sexual sway of their fathers—daughters become wives. In *Dracula*, this role transformation is reversed and is accompanied, moreover, by a powerful incest taboo that seems to preclude Dracula's further sexual interest in his onetime partners. In fact, unlike the greedy patriarch of the horde, Dracula encourages his women to seek other men. He tells the female vampires at his castle that, when Harker's usefulness to him is over, they can have their way with the Englishman: "Well, now I promise you that when I am done with him you shall kiss him at your will" (47).

The inevitable question arises for vampires as well as for human beings: why is there an incest taboo? The answer, however, is not that incest avoidance has been ingrained in the vampire's conscience, if such a thing should exist; instead, vampires appear incapable of committing this particular crime, since they face a physical barrier to incest, not just a psychological one—another dramatic instance of vampire literalization. Such a barrier is an example of the many physical changes that mark the transformation into a vampire, as we learn on the day that Lucy dies to her old identity as Englishwoman and is reborn as one of Dracula's own kind. (Vampire victims, it seems, always die in childbirth.) Van Helsing and Seward examine her neck and discover, to their horror, that the punctures in her throat "had absolutely disappeared" (167). Dracula could not commit incest even if he wanted to; he has no orifice to penetrate.

With the exaggeration of human tendencies characteristic of vampire sexuality, the vampire's incest taboo creates its own iron rule of exogamy. Just as there is a physical obstacle to vampire incest, so the vampire's need to marry out is not a matter of custom or of a long-term evolutionary benefit but an immediate and urgent biological necessity. Westermarck approvingly quotes another

nineteenth-century anthropologist, who speaks of “mankind’s instinctive hankering after foreign women” (2: 165). For Dracula, though, the need for “foreign women” is no mere hankering. Rather, because his sexual partner is also his food, the vampire must marry out or die.⁸ A world without foreign women would represent not only sterility but famine.

The vampire as a sexual being is thus strangely familiar—he avoids incest and he seeks sexual partners outside his family. But that sexuality is also a parody of human sexuality, a literalization that makes him seem very odd: he *cannot* commit incest, he *must* marry out. And that necessity, in turn, creates his primary danger. Since all vampires are kin, they cannot simultaneously seek likeness (i.e., marry within the confines of the group) and avoid incest, as human beings do. Dracula thus cannot respect group or racial boundaries with regard to women; his particular physiology demands instead that he take “foreign women” away from the men they already belong to, a theft that continues his own kind. Moreover, his physically insistent need to steal threatens the existence of the group on which he preys. As he tells Van Helsing and his allies, “Your girls that you all love are mine already; and through them you and others shall yet be mine” (312). Dracula is thus doubly frightening—he is the foreigner whose very strangeness renders him monstrous, and, more dangerous, he is an imperialist whose invasion seeks a specifically sexual conquest; he is a man who will take other men’s women away and make them his own.⁹

And Dracula will make “foreign women” his own in a radical way. He does not simply kidnap or alter cultural allegiances; his sexual union with women like Lucy and Mina physically deracinates them and re-creates them as members of his own kind.¹⁰ This point will be clearer if we look at Stoker’s manipulation of the novel’s central image, that of blood. Blood means many things in *Dracula*; it is food, it is semen, it is a rather ghastly parody of the Eucharist, the blood of Christ that guarantees life eternal. But its meaning also depends on the way humanity has made blood a crucial metaphor for what it thinks of as racial identity. Blood is the essence that somehow determines all those other features—physical and cultural—that distinguish one race from another. And this connection of blood and race explains most fully that fascinating sequence when each of the good, brave men in turn gives Lucy a transfusion. Ostensibly,

they are replacing what the count has removed, so that she will not perish from loss of blood. But Dracula’s action is not feeding, nor is it only a combination of feeding and copulation. The men are desperate to transfuse their blood into Lucy because they understand that sexual intercourse with a vampire deracinates. Dracula’s threat is not miscegenation, the mixing of blood; instead, he gives his partners a new racial identity. And he can do this because the source of their original identity, their blood, has been taken away. In only one more of the remarkable literalizations that give this novel mythic power, the answer to the kind of genocide that the vampire threatens is to reinfuse Lucy with the “right” blood, “young and strong . . . and so pure” (131), as Van Helsing says.

Such deracination is one effect of the economy we observed above, that of the vampire’s sexual partners becoming his offspring. But what I have been calling the racial element needs emphasis here; not only do wives become daughters but brides who were originally foreign to Dracula become pure vampires. This is what the Deuteronomist understood: the problem with mixed marriages is that they produce new loyalties, not confused ones. As Mina says, “I . . . *shall be* . . . leagued with your enemy against you.” And why? Because, with her own blood removed, she will be like Dracula, and it is that loss of women’s loyalty that the good, brave men cannot abide. As Van Helsing explains it to Mina: “He have infect you in such a wise, that . . . in time, death . . . shall make you like to him. This must not be! We have sworn together that it must not. Thus are we ministers of God’s own wish: that the world . . . will not be given over to monsters . . .” (325). The desperation these men feel about the threat from Dracula is suggested, perhaps, by the multiple transfusions they give Lucy. Van Helsing recognizes that these transfusions are sexual and that they imply a kind of promiscuity in Lucy; as he puts it in his distinctively incompetent English: “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” (182). Lucy’s promiscuity—her “polyandry,” as the propriety of the Dutchman would have it—is forgivable, because finally her loyalty to her own kind is more vital than her absolute chastity. Clearly, it is more important that the group maintain its hold over her than that any one man has exclusive rights. In the face of such anxiety, too, there

is always the option we began with, euthanasia, the killing by brave men of their women, to keep them from falling into the hands of the enemy.

In the light of all this, it is very hard to see as “incestuous” the competition for women that constitutes the primary action of the novel. *Dracula* does touch on primal fears and urges, but they are not the horror or allure of incest. Stoker’s perdurable myth reflects the ancient fear that “they” will take away “our” women, and Dracula is at his most horrifying not when he drinks blood or travels in the form of a bat but when he, a man of palpable foreignness, can say, “Your girls that you all love are mine.” An old black ram, he says, is tugging your white ewe. Richardson is right to find the count a figure of “huge potency” (427), but Dracula’s power is not that of the father, as Richardson suggests, but that of the “extravagant stranger,” or, in Van Helsing’s words, “the other.” But such power raises a new set of questions. The men are anxious about losing their women, but what of the women themselves? How do they respond to Dracula’s frightful glamour? What is this novel’s attitude toward women?

Stoker’s description of the first women we see in *Dracula*, the vampire women at the castle, strongly emphasizes their overt sexuality. The word *voluptuous* is repeated—they have “voluptuous lips” and a “deliberate voluptuousness” in their approach to Harker (46). And he, in turn, is quickly aroused by their seductive appeal, as he feels “a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips” (46). They project themselves as sexualized beings and have power to inspire a sexual response in others. The pattern is exactly repeated when Lucy’s transformation into a vampire is complete. Shortly after Van Helsing and Seward note the disappearance of the wounds in her neck, the young doctor reports that she speaks in a “soft, voluptuous voice, such as I had never heard from her lips” (167); and when the whole band confronts the undead Lucy outside her tomb, “we recognised the features of Lucy Westenra. Lucy Westenra, but yet how changed. The sweetness was turned to . . . cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness” (217). Within the next three paragraphs, we hear that she has a “voluptuous smile” and a “wanton smile” and that she speaks with “a languorous, voluptuous grace.” As is typical when Stoker discusses the characteristics of a group, his vocabulary shrinks, and he resorts to formulas—*good*, *brave*, and, for vampire females, *voluptuous*. And when the posse

of racial purity hammers the stake through Lucy’s heart, that merciful penetration which undoes the undead, the transformation is a return to her former state of desexualization: the “foul Thing” with its “voluptuous mouth” and its “carnal and unspiritual appearance” disappears, replaced with “Lucy as we had seen her in her life, with her face of unequalled sweetness and purity” (220–22).

There are several ways to interpret the novel’s attitude toward the sexuality these female vampires project. The first—developed by a number of critics—is that Stoker is expressing what have usually been regarded as typical Victorian attitudes about female sexuality. According to these readers, the violence against women in *Dracula*, most vividly rendered in the staking of Lucy, reflects a hostility toward female sexuality felt by the culture at large. Women should not be “wanton” or “voluptuous”; they should be “pure” and “spiritual.” So, Phyllis Roth contends that “much of the novel’s great appeal derives from its hostility to female sexuality” (“Suddenly Sexual” 113), Judith Weissman insists that *Dracula* “is an extreme version of the stereotypically Victorian attitudes toward sexual roles” (392), and Gail Griffin argues that, among other things, Dracula represents “a subliminal voice in our heros, whispering that, at heart, these girls . . . are potential vampires, that their angels are, in fact, whores” (463). Very recently, Bram Dijkstra has renewed the charge, calling the book a “central document in the late nineteenth-century war on woman” (341).¹¹

Undoubtedly, *Dracula* exhibits hostility toward female sexuality. Women who are “pure” are not only good, they are recognizable as members of the group—after the staking, Lucy again looks like “we had seen her in her life.” By contrast, “voluptuous” women are monsters, loathsome creatures fit only for destruction. What interests me, however, is not the possibility that *Dracula* is yet another misogynist text but the way in which the novel incorporates its portrayal of women into its consideration of foreignness. A careful look at the women in *Dracula* reveals that the primary fear is a fear of the foreign and that women become terrifying insofar as they are associated with the kind of strangeness vampires represent. Lucy and those women at Castle Dracula are, as Van Helsing puts it, “like him,” members of that “new order of beings” that the count wishes to “father” (308). Two issues are important in this regard. First, there is the bisexuality of female vampires (and males, too), a consideration that compli-

cates any attempt to generalize about the place of gender in this novel. Second, the women here do not transform themselves. The count is the indispensable catalyst for their alteration into sexual beings, a catalytic role that exposes again *Dracula's* deep anxieties about excessive exogamy. I would like to look briefly at both these issues before concluding.

A famous psychoanalytic comment on vampirism occurs in Ernest Jones's *On the Nightmare*:

The explanation of these fantasies is surely not hard. A nightly visit from a beautiful or frightful being, who first exhausts the sleeper with passionate embraces and then withdraws from him a vital fluid; all this can point only to a natural and common process, namely to nocturnal emissions. . . . In the unconscious mind blood is commonly an equivalent for semen. (119)

Dracula does indeed make blood and semen interchangeable fluids,¹² and this equivalence may offer another clue why the combination of red and white is the vampire's distinct coloration. But the striking omission from Jones's rather condescending comment is that, in Stoker's novel, the "vital fluid" is being withdrawn from women, that the nightly visitor is a man. Vampirism may have something to do with nocturnal emissions, but surely it is important that in *Dracula* women have all the wet dreams. Clearly, in the vampire world traditional sexual roles are terribly confused. Dracula penetrates, but he receives the "vital fluid"; after Lucy becomes a vampire, she acts as a "penetrator" (and becomes sexually aggressive), but she now receives fluid from those she attacks. Nowhere is this confusion greater than at the moment the brave band interrupts Dracula's attack on Mina:

With . . . his right hand [he] 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. (288)

As many have remarked, there is a powerful image of fellatio here (and there is also an exchange of fluids—a point not made clear in the description of Dracula's attack on Lucy); but in this scene Dracula, in a breathtaking transformation, is a mother as well, engaged in an act that has a "terrible resemblance" to breast-feeding. What is going on? Fellatio? Lactation? It seems that the vampire is sexually capable of everything.

Like Tiresias, the vampire has looked at sex from both sides, and that fact is significant for several reasons. First, it makes it difficult to say, simply, that the novel is hostile to female sexuality, when the nature of the "female" has itself been made problematic; it is more accurate to say that the primary fear is of vampire sexuality, a phenomenon in which "our" gender roles interpenetrate in a complicated way. Female vampires are not angels turned into whores but human women who have become something very strange, beings in whom traditional distinctions between male and female have been lost and traditional roles confusingly mixed. Moreover, we encounter again here the central paradox of *Dracula's* representation of the foreign. For the bisexuality of the vampire is not only monstrously strange, it is also a very human impulse—an impulse that, once more, the vampire has made astonishingly literal. As we have seen throughout this essay, the sexuality of vampires—here their bisexuality—is both strange and familiar, both an overt peculiarity to be seen and dreaded and a reflection to be repressed.

If female vampires are powerfully bisexual, they are also creatures who have been profoundly changed. The pure and spiritual become voluptuous, the passive become aggressive, and so on. As Van Helsing says, "Madame Mina, our poor dear Madame Mina, is changing" (328). The novel makes it clear that these changes do not come from within—Dracula brings them about as part of that complex process of deracinative reproduction discussed above. In other words, the erotic energy of the female vampires is somehow the count's creation. And that, in turn, suggests another way in which he is terrifying to the band of good, brave men. What if the problem is not that women like Lucy and Mina have become sexual but that their sexuality has been released in the wrong way, by a foreigner, a foreigner who has achieved what the men fear they may be unable to accomplish?¹³ That is, the anxiety of Van Helsing and his band may be partly a fear of aggressive or demanding women, but it may also be a fear of superior sexual potency in the competition. The boy next door may be no match for an extravagant stranger.

The fear of excessive exogamy, so much a part of the terror that Dracula inspires, is thus both a racial and a sexual problem. As I suggested earlier, Dracula is a sexual imperialist, one who longs to be "the father or furtherer of a new order of beings" (308). And he can beget this race only on the bod-

ies of other men's women, imperiling the racial integrity of the West. The fear he inspires, however, is also personal, for his is not merely an imperialism that takes women, it is especially an imperialism of seduction—if he initially approaches these women through violence, in the end they are converts, “leagued with your enemy against you.” Dracula threatens to destroy both the “good” men's race and their masculinity, to destroy them as a group and emasculate them as individuals. No wonder they are so desperate to stop him.

Dracula emerges, then, as a remarkable meditation on foreignness, in at least two ways. The surface of the tale is a memorable myth of interracial sexual competition, a struggle between men who wish to retain their control over women defined as members of their group and a powerful and attractive foreigner, who wishes to make the women his own. This battle, finally, is between two kinds of desire. The desire of the good, brave men is a force that must be called conservative, for it is an urge to protect possessions, to insist on the integrity of racial boundaries, to maintain unmixed the blood of their group. Hence, we see their xenophobic insistence that “the world”—meaning their world and their women—“not be given over to monsters.” Dracula's desire is the antithesis of such conservatism: what the count has once possessed is useless to him in his continuing struggle for survival. His constantly renewed desire for difference may be “monstrous” in terms of the marriage practices of most cultures, but it is hardly the monstrosity of incest. The threat Dracula represents is not the desire of the father to hoard his own women; it is an urgent need to take, to violate boundaries, a desire that must incorporate foreign blood for the very survival of his kind. For the vampire, the blood he needs, both for sex and for food, always belongs to somebody else.

Dracula thus uncovers for us the kind of mind that sees excessive exogamy as a particularly terrifying threat. Such thinking is common in human experience: we tend to divide ourselves into groups and to fret about sexual contact across group lines. At the same time, such fears must have been acute

in late nineteenth-century Britain, plump with imperial gain, but given perhaps to the bad dream that *Dracula* embodies: what if “they” should try to colonize us?¹⁴ *Dracula* is interesting, however, as something more than a representation of the xenophobic mind, in either its Victorian or its aboriginal avatar—fascinating as that representation is. For xenophobia requires, first of all, a concept of what is foreign, and the remarkable thing about Stoker's novel is the way it is able to undermine that very conception of the “foreign” on which so much of its narrative energy depends. That is, *Dracula* both exemplifies what Hannah Arendt terms “race-thinking” (158) and calls such thinking radically into question. Again and again Stoker depicts vampire sexuality as a curiously doubled phenomenon—always overtly bizarre, but also somehow familiar.¹⁵ Such a paradox possibly is inherent in the enterprise by which foreignness, that ancient need to separate “us” from “them,” is constructed in the human imagination. As *Dracula* represents that process, it is a simultaneous movement, in which differences are perceived and reified, while likenesses are repressed and denied. The refusal of some recognition may thus always be a part of the perception of foreignness—even (or maybe especially) the extreme foreignness of monstrosity.

Vampires, we all know, cast no reflection. Virtually the first frightening oddity that Harker notices at Castle Dracula is that “there was no reflection of [the count] in the mirror” (34). In the light of this discussion, that missing image presents a striking metaphor. The vampire, “the other,” “the monster”—everything that Dracula represents, and represents so powerfully—depends on our refusal to see the ways in which he is also a mirror. After all, it is Harker who can see nothing in the glass. When we say that the vampire is absent from the mirror, perhaps what we are saying is that we are afraid to see a reflection—however uneasy and strange—of ourselves.

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Notes

¹ The first critic to insist on a parallel between *Dracula* and *Totem and Taboo* was Maurice Richardson. In his wake have come James Twitchell's *The Living Dead* (134–35), *Dreadful Pleasures* (99–104, 137), and *Forbidden Partners* (69–70), and

Phyllis Roth's “Suddenly Sexual Women” (115) and *Bram Stoker* (114). Richard Astle also brings up the theory but notes that there are two “fathers” in Stoker's novel, Dracula and Van Helsing, a “wish-fulfillment” situation that enables the “sons” simulta-

neously to kill and obey the father (98–99).

² For a valuable discussion of the differences between anthropology and psychoanalysis, see W. Arens (40–43 esp.). In *The Red Lamp of Incest*, Robin Fox attempts to reconcile recent anthropological and biological work on incest with *Totem and Taboo*. The result has been controversial, and in any event I am not sure Freud would recognize his theories in their rehabilitated form. The approach I use in this essay does not imply that I believe anthropology to be “right,” psychoanalysis “wrong.” I do want to substitute one model of human behavior for another (and models are what I believe both approaches are) and see what happens.

³ The discussion that follows is much indebted to Arens and to the two volumes by Fox, all three of which provide good summaries of the vast anthropological literature on these subjects. Also, while I am aware that Lévi-Strauss’s theories have been much debated in the anthropological community and that they are not, perhaps, entirely original, I must acknowledge that I could not have arrived at the ideas developed in this essay without his powerfully expressed notion of the interrelation between an incest taboo and the exchange of women among allied men.

The existence of an incest taboo does not contradict the idea that humans have an instinctive aversion to committing incest. See Arens 14.

⁴ Pierre Van den Berghe provides a useful summary of the history and current status of attempts at racial classifications (ch. 1). A dictionary (*American Heritage*) definition of *race* suggests the range of essentially metaphoric meanings attached to the word. Those definitions include “a distinct group [defined by] genetically transmitted physical characteristics”; “a group united” on the basis of history, geography, or nationality; and “a genealogical line.” As a “race,” vampires partake of all these meanings.

⁵ Stoker would have known *Hamlet* intimately, having been associated for many years with the actor Henry Irving and having long served as manager of the Lyceum Theatre in London. In fact, a review Stoker wrote of Irving’s performance as Hamlet first brought the two together, and Stoker’s management of the Lyceum began with a ninety-eight-night run of *Hamlet*. See Daniel Farson 17, 56.

There is a further biographical consideration here if it is true, as Farson argues, that Stoker died of syphilis. Farson claims that in view of the typical progression of the disease Stoker might have caught the infection at about the time he wrote *Dracula* (233–35).

⁶ For this reason, there is no such thing as birth control for vampires, except coitus interruptus, whose efficacy seems uncertain. The good men certainly interrupt Dracula’s last attack on Mina, but her salvation from rebirth as a vampire seems more a function of Dracula’s death than the result of the interruption. The impossibility of separating sexuality from reproduction in *Dracula* inverts the pattern in the other great nineteenth-century monster novel, *Frankenstein*, which insists on that separation. In a sense, these novels anticipate the contemporary debate between Catholic conservatives and technological interventionists on the issue of reproduction. *Dracula*, with its crucifixes, its use of the host as a kind of disinfectant, and especially its literalization of certain Catholic preoccupations about sex, emerges as an oddly Catholic novel, with vampires representing a fantasy of sexual orthodoxy. Neither of the biographies I consulted had anything to say on the subject of the novelist’s religion, but Stoker was Irish.

⁷ Again, there is a deliciously gossipy biographical sidelight

here. According to Farson, who is Stoker’s great-nephew, family gossip maintains that Stoker’s wife ceased to have sexual relations with her husband after the birth of their one child in 1879 (214). Of course, it is impossible to know how far to trust such evidence, but the parallel is worth noting.

⁸ Here we see an exaggerated and literalized version of the sociobiological argument that outbreeding is genetically useful for humanity. See Arens 22.

⁹ It is Dracula’s status as an invader that sets him apart from other supernatural beings. Most of the terror ghosts create is bound up with the belief that dead people haunt the places they knew in life: houses are normally haunted by former residents, or at least by someone who had a significant relation to the place. Dracula, however, must leave his old home to do his dreadful work. This supernatural imperialism suggests again that the fear Dracula creates is linked to his strangeness, to his remote origins. In a sense, Dracula is a demonic version of Abraham, who also must leave his old home and go to another place to begin his new race.

¹⁰ A powerful expression of this mentality dominates John Ford’s great western *The Searchers* (1956). At one point, John Wayne and an army doctor are looking over a group of women, all of them very blond, recently rescued from long captivity (the chief who has been holding them is named, interestingly, “Scar”). The women are behaving strangely, and the doctor remarks, “It’s hard to believe they’re white.” Wayne’s reply tersely reveals his character’s belief in sexual deracination: “They’re not white—any more. They’re Comanche.”

¹¹ There is, however, another school of thought that finds at least glimmers of real sympathy for women in *Dracula*. Nina Auerbach sees in Lucy and Mina a “self-transforming power surging beneath apparent victimization,” observing that “we are struck by the kinds of power that [Stoker] grant[s]” to his women (34, 17). Stephanie Demetrakapoulos insists that the novel expresses hidden desires in Victorian culture, particularly women’s desire to be sexually alive, and Alan Johnson says that the count “symbolizes” these women’s “inner rebelliousness,” which the novel portrays as “justified” (21). Carol Senf suggests that Stoker’s “treatment of women . . . does not stem from his hatred of women in general but . . . from his ambivalent reaction to a topical phenomenon—the New Woman” (34).

¹² It seems inevitable that, at some point soon, the phenomenon of AIDS and the vampire myth will converge. In fact, we may already be seeing a “vampirization” of high-risk groups for the disease. One heterosexual was quoted in the *New York Times Magazine* as saying, “[Avoiding sex with members of high-risk groups] is, in a way, a tyranny, a part of the inexorable return to conservatism. It’s so antithetical to intermingling. . . . People are saying you should sleep only with your own kind” (Davis 35).

¹³ Some important recent historical work suggests that the standard view of Victorian attitudes toward female sexuality is seriously flawed. Both Peter Gay and Carl Degler argue that there was no monolithic suppression or denial of women’s erotic potential in the era and that a notorious figure like Dr. William Acton (who thought “normal” women had no sexual feelings) should not be viewed as a spokesperson for the age.

¹⁴ Jerome Buckley’s comment is interesting in this regard: “All through the nineties there lay behind the cult of empire a half-hushed uneasiness, a sense of social decline, a foreboding of death . . .” (228).

¹⁵ Such doubleness calls to mind Freud’s analysis of the “uncanny,” in which the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich* converge. For

Freud, however, the “uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (“‘Uncanny’” 220). My understanding of *Dracula* here depends on the poles of the strange and familiar remaining simultaneously present. Freud’s “leads back to” suggests the priority Freud assigns to the family romance even in the realm of the lit-

erature of fright. In insisting on concealed points of similarity between vampires and human beings, I have not been led “back to” an incestuous reading of the novel. Rather, I mean to show how foreignness is perhaps an inevitably compromised perception.

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