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"Unconscious Cerebration" and the Happy Ending of Dracula

Cover Page Footnote

John Greenway has recently retired from the University of Kentucky. This article expands the paper he gave at the 2002 International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts.

“Unconscious Cerebration” and the Happy Ending of *Dracula*

John Greenway

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The clever Dr Seward introduces this odd term while ruminating about the experiment of his “zoophagous” patient Renfield. Renfield, recall, has been ingesting animal life of increasing complexity, from flies to spiders to birds and now begs for a cat. “What would have been his later steps?” Seward wonders, “It would almost be worth while to complete the experiment. It might be done if there were only a sufficient cause.” “I must not think too much of this,” he continues, “or I may be tempted; a good cause might turn the scale with me, for may not I too be of an exceptional brain, congenitally?”¹

Seward’s Nietzschean flirtation echoes a motif expressed throughout the novel that gives us a perspective on vampirism as metaphor. I suggest that Seward’s expressed interest in “unconscious cerebration” extends beyond the doctor’s meditations to create irony to the novel’s superficial sentimentality and to the ending’s sweet tableau. Furthermore, the motif gives a complexity to relationships among the various characters and their world that they, and perhaps even Stoker himself, cannot acknowledge. Animated by the interplay of fear and desire, the characters begin trains of thought and for varying reasons become unwilling or unable to complete the “cerebration,” lest, I suggest, it destabilize the assumptions governing their social and ethical compass. For instance, Renfield’s completed experiment in aggregate metabolisms would end with Dracula, and Seward would have to realize that we are not at the top of the food chain: Dracula is.

He would also have to look at his relationship to Lucy, but we will do this for him. We will look at the explicit expressions of “unconscious cerebration” in the relationships between Seward and Lucy, Harker and Mina, then speculate as to the effect of the motif upon the characters’ underlying motivations. In this sense, I use the medical term to continue David Seed’s contention that “each partial and individual account is based on the general principle that the recorder’s capacity to analyze lags well behind the circumstantial detail recorded” (70). By shifting the emphasis from repressed sexuality in the novel to the larger context of atavistic behavior, I also elaborate upon Carol Senf’s contention that “the face of the vampire is the hidden side of the human character” (168).

Seward takes the idea of “unconscious cerebration” from Dr William Carpenter, who popularized the term. Throughout his writings, he focused on the relationship of the will to the reflex responses of the mind and body, with speculations on the relationship between mind and

¹ Wolf 95. Subsequent citations are from this edition. The full passage, to be referenced throughout this article, is as follows (my italics): “11 p.m. I gave Renfield a strong opiate tonight, enough to make even him sleep, and took away his pocketbook to look at it. *The thought that has been buzzing about my brain lately is complete*, and the theory proved. My *homicidal maniac* is of a peculiar kind. 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, and he has laid himself out to achieve it in a cumulative way. He gave many flies to one spider and many spiders to one bird, and then wanted a cat to eat the many birds. *What would have been his later steps? It would almost be worth while to complete the experiment.* It might be done if there were only a *sufficient cause*. Men sneered at *vivisection*, and yet look at its results today! Why not advance science in its most difficult and vital aspect, the knowledge of the brain? Had I even the secret of one such mind, did I hold the key to the fancy of even one lunatic, I might advance my own branch of science to a pitch compared with which Burdon-Sanderson’s physiology or Ferrier’s brain knowledge would be as nothing. *If only there were a sufficient cause! I must not think too much of this, or I may be tempted.* A good cause might turn the scale with me, for may not I too be of an exceptional brain, congenitally? Oh, *Lucy, Lucy*, I cannot be angry with you, nor can I be angry with my friend whose happiness is yours, but I must only wait on hopeless and work. Work! Work! *If I could have as strong a cause as my poor mad friend there, a good, unselfish cause to make me work, that would be indeed happiness.*”

body. By the 1855 edition of *Principles of Human Physiology* Carpenter had abandoned materialism in favor of Laycock's concept of unconscious mental reflex. By 1874, Carpenter had added research and conjectures on mind/body relationships, expanding the material still further into *Principles of Mental Physiology* (Taylor 62). In *Principles of Mental Physiology*, Carpenter notes that the unconscious mind can produce logical conclusions "*below the plane* of consciousness, either during profound sleep, or while the attention is wholly engrossed by some entirely different train of thought" (Carpenter 516).

"When we have been *trying to recollect* some name, phrase, occurrence, &c," Carpenter continues, "it will often occur *spontaneously* a little while afterwards, suddenly flashing (as it were) into our consciousness, either when we are thinking of something altogether different, or on awaking out of profound sleep" (519; italics Carpenter's). Other commentators on "unconscious cerebration" such as Frances Power Cobbe and Henry Holland described a "double consciousness" (perhaps a better term for us). Mentioning that the "unconscious cerebration" process seems to work through a chain of apparently unrelated associations (527), Carpenter notes that often the question will "*settle itself*" (532; italics Carpenter's).

Carpenter's notions of the physiology of the unconscious may be relevant to Stoker's novel in that he connects mental action with physiology by asserting "how close is the dependence of the normal action of the Brain upon an adequate supply of pure Blood" (676). This connection may be a coincidence; the characters do exhibit what Carpenter called "moral insanity," however, and the blood is not, to put it mildly, "pure." "Moral insanity," Carpenter continues, can come from an "altered character of the blood" (658), eventually becoming "a poisonous agent in the blood" (659). Carpenter repeatedly observes that irritability and anger characterize "moral insanity," which he defines as a "deficiency of volitional control over the current of thought and feeling" (658).

We will return to Carpenter's conjectures on the unconscious during our discussion of *Dracula*, for as William Hughes has observed, the "physiological model of mental habituation has penetrated the fabric of the novel" (147). In pointing out parallels, I do not wish to assert a causal relationship, but the questions the narrative raises, such as that of Renfield's experiment, "settle themselves" only through creating an ambivalence in the reader toward the novel's expressed moral vision. Carpenter's thought helps us to understand this.

Turning from Carpenter to the novel, let us note initially that Dracula catalyzes anger as well as lust in all the characters: while "voluptuous" appears twelve times in the novel, so does "fury"; add to that "rage" (five) and "anger" (three) and we see that "blood" in the novel goes beyond lurid gothic eroticism into medical discourse of pathological behavior. Let us look more closely at the relationships among the characters, to each other and to themselves in the context of uncompleted thoughts and repressed anger.

Seward, who believes that "Surely there must be some rational explanation of all these mysterious things" (249), has a fear/desire relation to Renfield, a relationship that goes beyond the clinical. He senses that he and his patient have a great deal in common, though he cannot afford to admit it. Seward finds Renfield's experiment, for instance, simultaneously appalling and fascinating: "There is method in his madness, and the rudimentary idea in my mind is growing. It will be a whole idea soon, and then, oh, unconscious cerebration!" (92-93).

Though he wonders at the "later steps," he does not complete the thought, and we can understand why: Renfield's experiment, if completed, leads to Dracula and a realization that he, not we, are at the top of the food chain. Seward tempts Renfield with a cat (142), saying "I wish I could fathom his mind" (152); he still can't figure out why Renfield's desire for a cat has something to do with his trying to "tear my throat out with his teeth" (300). He suspects that there is a "story" somewhere, but not until Chapter 20 do the pieces come together and, to his horror, one of his problems "solves itself": Dracula is real (325).

But Seward does not fully realize *how* Dracula is real, for to work through the relationship between him and his patient would involve dangerous introspection into his own motives. If Seward were to allow his "unconscious cerebration" to work on his own thought-processes, he

would find that he is not as noble as everybody thinks. On the official level, he has a physician's theoretical admiration for the virulently controversial research program of vivisection, saying "Men sneered at vivisection, and yet look at its results to-day!" and mentions the work of David Ferrier, who had literally done cutting-edge research on cerebral locations in the brain.

Ferrier provides an interesting perspective on Doctor Seward's relationship to Renfield. In "Dr Ferrier on the Brain," Appendix 1 to the fifth edition of *Mental Physiology*, Carpenter describes Ferrier's vivisection work at the West Riding Lunatic Asylum in 1873. Ferrier reports that after withdrawal of chloroform in animals during surgery, brain-activity resumed when they were refreshed (710). Like Renfield, Ferrier worked up from rabbit to cat to dog to monkey. Paralleling Seward's musings, Carpenter then wonders what would happen "if we could stimulate those centres by Electricity" (719).

Seward is aware that this program is controversial, even notorious, and on one level distances himself from it. But Seward resembles Ferrier more than Carpenter in his treatment of his patient. Like the Count, he's a closet vivisectionist. Carpenter admonishes the physician to "ward off sources of mental disturbance, and to divert the current of thought and feeling from a morbid into a healthful channel," and to "sedulously watch for every opportunity of fostering the power of self-control" (674-75). Seward begins an awareness that "In my manner of doing it there was, I now see, something of cruelty. I seemed to wish to keep him to the point of his madness -- a thing which I avoid with the patients as I would the mouth of hell" (80), but Seward baits Renfield. Later in the novel he rationalizes badgering Renfield by saying that he must "be cruel only to be kind" (323). This involves turning Renfield over with a spinal injury (329) and assisting in a cranial operation upon him without anesthesia.

Seward fears Renfield's sanity more than his madness, and for good reason. Seward suspects that he's not that different from Renfield, saying, "I am beginning to wonder if my long habit of life among the insane is beginning to tell upon my own brain" (174). Externally, they both keep notebooks, of course, but on a deeper level Seward begins another fear-driven thought which the sentence does not complete: "my friend is just a little too sane at present to make it safe to probe him too deep with questions. He might begin to think, and then!" (274). With Renfield unconscious, Seward begins to voice his fear, though he gives it no content: "I dreaded the words Renfield might speak. I was positively afraid to think; but the conviction of what was coming was on me" (331). When others comment on how sane Renfield was with Mina, Seward "seemed to answer them both in a dreamy kind of way" (300) much as Carpenter describes the somnambulist reverie.

Rather than follow through on his relation to Renfield, Seward uses his status to support his denial. When Renfield begins to sound saner to Mina than he does, rather than look at the relationship as Carpenter would, he terminates it abruptly: "I thought it was now time to end the scene, which was becoming too comically grave, so I went towards the door, simply saying, 'Come, my friends, we have work to do. Goodnight'" (297). Seward's unconscious, however, goes beyond Renfield, for early on he begins a thought: "If only I could have as strong a cause as my poor mad friend there -- a good, unselfish cause to make me work - that would be indeed happiness" (96). Note Seward's protective digression here: ironically, he'll get his wish with Lucy by finding a "sufficient cause" to complete the experiment.

As a rejected suitor, Seward has a more complex relation to Lucy than he does to Renfield, again based on fear and desire, but I see a point of tangency. With Renfield, he is a closet vivisectionist, experimenting upon his patient in a way that, in theory, even he finds appalling. Lucy notes that Seward "has a curious habit of looking one straight in the face, as if trying to read one's thoughts. He tries this on very much with me, but I flatter myself he has got a tough nut to crack. I know that from my glass" (73). This says as much about her as it does about Seward, and we will return to this point, but he does sense she's a "curious psychological study" before either of them knows of Dracula.

As we have seen, Seward's a bit of a "curious study" himself. He masks his fascination and fear of Renfield and his rejection by Lucy by "Work! Work!" rather than thought. "Oh, Lucy, Lucy, I cannot be angry with you," he writes, "nor can I be angry with my friend whose happiness is yours; but I must only wait on hopeless and work." To arrive at that noble if mawkish resolution, Seward's associations in this passage go from Carpenter to Renfield, to vivisection via David Ferrier, to himself, and end with Lucy. Seward will find the "sufficient cause" for his own experiment.

So one might wonder at the depths of Seward's sentimental self-pity. Recall the suggestion of his vivisectionist relationship to Renfield; it applies to Lucy as well. At their first meeting, Lucy notices that when Seward "wanted to appear at ease he kept playing with a lancet." Stage props usually reveal character. If you think of this as a stage prop, as Stoker would likely have done, this bizarre visual tic anticipates Lucy's later decapitation -- she says it "made me nearly scream" -- and Seward's "savage delight" in participating. He expresses initial reluctance to raid Lucy's tomb, but with a revealing simile: to violate Lucy's tomb would be "as much an affront to the dead as it would have been to have stripped off her clothing in her sleep whilst living." But note his observations as he prepares for his beloved's decapitation: "To me, a doctor's preparations for work of any kind are stimulating and bracing, but the effect of these things on both Arthur and Quincey was to cause them a sort of consternation."² Seward, "with savage delight," found his "sufficient cause," though he cannot admit it.

Many commentators have pointed out the sexual nature of Lucy's vampirism, but her vampirism is more complex than that. Obviously, she's not as "sweet" as the other characters think she is, but as with Seward, she has cause for repressed anger as well. Here vampirism engages the idea of negative evolution: atavism. In our context, it is interesting that the characters, through Mina, are willing to apply Cesare Lombroso's then-current theories of criminal behavior to understand the Count's vampirism, but not to Lucy's. Lombroso asserted that criminal behavior expressed evolutionary regression -- atavism -- and supported his conjectures with cranial measurements.

Fontana has pointed out the similarities between the description of the Count and that of the "born criminal" in Lombroso's *Criminal Man* (1876), but the Lombrosan details apply to Lucy as well. Had they looked at the "bloofer lady" through the same lens as they do the Count, as Lombroso looked at *The Female Offender* in 1895, they would know that

When piety and maternal sentiments are wanting, and in their place are strong passions and intensely erotic tendencies ... for the conception and execution of evil, it is clear that the innocuous semi-criminal present in the normal woman must be transformed into a born criminal more terrible than any man ... the criminal woman is consequently a monster. (151)

Mina, who brings Lombroso into the analysis in the first place, alone knows of Lucy's desire to marry three men. She won't, however, go farther and realize that

Nymphomania transforms the most timid girl into a shameless bacchante. She tries to attract every man she sees, displaying sometime violence, and sometime the most refined coquetry. She often suffers from intense thirst, a dry mouth, a fetid breath, and a tendency to bite everybody she meets, as if affected with hydrophobia... (Lombroso 296)

² He sounds here rather like Claude Bernard, who became notorious among the anti-vivisectionists by insisting that the experimenter on living humans must not express compassion, for in the name of Science, "no surgeon is stopped by the most moving cries and sobs, because he sees only his idea and the purpose of his operation" (Bernard 103).

One wonders if Lucy is (to use Van Helsing's term) as "predestinate to crime" as the Count.³ After all, Stoker gives us reason to infer that the Count does not cause anything Lucy was not predisposed to do. We know that Lucy, "curious psychological study" that she is, had a history of sleepwalking before the Count entered the story: twice we are told she inherited the trait from her father (96, 147). While Carpenter discusses insanity as a fixation on a "dominant idea," Seward notes about Lucy that "there is an odd concentration about her" (98).

As did Seward, Lucy has a self-imposed prohibition against expressing atavistic ideas. When she writes to Mina that "Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?" she breaks off the thought by saying "But this is heresy, and I must not say it" (78). Van Helsing, however, will complete the idea for her by realizing the erotic implications of the transfusions in his hysterical "King Laugh" speech, when he says that not only was Lucy a polyandrist, but he is a bigamist (219). So Lucy got what she wanted.

The by-then obsolete technique used for the transfusions, the active male donor to passive female recipient, does serve to hint at the motives the characters repress.⁴ Seward's transfusion to his would-be fiancée leaves him feeling "faint and a little sick" (166). Van Helsing predictably cautions silence, lest Arthur feel fear and anger: "if our young lover should turn up unexpected, as before, no word to him. It would at once frighten him and enjealous him, too" (166). But the other characters share this traditional, qualitative view as well: Lucy "turns crimson" when her mother says Seward needs a wife and a nurse (167); Seward, realizing the transfusion's erotic import, "laid a finger on my lips" in response to Lucy's tacit imploring. When Arthur talks about transfusion after Lucy's death, saying that he felt since then as if they had been really married and that she was his wife in the sight of God, Seward "could see Van Helsing's face grow white and purple by turns" (217). In other words, others had hints of Lucy's metaphoric polyandry (78). Predictably, they vow to remain silent.

Quincey continues this chain of thought. When he realizes that Lucy has the blood of "four strong men" in her, he "whispers" the question none have dared ask: "What took it out?" (193). To complete the thought, however, would involve the same psychological danger that Renfield's experiment posed for Seward.

For another unvoiced "heresy," consider Lucy's relationship to her mother, who makes her, first, economically vulnerable by leaving all her property to Arthur, knowing that this act "might leave her daughter either penniless or not so free as she should be to act regarding a matrimonial alliance." Her mother (inadvertently, we would like to think) leaves her vulnerable to the Count by removing the garlic flowers from her room, later from Lucy's neck; and dies of a stroke in her arms. Though all the characters blither about Lucy, she has no authority over her own life, privacy or personal effects, as the narrative shows us through her friend Mina's revelations about her. As an ironic note, sentiment dictates she'll be buried next to her mother, while Arthur for some reason has the key to the tomb.

"Moral insanity," according to Carpenter, "is particularly common among females of naturally 'quick temper,' who, by not placing an habitual restraint upon them selves, gradually cease to retain any command over it" (663). One could also see Lucy's metamorphosis into the "bloofer lady" as a rebellion against wife/mother role she's destined for. She preys upon children and attempts to seduce an all-too-willing Arthur not out of love, but for power. Unlike Mina, whose anger will take a different route, Lucy enjoys vampirism as a kind of liberation. As Van Helsing

³ Lombroso also notes "Anomalous teeth" in 78% of prostitutes, vs 2% in "normals" (*Female Offender* 81).

⁴ With all Stoker's injection of up-to-date technology in the narrative, the doctors' view of transfusion is obsolete. By the time of the novel, doctors in general had ceased to view transfusions in qualitative terms, but not Stoker's doctors. Kim Pelis describes Stoker's depiction of transfusions as being "a strange twist of vitalistic and revitalizing beliefs with gender assumptions and medical practice" (344). Van Helsing, for instance, evaluates Arthur's fitness in moral terms: "He is so young and strong and full of blood so pure that we need not defibrinate it" (160).

realizes, she gets her wish for polyandry, and she loses the anemic look. As a vampire, she exhibits "rage" until restored, the men believe, to her "natural" state of "sweetness."

Lucy does feel a "vague fear," which then becomes a "dread thought," but avoids realization by rationalizing that what is happening to her is a dream ("this weakness comes to me in sleep," (162). Still, she manipulates Seward into leaving her alone. Even when asleep, her unconscious governs her actions: "As I came close, she put up her hand in her sleep and pulled the collar of her nightdress close around her throat" (123).

Let us reread Lucy's first meeting with Seward as an insight into her "unconscious cerebration." Remember her comment that "when he wanted to appear at ease he kept playing with a lancet in a way that made me nearly scream," but one wonders, as a parallel foreshadowing, what sort of scream a director would have her give. In terms of the working of "unconscious cerebration" in the novel, a director could motivate her, just as with Seward, by her repressed fear and anger as well as her sexuality.

If Lombroso's observations on the atavistic nature of criminal behavior apply to Lucy as well as the Count, in a certain sense they apply to the men as well. As Elizabeth Miller points out, all the men break social and professional norms to deal with the Count (36): Seward falsifies death certificates, Arthur uses his nobility to mask a daylight breaking-and-entering on Piccadilly Circus, Counselor Harker suggests the break-in and becomes angry at Dracula's agent when he will not divulge confidential information. However noble the motives of the men (as doctor, lawyer, aristocrat and adventurer they form an emblem of the Victorian male establishment) Seward, Harker, Arthur and Quincey all deal with Dracula by becoming like him, as Van Helsing fears.

More tellingly, the men fall into rage. Arthur, for instance, preys upon Lucy when she is helpless, as Dracula does, perhaps with a submotive of revenge; Senf observes that "this kind of violent attack on a helpless victim is precisely the kind of behavior which condemns Dracula in the narrators' eyes" ("Unseen face" 167). The phallic innuendo of Arthur's staking and Lucy's writhing has long been obvious, but not the anger. Van Helsing had sensed the erotic qualities of the transfusions, suggesting silence lest they "enjealous" Arthur. One could wonder: Seward transfers his "savage delight" into a vivisection at her decapitation; Harker and Quincey viciously dispatch the Count at the end with Kukri [Ghurka] and Bowie knives, exotic weapons of the Eastern and Western frontiers. So perhaps Arthur takes his turn, albeit with not as subtle an image as Seward's lancet.

Let us take a little more time with Harker, who becomes in a way a double of Dracula, his competition for Mina. As with Seward, he fears madness as his world erodes, opting to work rather than think about the implications of what is happening. After the incident with Mina and the Count, he says that "I must do something or go mad." A director could make a strong case for revenge being Harker's motive rather than the official one of duty, given the Count's seduction of his wife who "did not want to hinder him"; note that Mina "shrieked" when Harker whacks at him with his Kukri knife; as with Lucy's "scream," one could read this reaction on several levels. The dispatch of Dracula does not even follow the rules Van Helsing has elucidated; it is rather a berserk assault. But nobody comments upon this, except perhaps Mina with her shriek.

Mina does not get the erotically suspect transfusions from men, but vampirism expresses itself differently in her than in Lucy: her intelligence increases to the point of being able to outwit Dracula, something the men have been unable to do. Van Helsing speaks of her "man's brain," which speaks to her evolution if we remember that contemporary medical manuals saw women as unevolved males (Lansbury 417). Yet she has some repressed resentments as well. First, she notices that she does not have Lucy's latent sensuality. Without any overt resentment, Mina writes that the Whitby men paid no notice to her but "did not lose any time in coming up and sitting near her [Lucy] when we sat down" (87). She does not follow that thought out, and officially repudiates

the brazen qualities of the “New Woman” (Senf, “Stoker’s Response” 36). But her vampiric power takes a different, more subtle form, although it still could express anger.

On the surface Mina only wants to be “useful” to, first, her husband then to the male collective, but her emerging intelligence controls the men in a less lurid manner than Lucy’s sexuality. Her idea of using hypnotism comes through “unconscious cerebration”: “I suppose it must have come in the night and matured without my knowing it” (369), but she then “bustles off to get tea” for the men.

Let us return to our speculations on “unconscious cerebration” by recalling her “shriek” when Harker’s enormous knife shears through Dracula’s throat. We have conjectured that Harker’s motives here might be less noble than the narrators announce. Though Mina’s vampirism expresses itself in intelligence, one could understand Mina’s physical involvement with the Count as revenge for Harker’s infidelity with the Draculettes, who call her “sister.” Before she reads Harker’s journal she says to Lucy that “I felt a thrill of joy through me when I *knew* that no other woman was a cause of trouble” (138). When she is with Van Helsing at the circle, one could read some ambiguity when she says, “Let us go to meet my husband who is, I know, coming towards us” (438), for Dracula saw the lurid scene in her room as a consummated marriage, much as Arthur had regarded the morally ambiguous transfusion with Lucy. One could wonder which “husband” she anticipates.

If Lucy got her atavistic wish for Lombrosan polyandry, Mina bonds more subtly. While her intellect lets her control the plot and the sources for the narrative, she also becomes a receiver of men’s emotions, not as an object of desire. She mothers Arthur and Quincey in their grief, and has a curious, intellectually flirtatious relationship with Van Helsing, beginning with her teasing him about Harker’s journal being in shorthand. She not only takes over through her intellect, but also creates the text we read through synthesizing the various media of communication. If Lucy gets the men’s blood, Mina gets all their names in her son.

So as a conclusion let us complete our own chain of thought by drawing these conjectures together. On one level, we are led to believe that the crew saves the sentimental Victorian world through typewriting, technology and the group’s crusading moral solidarity. But the plot evolves through inhibition, fear of hurting Lucy, embarrassing Arthur, provoking Jonathan, or frightening Mina (who is not of “fainting disposition” anyway). All the males violate professional and social conventions, and Quincey’s prudish reluctance to break in on Mina’s fellatio with the Count -- “May it not frighten her terribly? It is unusual to break into a lady’s room!” (336) -- must have struck even contemporary readers as comic, under the circumstances.

The characters all profess “love” in the sentimental terms that assume “chaste” and “pure” as natural states. But love in the novel’s vampiric catalyst craves power or revenge, not affection, as Dracula makes clear: “Your girls that you all love are mine already; and through them you and others shall yet be mine -- my creature, to do my bidding and to be my jackals when I want to feed” (367) This power in turn comes from anger: recall that “fury,” “rage” and “anger” appear more often than does “voluptuous,” and we have an index to the subcurrent interplay of sexuality and anger in the novel. We have seen that Harker, Lucy, Arthur, Seward and Mina all have cause for repressed anger, while the Count embodies “malignity, anger, hellish rage” (364).

In the “King Laugh” speech, Van Helsing knows the moral insanity of world, extending beyond the erotic implications of transfusion (219). Van Helsing has lost a son, and is married to a madwoman (219). “My life,” he says, “is a barren and lonely one” (229). The “smileless mouth” he uses to describe “King Laugh” (218) suggests death. As William Hughes points out, many of the characters verge on or engage clinical hysteria: a result, I suggest, of this threat to their ontological base for living. Van Helsing’s laughter seems on the edge of this, but laughter in the remainder of the novel is a function of Dracula. The Draculettes laugh at their incipient conquest of their willing victim; Mina only laughs with her “sisters,” the vampires (434).

Although the characters flirt with madness, they survive through denial. Although the crew knows that Dracula has a eugenics program in mind to beget “a new order of beings” (360), they narrow the conflict to a quest to save Mina. This shrinking of fear allows them to avoid realizing

not only that the atavistic Count asserts the primacy of a prior stage of evolution, but that he may be the future of evolution. Although several commentators have suggested the Christian allegories in the novel, Van Helsing follows the ontological status of Dracula to its conclusion, suspecting that the world might be otherwise than the characters believe. When Mrs Westenra removes flowers from Lucy's neck, Van Helsing wonders "Is there fate amongst us still, sent down from the pagan world of old, that such things must be, and in such way?" (175). Although the characters invoke "God" one hundred seventy-eight times, against Dracula (and what he symbolizes) only "superstition" works. Van Helsing uses the Host not as a Sacrament, which he is not allowed to do (Wolf 255, n.2), but on the animistic level of Voodoo.

So I can only read the bland epilogue (Harker's "Note" at the end, 444-45) as an exercise in irony. The characters have learned nothing from their ordeal, and they do not want to. If at the beginning of the story, readers may excuse Harker in dismissing the threat to his world as "superstition," his wife remains equally obtuse at the end. After all she has been through, and all the information she has collated, she belittles the Transylvanians' crossing themselves by saying "They are *very, very* superstitious" (427). Even knowing -- having created -- Lucy's story, she asserts that "I can't abide garlic" (428), and her puzzling blaming of herself for her vampirism she continues by calling herself "unclean to His eyes" (429). But this makes sense if on one level she's processing her ambiguous relationship to Jonathan.

I suggest that the appeal in the novel lies in the very absence of the Count's direct voice: he does not need one. He is a catalyst, not a force, activating an atavism we deny in ourselves. As such, he lets us become what we fear. In the story, we, like Seward, only see what we're willing to see, but the Count forces us into unsettling trains of thoughts we fear to complete. We don't see him in the mirror because we think he doesn't exist; in that case, the joke of Van Helsing's "King Laugh" is on us.

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