

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Late-Victorian Advertising Tactics: Earnest Men, Virtuous Ladies, and Porn

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"The book is of necessity full of horrors and terrors but I trust that these are calculated to 'cleanse the mind by pity and terror.' At any rate there is nothing base in the book."¹

Dracula is "a veritable sexual lexicon of Victorian taboos," "seduction, rape, gang rape, group sex, necrophilia, pedophilia, incest, adultery, oral sex, menstruation, venereal disease, and voyeurism."²

CONTEMPORARY READERS who have learned to identify an erotic potential in every episode of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897)³ may be somewhat surprised to learn that the text's "quasi-pornographic" quality seems to have escaped the notice of most late-Victorian critics.⁴ Although an anonymous reviewer in the 1899 December issue of the *Wave* vaguely commented on the prevalence of the text's "unnatural appetites," most reviews of the time focused on its sensationalism, its fascinating blend of medieval lore and nineteenth-century technology, and its ability to terrify.⁵ One might wonder if sexually inflected readings of *Dracula* have more to do with a twenty-first-century hyper-sexuality than with any inherent erotic tensions within Stoker's text. Stoker's article on censorship, however, in which he emphasizes purity of intention in a writer who deals "with impure or dangerous material" of the imagination, argues not for a total denial of risqué matter, but for an author's "control of his own utterances."⁶ Stoker's claim supports Foucault's observation that Victorian "sexual repression" involved a development of stringent codes by which to talk about sex rather than a dearth of discussion surrounding sex.⁷ One certainly has to keep in mind that Foucault's focus on the proliferation of discourses concerning sex in Victorian society ignores the complex, sometimes contradictory relations between beliefs and sexual practices.

Michael Mason observes that a discursive interest in sex was indeed notable in the late nineteenth century, but that sexual behaviours of various classes and subcultures were not necessarily reflective of such changes: if discussions about sex were not repressed, it does not necessarily follow that people's actions were not.⁸ Late-Victorian society was far from monolithic in its treatment of sexual matters, so that a proof of stringently controlled but inherently erotic elements within a work of popular *fin-de-siècle* fiction hardly justifies any general conclusions about the sexual practices of various Victorians. Yet if one analyzes Stoker's popular text as a cultural artifact that absorbed, reinscribed, and exploited some of its society's marked interest in discussing sex, one could simultaneously account for its ostensible "decency" and its underlying eroticism.

To speak of *Dracula's* "sexiness" in any refreshing manner one would have to resist the psychoanalytically informed tendencies by which almost every recent scholar has approached the text. The aim of this article is to provide a historical materialist reading of Stoker's novel that explores the relations between the burgeoning, increasingly sexualized commodity culture of Victorian Britain and *Dracula's* depictions of desire. *Dracula's* monsters, first and foremost, consume and proliferate: through them the text expresses anxieties about *fin-de-siècle* practices of excessive material production, consumption, and expanding middle-class pursuit of leisure; the rise of commercial advertising directed at "modern" women who increasingly act as independent managers of their household incomes; the industry's profit-oriented sexualization of female figures; and the consequent destabilizations of Victorian gender norms. Yet Stoker's novel is one of contrary impulses. Although it seeks to purge Britain of destabilizing influences by repeatedly reaffirming traditional ideologies of gender, class, and race, its descriptions of vampire-otherness are in fact thoroughly structured by the language and plot codes of the Victorian pornographic industry. In consequence, the novel taps into the same sex-sells tactics as the commercial culture it identifies as threatening and partakes in the discussion, portrayal, and commodification of sex. Its insistence on the purity of London's citizens contrasts with its racy descriptions of foreign, sexualized, predominantly female vampires,⁹ but its "dangerous material" is only displaced, distanced, and controlled in this manner, rather than eliminated.¹⁰ Keeping in mind that there was not always a clear or a necessary relation between what could be uttered and what could be shown—Mason records that it was common for Victorian men to

urinate openly in public parks, but that words such as “trousers” were “unmentionable” in polite society¹¹—one should also pay special attention to those passages in *Dracula* that feature a plethora of clichéd figures of speech that gesture towards cultural meanings beyond the written text. Thus, in order to analyze *Dracula* as a text with erotic potential and to understand both its ability to satisfy codes of Victorian censorship and yet titillate decades of readers and scholars, it is crucial to read it as a cultural product influenced by the sometimes contradictory impulses and commercial tactics of a tempestuous period in British consumerist culture. *Dracula* not only functions as a “kind of ‘test-bed’ for competing arguments and sensibilities,” but it reflects the ways in which its society’s ambivalent responses to consumerism and advertising were repeatedly elaborated through models of femininity and female sexuality.¹²

Sex Sells

Some specific changes besetting late-nineteenth-century British society included the rise of trade unionism (the Independent Labour Party was founded in 1893); fears of colonial rebellion;¹³ and reform legislation which significantly improved women’s legal status.¹⁴ While New Women and fashionable male aesthetes were vexed and vexing symbols of change, the rising consumer culture was beginning to unbalance the gendered existences of even those who did not actively seek to resist traditional roles. The rise in middle-class standards of living and subsequent attempts by families and individuals to accumulate the “paraphernalia of gentility” coincided with the establishment of department stores in the 1860s, which attracted domesticated women into the public sphere.¹⁵ At the center of this burgeoning consumer culture was the phenomenon of advertising.¹⁶ By identifying women as the primary household consumers, advertisers reaffirmed gendered labour divisions, but also encouraged quasi-liberating practices of public shopping and interaction.

The advertising industry had a significant impact on the creation and circulation of fiction. Middle-class magazines such as *Munsey’s*, *McClure’s*, and *Cosmopolitan*, whose main attractions were short stories, shifted their revenues from subscriptions and newsstand sales to ads by the early 1890s, thus decreasing their prices, increasing circulation, and featuring fiction side by side with ads for the latest consumer products. The dialogues that existed between the stories and ads frequently revealed Victorian society’s ambivalence towards cultural

transformations enabled by the very products that the advertising industry promoted. Ellen Bruber Garvey notes, for example, that several middle-class magazines included stories which routinely disparaged women's writing and attempts to earn money, while at the same time featuring ads that offered entrepreneurial opportunities for both sexes, asked women for advice on how to earn pocket money, and used the figure of the efficient, independent New Woman to promote new consumer products.¹⁷ Ultimately, the rise of advertising emphasized and reaffirmed the links between literature and consumer culture, for no fiction remained untouched by the commercial culture of which the publishing industry was a part. It is worthwhile to ask how popular literature of the age, such as *Dracula*, reflects the complex impulses and interests occasioned by the advertising industry and more specifically, how and why these issues are predominantly elaborated through discussions of femininity and female sexuality.

That advertisers recognized housewives as primary agents of material consumption is perhaps best reflected in the establishment of forty-eight *ladies'* magazines in the period between 1880 and 1900, which consisted in large part of advertisements.¹⁸ Playing into the belief that females were naturally more susceptible to addictions (the stereotype of a young girl made silly by romance or Gothic fiction),¹⁹ these industry professionals developed ads that identified various consumer products with women's sense of self as modern, desirable, and/or independent. Both Thomas Richards and Lori Anne Loeb note that the ads hardly featured the nonsexual Victorian ideal of the Angel in the House: women in this new medium were often portrayed as provocative, sensual beauties.²⁰ The 1890 Brooke's Soap advertisement in *Illustrated London News* (Fig. 1) is a typical example of an ad that plays with the idea of an active female sexuality: the soap's cleansing powers are showcased through images of the female body (legs, neck, face), reflected multiple times and accentuated in shiny new kitchenware. In short, the ad purports to sell soap that protects the health of British families, but it ultimately does so through a commodification of female sexuality. The eroticization of female figures in a male-run advertising industry was only a predictable product, or extension, of male objectification and fantasy, but it cannot be denied that the advertisements featured a type of female sexuality that was more active than the one elaborated by the standards of late-Victorian middle-class morality. The advertisements' allure was most often contained by featuring the women as classical goddesses, Middle Eastern seductresses or Eliza-

bethans (distant temporally and/or geographically) and decentered by the advertisements' loud reaffirmations of what Richards calls the "ideology of England."²¹ Nevertheless, while the erotic energies of the prevalent ads were subtly veiled, they reflected the advertisers' growing interest in the commercial potential of sex and their willingness to subvert the Victorian ideal of passive, virtuous femininity in order to appeal to increasingly active female consumers.

The incitement to talk about or represent sex was further reflected in and propelled by the mass production of news. Thomas F. Boyle describes the proliferation of "low" and "sensational" newspapers that graced the "tea tables of respectable (and other) Victorians" and featured a cornucopia of "graphically detailed accounts of the sexual misbehavior of all classes of citizens."²² An underground market for erotic literature (mainly from the Continent) had existed for a long time in London, but the publishing of pornography increased from the 1860s onwards, as is reflected in the popularity of erotic magazines such as the *Pearl*, the *Exquisite*, the *Annals of Gallantry*, the *Boudoir*, *Bon Ton Magazine*, and *Pleasure*. By realizing the capitalist potential of sex, these various publications served to proliferate discourses on sexuality, either through subliminal and/or subtle advertising, sensational reporting, or explicitly erotic tales. In short, sex permeated *fin-de-siècle* culture, while the up-and-coming advertising industry shaped the mentality of middle-class consumers. If we read Stoker's *Dracula* as a product of this tempestuous cultural moment, we realize how the patterns and tactics cited shaped the novel's explicitly traditional arguments,

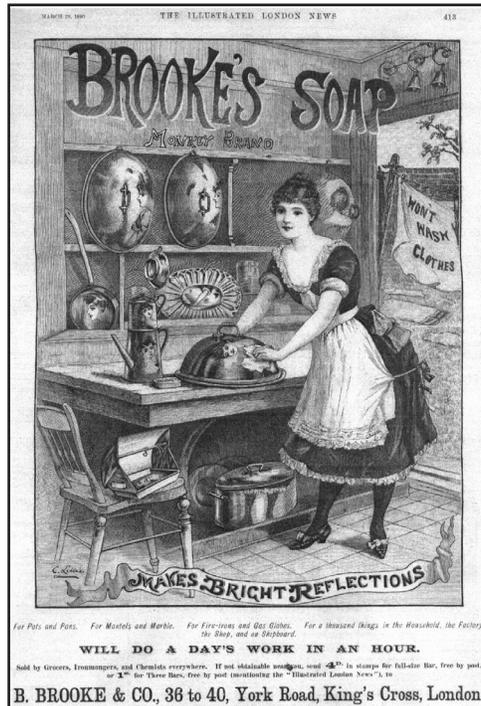


Fig. 1 Brooke's Soap
Illustrated London News 29 March 1890

its displacement of eroticism onto foreign figures, and its simultaneous (and contradictory) commercial exploitation of sex.

Dracula's Ravenous Female Consumers

It is not surprising that many commentators ignore the fact that *Dracula* is first and foremost a text about material consumption: the sucking and the biting that transpire in the text are unarguably erotic and beg for a psychoanalytic explanation (as oral fetish). It is, however, crucial to analyze why consumption becomes the choice monstrosity of the text, the root of all evil. Apart from the very obvious cravings indulged in by the vampires, Stoker's text is populated with images of people who wish to and/or do consume in immoderate amounts. Renfield, for example, an often overlooked figure, is a key character whose abnormalities are closely observed by Dr. Seward: "I shall have to invent a new classification for him and call him a zoophagous (life-eating) maniac; what he desires is to absorb as many lives as he can..."²³ In his obsessive ingestion of flies, spiders, birds, and cats ("feed—and feed and feed"), Renfield is explained as a new phenomenon, who in many ways resembles an ad-stimulated, ever-hungry consumer of commodities: his pages of "single numbers added up in batches ... as though he were 'focussing' some account," suggest a connection between his unrelenting desire and the world of accelerating capitalist transactions.²⁴ Mina Harker and Lucy Westenra are also, from the outset, identified with forms of unrestrained consumption, or one's desire for it: while Mina states that their appetites would have shocked the New Woman, Lucy wonders why a girl cannot marry three men.²⁵ The relation between women and an immoderate desire to consume are key to understanding why female figures in the novel are so vulnerable to Dracula's powers. The primary targets of advertising culture, which creates and perpetually stimulates the craving for more commercial products, women are also perfect recruits for a contagious army of beings whose monstrosity lies in their unquenchable appetites. Perhaps it would not be too far-fetched to compare Dracula to an advertising mastermind, whose aims are accomplished through the creation of a new, "devouring" kind of human race, which will ultimately take over the world. The statement of Dracula's that most infuriates the "earnest" men of the novel is one in which he emphasizes his growing control of British women's actions and desires: "Your girls that you all love are mine already; and through them you and others shall yet be mine—my creatures, to do my bidding and to be my jackals when I want to feed."²⁶ Repetition of the possessive terms such as "mine" and

“my” suggests that the threat Dracula poses is inextricably linked to a desire to possess. Dracula undermines the men’s (“your”) management and/or ownership of the easily susceptible women, but also predicts he will control the rest of Britain, with the implication that even men will ultimately fall prey to the same “infection,” thus becoming feminized. Indeed, late-nineteenth-century aesthetes (best exemplified by Oscar Wilde and characterized as “degenerate” and “effeminate” by Max Nordau in *Degeneration*, 1892) were known to express their interests in artifice, beauty, and sensuality through acquisitions of commercial goods and elaborate fashions.

Although the women in the novel do betray some very questionable desires, it is important to emphasize that neither Mina nor Lucy is an example of the New Woman. Mina works as a schoolmistress before her wedding, learns shorthand and typing, and has some journalistic aspirations, but she mainly acquires practical knowledge in order to “be useful to Jonathan.”²⁷ In fact, she prudishly worries about Lucy’s reputation when she finds her sleepwalking in her nightdress and is often a mouthpiece for the Victorian ideology of “stalwart manhood” and nurturing, admiring femininity: “Oh, it did me good to see the way that these brave men worked. How can women help loving men when they are so *earnest*, and so true, and so brave!”²⁸ Lucy, on the other hand, is characterized as an ideal of Victorian, upper-class, innocent femininity. Yet even these seemingly conformist women seem to be changing—and this is where the horror lies. Like the housewives who are overstimulated by advertised novelties, Mina and Lucy are developing certain immoderate desires: Lucy, aside from craving far more men than the traditional, heterosexual marriage can decently accommodate, is unable to resist Dracula’s charms, while Mina cannot get enough of the late-nineteenth-century technological innovations. Apart from acquainting herself with the typewriter and using manifold paper,²⁹ Mina is fascinated by Dr. Seward’s phonograph. Her first encounter with the phonograph is somewhat comic, for in the midst of everyone’s deep mourning for Lucy and a general, vampire-infested gloominess, Mina becomes rather giddy about it: “I felt quite excited over it, and blurted out: ‘Why, this beats even shorthand! May I hear it say something?’”³⁰ Mina’s exclamation and question, as well as the abrupt phrase “blurted out,” suggest a lack of mannered, feminine restraint.

Since Mina’s various secretarial skills and knowledge of the latest technology prove instrumental during the hunt for Dracula, one can

certainly contend that Stoker's novel argues against the patriarchal impulse by which the men attempt to exclude Mina from their investigation and relegate her to the role of their home-bound "star" and "hope": "And now for you, Madam Mina, this night is the end until all be well. You are too precious to us to have such risk. When we part tonight, you no more must question. We shall tell you all in good time. We are men and are able to bear..."³¹ Interestingly enough, it is precisely when the men decide to take away her role as the official "chronologer" of the hunt that Mina becomes vulnerable to Dracula's attentions, and he is able to penetrate into the very household that the men strive most to protect.³² Richards, in her study of mass production of information in *Dracula*, points out that it is Mina's superb memory, as well as her expertise with shorthand and various gadgets, that enables her speedily to gather, arrange, mechanically reproduce, and disseminate characters' various accounts of Dracula's activities—to provide Van Helsing with crucial knowledge as to how to defeat the foreign threat.³³ The text certainly presents an argument for women's active interaction with technology, at least in the role of men's helpmates and during times of dire need. Nevertheless, the latter part of *Dracula* becomes increasingly populated by blatant declarations of chivalry and reaffirmations of Victorian gender ideology, and the novel ends with a containment of Mina within the role of Victorian mother.³⁴ (As we learn from the short epilogue, Jonathan Harker has become the final editor and manager of this "so wild a story."³⁵) It seems as though Mina's involvement in the vampire hunt (and her authoritative use of technological novelties) is only temporary and needs to be countered carefully by heavy doses of patriarchal discourse. Her participation, however instrumental, is allowed only because it is proven to be the lesser of two evils: to leave a woman in the dark, away from male supervision, is to leave her open to Dracula's influences, while to have her near is to be able to monitor her addictive tendencies. In the end, when Van Helsing and his cohort have managed to purge the modern world of consuming monstrosities, Mina's appetite for clever gadgets seems quite forgotten, especially since her hands are busy holding her newborn son.

If one accepts the notion that *Dracula's* monstrosities are in large part shaped by a conservative reaction to *fin-de-siècle*, female-oriented consumer decadence, then it is obvious that the text identifies consumption with overt eroticism and transgression of Victorian gender norms. The women whom Dracula infects with vampirism are prone to displays of "ribald coquetry": the three "voluptuous" female vampires,

excited at the prospect of “kisses for [them] all,” get much closer to Jonathan Harker than proper Victorian ladies should.³⁶ Lucy’s developing vampiric state, on the other hand, is betrayed by her seductiveness, as when she asks Arthur for a kiss in a “soft voluptuous voice” before her death.³⁷ Later, when she attempts to lure Arthur to her in the crypt, she expresses herself in a manner that is both sexually aggressive and suggests a physical need to hold the object of her desire (much like an addicted female consumer yearns for yet another material possession): “Come to me Arthur... My arms are hungry for you.”³⁸ These vampiric females use a somewhat more blatant version of the seductive look displayed in the Brooke’s Soap advertisement (Fig. 1), their sexiness a tactic by which they attempt to feed their desire for consumption and turn men into the same type of relentless consumer. The pinnacle of their monstrosity, however, is their rejection of the nurturing mother role: Dracula’s female companions excitedly feed on a “half-smothered child,” while Lucy becomes the “bloofer lady” who has a fetish for very young blood.³⁹ Female consumers, the text seems to imply, are so bent on their never-ending hunger that they are on their way to forgetting the sacred feminine role upon which is founded the family, the quintessential bastion and breeding ground of Victorian morality.

Against these tropes and incidents of transgression and immorality, the perversion by which the “sweet purity” of Lucy Westenra is morphed into “voluptuous wantonness,” the text offers increasingly vociferous and exaggerated declarations of traditional gender ideology.⁴⁰ Dr. Van Helsing, a symbol of patriarchal authority (the scientist who will diagnose the disease and methodically cure it), offers ample doses of convention to counter the subversive effects of vampiric lasciviousness, as when he idealizes Mina’s virtue and nurturing qualities: “Believe me, then, that I come here full of respect for you, and you have given me hope ... that there are good women still left to make life happy—good women, whose lives and whose truths may make good lesson for the children that are to be.”⁴¹ Ultimately, Van Helsing’s goal is to solidify the men’s masculinity—to make Jonathan Harker, who likes to compare himself to a blushing fair lady, “strong and manly”—and to erase the stain of impurity from the women’s foreheads.⁴² By the end of the novel, Harker is the epic hero who decapitates the monster, while Mina is busy nurturing the stalwart future of Victorian masculinity in the shape of her young son.

***Dracula* as Pornography**

Beneath the resounding proclamations of Victorian patriarchal ideology there exists a commercially oriented, sexually subversive current in *Dracula*. There is something especially charged in Stoker's descriptions of the vampires, an intensity and verbal relentlessness that suggest a careful, yet erotically charged delivery of risqué material. Few of the quotes cited draw a reader's attention to the prevalence of the word "voluptuous," which Stoker repeatedly uses to describe the female vampires: "voluptuous lips," "voluptuousness," "soft, voluptuous voice," "voluptuous wantonness," "voluptuous smile," "voluptuous grace," "voluptuous mouth," "the voluptuous lips," "voluptuous beauty," and "so exquisitely voluptuous."⁴³ The word is almost exclusively utilized in those sections of the text that feature the female vampires, and its blatant reiteration in these instances connects yet sets apart the specific passages. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "voluptuous" as "of or pertaining to, derived from, resting in, characterized by, gratification of the senses, esp. in a refined or luxurious manner; marked by indulgence in sensual pleasures; luxuriously sensuous." Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (1374) contains the first written use of the word—"lust voluptuous"—and testifies to the fact that the adjective was from the onset associated with carnal vice. While the term could perfectly apply to the decadence of *fin-de-siècle* consumerism and pursuit of leisure, "voluptuous" is also the quintessential word by which the Victorian texts could be commonly identified as pornographic. Although bibliographies of Victorian erotica frequently fail to mention the years of publication for many of the listed texts, they still contain enough information to testify to the fact that "voluptuous" consistently appears in titles of pornographic texts throughout the nineteenth century:

The Modern Rake or, The Life and Adventures of Sir Edward Walford: Containing a Curious and Voluptuous History of His Luscious Intrigues etc. (1824)

The Voluptuarian Cabinet: Being a Faithful Re-Print of Such Facetious Facts as Have Become Scarce (1824)

The Festival of the Passions or, Voluptuous Miscellany (1828)

The Voluptuous Night or, the Non Plus Ultra of Pleasure (1830)

How to Make Love and its Sequel How to Raise Love; or the Art of Making Love in More Ways Than One; Being the Voluptuous History and Secret Correspondence of Two Young Ladies (1830s)

Intrigues and Confessions of a Ballet Girl: Disclosing Startling Voluptuous Scenes Before and Behind the Curtain etc. (1868–1870)

The Confessions of a Voluptuous Young Lady of High Rank (1871)

The Power of Mesmerism, a Highly Erotic Narrative of Voluptuous Facts and Fancies (1880)

Catalogue of Rare Curious and Voluptuous Reading (1896)⁴⁴

The Pearl: A Journal of Voluptuous Readings: The Underground Magazine of Victorian England, a popular publication which ran from 1879 to 1881, also follows this example. “Voluptuous” is primarily paired with nouns that denote collections of information (“history,” “cabinet,” “miscellany,” “scenes”) and is therefore instrumental in indicating the generic nature of the content. It is also utilized in the descriptions of sexual women—“Voluptuous Young Lady of High Rank” or “The merry month of May has always been famous for its propitious influence over the voluptuous sense of the fairer sex”⁴⁵—so that active female sexuality itself connotes pornography. The copious use of the word “voluptuous” to describe female vampires in several scenes of Stoker’s text clearly gestures towards scripts of sexual arousal.

Perhaps it is best to compare a few passages from notable Victorian erotic stories with Stoker’s descriptions of vampiric sensuality. Ashbee provides a quote from *Fanny Greeley* (1865) in which the innocent heroine describes her encounter with an expert lover: “I had no power to move, a dreamy, intoxicated feeling came over me; my breath came quick and panting through my parted lips: I was as though in a trance ... I was in a state of most unspeakable, most ecstatic enjoyment.”⁴⁶ This description of seduction is hardly different from the one featured in *The Lustful Turk* (1828), in which a young British woman succumbs to her passion for a hypermasculine foreign male:

“Never, oh never shall I forget the delicious transports that followed the stiff insertion; and then, ah me!, by what thrilling degrees did he, by his luxurious movements, fiery kisses, and strange touches of his hand to the most crimson parts of my body, reduce, reduce me to a voluptuous state of insensibility ... until the nature of the pleasure and ravishment became so overpowering, that, unable longer to support the excitement I so luxuriously felt, I fainted in his arms with pleasure.”⁴⁷

Such generic passages of Victorian erotica, in which an inexperienced and initially resistant maiden is paralyzed by passion, should sound familiar to a *Dracula* reader, for Jonathan Harker’s description of his encounter with Dracula’s female vampire companions in Transylvania

operates according to the same codes: “I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the super-sensitive skin of my throat, and the hard dents of two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I closed my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited—waited with beating heart.”⁴⁸ The three passages feature a plethora of adjectives, most of which are tautological, as well as quintessential symbolic imagery of predominantly male-made and male-oriented pornography. While words that end in “y” or feature sibilants, such as “dreamy,” “intoxicated,” “trance,” “ecstatic,” “insensibility,” “languorous,” and “ecstasy,” caress with their sounds and suggest increasing sensual abandon, crisper ones such as “quick and panting” and “beating heart” add a pulsating dimension to the descriptions. There is no focus on individual characteristics or the feelings of sexual partners in any of the cited passages. The generic nature of the copious adjectives depersonalizes the interactions among the participants so that they are described primarily through images of passive, yielding feminine entities and penetrating, phallic forces: disembodied, super-powerful, erect penises, strong hands, and vampiric canines assault quivering, increasingly submissive forms. The fact that Jonathan Harker is featured as the shy virgin, who glances “under [his] lashes in an agony of delightful anticipation” as the predatory females approach with their phallic teeth, functions to unsettle a (usually male) reader who is programmed to respond to generic erotic writing.⁴⁹ The passage works to arouse and in turn generate anxiety about the destabilization of gender roles, testifying once again to the contradiction between *Dracula’s* sex-selling tactics and its insistent traditional arguments.

At the point in the narrative when Jonathan encounters the three female vampires in the castle, the act of biting or being bitten has not yet been described, so that there is a level of ambiguity (perhaps not to the modern reader, who is familiar with vampire lore) as to what it is that the vampires will do with or to Jonathan. Words and phrases that suggest indeterminacy populate the paragraph in which Jonathan describes his initial reaction to the women’s appearance: “seemed somehow to know her face,” “some dreamy fear,” “I could not recollect at the moment how or where,” “there was something about them,” “some longing,” and “some deadly fear.”⁵⁰ As their lust for blood and monstrous drinking practices are not explicitly mentioned, the female vampires’ type of “perversion” is not yet fully defined. Jonathan’s focus on the “ruby of their voluptuous lips,” as well as his urgent desire that they should kiss him, immediately characterizes the women as sexual and

implies that their interaction with Jonathan might be of an erotic nature. The beginning of the scene reads like a commencement of a sexual orgy, for the women behave “coquettishly” as they mention taking turns with Jonathan for “kisses” (*not* bites): “Go on! You are first, and we shall follow; yours is the right to begin.”⁵¹ One of the vampires goes down on “her knees” and suggestively bends over Jonathan: “Lower and lower went her head as the lips went below the range of my mouth and chin and seemed about to fasten on my throat.”⁵² It is only after the vampire stops at and focuses on his throat that it becomes clear Jonathan is not about to receive fellatio, but a blood-draining bite.

Stoker also divulges information in a manner that belies an intention to arouse in the episode in which Dracula enters Mina and Jonathan’s bedroom to make the former drink his blood. As Dr. Seward recounts what he and his companions witnessed as they entered the couple’s bedchamber, he focuses on the sexually suggestive positions of the three figures by the bed; he only “zooms in” to describe the details of their actions after a few sentences. As he initially makes no references to blood and biting, Dr. Seward could be informing the reader that Jonathan was aroused by watching Mina perform oral sex on Dracula:

On the bed beside the window lay Jonathan Harker, his face flushed and breathing heavily as though in a stupor. Kneeling on the near edge of the bed facing outwards was the white-clad figure of his wife. By her side stood a tall, thin man, clad in black.... With his left hand he held both Mrs. Harker’s hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand gripped her by the back of her neck, forcing her face down on his bosom.⁵³

It is only the last word of the cited text, namely “bosom,” which redirects the scene towards descriptions of specifically vampiric “perversions.” One need only replace “bosom” with any of the words describing male genitalia, however, and this passage would operate as erotica. Furthermore, the fact that Mina forcibly drinks Dracula’s blood from his chest, rather than the latter eagerly sucking the blood from Mina’s neck, creates a sense of impropriety and defamiliarization: the role reversal is not something that the text has taught its readers to expect. As a result, the word “bosom” does not manage smoothly to contain the erotic energies of the preceding sentences by quickly “packaging” them within or distancing them through the conventions of vampire lore. The Jonathan-Mina-Dracula passage creates a sense of taboo that titillates long after it has been ostensibly counteracted by the men’s rhapsodies about Mina’s purity.

The previously mentioned scene of Jonathan and the female vampires in the castle, as well as the episode in which Van Helsing opens the vampires' coffins in order to kill them, contain rhythmic repetitions of several words and phrases (especially adjectives). Jonathan, who tries to articulate the feelings that the vampires arouse in him, reiterates the word "tingling" three times within two paragraphs: "intolerable, tingling sweetness," "tingling through the nerves," and "my throat began to tingle."⁵⁴ A limited capacity to express himself belies Jonathan's focus on the sensory overload of his excited body: the words "tingling," "tickle," "shivering," and "super-sensitive" draw attention to his heightened sense of touch. As one of the female vampires begins to explore his throat, his descriptions acquire an increasingly throbbing rhythm: "lower and lower went her head," "waited—waited with beating heart," and "nearer—nearer."⁵⁵ Van Helsing is similarly entranced by the "swaying round forms" and "tingling tones." While he stands in front of the opened coffins, looking at the unconscious female vampires, he cannot resist musing on the "voluptuous" beauties that awaken "the very instinct of man" in him.⁵⁶ His chants, "search, and search" and "delay, and delay, and delay," as well as his repeated use of the words "voluptuous" and "fascination," suggest that Van Helsing is becoming hypnotized by a rhythm that counteracts his pure, earnest intentions.⁵⁷ The reiterations of these words by the two characters suggest that the passages gesture towards generic erotic scripts by conjuring sexually charged rhythms.

The descriptions of the vampires in the text are colour-coded blood-red, which adds to the visceral tone of the scenes. Viktor Sage, the only *Dracula* scholar who has written on the relation between this text and Victorian pornography⁵⁸ (albeit with a psychoanalytic bent), suggests the novel is built around three scenes of "sado-masochistic sexual fantasy, two of them oral and one phallic."⁵⁹ He overstates his case when he insists that colour-coding works as a euphemism—"ruby lips" always imply vagina or "crimson suggests anatomical arousal and the flow of blood to the organs"—but it is safe to say that *Dracula's* obsessive focus on vampires' "red lips," "scarlet lips," "lips ... crimson with fresh blood," "lovely, blood-stained mouth," "opened red lips," "full lips," and "parted red lips" connects it with the imagery typical of erotic texts: seduction begins with "I kissed her ruby lips" in "Sub-umbra, or Sport Among the She Noodles," while "the blushing face turned to a still deeper crimson as the dart of love slowly entered the outworks of her virginity" in "Lady Pokingham, or They All Do It."⁶⁰ The most fas-

cinating thing about Stoker's descriptions of vampiric sensuality, however, is not simply the fact that he uses clichés from erotic literature—it is the fact that he uses the same words and phrases to describe the thoughts of three completely different characters (Jonathan Harker, Dr. Seward, and Dr. Van Helsing), thus blatantly going against the logic of character differentiation and development. Not only is the word “voluptuous” repeatedly uttered by all three men,⁶¹ but they use the same simile to describe the titillating presence of vampiric females: Jonathan notes that the women's laughter was “like the intolerable, tingling sweetness of water-glasses when played on by a cunning hand”; Dr. Seward, who has not at this point read Jonathan's diary, observes that there was something “diabolically sweet” about Lucy, which was like “the tingling of glasses when struck”; and Dr. Van Helsing, who has read Jonathan's description, simply repeats the already-familiar phrase about the “sweet tingling tones” and “intolerable sweetness of the water-glasses.”⁶² A similar metaphor is also used in pornographic texts such as *The Lustful Turk*, where orgasm is described as “those exquisite vibrations that trembled on the strings of delight.”⁶³ Stoker's writing in the scenes that feature the female vampires is replete with metaphors but, as the examples cited so far prove, these metaphors are markedly ineffective. While these figures of speech are generally supposed to link two disparate objects for the purposes of increasing one's “command over reality,” they achieve quite the opposite effect in Stoker's narrative: vague and overused as they are, they, like metaphors in erotica, “de-elaborate the verbal structure and the distinctions upon which it is built.”⁶⁴

Indeed, Steven Marcus describes the language of Victorian pornography as a depository of “formulaic gesturings” and “interchangeable adjectives.”⁶⁵ Jonathan's “languorous ecstasy” can be replaced with Van Helsing's “yearning” and “sweet fascination,” or with the “voluptuous delight” expressed in *The Lustful Turk*, or with the “unspeakable bliss” enjoyed in *The Delights of Love* without any loss of meaning.⁶⁶ What such repetitive, vague, and “dead” pornographic language suggests, Marcus observes, is that pornography “moves ideally away from language,” seeking to demonstrate something beyond language itself, namely sex:

[A]lthough a pornographic novel is by necessity a written work, it exists less in its language than any other kind of literature.... Language is for pornography a bothersome necessity; its function is to set going a series of non-verbal images of fantasies—and if it could dispense with words it would.... Pornography has only one intention. On this side, then, pornog-

raphy falls into the same category as such simpler forms of literary utterance as propaganda and advertising. It aims to move us in the direction of action.⁶⁷

Dracula's descriptions of vampiric women, therefore, are points of verbal stagnancy that belie the text's strategic commodification of sex: distanced by Eastern European vampirism and contained by insistent expressions of patriarchal ideology, the erotic clichés of *Dracula* nevertheless titillate its readers, many of whom have already been conditioned into quick response by direct or indirect knowledge of erotic lingo and tropes. In this sense, Stoker's text, like many Victorian advertisements, reassures the reader with its loud declarations of traditional ideology, while stroking them in just the right places.

§ § §

Dracula is a commercial product that has, consciously or not, absorbed the contrary impulses of a particular cultural moment in which the rise of advertising and the concomitant elaboration of "sex-sells" tactics intersected in various ways with the conventional Victorian ideologies of gender, class, and race. As the text elaborates both its sex appeal and its reactionary arguments by formulating various models of femininity and female sexuality (the vampiric nymphomaniac, the addicted female consumer, the virtuous damsel in distress), it is an especially useful instrument for those who wish to study the intersections between gender constructs and the rise of consumer culture. *Dracula* provides its readers with a view of the tumultuous conditions in which the Angel in the House was challenged by more profitable models of active female sexuality. While such commodification of sex did generate what Victorians perceived as subversive erotic energies, advertising also reaffirmed women's connection to home by emphasizing their homemaker roles; increased their financial dependence on men who supplied them with money to purchase novelties; and provided a means by which women's desires and identities could be further molded and policed. More active representations of femininity should not therefore be interpreted as some sort of liberation from "Victorian repression"; rather, they should be read as strategies of surveillance and normalization by which the bourgeois society increasingly sought to control sexuality so as to "ensure populations, to reproduce labor capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations."⁶⁸

In considering why readers today obsessively discuss *Dracula's* eroticism we should address the text's inherent sexual tensions as much

as the nature of contemporary society. That recent scholars read Jonathan's relationship with Dracula as homoerotic, the staking of Lucy as a gang rape, or Mina's encounter with Dracula as implying fellatio suggests a desire to locate and classify types of sexually polymorphous desires or aberrations. Such a reading would agree with Foucault's theory that the twentieth century featured not a liberation of sex from Victorian "repression," but only a loosening of rules by which to speak about it, as well as a further development of the Victorian tendency to study and discuss it. By treating sex as a mystery that needs to be discussed, probed, and, of course, traded, we are in reality simply a loosertongued, more classification-savvy version of the Victorians.

To read Stoker's *Dracula* by focusing on its strategic and often contrary representations of sex (especially female sexuality) is to understand how this novel managed to pass the censorship laws of its time and yet catalyzed erotic energies throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Well designed for exciting and fairly easy consumption, it has successfully disseminated itself (somewhat like a ravenous, yet seductive vampire), spurring numerous adaptations on stage and in film, and inspiring a long-lasting cultural fascination with the vampire figure.⁶⁹ One thing is certain: *Dracula's* sexiness is a living and multiplying thing, and one is as likely to ignore it as Lucy Westenra was likely to resist the Count's nocturnal beckonings.

Notes

1. Elizabeth Miller, *Bram Stoker's Dracula: A Documentary Journey Into the Vampire Country and the Dracula Phenomenon* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2009), 274. The quote from Stoker's letter to William Gladstone, 24 May 1897, is cited in Miller's work; there are no published volumes of Stoker's collected correspondence. Selections of Stoker's letters have been published in Miller's text and in biographies.

2. Barbara Belford, *Bram Stoker: A Biography of the Author of 'Dracula'* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1996), 9.

3. See Christopher Bentley, "The Monster in the Bedroom: Sexual Symbolism in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," *Psychology and Literature*, 22 (1972), 27–34; Phyllis A. Roth, "Suddenly Sexual Women in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," in *Dracula: Bram Stoker*, Glennis Byron, ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 411–21; Victor Sage, "Dracula and the Codes of Victorian Pornography," in *Dracula: Insemination–Dissemination*, Dominique Sipièrè, ed. (Amiens: University of Picardie Press, 1996), 31–47; and Christopher Craft, "Kiss Me With Those Red Lips: Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," in *Dracula: Bram Stoker*, 93–118.

4. Bentley, "The Monster in the Bedroom: Sexual Symbolism in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," 27.

5. Miller, *Bram Stoker's Dracula: A Documentary Journey Into the Vampire Country and the Dracula Phenomenon*, 259–67.

6. *Ibid.*, 125.

7. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Robert Hurley, trans. (New York: Random House, 1978), I: 17–18. “The affirmation of a sexuality that has never been more rigorously subjugated than during the age of hypocritical, bustling, and responsible bourgeoisie is coupled with the grandiloquence of a discourse purporting to reveal the truth about sex, modify its economy within reality, subvert the law that governs it, and change its future.... Without question, new rules of propriety screened out some words: there was a policing of statements.... But more important was the multiplication of discourses concerning sex in the field of exercise of power itself: an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more.”
8. Michael Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 172.
9. This novel clearly invites postcolonial readings. The burgeoning global commodity culture in Victorian society made foreign products and peoples a part of everyday life in London. Fears of miscegenation and racial decline are reflected in the monstrously potent sexuality of the foreign Other. See Joseph McLaughlin, *Writing the Urban Jungle: Reading Empire in London from Doyle to Eliot* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 16–17.
10. See Valerie Pedlar, “*Dracula*: A *Fin-de-Siècle* Fantasy,” in *The Nineteenth-Century Novel: Identities*, Dennis Walder, ed. (London: Routledge, 2001), 196–216. As Pedlar suggests, “Stoker was writing at a time when the explicit discussion of sex still offended public sensibilities, but in writing a fantasy he was able to encode ideas, fears and desires (consciously or unconsciously), in a way that made them more acceptable to the general reading public” (207).
11. Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality*, 127.
12. David Punter, “Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*: Tradition, Technology, Modernity,” in *Post/Modern Dracula*, Jon S. Bak, ed. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 31–44, 34.
13. General Gordon’s defeat by Islamic fundamentalists at Khartoum in 1885 instigated fears of rebellion, while the rising power of Germany and the United States threatened Britain’s imperialist ventures. See Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Penguin Group, 1990).
14. The Married Women’s Property Act, 1882; The Guardianship of Infants Act, 1886.
15. Lori Anne Loeb, *Consuming Angels: Advertising and Victorian Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3.
16. “Between 1850 and 1880 a combination of factors—new techniques of illustration, the recognition of an expanding middle-class market, the rise of the press, the abolition of the advertising duty, and the professionalization of technical and creative assistance—produced an unparalleled advertising craze” (Loeb, *Consuming Angels*, 5). Loeb also records that by the 1880s, for example, Pears’ Soap spent £30,000 to £40,000 annually on advertising, while a real-life adventure hero and American Civil War veteran, H. M. Stanley, became a household name after he posed in ads for Victor Vaisser’s Congo Soap, Edgerton Tents, and U. K. Tea (11, 80).
17. See Ellen Bruber Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). Many ads tried to attract both male and female agents to sell flower seeds (137). Magazines such as *Ladies’ Home Journal*, on the other hand, ran editorials and stories that disparaged women’s suffrage, while using the New Woman figure to advertise the “new,” modern carpet sweeper (154–55).
18. Loeb, *Consuming Angels*, 78.
19. See Kristina Aikens, “Battling Addictions in *Dracula*,” *Gothic Studies*, 11.2 (2009), 41–51.
20. Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990). Richards records the prevalence of sexual overtones in late-Victorian advertising: the scantily clad, sensuous figure of the “Seaside Girl,” he notes, preponderates in the advertisements of Beecham Pills, Edward’s Harlene for the Hair, Clearer’s Terebene Soap, Cadbury’s Cocoa, Chicester Brand Potted Meats, Y & N Diagonism Seam Corsets, and Betham’s Ointments (232). Also see Loeb, *Consuming Angels*, 78.
21. See Loeb, *Consuming Angels*, 68. Also see Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*, 5. The facets of “English” ideology sold by ads ranged from “the national identity embodied in the monarchy to the imperial expansion taking place in Africa, from the many diseases threatening the national health to the many boundaries separating classes and genders” (Richards, 5).
22. See Montgomery H. Hyde, *A History of Pornography* (London: Heinemann, 1964), 212.

23. Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Hareford: Hay Editions Limited, 1994), 72.
24. *Ibid.*, 71.
25. *Ibid.*, 90, 61.
26. *Ibid.*, 305.
27. *Ibid.*, 55.
28. *Ibid.*, 43, 167, 354. My italics.
29. As Leah Richards notes, manifold paper was “an early type of carbon paper.” See “Mass Production and the Spread of Information in *Dracula*: ‘Proofs of So Wild a Story,’” *ELT*, 52.4 (2009), 441–45.
30. Stoker, *Dracula*, 219.
31. *Ibid.*, 241.
32. *Ibid.*, 256–67.
33. Richards, “Mass Production and the Spread of Information in *Dracula*,” 441–45.
34. Stoker, *Dracula*, 377. In chapter 22 the men pledge to “raise the veil of sorrow from the head of her whom, each in his own way [they] loved” (296); in chapter 25, amid repeated expressions of devotion, the men pledge to save Mina’s soul by killing her if she turns into a vampire; subsequently, in chapter 26, Mina speaks about the bravery and earnestness of men.
35. *Ibid.*, 371.
36. *Ibid.*, 41, 40.
37. *Ibid.*, 160.
38. *Ibid.*, 210.
39. *Ibid.*, 41, 176.
40. *Ibid.*, 213, 210.
41. *Ibid.*, 184.
42. *Ibid.*, 38, 184.
43. *Ibid.*, 39, 40, 160, 210, 213, 365, 368.
44. Examples of nondated Victorian erotic texts include: *The Confessions of a Lady’s Maid, or Bou-doir Intrigue: Disclosing Many Startling Scenes and Voluptuous Incidents etc.* (n. d.); *The Amours of a Quaker; or, the Voluptuary* (n. d.); *The Voluptuarian Museum: or, History of Sir Henry Loveall* (n. d.); and *The Wedding Night; or, Battles of Venus, a Voluptuous Disclosure, etc.* (n. d.). See Hyde, *History of Pornography*; Peter Mendes, *Clandestine Erotic Fiction in English 1800–1930: A Bibliographical Study* (Hants: Scholar Press, 1993); Colette Colligan, *The Traffic in Obscenity from Byron to Beard-sley: Sexuality and Exoticism in Nineteenth-Century Print Culture* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006); Henry Spencer Ashbee, *Forbidden Books of the Victorians: Henry Spencer Ashbee’s Bibliographies of Erotica*, Peter Fryer, ed. (London: The Odyssey Press, 1970); and *The Pearl: A Journal of Voluptuous Readings: The Underground Magazine of Victorian England*, 1.3 (1880).
45. “Sub-umbra, or Sport Among the She Noodles,” *The Pearl: A Journal of Voluptuous Readings*, 2–6, 2.
46. Ashbee, *Forbidden Books of the Victorians*, 99. Ashbee does not provide important bibliographical details for many of the works he lists. *Fanny Greeley*, written by George Thompson, was published in New York by Henry S. G. Smith and Co.
47. Quoted in Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1964), 226. Although an oft-quoted study of Victorian pornography and sexuality, Marcus’s text provides no bibliographical information for the erotic works that he analyzes and quotes.
48. Stoker, *Dracula*, 40.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*, 39.
51. *Ibid.*, 40.

52. Ibid.
53. Ibid., 280.
54. Ibid., 40.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid., 368.
57. Ibid., 365, 367.
58. Although Michael Gamer provides a general discussion of how the Gothic relates to pornography in his "Genres for the Prosecution: Pornography and the Gothic," *PMLA*, 117.5 (1999), 1043–54, he does not discuss late-nineteenth-century texts.
59. Sage, "Dracula and the Codes of Victorian Pornography," 31.
60. Ibid., 35; Stoker, *Dracula*, 40, 210, 211, 215, 281, 286, 367; "Sub-umbra, or Sport Among the She Noodles," 1; "Lady Pokingham, or They All Do It," *The Pearl: A Journal of Voluptuous Readings*, 93–98, 95.
61. Stoker, *Dracula*. Jonathan in chapter 3; Dr. Seward in chapter 25; and Van Helsing in chapter 27.
62. Ibid., 40, 210, 365.
63. Marcus, *The Other Victorians*, 214.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid., 279.
66. Stoker, *Dracula*, 41, 368; Marcus, *The Other Victorians*, 207; Ashbee, *Forbidden Books of the Victorians*, 87.
67. Marcus, *The Other Victorians*, 208, 278.
68. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 37.
69. Beginning with the German silent cinema masterpiece *Nosferatu* (1922), Stoker's text has been relentlessly adapted. Observe the current frenzy surrounding the *Twilight* series of films/novels and television shows such as *True Blood* and *Vampire Diaries*.

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