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FACULTY OF PHILOLOGY

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Address of editorial office

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Faculty of Philology

Krste Misirkov b.b., PO box 201

2000 Stip, Republic of North Macedonia



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BLOOD AND SEXUALITY IN STOKER'S *DRACULA*Natalija Pop Zarieva¹, Kristina Kostova², Marija Krsteva³¹Faculty of Philology, University "Goce Delcev"- Stip
natalija.popzarieva@ugd.edu.mk²Faculty of Philology, University "Goce Delcev"- Stip
kristina.kostova@ugd.edu.mk³Faculty of Philology, University "Goce Delcev"- Stip
marija.krsteva@ugd.edu.mk

Abstract: This paper analysis Bram Stoker's *Dracula* with respect to the use of the images of blood which are profound in the work. It focuses on the various meanings and usages of this motif and draws on the implications on the overall meaning of the novel. We consider the work within the frame of the advancing scientific and quasi-scientific theories that marked the era, and can be seen as reflected in Stoker's eponymous novel. Another aspect addressed in this paper is the unique representation of sexuality as part of the vampiric nature. The attraction of the vampire since its folkloric origins has been developed in Stoker to covert but persuasive erotic scenes, some of which can be read as disguised perverted sexual acts. Furthermore, the exchange of blood through the transfusions as a symbol of exchange of bodily induces the idea of indirect male to male blood mixing revealing the idea of veiled homosexuality.

Keywords: *blood, eroticism, bodily fluids, seductresses, bloodthirsty, homosexuality*

Introduction

The vampire figure of the nineteenth century literature has been shaped into a supple metaphor malleable to the impacts of the era's developments and discoveries such as Darwinian theories, Freudian discoveries as well as some quasi-scientific theories such as Cesare Lombroso's criminology. *Dracula* represents a narrative written from different perspectives or 'points of view', encompassing an array of fields—medicine, ethnography, imperialist ideologies, criminal theory, theories of degeneration and evolution, physiognomy, ideas of feminism and so on. There is a sudden change in the nature of the vampire from folklore during the Late Victorian period due to these scientific advancements when the vampire ceased to be merely an impulsive folkloric construction and resulted in, after the publication of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, a significant product of the entertainment industry of the centuries that followed.

At the end of the nineteenth century, theories related to degeneration and negative evolution began to be gradually accepted. Max Nordau's *Degeneration* was translated in 1895 by William Heinemann, who was also Bram Stoker's publisher (Hoeveler, 2006). In *Dracula* there is an explicit reference to Nordau and Cesare Lombroso when Mina claims that "[t]he Count is a criminal and of criminal type. Nordau and Lombroso would so classify him" (Stoker, p. 363). There may not be another novel that has invited so many various topics for critical discussion, ranging from its decadence and reverse colonialism themes (Arata, 1990; Boone, 1993; Hughes, 2003), capital and economy (Moretti, 1988; Halberstam, 1995; Houston, 2005), and gender and sexuality (Senf, 1982; Schaffer, 1994; Phyllis, 1988).

Cultural Context

Considered in the broader historical and literary context, Stoker's novel belongs to the "romance revival" of the 1880s and 1890s. It was written during the Late-Victorian period of imperialism, surrounded besides the aforementioned theories of degeneracy also by the emergence of the New Woman movement, scientific and medicine advancement, as well as the practice of psychology, on the one hand and occultism and Spiritualism on the other hand. Stoker also shows his awareness of the relationship between danger and sexuality, which may help to explain why he often represents figures of danger, such as vampires, in forms which are also sexually appealing. In the case of *Dracula*, the sexualized figures are women; the male vampire figure has acquired other forms and representations.

Stoker was probably familiar with some psychoanalytic texts, such as Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), which was published eleven years before Stoker wrote his masterwork. There is also evidence that Stoker had studied contemporary sciences, among them psychoanalysis (Glover, 1996). David Glover remarks that Stoker shows knowledge of physiognomy in his novels, but also that "by the turn of the century, physiognomy was becoming a far less secure discipline than it once had been, psychology was becoming an increasingly well-established specialism, and selected ideas were beginning to filter into ordinary, educated discourse" (1996, p.76). Stoker's familiarity with psychoanalysis and Freud's ongoing work, and its influence on his work was also affirmed by Nina Auerbach (*Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*, 1982, p. 24). Furthermore, Ken Gelder states, "the doctors in this novel are themselves psychoanalysts of a kind, doctors of the brain or mind" rather than merely of the body (1994, p.66). Joseph Andriano has noticed the influence of contemporary sciences on Stoker's novel claiming, "*Dracula* reflects anxieties about Darwin's discovery of the intrinsic link between men and beasts, and anticipates Freud's discovery of the id by only a few years" (1993, p.106).

Another important aspect revealed in Stoker's novel is the nineteenth-century attitude toward women. Lisa Hopkins observes, "Women are constantly represented

throughout Bram Stoker's fiction as sites of strangeness, uncertainty and dangerous, unpredictable sexuality" (1998, p.134). The reason for such depictions of women was often seen in the way women were treated in a society, which was generally a masculine one.

The conflict arose, as women were simultaneously perceived as nurturing beings and inciters of dangerous sexuality. As sexual sin was condemned with death, Dijkstra accounts for the literary and artistic representations of dead or dying women. He explains that women "whose 'animal energies' made them threatening, active forces while alive could be brought back into the realm of passive erotic appeal by [artists] who chose to depict them safely dead" (1986, p. 56). The depiction of the dead woman who sacrifices herself for the sin of the man's flesh did not obliterate the notion of the women as source of sexual danger. From a male perspective, as Dijkstra proposes a woman possesses the ability to be "an 'unconscious siren' even when on the verge of death" (1986, p.58).

In addition, medical advancements at that time discovered an intimidating side of women—they had a "generally anemic constitution—women's blood was thinner, more watery than men's . . . —and their inevitable periodic blood loss" led medical experts to suspect that women had "a constitutional yearning for this tonic" (1986, p. 336). This could easily lead to the assumption that women, in a given situation, could turn into bloodthirsty creatures, "that for woman to taste blood was to taste the milk of desire, and that such a taste might turn an innocent, inexperienced woman into an insatiable nymphomaniac" (1986, p. 347). Therefore, it was easy to arrive at the link between women and vampires, and "as a daughter of the moon, woman could hence easily become an actual vampire" (1986, p. 337).

Dracula's creation was engulfed by two conspicuous anxieties of the period: women as sexually alluring seductresses and bloodthirsty creatures. This is what directs Auerbach to conclude, "It is fashionable to perceive and portray *Dracula* as an emanation of Victorian sexual repression" (1982, p. 24). According to Robert Tracy the vampire figure offers "a metaphoric vocabulary to represent certain obsessions and anxieties not otherwise admissible into literature" (1990, p. 35). Phyllis Roth defines the novel as "a disguise for greatly desired and equally strongly feared fantasies" (1988, p. 59). In addition, Bentley states, "what is rejected or repressed on a conscious level appears in a covert and perverted form" (1988, p.26). So, "the traditional view of vampirism as a species of demonic possession to be cured by spiritual means survives in the novel, but it has been partly displaced by a more modern attitude which sees vampirism as a disease and a perversion" (1988, p.31). He further claims, "the apparatus of the vampire superstition, described in almost obsessional detail in *Dracula*," can be seen as "the means for a symbolic presentation of human sexual relationships" (1988, p.26).

The symbolism of blood

The significance of blood not only as a symbol of nobility, life and the blood that Christ shed for salvation, is evident in the novel as it is centered around the idea of blood as a substance. It entails several functions, though: food, disease and marriage. There is blood on Mina's lips, cheeks and chin, and smeared on her nightdress, on Harker's white night-robe and his chin when he cuts himself while shaving; the Transylvanian women smell of blood; we can see blood on Dracula's breast and dripping from his mouth. Lucy receives blood transfusions, whereas, Renfield licks the blood from the floor, which had fallen from, Van Helsing's wounded wrist. Van Helsing is perplexed into laughter when Arthur tells him that he has actually been married to Lucy by the transfusion of blood. As the basic function of marriage is creating progeny by exchange of bodily fluids, metaphorically referred to as mixing of blood, so does this medical mixing of blood symbolically represent marriage. What troubles Van Helsing is whether this kind of blood transfer from one body to another is holy or unholy, and what properties it entails, whether it heals or pollutes. Although it seems to have a healing effect in the text, the end of the novel uncovers the idea of blood transfusions as a means of polluting the blood in terms of Little Quincey having all their blood, including Dracula's, flow through his veins. The idea that blood exchange through transfusion symbolizes marriage may sound pleasant to Arthur as he was Lucy's fiancé, but when Lucy as a vampire addresses him as "husband" in the churchyard (Stoker, p. 211) the significance of marriage as a life-creating union is perverted into the possibility of death through the vampire's draining away of blood. The issue of blood shedding in the novel is profoundly ambiguous; it both gives life, through the transfusions, but also contaminates it. From the perspective of medical science, blood is the means of life, preserving Lucy's physical existence; from the zoophagous Renfield's perspective from the Old Testament, "the blood is the life" (p. 141, 234); to the vampire, blood is the substance that perpetuates his undead existence and strengthens his power. Blood is the means by which the three men, Van Helsing, Seward and Lord Godalming show their love for Lucy by giving her blood transfusions. The three vampire women in Dracula's castle offer a different kind of love to Jonathan Harker, whose kisses would drain his blood and lead to pollution and death. And most repulsively, Dracula himself cuts his breast and forces Mina to drink his blood as a parodic ritual which Van Helsing pronounces as "baptism of blood" (Stoker, p. 322). The point is that even when blood seems to have a beneficial purpose, such as saving Lucy's life, it actually simultaneously contaminates it. As Lucy has previously been contaminated by the Count's blood sucking, the blood of Van Helsing, Seward and Lord Godalming is mixed with Lucy's through the blood transfusions and with Dracula's second vampirising of Lucy, he passes his mixed blood to Mina's through the forceful act of sucking from his torn breast. This mixed blood in turn is passed to Harker in their marriage union and in the blood of their son

Little Quincey. We arrive at the ambiguous threshold of the role of blood in the novel. Whereas, the band fights for preserving pure English blood by defeating Dracula, the novel overtly ends with the reaffirmation of the triumph of good over evil, but covertly conveys the idea of perpetuation of “bad” blood through the character of Little Quincey.

It is evident that there is no male character essentially transformed into a vampire in the course of the book. One must conceive that by attacking only female characters, Dracula did not favour other male competition, and enjoyed a status of vampire Lord. We may as well suppose that Dracula's intended legion of vampires is to be entirely female. Vampirism in *Dracula* articulates great sexual energy generally directed from male to female characters and vice versa, but also essentially distorts it. As Dracula drinks from Lucy's veins not only her blood, but a mixture of blood from the transfusions of the men of the Crew of Light: “even we four who gave our strength to Lucy it also is all to him” (Stoker, p. 244). These blood transfusions enable the transfer of blood from Dracula to the male characters and from the male characters to Dracula, although, none of the male characters has been bitten by a vampire in the text. This male to male fluid exchange invites for a reading of elusive homosexuality. Although sexual desire in *Dracula* is always presented under the guise of monstrous heterosexuality, there is a hint of latent homosexuality. The distortion of vampiric heterosexuality into human homosexuality in *Dracula* generally serves two purposes: first, it veils the anxiety of representation of homoeroticism; and second, by reversed portrayal of a sexually aggressive female as penetrator, it reverses the natural order and demonstrates the anxieties about female sexuality. Dracula's invasion of England is by the creation of a race of vampiric women, who are feminine demons, but are armed with fangs as masculine devices for penetration. Lucy's fangs threaten to challenge the function of penetration biologically reserved for males. Not only is the female sexual role inverted, but the role of the woman as a mother, whose basic role is to nurture and feed children is also displaced. The vampire ladies feed themselves on small children. Lucy's feeding practice induces deep repulsion of the Crew of Light:

With a careless motion, she flung to the ground, callous as a devil, the child that up to now she had clutched strenuously to her breast, growling over it as a dog growls over a bone. The child gave a sharp cry, and lay there moaning. There was a cold-bloodedness in the act which wrung a groan from Arthur; when she advanced to him with outstretched arms and a wanton smile, he fell back and hid his face in his hands. She still advanced, however, and with a languorous, voluptuous grace, said: “Come to me Arthur. Leave those others and come to me. My arms are hungry for you. Come, and we can rest together. Come, my husband, come!

(Stoker, p. 253-254)

Here, Stoker demonstrates apparent reversal of the female role as a mother. The passage reminds of Lady Macbeth expressing her coldblooded preparedness to kill her own child and the devastating extent of her cruelty:

I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, (Shakespeare, 1.7.61-65)

In Stoker, the scene reminds of a female nourishing a child, but the child is not being fed: the child Lucy holds “strenuously to her breast” is being fed upon. Stoker provides inversion of the natural mother instinct by perverting it from a creator and nourisher into a fatal destroyer of Lady Macbeth’s merciless caliber. Moreover, by eliminating the child and stretching out for the husband, as Lucy “callous as a devil” invites Arthur, “My arms are hungry for you” (Stoker, p. 302), Stoker subtly points to the woman’s satanic nature. Lucy’s demonic phallicism is indeed punished with her death by staking, again a phallic act, and order is restored, but the novel essentially bears the idea that maternity and sexuality be separated. This termination of Lucy’s monstrosity has a twofold effect in the novel: it efficiently expels the threat of a hideous feminine sexuality, and it balances the concealed homoeroticism in the vampiric threat.

Dracula and his legion of vampires are foreign invaders who have assaulted the English nation by transmitting degeneracy, moral and physical, and blood lust. If the vampires of folklore and their representations in Romantic texts were endowed with the characteristic of bloodthirstiness, in its original meaning—bringing death, but were hardly ever portrayed directly as sucking blood, Dracula and his vampire women crave for blood. Stoker offers a vivid example of the Count’s bloodthirstiness in the scene when Harker cuts himself while shaving.

When the Count saw my face, his eyes blazed with a sort of demoniac fury, and he suddenly made a grab at my throat. I drew away and his hand touched the string of beads which held the crucifix. It made an instant change in him, for the fury passed so quickly that I could hardly believe that it was ever there. ‘Take care,’ he said, ‘take care how you cut yourself. It is more dangerous that you think in this country.

(Stoker, p. 38)

The bloodthirstiness of the vampires in Stoker not only satisfies a sexual appetite, but simultaneously literally denotes satisfying hunger. Sexuality and food as two basic human urges have been fused in a single instinct. If the folkloric vampire

exposed only hidden erotic charge, which the male vampires of Coleridge and Byron have utterly been robbed of, Stoker's vampires are not only highly eroticized, but have conflated the two urges—sexuality and food into one. Dracula's parasitic feeding habits draw health of the English women, in the novel represented with Lucy and Mina. Jonathan Harker depicts the horrible sight of seeing the vampire gorged in his coffin after a night's feed:

The cheeks were fuller, and the white skin seemed ruby-red underneath. The mouth was redder than ever, for on the lips were gouts of fresh blood, which trickled from the corners of the mouth and ran down over the chin and neck. Even the deep, burning eyes seemed set amongst swollen flesh, for the lids and pouches underneath were bloated. It seemed as if the whole awful creature were simply gorged with blood. He lay like a filthy leech, exhausted with his repletion. (Stoker, p. 54)

The health and strength of the vampire, his appearance with round cheeks and blushing skin, very much akin to the folkloric vampire, comes with the sacrifice of the women and children he has victimized. What repulses Harker even more is the thought that when he moves to England, he intends to “sate his lust for blood, and create a new and ever-widening circle of semi-demons to batten on the helpless” (Stoker, p. 54). Dracula's feeding habits are transmitters of vampirism as a disease which serves his colonizing intentions for the new land he is about to conquer. Hence, Dracula represents an invisible, infectious colonizing force which poses a threat on a larger scale—the extinction of a whole nation. With knowledge of British history at that time, the fear of a possible reverse colonization seems a likely suggestion by Stoker. Dracula's ability to corrupt is symbolically presented in Dracula's smell—he emits an awful odour of decay, as Harker remarks, “corruption had become itself corrupt” (Stoker, p. 265). Even when the band of vampire hunters enter his London home, they are exposed to a “smell composed of all the ills of mortality and with the pungent, acrid smell of blood” (Stoker, p. 265). The vampire survives on the blood of humankind and the ingestion of mortality. He brings pollution and decadence, and becomes himself an epitome of degradation and corruption, symbolically represented through the sense of smell.

The band of “good” men led by Van Helsing have undertaken the task to defeat “the father or furtherer of a new order of beings, whose road must lead through death, not life,” (Stoker, p. 299) as Dracula's vampirism is contagious. It is transmitted as a disease through his eating habits—drinking human blood. And, the victims he has vampirised turn into vampires themselves, who in turn vampirise new victims. Vampirism spreads like a contagious disease through the exchange of blood, and is likely to become epidemic if the Crew of Light do not prevent it. They finally achieve this, after tracking him down to Transylvania. His quick death by stabbing, however,

seems rather inconclusive. There is even a suggestion in the final scene of Dracula's dissolution that all may not be ended for Dracula.

With the destruction of the vampire, some extremely unsettling elements in society have been symbolically destroyed and the fluid boundaries between vital categories have been reestablished, such as life and death, male and female, human and non-human, positive evolution and degeneracy, which Dracula has distorted and desecrated. With his power to possess the victims' willpower, Dracula has violated an even more vital boundary, that of self and the other.

Conclusion

Stoker utilizes the vampire figures to blur vital categories and distinctions of gender—male and female, basic human physiological needs—hunger and sexual desire, superstition and religion, good and evil. The author operates on the principle of inversion to undermine basic ideas: what is male is often passive, whereas the female is active, assertive with a 'man's brain'; the female, on the other hand, is robbed of the characteristics of a mother and infused with sexual energy and violence. Food, as a basic physiological need, is not only for nourishment but satisfies erotic and sexual urges, and is based on the need for blood. Blood satisfies both, hunger and sexual desire. Superstition rituals and religious paraphernalia tread on a thin line and tend to be conflated into one idea. Whatever is overtly presented as good, the Crew of Light versus Dracula opposition is subverted by the unreliable text of the novel because of its multiple-point view and lack of documentation. Human gender, sexuality, beliefs and ethical thinking is subverted and degraded. The vampire figure in Stoker collapses normal gender roles, inverts sexual roles and questions our moral judgment of good and bad. But, this is all concealed and submerged in the novel, as it seems to tell a traditional story of a group of good men fighting against a bad vampire; good and chaste women versus child-devouring voluptuous vampire women; and of the victory of good versus evil. However, what is revealed turns to be unreliable and what is concealed tends to subvert the objectivity of presentation. This is Stoker's way to critique Victorian society with reference to gender norms, sexuality and morality.

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