

## Count Dracula versus Abraham Van Helsing through the Looking Glass: A *Tour de Force*

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I have labored carefully, not to mock, lament, or execrate, but to understand human actions.

Benedict de Spinoza, *The Chief Works*. Vol. I: *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670), ed. and trans. Robert H.M. Elwes (London: George Bell & Sons, 1891), 288.

### Prolegomena

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* has had his partial, sublimated revenge<sup>1</sup>, in that even after Van Helsing's moral-magical onslaught against him, he remains the centerpiece of a vibrant albeit often volatile hermeneutical battle among scholars who have concocted a heady brew of interpretations of the novel ranging from historical, allegorical, theological, political, colonial, and postcolonial to racist, feminist, Freudian, and queer. Nevertheless, its eponymous protagonist, seen variously as a hetero-homo-bi-sexual predator, an abominable cultural/ethnic other, an anti-Christ, or an embodiment of infectious disease, still remains a shadowy satanic figure as ever. But, as Nursel Icoz maintains, "Stoker's apparent reluctance to impose a closure on *Dracula* effectively opens up the novel to alternative interpretations."<sup>2</sup> There thus remains the possibility of proffering another perspective with a view to shedding some interesting sidelights not yet explored by historians, sociologists, anthropologists, or psychologists.

This brief essay anatomizes *Dracula*'s character and behavior contrasting them with those of his nemesis, the Dutch necromancer Abraham Van Helsing, with a view to presenting a new perspective on the character, conduct, and significance of both the blood-sucking revenant and his blood-letting avenger. This perspective is predicated on certain presumptions that must at once be made clear. As a vampire, as presented by Stoker, Count *Dracula* is neither human nor sexual, of either homo or hetero variety. The very vampiric ontological constraints of a revenant makes it a doppelganger that resembles a male or a female human being from outside without any human emotion other than the animal-instinctual sentiments of self defense, thirst (not hunger), and rage. An outcome of this exercise within the parameters of analysis provided above is that the readers of *Dracula* can now see both the lonesome and loathsome beast of the East, the vampire Count, and his Western persecutor, the Western doctor and exorcist, out of the Manichean box of binaries. This new perspective bypasses the highways of models and theories of the familiar variety such as colonial, imperial, postcolonial, postmodern, and above all, sexual—straight or queer—to interpret *Dracula*, but follows the unfashionable and humdrum byways of the commonsensical "traditional standards of 'literalness'," *pace* Ludmilla Kostova.<sup>3</sup> "Theory is good, but it doesn't prevent things

<sup>1</sup> Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, ed. Andrew Elfenbein (1897. Boston: Longman, 2011), 308. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated D.

<sup>2</sup> N. Icoz, "The Un-dead: To be Feared or/and Pitied" in Peter Day, ed., *Vampires: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 209-26, here at 221.

<sup>3</sup> Ludmilla Kostova, "Straining the Limits of Interpretation: Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Its Eastern European Contexts," in John S. Bak, ed., *Post/Modern Dracula: From Victorian Themes to Postmodern Praxis* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 13-30 here at 13.

from happening,” Sigmund Freud’s (1856-1939) mentor at La Salpatrière, Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-93), is reported to have observed shrewdly sometime in 1886.<sup>4</sup>

### Count Dracula

Dracula is believed to have a human and historical, genealogy. As Van Helsing deposes on the authority of the Hungarian scholar Jakob Ármin Vámbéry, the Draculas were noted for their resistance against the imperial Turks. Their progenitor Vlad Tepes [Impaler] III, *Voivode* of Wallachia (r. 1456-76), had been schooled at the Devil’s academy, the Scholomance, amongst the mountains over Lake Hermanstadt. He is the Caligula (Roman emperor r. 37-4 CE) of the East, sharing similar bloody legends of mass murder and mayhem.<sup>5</sup> His initiation by the devil there and later his infamous atrocities together with his father’s name Vlad II the Dracul, who had joined (1431) the Order of the Dragon [*dracul*], earned him the fearsome sobriquet of Dracula, the junior Dracul (243), although there is no literary or historical evidence for the bloody Vlad II having ever been referred to as a blood-sucking vampire.<sup>6</sup> After Vlad II’s death by murder his son Vlad Tepes became a revenant as Count Dracula. Dracula the vampire, thus, was not begotten but forged.<sup>7</sup>

Dracula has a human face, physique, and even feelings, though he miraculously shape-shifts at will (*D*, 307-8). Jonathan Harker provides a graphic phrenological description of the Count’s countenance twice. At the first sight he describes him as “a tall old man, clean shaven save for a long white moustache” (*D*, 20). Later he details Dracula’s visage—very strong face, arched nostrils, massive eyebrows, heavy moustache, cruel-looking mouth, and sharp white teeth protruding over ruddy lips—all of which show an “astonishing vitality in a man of his years” (*D*, 22). The only fearsome and loathsome aspects of the Count besides his protruding teeth and extraordinary strength (*D*, 20) are his hairy palms and rank breath (*D*, 22). Similarly, Jonathan’s fiancée (later his wife) Mina Murray finds Dracula possessing “not a good face” but one that is “hard and cruel, and sensual” (*D*, 177). Carol Senf notes shrewdly that Stoker “adds a number of humanizing touches to make Dracula appear noble and vulnerable as well as demonic and dreadful.”<sup>8</sup>

Françoise Dupeyron Lafay’s claim “the body is a central figure and a major theme in *Dracula*”<sup>9</sup> overlooks the obvious textual fact that Stoker, while being meticulous in describing the faces of Dracula and the lamias, never hints at their bodies below the

<sup>4</sup> Charcot’s Obituary cited in Sigmund Freud, *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (1893-98. London: Hogarth Press, 1962), III: 11-23.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Beresford, *From Demons to Dracula: The Creation of the Modern Vampire Myth* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 26.

<sup>6</sup> Roxana Stuart, *Stage Blood: Vampires of the 19th Century Stage* (Madison, WI: Popular Press, 1994), 189.

<sup>7</sup> See Adrian Axinte, “Dracula between Myth and Reality” (n.d.).  
[http://www.stanford.edu/group/ras\\_content/\\_public/\\_htm/dracula.shtml](http://www.stanford.edu/group/ras_content/_public/_htm/dracula.shtml) (accessed 4/7/2013).  
 See also Ray Porter, “The Historical Dracula” (1992).  
<http://www.eskimo.com/~mwirrk/castle/vlad/vladhist.html> (accessed 4/7/2013).

<sup>8</sup> Carol Senf, “Dracula: The Unseen Face in the Mirror,” in Margaret L. Carter, ed., *Dracula: The Vampire and the Critics* (Ann Arbor: U.M.I. Press, 1988), 93-103, here at 95.

<sup>9</sup> “Fragmented, Invisible, and Grotesque Bodies in *Dracula*” in Jon S. Bak, ed., *Post/Modern Dracula: From Victorian Fiction to Postmodern Praxis*. New Castle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 61-73, here at 61.

neckline. Even the description of the lamias (the three “sisters” in Dracula’s castle) or the vamped Lucy Westenra or the quasi vamped Mina Harker (née Murray) never reaches lower than their visage. Maybe it is due to Stoker’s long connections with the stage and possibly the green room behind it that made him super conscious of the significance of facial make-ups (or masks) as indicators of dramatic character. The adjective “voluptuous” used in the novel several times designates the face, the lips, the teeth, and the smile (and nothing more), carrying a derogatory connotation. The Count, however, uses the word in an entirely non-erotic sense, as will be noted below.

Those who view Dracula as human tend to emphasize his libido “with almost prurient interest”<sup>10</sup> and regard him, *a la* Maurice Richardson, as “a vast polymath perverse bisexual oral-anal-anal-genital sadomasochistic.”<sup>11</sup> Consequently, the Count’s getting excited (or thirsty?) at the sight of blood on Jonathan’s chin (he had nicked it while shaving) or his claim on Harker—“this man belongs to me” (*D*, 44)—have been interpreted as his homoerotic attraction leading one scholar to conclude that this claim “expresses his love for Jonathan, the new member of the harem.”<sup>12</sup> Another critic asserts that “feeding upon human donors [victims?] constitutes [the vampires] only sexual outlet.”<sup>13</sup> Then there is a perplexing insight that “vampires combine feeding with reproduction [and]...The vampire...avoids incest and... seeks partners outside his family.”<sup>14</sup> Laura Linneman, asserts confidently that Dracula “exhibits characteristics of both genders”<sup>15</sup> echoing Stevenson’s interpretation of the scene of the Count’s vamping of Mina as a “terrible resemblance” to “breast feeding”<sup>16</sup> thus turning Dracula into a nurturing mother. An even more perplexing statement is that “the Count is the *only one* with the reproductive power to create new vampires.”<sup>17</sup>

Dracula’s vampirical attack, interpreted as sexual, is in fact dental rather than phallic, but in some Hollywood versions of *Dracula*, the vampire’s bite becomes a “clever metonymy for phallic penetration.”<sup>18</sup> Does he possess a phallus? And if he does, could he achieve erection? The biologist Madeline McCurry-Schmidt speculates that a vampire “is

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<sup>10</sup> Bram Stoker, *The New Annotated Dracula*, ed. Leslie S. Klinger (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 540.

<sup>11</sup> Maurice Richardson, “The Psychology of Ghost Stories” (review of Bram Stoker, *Dracula*), *Twentieth Century*, 166 (1959): 419-31, here at 429.

<sup>12</sup> Cindy Hendershot, “Vampire and Replicant: The One Sex Body in a Two-Sex World,” *Science Fiction Studies*, 22 (1995): 373-98, here at 381.

<sup>13</sup> Fred Saberhagen, *The Dracula Tape*. E-edition. Albuquerque: JSS Literary Production, 1975, 37.

<sup>14</sup> Stevenson, “Vampire in Mirror,” 143-44.

<sup>15</sup> Laura Linneman, “The Fear of Castration and Male Dread of Female Sexuality: The Theme of the ‘Vagina Dentata’ in *Dracula*.” *Journal of Dracula Studies*, 12 (2010): n.p. [www.blooferland.com/drc/index.php?title=journal\\_of\\_dracula](http://www.blooferland.com/drc/index.php?title=journal_of_dracula). (accessed 4/4/2013).

<sup>16</sup> John A. Stevenson, “A Vampire in the Mirror: The Sexuality of *Dracula*,” *PMLA* [Publications of the Modern Language Association of America], 103, 2 (1988): 139-49, here at 146

<sup>17</sup> Anonymous, “The Vampire: What Boundaries does the Vampire Threaten?” [www.123helpme.com/view.asp?id=93279](http://www.123helpme.com/view.asp?id=93279) (accessed 4/1/2013). Emphasis added.

<sup>18</sup> Bak, ed., *Post/Modern Dracula*, xiii.

ice-cold [Jonathan felt Dracula's hand as such, (D, 20)], and...his weiner [sic] is too."<sup>19</sup> Roxana Stuart asks a legitimate question: "How specifically are vampires reproduced? If by biting, why are there not thousands, if not millions, of vampires multiplying exponentially?"<sup>20</sup>

Although James Twitchell writes about Dracula's sex *sans genitalia* he still finds him "terrifically alluring...[because]...he has money and power without responsibilities, he *parties* all night with the best people...he has life without death, but most attractive of all, he has sex without confusion (i.e., genitalia, pregnancy or love)."<sup>21</sup> This is an amazingly amusing interpretation that has the single merit of acknowledging the absence of genitalia in *Dracula*, but fails to note that Dracula does not have "life" as he is a revenant. Twitchell overlooks Dracula's lonely existence in a dilapidated castle (D, 28) without any helping hands, as Harker had found out (D, 23-24). He also needs to revisit the passage in which the Count confesses: "I seek not gaiety nor mirth.... I am no longer young; and my heart, through weary years of mourning over the dead, is not attuned to mirth" (D, 28). Senf's judicious and cautious view of Dracula is that it is "difficult to determine whether he is a hideous bloodsucker whose touch breeds death or a lonely silent figure who is hunted and persecuted."<sup>22</sup>

The plethora of studies on the concealed sexuality in *Dracula* furnish a glaring example of how hermeneutics distorts, even mutilates, the text extravagantly! The two major episodes—Mina's vamping by Dracula interpreted as her pleasurable sexual experience and Lucy's corpse's orgasm induced by its staking—have spawned a new *mythos*. When Lucy begins showing strange symptoms—somnambulism, pallor, and restlessness—one of her friends as well as suitors, Dr. John Seward, consults his erstwhile professor, Dr. Van Helsing, who diagnoses her condition as a fast approaching vampiric transformation. With a view to preempting this eventuality and making up for her blood loss due to the vampire bite, he prescribes blood transfusion (D, 128-38). Lucy's blood transfusion by her three suitors and the "enchanted" old man Van Helsing has been seen as sexual intercourse of four men with an "anemic" young woman in numerous studies. In any case, Van Helsing's treatment fails to save the unfortunate woman who dies and becomes an undead vampire. The doctor thereupon decides on a final solution—ritual killing of the undead by means of staking, so that it could be truly dead and selects Lucy's fiancé Arthur Holmwood (Lord Godalming) as the executioner (D, 277).

The staking is a violent ritual slaughter and its description is appropriately gory and gruesome:

Arthur took the stake and the hammer, and... placed the point over the heart, and...then he struck with all his might. The thing in the coffin writhed; and a hideous, blood-curdling screech came from the opened red lips. The body shook

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<sup>19</sup> Madeline McCurry-Schmidt, "The Reproductive Biology of Vampires" (2011). <http://howanimalsdoit.com/2011/11/01--reproductive-biology-of-vampires> (accessed 1/5/2013).

<sup>20</sup> Stuart, *Stage Blood*, 187.

<sup>21</sup> James B. Twitchell, *The Living Dead: A Study of the Vampire in Romantic Literature* (1981. Second printing. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 134 (emphasis added). Twitchell's idea of the vampire "party" probably comes from Joel Schumacher's film *The Lost Boys* (Warner Brothers, 1987).

<sup>22</sup> Senf, "Dracula," 95.

and...twisted in wild contortions; the sharp white teeth champed together till the lips were cut, and the mouth smeared with a crimson foam. But Arthur never faltered. He looked like figure of Thor [hammer wielding Norse god of thunder] as his untrembling arm rose and fell, driving deeper and deeper the mercy-bearing stake, whilst the blood from the pierced heart welled and spurted up around it.

And then the writhing and quivering of the body became less, and the teeth ceased to champ, and the face to quiver. Finally it lay still. The terrible task was over (*D*, 219-20).

The stake, a round wooden implement with a pointed head procured by Van Helsing, measures “some two and a half or three inches thick and about three feet long” (*D*, 218). The application of this implement has been interpreted as a violent necrophilous fuck supposed to be the method of killing a vampire. As Barbara Belford understands (or fancies), “the staking of Lucy, which marks the novel’s real—and the woman’s only—climax...obviously depicts passionate intercourse ending in orgasm. Women readers must have gasped.”<sup>23</sup> It will, of course, take a quantum leap of imagination to make the mighty stake a symbol of the executioner’s manhood! In fact Stoker’s description of the undead Lucy’s staking thought to be causing its orgasm violates common sense as well as the psychology of *jouissance* or the eroticism of copulation with vengeance, as it were. Moreover, why should the members of the “Crew of Light,”<sup>24</sup> the moral vigilantes, like to rape an unconscious (undead) woman? Rape is not considered a means for dispatching a lamia, although it is quite conceivable that actual gang rape could kill a real life woman.

It has been suggested that Dracula’s forcing Mina Harker at Seward’s home to drink his ichor spurting out of the self-inflicted wound on his chest is a “final primal scene”<sup>25</sup> or a concealment of his “enforced fellatio” by the woman.<sup>26</sup> Stoker’s distinguished biographer Belford has little qualms interpreting this incident as the vampire’s seduction of another man’s wife.<sup>27</sup> Going a step further Twitchell interprets Mina’s vamping—to quote Van Helsing, “the Vampire’s baptism of blood” (*D*, 323)—as “a rape scene...played out through the gauze of fantasy” has the female victim enjoy the experience as “highly sexual.”<sup>28</sup> One scholar remarks that “in this scene Dracula...is a mother as well, engaged in an act that has a ‘terrible resemblance’ to breast-feeding.”<sup>29</sup> Another scholar comes up with the explanation that vampirism makes women sexually aggressive while, at the same time, makes men nurturing because female vampires bite their male victims while Dracula the “male” vampire lets his female victims feed off him

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<sup>23</sup> Barbara Belford, *Bram Stoker: A Biography of the Author of Dracula* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996, 7.

<sup>24</sup> Christopher Craft, “‘Kiss Me with those Red Lips’: Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*” in Carter, ed. *Dracula*, 167-94, here at 169.

<sup>25</sup> Belford, *Stoker*, 8.

<sup>26</sup> Christopher F. Bentley, “The Monster in the Bedroom: Sexual Symbolism in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*” in Carter, ed. *Dracula*, 25-34, here at 29.

<sup>27</sup> Belford, *Stoker*, 9.

<sup>28</sup> J.B. Twitchell, “The Vampire Myth” in Carter, ed. *Dracula*, 109-17, here at 112.

<sup>29</sup> Stevenson, “Vampire in Mirror,” 146.

to keep them alive.<sup>30</sup> Does Dracula's chest reveal gynecomastia? If so, is he able to lactate?

Mina's reported admission of her inability to resist Dracula's attack and her comatose condition (*D*, 289) has been interpreted as her ecstatic (i.e., orgasmic) state. That her abject surrender to Dracula could have been caused by her fear for Jonathan's life as per the Count's threat that if she made a sound he "shall take him and dash his brains out" (*D*, 288) has wittingly or unwittingly been overlooked. Dracula clearly expresses his intent before biting Mina's throat: "First, a little refreshment to reward my exertions" and declares her as his "bountiful winepress" moments later. Afterwards, "he pulled open his shirt, and with his long sharp nails opened a vein in his chest" and pressed her mouth to the wound. He thereupon asserts that his action is meant as her punishment for conspiring against him. When he claims her as the "flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood; kin of my kin," he explains his action as converting her into a vampire (*D*, 289). Thus Dracula's attack on Mina—initially his sucking her blood and thereafter forcibly suckling her with his—is neither a case of sexual assault nor one of maternal breast-feeding (imagining red blood as white milk) or cunnilingus (imagining his bloody chest as a menstruating or "bleeding" vagina<sup>31</sup>). It is for avenging his harassment and hurt at the hands of Jonathan Harker (*D*, 57) and also to warn his adversaries against chasing and chastising him. As there are no references to genitals (vagina or penis) in the text, we cannot think in terms of fellatio or cunnilingus.

By the same token, we need to bear in mind that the vampire does not spill its blood on its victim but only sucks the latter's blood. Thus Mark Hennelly's observation "the blood of Dracula lethally drowns... Lucy"<sup>32</sup> makes no sense because, as per Seward's reckoning, it's the other way round (*D*, 130). Dracula drowns himself in Lucy's blood rendering her anemic; he also literally "drowns" himself in Mina's blood to which Van Helsing refers as the Count's "banqueting" (*D*, 297). The vampires appear hungry (better still, thirsty) for blood rather than for sex. They penetrate their quarry neither to inject semen nor to ingest it but to drink blood—their *ambrosia*—to stay "undead." Their contact with humans is comparable to the predator animals' with their quarry. Their sole interest in prolonging their existence ("vampire life") is to refill their stomach, a veritable tank of sorts, whenever it is depleted. Thus when Dracula sucks blood it is not a case of blood lust but blood thirst. There is also the puzzling anomaly of vampire existence; if it is undead, then why does it feel thirsty or hungry for anything, let alone blood? Furthermore, why should a vampire seek any sexual outlet? Desire for food, drink, or sex is normal for mortal being. But a vampire is a doppelgänger—to quote Mina, a "Thing" (*D*, 231)—not a live human.

Moreover, we have no way of figuring out how the depletion takes place, as there are no clues whatsoever to their digestion or excretion. There are no indications to toilets or bathrooms in Castle Dracula except at the beginning the Count's reference to

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<sup>30</sup> Tanya Olson, "I Would Be Master Still': Dracula as the Aftermath of the Wilde Trials and Irish Land League Politics," *third space: a journal of feminist theory & culture*, II: 1 (2002). [journals.sfu.ca/thirdspace/index.php/journal/article/viewarticle/olson/66](http://journals.sfu.ca/thirdspace/index.php/journal/article/viewarticle/olson/66) (accessed 2/5/2013).

<sup>31</sup> Craft, "Kiss with Red Lips," 186.

<sup>32</sup> Mark M. Hennelly, "Dracula: The Gnostic Quest and Victorian Wasteland" in Carter, *Dracula*, 79-103, here at 88.

Jonathan's "need...to refresh...by making...toilet" (*D*, 21). Do vampires consume any non-liquid foods such as meat, vegetables, bread etc.? We know that Harker enjoyed a delicious dinner of roasted chicken and wine, though we do not know who cooked the meal when, where, and how. Harker confirms that Dracula's castle was entirely empty (*D*, 30), except for three lamias after he had encountered them. Did the Count cook for himself and/or his "family" in the castle? No clue. Thus we are not sure if vampires eat and excrete. We also do not know if they bathe or wash their bodies or cleanse their mouth. Jonathan comments on Dracula's rank breath (*D*, 22). There is a single reference to Van Helsing *et al.*'s discovery in the dining room of Dracula's Piccadilly (London) home "a clothes brush, a brush and comb, and a jug and basin—the latter containing dirty water which was reddened as if with blood" (*D*, 302) and the surroundings of the home "smells so vilely" (*D*, 301).

Then, as noted earlier, there is no actual vampire sex: no "kiss," the erotic mutual labial contact *pace* Craft<sup>33</sup>, no exchange of niceties, only biting and feeding, in other words, consumption, not copulation. Nor do we have any textual evidence of their estrus or orgasm or *jouissance* other than some imaginative interpretations. There is thus hardly any justification to turn a necromantic vampire into a nec[k]romantic revenant. The existing *corpus* of sexual interpretation—hetero, homo, or queer variety—has reared an intricate and ingenious hermeneutical castle in sand, as it were, that disintegrates in the light of sober reason and sensible reading of the text. Jim Tushinski has it almost right when he observes:

Vampire sexuality inevitably involves death. Sex and feeding are almost equivalent and therefore, sex is a destructive act. Link vampirism and homosexuality, throw in all the connotations involved with drinking blood and exchanging bodily fluids, stir well, and you have the recipe for either homophobic writing or some interesting symbolic use of the vampire myth to comment on the gay male experience.<sup>34</sup>

There could have been a connection between vampiric blood thirst and bloodlust in the case of a human patient of haematophilia, addiction to a sexual deviation in which "the sight and taste of the blood flowing freely from the 'love-bitten' partner represent the main erotic satisfaction for the addict" or haematodipsia causing the afflicted to desire blood to appease all appetites including sexual.<sup>35</sup> However, some scholars theorize on the vampiric infection causing an affliction like rabies<sup>36</sup>. At least one scholar proffers a contextually somewhat reasonable speculation that "Count Dracula himself was the victim of another vampire."<sup>37</sup> Sadly, such a pathological analysis is absent in the extant literature related to Dracula. It is incredible that so many scholars, some of them well-

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<sup>33</sup> Craft, "Kiss with Red Lips," 179, 180.

<sup>34</sup> J. Tushinsky, Review of Jeffrey N. McMahan, *Vampire Anonymous* (New York: Alyson Books, 1991) in *Bay Area Reporter* (May 23, 1991).

<sup>35</sup> Axinte, "Dracula."

<sup>36</sup> Jessjca Sutton, "Dracula and the Victorian Understanding of Disease." [www.simplysupernatural-vampire.com/draculavictoriandiseases.html](http://www.simplysupernatural-vampire.com/draculavictoriandiseases.html) (accessed 10/12/2014).

<sup>37</sup> Christos Angelis, "The Immor(t)al Monstrosities of the Victorian Gothic: Temporality and Otherness in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*." Pro Gradu Thesis, Department of English Philology, University of Tampere (April 2010), 38.

known and widely respected among specialists, have completely and wantonly overlooked or debunked the context and content of Dracula's attack or vampire victim's exorcism.

The simple palpable fact is blissfully overlooked by generations of hermeneuts that Stoker's primary agenda behind publishing his novel was to create a sensation of horror for the obvious mundane reason of publicity and profit. In his Introduction to the classic text edition of *Dracula* (1983), Andrew N. Wilson observed that "no one in their right mind would think of Stoker as a 'great writer'.... How can someone who is not a great writer be said to have written a classic? [By making] your hair stand on end. And that, from the first page to the last, is what Dracula [*sic*] is meant to do."<sup>38</sup> An anonymous critic observed that "Stoker did not think himself as a great artist—he was primarily a businessman. He managed the famous Lyceum Theatre in London and was good friend with a lot of the actors there. Stoker only wrote to pay the bills."<sup>39</sup>

### **Abraham Van Helsing**

Dracula's arch adversary, the brawny and brainy aging Dutch polymath Abraham Van Helsing remains a somewhat mysterious and melancholy figure or, to quote Jeanne Cavelos, "arguably one of the most well-known yet least explored characters in literature."<sup>40</sup> We know virtually little about his antecedents, though we learn that despite his putative reputation as a scientist and a polymath, he is basically a necromancer and shaman *par excellence*, whose "scientific" explanations and arguments are imbricated in folklore, hypnotism, magic, and witchcraft, and whose prescriptions for protection against vampires include garlic and religious artifacts such as the cross or the wafers. Mark Hennelly compares Van Helsing to the Jewish and gypsy-like characters of George Eliot's novels, *Daniel Deronda* (1876) and *Middlemarch* (1874)<sup>41</sup>. Ironically and sadly, Van Helsing's only "scientific" treatment turns out to be a dysfunctional blood transfusion for Lucy.

From the patchy evidence scattered in the novel it appears that Van Helsing is far from what Cavelos believes "part holy man, part mad scientist, part prophet of doom,"<sup>42</sup> but is an aging male, whose deranged wife having been a burdensome and "awful" companion of his loveless, i.e., sexless, late adult life. He suffers from melancholia and from occasional bouts of hysteria. Arguably, his attitude to Lucy, whom he is supposed to be curing of vamping, is enigmatically ambivalent. He found her very attractive (especially for the "angelic beauty of her eyes" [*D*, 166]) and knew that she had been vamped and was turning into a vampire. But he took time in describing Lucy's anemic state to Dr. Seward with innuendos and in a dry matter-of-fact tone that the "small holes in the children's throats...were made by Miss Lucy!" (*D*, 190). Unlike Mina (as we see later), she received no reassurance from Van Helsing except the failed blood transfusion. Prior to deciding on blood transfusion for Lucy, he could have examined her condition using the consecrated wafer test as he would in Mina's case later. Instead he prescribed blood transfusion and, failing which, let her die a vampire death.

<sup>38</sup> Cited in Berresford, *Demons to Dracula*, 135.

<sup>39</sup> "Dracula: Introduction." [www.shmoop.com/dracula](http://www.shmoop.com/dracula) (accessed 8/29/2014).

<sup>40</sup> Jeanne Cavelos, ed., *The Many Faces of Van Helsing* (New York: The Berkeley Publishing Group, 2004), xi

<sup>41</sup> Hennelly, "Dracula," 89.

<sup>42</sup> Cavelos, *Van Helsing*, xiii.



When Van Helsing recalled his own participation in the blood transfusion, he suddenly changed from a rational professional into a maniac giving way to “a regular fit of hysterics,” (*D*, 179). He started babbling about the noisy advent of the nonsensical “King Laugh” in times of distress (*D*, 180).<sup>43</sup> The underlying message of this ungainly expression is that “in times of greatest pressure we laugh instead of cry” (Twitchell’s glossing of Van Helsing’s uncouth sarcasm). He further expatiated with apparent elation on the transfusion procedure fantasized as “marriage” (medicalized copulation?), and thus her multiple transfusion making her a “polyandrist” (*D*, 180) and him with his “previous wife dead to [him]...but alive by Church’s law, though...[a]...faithful husband to this now-no-life,...[a] bigamist”(*D*, 181).

He wanted to behead Lucy’s corpse and remove the heart from the body in order to prevent it from turning into a revenant blood sucker (*D*, 170) but later abandoned the idea that it was “too late ---or too early,” the reason being her lucky charm the crucifix provided by the doctor had been stolen and thus she presumably had become a complete vampire who must be staked in order to turn into a truly dead human (*D*, 171). Standing near the door of the room where Lucy’s corpse was laid in a coffin, “he suddenly broke down” and throwing his arms around Seward’s shoulders and placing his head on his chest, cried: “What shall I do? The whole of my life seems gone from me all at once, and there is nothing in the wide world for me to live for” (*D*, 173). Why did he not try to save Lucy like he did Mina after her vamping by Dracula (*D*, 283-84)?

The West European Van Helsing is the “Enlightened” (leader of the “Crew of Light”) counterpart of the East European Dracula with this difference—while the latter drains (abnormally) vitality from his victims, the former exhausts himself in transfusing his vital fluid (clinically) into Lucy and possibly in entrancing Mina, the woman of his adoration, every morning during their journey from Galatz to Borgo Pass en route to Dracula’s castle. If Dracula, whose noble-royal forbears distinguished themselves in defending their homeland against the invading infidels, is a tragic Promethean figure being beleaguered by a band of racist and murderous vigilantes, Van Helsing, Nestor cum Pantocrator as well as a self-chosen psychopomp, is a self-righteous crypto-sadist beneath his respectable veneer as a metaphysician, philosopher, and medical doctor. His medical treatment actually aggravated Lucy’s condition and the final treatment of her disease came with a *violentum pharmacum* prescribed by an exorcist. He refused to put a quick end to her vampiric condition by beheading as her lucky charm the crucifix provided by the doctor had been stolen and thus she presumably had become a complete vampire needing the traditional staking to turn into a truly (dead) human (*D*, 171).

On his first meeting Mina, Van Helsing finds her attractive and intelligent and showers gratuitous compliments on the young woman. Upon her mild remonstrance “But, doctor, you praise me too much, and—and you do not know me” (*D*, 189), the ebullient Dutchman retorts: “Not know you—I, who am old, and who have studied all my life men and women; I ...who have read your so sweet letter to poor Lucy of your marriage and your trust, not know you!” (*D*, 189). When Mina goes on her knees and implores him to treat her ailing husband (who had suffered brain fever following his escape from Dracula’s castle and treated in a hospital in Budapest, *D*, 106-7), the Professor raises her up, makes her sit on the sofa, and holding her hand in his consoles her with “infinite sweetness”:

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<sup>43</sup> See also Twitchell, *Living Dead*, 137.

My life is a barren and lonely one, and so full of work that I have not had much time for friendship; but since...I have known so many good people and seen such nobility that I feel more than ever...the loneliness of my life. Believe me, then, that I come here full of respect for you, and you have given me hope... not in what I am seeking of, but that there are good women still left to make life happy (*D*, 190).

We may note from Mina's journal how the "old man" had impressed her at their first meeting as she found him:

a man of medium height, strongly built, with his shoulders set back over a broad, deep chest and a neck well balanced on the trunk as the head is on the neck. The poise of the head strikes one at once as indicative of thought and power; the head is noble, well-sized, broad....The face, clean shaven,...a hard, square chin, a large, resolute, mobile mouth, good-sized nose....The forehead is broad and fine... .Big dark blue eyes...are quick and tender or stern with the man's moods (*D*, 187).

Van Helsing thus appears to Mina not as a decrepit old man, but as a sturdy, confident, and dependable adult male, whom she regarded as "a master amongst men" (*D*, 320). He appears to be a physically and intellectually potent patriarchal figure as contrasted with her youthful, naïve, and fragile lover and husband Jonathan Harker, who had suffered a brain fever. Van Helsing pays Jonathan a compliment: "Oh, sir, you will pardon praise from an old man, but you are blessed in your wife," and Harker adds his comment in his journal: "I would listen to him go on praising Mina for a day, so I simply nodded and stood silent" (*D*, 193). The garrulous Dutchman continues with his characteristic dithyramb: "She is one of God's women, fashioned by His own hand to show us men and other women that there is a heaven where we can enter, and that its light can be here on earth" (*D*, 193). At Galatz, en route to Transylvania in pursuit of Dracula, Van Helsing praises Mina's reading from her journal: "Our dear Madam Mina is once more our teacher. Her eyes have seen where we were blinded. Now we are on the track once again, and this time we may succeed" (*D*, 354).

Van Helsing thereupon argues for isolating the "open," "bright-eyed," and "clever lady" Mina (*D*, 343) as an indispensable aid to his Council of War against Dracula (*D*, 354). According to the professor, she has been endowed with telepathy with respect to the Count as a consequence of "baptism of blood" (*D*, 344). At Galatz, he divides his Crew by pairing them—Jonathan with Quincey, Seward with Godalming, and says: "Be not afraid for Madam Mina; she will be my care, if I may." He provides persuasive explanations: he is old and as such unable to undertake arduous treks or rides or risk violent encounters with the Slovaks, but as he said,

I can be of other service; I can fight in other way....I will take Madam Mina right into the heart of the enemy's country....Here Madam Mina's hypnotic power will surely help, and we shall find our way...after the first sunrise when we are near that fateful place. There is much to be done, and other places to be made sanctify, so that the nest of vipers be obliterated (*D*, 355).

Jonathan is horrified at the prospect of his "ailing" wife's grim prospects alone with the crazy Dutch exorcist: "Do you mean to say, Professor Van Helsing, that you would bring Mina, in her sad case and tainted as she is with that devil's illness, right into the jaws of his death-trap? Not for the world! Nor for Heaven or Hell!" (*D*, 355-56).

Van Helsing with his gift of the gab, his notorious grammar notwithstanding, rises to the occasion and bamboozles Jonathan and the rest of the Crew with his theatrics and rhetoric and has his way. He scares Jonathan by painting a gruesome picture of Dracula's crypt "that awful den of hellish infamy" and reminds the now enfeebled doubting thomas: "Have you felt the Vampire's lips [shouldn't it be teeth instead?] upon your throat?" He then turns to Mina and spots the scar on her forehead (mark of the burn caused by his consecrated wafer, *D*, 298) and cries out: "Oh, my God, what have we done to have this terror upon us!...it is because I would save Madam Mina from that awful place that I would go. God forbid that I should take her into that place (*D*, 355-56).

He conjures another spectacle to scare Jonathan further.

If the Count escape us this time—and he is strong and subtle and cunning—he may choose to sleep him for a century; and then in time our dear one [taking Mina's hand]...would come to him to keep him company, and would be as those others [meaning the three lamias in Dracula's den] that you, Jonathan, saw....You shudder; and well may it be. Forgive me that I make you so much pain, but it is necessary (*D*, 356).

Van Helsing's peroration wins over Jonathan's intransigence, and "with a sob that shook him all over," whimpers: "Do as you will. We are in the hands of God" (*D*, 356). Obviously he is not in God's hand but under the spell of the commander of the Council of War against Count Dracula. Mina and Van Helsing depart for Veresti on the night train from Galatz en route to Borgo Pass (70 miles). Upon leaving her husband for her ride with the doctor as the coachman, she notes [with apprehension of the onset of her vampire disease] in her journal "Courage, Mina! The professor is looking at you keenly; his look is a warning" [meaning the onset of her vampiric illness (*D*, 357)]. Before departing from Veresti Mina writes in her journal: "Whatever may happen, Jonathan may know that I loved him and honoured him more than I can say...." (*D*, 360).

We note further that while preparing himself to stake and behead the sexy-looking lamias in the vampire pit of Castle Dracula, Van Helsing finds one of them especially erotic and attractive but alarming: "full of life and voluptuous beauty" and "beautiful eyes...open and look love, and the voluptuous mouth present to a kiss—and man is weak," and confesses:

Yes, I was moved... to a yearning for delay which seemed to paralyze my faculties and to clog my very soul...She was so fair to look on, so radiantly beautiful, so exquisitely voluptuous, that the very instinct of man in me, which calls some of my sex to love and to protect one of hers, made my head whirl with new emotion" (*D*, 369-70; emphasis added).

Here we recall how he did neither show such hesitation nor express such sentiments when with his "iron nerve" he took the lead in counseling, even ordering, the staking of Lucy "the thing" (*D*, 216).

Van Helsing's puzzling remark on Mina's vamping by Dracula making a mockery of a morbid and potentially fatal incident reveals his cold and callous attitude to the woman of his adoration. Countering Jonathan's suggestions for haste to visit Carfax, Dracula's home in England, lest the Count arrives there before their visit, Van Helsing quips "with actually a smile" "Not so!...Do you forget that last night he banqueted

heavily, and will sleep late?" Moments later, "When it struck him what he had said...he... tried to comfort her: 'Oh Madam Mina, dear, dear Madam Mina, alas! that I of all who reverence you, should have said anything so forgetful'" (*D*, 297).

During the journey from Veresti to the Borgo Pass and at destination Van Helsing routinely puts Mina under a hypnotic spell, apparently to get to know from her the Count's journey (*D*, 289) but every time he fails to elicit the desired information. When he is unable to wake her from sleeping or to bring her state under hypnosis, he takes this as a sign of her turning into a lamia: "She sleep all the time...I feel myself to suspicious grow, and attempt to wake her" (*D*, 363-64). And what does Van Helsing do? He writes: "I think I drowse myself, for all of a sudden I feel guilt, as though I have done something; I find myself bolt up, with the reins I my hand, and the good horses go along jog, jog, just as ever" (*D*, 364). Thus pretty Mina sleeps and the Professor drives "jog, jog."

Late on next day, while on the carriage, he wakes her up but fails to hypnotize. In the evening they halt for the night in the open and as he writes, "Still I try and try, till all at once I find her and myself in dark;...Madam Mina laugh, and I turn and look at her. She is now quite awake, and look so well as I never saw her" (*D*, 364). She cooks supper for him but not for herself, as she says she is not hungry. Van Helsing's premonition: "I like it not, and I have grave doubts; but I fear to affright her, and so I am silent of it" (*D*, 364). He sups all by himself and "then we wrap in fur and lie beside the fire and I tell her to sleep while I watch" (*D*, 364). He finds her "lying quiet, but awake, and looking at [him]...with so bright eyes" (*D*, 364). In the morning, he finds her lying... not asleep but she falls into a deep slumber thereafter" and so he "lift her up, and place her ...in the carriage...Madam...look in her sleep more healthy and more redder than before. And I like it not...but I must go on my way. (*D*, 364). The frequent hypnotic spells are open to speculation as to the doctor's actual intent once we realize the ineffectual shamanic outcome of hypnosis and the heavenly Madam Mina's spell of slumber. It is also noteworthy how Mina, even after her multiple vampiring by Dracula, survived (*D*, 288-89) while Lucy could not.

Then, Van Helsing has little problem seeing Dracula dispatched by Jonathan's kukri and Morris's *bowie*. Why he is not staked? Is it because the professor is too scared to confront the count presumably possessing twenty men's strength? He thus lets the young and strong Morris and Harker carry out the slaughter together or otherwise as the leader of the Council of War he would have to undertake the hatchet job personally (*D*, 175). Fred Saberhagen rightly regards the Dutch doctor as "the bigoted villain of the piece, who kills Lucy with his mistyped blood transfusions and leads the superstitious lot of hunters to pursue Dracula ruthlessly."<sup>44</sup>

## Epilogue

Does the character of Dracula have any other symbolic significance than being a lusty Lothario hunted by a band of avenging angels under a villainous Dutch doctor? A

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<sup>44</sup> Saberhagen, *Dracula Tape* cited in Klinger, ed., *Annotated Dracula*, 532

meaningful interpretation of *Dracula* may be divided into three categories: pathological,<sup>45</sup> theological,<sup>46</sup> and allegorical.<sup>47</sup> I would like to offer a few observations on various perspectives of the third, there being a number of distinguished studies on the two other categories, some select titles of which are listed in the footnotes. One scholar shrewdly and imaginatively argued for Dracula's comparison to Dionysus of Mycenaean mythology. This comparison is particularly piquant and poignant as both the reveling god and the revenant count are connected with blood—actual animal and human body fluid and wine considered wine in ancient Greece. Both are also connected with women—Dionysus with his maenads and Dracula with his lamias. Dionysus the son of god is resurrected after his violent death and so the vampire Dracula the devil (he is ingeniously given a *nom de plume* as Count de Ville [Count Devil?] by Stoker) “dies” at daybreak and comes back to “life” at sundown.<sup>48</sup>

Fascinatingly enough, Dracula resembles Goethe's Faust, who traded his soul to the devil for *was die Welt im innersten zusammenhalt*—Nature's forces “that bind the world, all its seeds and sources and innermost life,”<sup>49</sup> so that he could control or defy them but eventually had to accept human limitations. The undead figure is a telling testimony to the doleful consequences for humans should they happen to be empowered or condemned to defy natural laws. Thus Dracula is a tragic, even a pathetic, figure<sup>50</sup> rather than his alter ego the psychopomp Van Helsing.<sup>51</sup> Even after her humiliating vamping by the enraged Count, Mina shows her compassion for the hounded and hapless undead when she tells her husband: “That poor soul who has wrought all this misery is the saddest case of all. Just think what will be his joy when he too is destroyed in his worser part that his better part may have spiritual immortality” (*D*, 310). A noted scholar comments on the Count sensibly: “it becomes difficult to determine whether he is

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<sup>45</sup> Cathleen Spencer, “Purity and Danger: Dracula, Urban Gothic, and the Late Victorian Degeneracy Crisis,” *English Literary History*, 59, 1 (Spring 1992):197-225; Martin Willis, “‘The Invisible Giant,’ Dracula, and Disease,” *Studies in the Novel*, 29, 3 (Fall 2007): 301-25; Sutton, “Dracula and Disease.” See also Nathalie Saudo, “‘Every Speck of Dust [...] a Devouring Monster in Embryo’: The Vampire's Effluvia in Dracula” in Bak, ed., *Post/Modern Dracula*, 45-60.

<sup>46</sup> Christopher Herbert, “Vampire Religion,” *Representations*, 79, 1 (Summer 2002): 100-21; Kedyne the Crow, “The Dark Mirror-Is Dracula a Metaphor for the Anti-Christ (2008). contributor.yahoo.com/user/125346/kedyne\_the\_crow.html; Patrick R. O'Malley, *Catholicism, Sexual Deviance, and Victorian Gothic Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Christopher Raible, “Dracula: Christian Heretic” (see note 50 below).

<sup>47</sup> Bruce Stewart, “Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: Possessed by the Nation?” *Irish University Review*, 29, 2 (Autumn-Winter 1999): 238-53; Joseph Valente, *Dracula's Crypt: Bram Stoker, Irishness, and the Question of Blood* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Santiago Lucendo, “Return Ticket to Transylvania: Relations between Historical Reality and Vampire Fiction” in John Edgar Browning and Caroline Joan (Kay) Picart, eds., *Draculas, Vampires, and Other Undead Forms: Essays on Gender, Race, and Culture* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2009), 115-26.

<sup>48</sup> Jason Colavito, “On Dracula and Dionysus” (2013). [www.jasoncolavito.com/blog/on-dracula-and-dionysus](http://www.jasoncolavito.com/blog/on-dracula-and-dionysus) (accessed 7/ 12/2014).

<sup>49</sup> David Luke, *Faust, Part One* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), lines 382-84.

<sup>50</sup> Leonard Wolf, *A Dream of Dracula: In Search of the Living Dead* (Boston: Little Brown, 1972), 222-23.

<sup>51</sup> Cavelos, *Van Helsing*, xiii.

a hideous bloodsucker whose touch breeds death or as lonely silent figure who is hunted and persecuted.”<sup>52</sup>

Dracula serves as an allegory pointing to a pathetic outcome of our innate but irrational longing for immortality. Precisely this longing has been instrumental of our invention of immortality, of rising from the grave of a divinely related or endowed human figure, of our fear of and frustration with old age and its infirmities and thus our fantasies for a life that does not end.<sup>53</sup> Like many terminally ill old men and women clinging to life via various life support systems the vampire’s undead state is pathetic and that is why even when their true (natural) death occurs through violence (staking or beheading), their visage betrays a tranquil end of their existence. Interpreted thus, Stoker’s *Dracula* is a didactic piece that equates the unnatural and supernatural with evil that could be counteracted with the Christian miracles—the dysfunctional magic of the Devil subverted by the divine miracles of the Son of God.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, as Mehemet Bilal Dede, the Istanbul-based author of vampire fiction, avers, “in our culture vampires are attributed to Western countries and Christianity.”<sup>55</sup>

In a seminal study of Stoker’s Gothic novel, Stephen Arata has persuasively argued its colonial-imperial perspective. Count Dracula’s travel to England and his intents and exploits there have been seen as the vile but virile East’s colonial enterprise mirroring Imperial Great Britain’s global triumphal career. Arata contends that the Roumanian revenant immigrant posed a challenge to the masculinity of the effete and emasculated British males as well as their patriarchal and gendered morality and the British paranoia against him constituted their fear of “reverse colonialism.”<sup>56</sup> Indeed, Dracula’s encounter with Lucy Westenra and Mina Murray and the band of xenophobic vigilantes led by the Dutch faith healer and exorcist Van Helsing prompts a comparison with the odyssey of the four major characters of William Shakespeare’s comedy *The Tempest* (1610-11): the enslaved Caliban, the savage native of a remote island conquered and ruled by the exiled Milanese magi Prospero, and his daughter, the pretty virgin Miranda, together with their vibrant and vivacious spirit factotum Ariel. These four Shakespearean characters must have provided Stoker with a template for Van Helsing, Dracula, Mina, and Lucy.

In one sense, Stoker’s *Dracula* is the moral version of the Victorian London’s coping with modernity—the city’s “grinding struggle” with cleansing the filthy environment in which “cleanliness sat alongside dirt, radiance [coming in of electricity] fought murk.”<sup>57</sup> The three articles by Hughes, Punter, and Saudo in Bak’s anthology provide intelligent and imaginative interpretations of Dracula’s modernity as well as its

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<sup>52</sup> Senf, “*Dracula*,” 95.

<sup>53</sup> Icoz, “Un-Dead,” 211.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Jack D. Maser, “*Dracula* and the Afterlife: A Psychological Explanation,” *Journal of Dracula Studies*, 7 (2005): 28-37

<sup>55</sup> *Hurriyat Daily News* (July 27, 2014).

<sup>56</sup> Stephen D. Arata, “The Occidental Tourist: ‘Dracula’ and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonialism,” *Victorian Studies*, 33 (4) (Summer 1990): 621-43.

<sup>57</sup> Christopher Otter, “Cleansing and Clarifying: Technology and Perception in Nineteenth-Century London,” *Journal of British Studies*, 43, 1 (January 2004): 40-64, here at 64.

problematics<sup>58</sup>. In another sense, Dracula is Freudian thanatos come “alive,” or better, “undead” (libido in a state of limbo)—a tragic outcome of our civilization created by smothering human *eros*<sup>59</sup>. The “undead” cannot be easily liquidated, despite Van Helsing’s corrective technology, because it lives on in the dark recesses of our psyche and soul, emerging from time to time to wreak its vengeance against the artificial moral world in periodic collective rage, violence, and destruction. Our history is replete with the graveyards of this diabolical neurosis. If you wish to view them, just look around—*si monumentum requiris, circumspice* (borrowed from the inscription on St. Paul’s Cathedral, London). Christopher Raible reminds his readers with uncanny perspicacity: “There are Draculas all around us.”<sup>60</sup> He could very well have made a similar remark about the enigmatic Dutchman.

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<sup>58</sup> W. Hughes, “On the Sanguine Nature of Life: Blood, Identity, and the Vampire” (3-12), D. Punter, “Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*: Tradition, Technology, Modernity” (31-41), and N. Saudo (45-60) in Bak, ed., *Post/Modern Dracula*. For the problematics of coeptualizing “modernity” see Vincent Houben and Mona Schrempf, eds., *Figurations of Modernity: Global and Local Representations in Comparative Perspective*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008, see especially the editors’s Introduction: Figurations and Representations of Modernity, 7-19.

<sup>59</sup> See Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) (Eastford: Martino Fine Books, 2010).

<sup>60</sup> Christopher G. Raible, “Dracula: Christian Heretic” in Carter, ed., *Dracula*, 105-7, here at 107. Nina Auerbach observes: “We all know Dracula...there are many Draculas—and still more vampires who refuse to be Dracula or to play him.” *Our Vampires, Ourselves*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 1.