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Final Paper

A Psychoanalytic View of the Role of Women in Dracula

In Bram Stoker's *Dracula* the role of the women characters seems mundane. The women are either used to assert the power-over archetype, to move along the plot or are used as sex symbols to enforce patriarchal elements in the text. Though it appears that Dracula isn't interested in these women for his own desires, he still benefits from being in control. His control stems from him wreaking havoc on an entire town, how he uses Lucy as a political pawn in his need to make a statement, and how he treats the female vampires that reside in his home. The female characters have such a miniscule role in the text that seems to only serve secondhand to Dracula's ego as well as the other male characters' lives. This paper will depict the roles of the women in *Dracula* using a psychoanalytic lens and will use queer theory to demonstrate why the roles serve the characters as they do.

With the contrast of good v. evil in *Dracula* the reader can look at the center of the text being the townspeople v. Dracula. Dracula is depicted as this omnipotent and malevolent being wreaking havoc for the sake of wreaking havoc while the townspeople are depicted as living wholesome and pure lives. One could argue that it is because of this contrast that Dracula punishes the townspeople. Dracula's mysticism is part of what secludes him from the rest of society making him an outsider, while also fueling his power. In terms of the power-over archetype, Dracula's unknown motives and lack of civilization is what makes him powerful over Lucy, a powerless 19-year-old girl. Lucy is depicted as this pure, angelic like young woman so consumed in wanting to be chosen by a suitor, needless to say distracted and this is what makes her alluring to Dracula.

While Lucy's innocence plays a huge role in her death, she is still very much sexualized. It is her beauty that captivates her suitors, and it is this beauty that makes her a threat. Once she is killed by Dracula, she becomes undead, which furthers her sexualization. Her death makes her an omnipotent being just like Dracula and depicts her as a potential threat. This plays into the demonization of women, therefore, Lucy must die, again. Just like Lucy, John Harker's wife, Mina, is sexualized as well, however she is depicted as more wholesome than Lucy. She's a woman that takes care of her family and is devoted to her husband. The term "*New Woman*" is a nineteenth century term used to describe women that were going against the societal norm. The term depicts sexual promiscuity and mischievous behavior from a woman. Lucy and Mina are different in the sense that Lucy uses her looks to her advantage, enticing her suitors and then because of her looks is essentially punished, this makes Lucy a *"New Woman."*

Through a queer lens one could argue that Dracula uses women to get to the men in the town. It is because of this, and Dracula's disregard for women, that the women are demonized. In

"Dracula: Stoker's Response to the New Woman," Carol Senf delineates the roles of women portrayed in Literature as either angels or demons and how readers are used to seeing themselves depicted as such. "Women may wonder why Dracula is the single male vampire in the novel while four of the five women characters are portrayed as vampires—aggressive, inhuman, wildly erotic and motivated only by an insatiable thirst for blood." (Senf., Carol, *"Dracula" Stoker's Response to the New Woman.* 1982) Dracula possess the power-over archetype not just over the townspeople but over his own people. Harker starts off as Dracula's victim, and the three Vampire women are playing with him. Dracula becomes possessive over Harker forcing the Vampires to back off. Dracula wants Harker to himself and doesn't beat around the bush about that. During this interaction, the contrast between each supernatural entity becomes apparent. Though the Vampire women possess just as much omnipotence as Dracula, they are still considered less than. Furthermore, to expound upon Queer theory, a psychoanalytic closed reading of this portion of the text could decipher that Dracula's mistreatment of women stems from his liking of men, which further outcasts him from the town.

While it seems that at first Mina Harker's role is to support John Harker, she ends up being at fault for the demise of Dracula. This is interesting because a woman, which is the embodiment of what Dracula hates, is the reason behind his downfall, which must be foreshadowing at best. Mina Harker's devotion to her husband is what sets her apart from the other women in the text. Not only is she married, but she's smarter and not initially a threat to Dracula. Another foreshadowing to Dracula's demise is in Mina's journal and a testament to her devotion to John, she writes "I shall try to save him from it; but it may be even a consolation and a help to him—terrible though it be and awful in its consequences—to know for certain that his eyes and ears and brain did not deceive him, and that it is all true." (Stoker., Bram, *"Dracula"* Second Edition. 2016) This is after the death of Lucy, and after Lucy's untimely revival. The revival of Lucy is interesting as well, because living she is innocent and pure but also alluring and enticing, however when she is revived, she is considered a very dark, powerful, and sexual being that must be destroyed at all costs.

Though Mina has this powerful role, she still plays into the "good housewife" trope and essentially being John's backbone. There's this ideal that even though she has power, her power wouldn't be executed at all in the text without John. Though the depiction of Mina, Lucy and the three Vampire women are all different, and delineates the different women in the nineteenth century, one thing connects them to each other and that is violence. According to Judith Bell, each "depictions of these women suggest that it is not vampirism itself that is horrifying but uncontrolled female sexuality and violence." She goes on to note that the promiscuity of women, even in monogamous relationships such as Mina's devotion to John, is still worthy of punishment in some contexts. (Bell, Judith. "Deliberate Voluptuousness": The Monstrous Women of Dracula and Carmilla) It is also interesting that when Mina expresses her plan to defeat Dracula the men are grateful and praise her after not giving her good treatment before. "When I had done reading, Jonathan took me in his arms and kissed me. The others kept shaking

me by both hands, and Dr. Van Helsing said: -- "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, this time we may succeed." (Stoker, Bram. "*Dracula*" pg. 349)

In terms of the queer theory, In Victorian Literature and Culture, Dejan Kuzmanovic delineates the repressed homosexuality of the text by discussing Stoker and Christopher Craft's closed reading of the text. "While rightly pointing out Harker's relevance throughout the novel and convincingly showing how homosexual desire in its heterosexually mediated and displaced into homosociality, Craft less persuasively insists that "the narrative's originary anxiety...derives from Dracula's hovering interest in Jonathan Harker" implying that homoerotic desire is a primary force in the novel, suppressed and displaced because of the homophobic proscriptions of Stoker's culture." Kuzmanovic goes on to discuss how Harker is emasculated and placed in a position that compromises his masculinity at the hands of Dracula, which is interesting because when compared to how women are treated, it's almost as if Harker experiences the same kind of treatment. (Kuzmanovic, Dejan. "Vampiric Seduction and Vicissitudes of Masculine Identity in Bram Stoker's 'Dracula.")

Though the women in *Dracula* seem to exploit as well as convey an underlying issue in terms of sexuality, each role develops a purpose. Lucy is used as a pawn in Dracula's rampage, the contrast of the before and after is like that of the 1970's film *The Exorcist* in which director William Friedkin, shows the contrast of an innocent girl transforming into a demonic, overtly sexualized being. In conclusion, Lucy's character is used to depict how impressionable young girls fall into the entrapment of being secular and therefore must pay the price of that. The three Vampires suggest a more in-depth view of Dracula's sexuality. Here he is in his own home, surrounded by women of his own kind that exude promiscuity, however he has a lack of interest in them. Dracula gets off more from the power-over archetype that he holds over these women, than their sexuality as it is of no interest to him. Mina is considered the savior, that unsuspectedly comes in and uses her smarts to destroy the man that is entrapping her husband. This fight can be looked at as Mina's devotion to her husband and her marriage, and the fight for it, meaning that Mina is aware of the homosexuality. It could also mean that within the negative depictions of roles of women in *Dracula* that Stoker simply doesn't hate women, instead alluding to the fact that no matter how many representations of women are depicted within the text, the male characters needed them in order to move forward. *Dracula* uses the different depictions of women to touch on queerness in the text and makes it, so readers understand that the demonization of women in the text, equates to a lack of interest due to a same sex normative, in a heteronormative culture.

Works Cited

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