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Demonizing the Emerging Woman: Misrepresented Morality in *Dracula* and *God's Little Acre*

Ashley Craig Lancaster

In Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Erskine Caldwell's *God's Little Acre*, vampirism and southern literature converge at the relationship between the nineteenth-century New Woman and the poor-white southern woman. Stoker reveals a pattern of male aversion towards women attempting to assert themselves both in the home and in the workplace. Just as Stoker presents self-sufficient women as parasitical and immoral, Caldwell also attempts to diminish the identity and the necessity of poor-white women in southern society. The negative versions of these women make them seem like the objectified source of society's decay in each of their respective time periods. Furthermore, the failure of both texts to recognize these women as positive contributors to their communities becomes clear through the women's interaction with other characters and with the impressions that they leave with others. As a representative of the New Woman, Mina Murray does "shock" the male vampire hunters "with [her] appetite" for knowledge (Stoker 118), and Ty Ty, Caldwell's dominant male figure, cannot help but admit, as his sons continue to die before him, that "[t]he good Lord blessed" him with girls he "[doesn't] deserve" (Caldwell 207). Although Stoker and Caldwell overwhelmingly present their female characters' weaknesses and cruelty, the women's strengths and importance in the community override the intended negative impact that these characterizations should impose.

Stoker's examination of the New Woman's role through his female characters acts as a response to the historical impact that women were beginning to have during the late-nineteenth century. The New Woman helped to change the idea of the feminine roles in the workplace, in the home, and in male-female relationships. The New Woman desired a more valuable role in society's workforce. Sally Ledger in "The New Woman and the Crisis of Victorianism" comments that "[a] substantial number of women were indeed actively involved in the labour movement of the late nineteenth century" (39). These ambitious women wanted to become active because they no longer could continue existing as men's possessions. Although critics of the New Woman did not support this surge of women in the workplace, they had more disturbing problems to deal with as a result of the sexual freedom that also came with this movement. Some female writers such as Millicent Garrett Fawcett denied the sexual revolution occurring during this time (Ledger 33); however, the New Woman's sexual ideology did seem to concur with the "Wildean [...] sexual candor" (25). Regardless of whether these women became noted as sexually pure or sexually free, the general notion of the New Woman had become that she would destroy the race and, in turn, become "breeders of 'monsters'" (30-31). The belief that the moral decay of society was being led by the New Woman developed because English society began to realize that these women no longer focused solely on motherhood. Her thoughts had now divided between work, sexuality, and the home life to which she formerly devoted herself completely. English society had to deal with the change in its female population and had to deal with how this change affected the dominant gender roles and the future of their society.

Poor-white women of the American South encountered many of the same difficulties as the New Woman despite the different geographical setting. In the nineteenth century, working in the textile mills in the South gave women the opportunity to earn their own money and to

become a viable factor in society's workforce. When a textile mill entered a town, women had a better opportunity to obtain a stable position than men because mill overseers paid women "60 percent" less than men's wages (Hall 67). Usually widows and young, unmarried women took this low paying factory employment because they simply had no other choice. Supporting themselves without the help of a man had become a necessity for them rather than a choice, especially for the widow women who had multiple children to protect. However, some married women actually chose to work at the mill because they felt unfulfilled by keeping the house and taking care of the children. By working at the textile mill, these women tried to break the traditional expectations that had dominated female existence; however, they still continued to work the jobs that required feminine qualities because the mill overseers did not think that the women had the physical strength or mental ability to do jobs that required durability. Young women with no families to support had the freedom to spend their money on "short sheathlike dresses, sheer silk stockings, and shiny waved hair" (Hall 254). Enjoying a freedom that they had not previously experienced, they began to drink alcohol, to dance, and to cause a panic among the still mainly conservative mill towns, and just as the Victorian New Woman gained sexual freedom, mill women also began to feel that, despite coming from impoverished backgrounds, they too had sexual freedom because they not only had the means by which to express their freedom but also had the chance to come into contact with men that they previously would not have met. Upper-class citizens kept the women from voicing their complaints because they argued that these poor women had poisoned their towns with "sexual misbehavior" (Hall 219). Even though society wanted to stifle the textile mill women's freedom, these women still enjoyed a sense of sexual independence as they crossed lifestyle and marriage boundaries; however, stereotypes still prevailed as they continued to exist in a society that often saw them only as poverty-stricken, working "hillbillies" (qtd. in Hall 380).

Both Stoker and Caldwell present their female characters negatively, making them seem responsible for the immorality not only of themselves but of others. Lucy Westenra in *Dracula* exhibits the most controversial traits of both groups because she exudes a high amount of sexual energy even before she becomes a vampire. Despite Lucy's engagement to Arthur Holmwood, her letters reveal her inability to commit to loving just one man as society expects her to do. In her first letter to Mina Murray, Lucy declares her "love" for Dr. Jack Seward. Later, she refuses both Seward's and Quincey Morris' marriage proposals, but still struggles with hurting each man and even kisses Quincey before she leaves. Even after she chooses to marry Arthur, Lucy once again professes, rather flagrantly, her "love" for another man, Dr. Abraham Van Helsing. Alexandra Warwick has deemed Lucy's whimsical loves as a "willingness to be possessed by those that want her" (205); however, although Lucy chooses which of her loves will become her husband, she seems unwilling to relinquish her right to love each man, regardless of how shallow or deep those feelings may seem. Stoker has presented Lucy as a woman who not only loves multiple men but who also has symbolically (through blood transfusions) had sexual relations with each man. This John Donne approach to sex and marriage makes Lucy appear to the male characters who know the secret of the blood transfusions as merely a punch line to their sexual jokes. Van Helsing comments about Lucy as he laughs saying, "[T]his so sweet maid is a polyandrist" (227). However, this implies that Lucy is "married" to the "good" men of the novel and also to the "evil" represented by Dracula. Dracula, like Arthur, Seward, Van Helsing, and Quincey, has shared blood with Lucy. As a result, Lucy has become a tainted victim marred by her inconclusive love and her literal and metaphoric sexuality.

After becoming a vampire, Lucy arouses an even greater sense of immorality through her sexuality and also through her cruelty to children. Before Lucy becomes an Un-dead vampire, she possesses a beauty that three men fail to withstand, but after she enters into the world of the Un-dead, her beauty grows more outstanding than before: "She was, if possible, more radiantly beautiful than ever; and I could not believe that she was dead" (257-58). While asleep, Lucy possesses the same beauty she has always had; however, making the complete change into a vampire, she has lost the weakness and the emotional trappings that have plagued her last few days as a human. With this resurgence of strength and beauty, Lucy has become more powerful and, as a result, more dangerous. Now, Lucy does not just want to love each man; instead, she manipulates their love for her to get them to submit as her next victims. When Arthur witnesses her transformation into a vampire for the first time, Lucy utilizes his attraction to her saying, "Leave these others and come to me. My arms are hungry for you [...] Come, my husband, come!" (272). However, Lucy wants to feed off his blood rather than love him, but she knows that Arthur longs for her and the marriage they never get to have. Just as Lucy becomes more like the New Woman through her dangerous sexuality, she also emerges as a treacherous mother figure because of her choice of victims, once again aligning herself with the immoral New Woman. Once Lucy dies, reports from children suggest that a woman they refer to as "The 'Bloofer Lady'" has begun to attack children, leaving her child victims "weak [...] and] emaciated" (230). The men reveal Lucy as the child stalker when they find her holding a child "strenuously to her breast, growling over it as a dog growls over a bone" (271). Warwick comments about how Lucy has committed a role reversal here because she "draw[s] nourishment" from the child rather than the natural mother-child relationship (212). By attacking children, Lucy personifies the worst possible characteristic of the New Woman, the destructive abandonment of the nurturing role.

In Caldwell's *God's Little Acre*, Darling Jill and Griselda share many of the same parasitical characteristics as Lucy, making them metaphorical vampires in their southern household. Darling Jill, like Lucy, does not readily refuse her possible suitors, but she, instead, manages to control men through her sexuality and her openness to sexual activity. Her first sexual offense comes through her relationship with her father Ty Ty because he applauds Darling Jill's promiscuous lifestyle when he learns of her sexual appetite by saying, "Darling Jill is the baby of the family, and she's coming along at last. I sure am glad to hear that" (16). Later, when Darling Jill has sex with Dave the albino man, Ty Ty watches from a distance and never feels as though he has acted inappropriately. As a result of her free sexual lifestyle, Darling Jill has aroused even her father, making him impure and incestuous. Although Ty Ty's behavior could have stopped Darling Jill from having sexual relations with men, she has chosen to transform her sexuality into a control mechanism. She betrays Rosamond by climbing into Will's bed and seducing him, and as she teases Dave, Darling Jill makes Dave admit that he prefers her to his actual wife. Of all the men that Darling Jill has sex with, she refuses sexual advances by Pluto; however, she only denies him sex because she knows that, no matter whom she sleeps with, she still maintains complete command of Pluto because he wants to marry her. Constantly, she torments Pluto by making him believe that she actually has an interest in him. Even after Darling Jill sleeps with Will, she manages to keep Pluto interested in her by allowing him to touch her naked body and to kiss her. Even though Darling Jill fills her life with deviant sexuality and the necessity to control men, she remains sterile. Just as the New Women of England and of the South have chosen not to become mothers, Darling Jill also never becomes one; however, her lack of children seems less like a choice than the result of the fact that she completely disregards

the consequences of her sexual actions. Unlike her models, she seems sterile both mentally and physically of mothering qualities, making her seem completely useless and immoral in society. She has become the poor-white southern vampire destroying the men without having the ability to replenish the race with children.

The sexual identity of Griselda supports Caldwell's identification of the sexual deviance of poor-white Southern women both in the textile mills and in the family unit. Before Will, Griselda's brother-in-law, rebels against the mill managers by turning on the mill's power, he manifests his strength and courage by transforming Griselda's body into pure beauty and by coveting her purity. Studying Griselda's body, Will tells her, "I'm going to look at you like God intended for you to be seen. I'm going to rip every piece of those [clothes] off of you in a minute [...] And I'm going to lick you, Griselda" (153, 157). Will enacts his plans to overthrow the power of the mill by destroying her clothes and revealing her natural beauty. Even their sexual activity suggests that Griselda dominates because Will performs sexual acts on her meant solely for her pleasure. Edward Wagenknecht says that Will "gains [...] power from his use of [Griselda]" (160-161); however, when he tries to exert this power that he thinks he has gained from Griselda onto the mill, he gets killed (41). Griselda's sexuality gives Will a false sense of security and invincibility. Jim Leslie, her other brother-in-law, also becomes a victim of Griselda's beauty when he gets so overwhelmed by her that he attempts to attack her when the family visits his house; later, he feels as though he must have her and returns to the farm to carry her forcibly back with him to the city no matter what: "Come out of that corner before I drag you out, Griselda" (202). Determined to have Griselda, a beautiful and uncorrupted woman not like his wife, a sexually diseased woman, Jim Leslie resorts to violence that ultimately leads to his death. Buck, Griselda's husband, shoots Jim Leslie, his brother, and then, Buck kills himself because he has destroyed his family and because he knows that his wife has cheated on him with Will, his sister Rosamond's husband. Griselda's sexual power destroys her husband's family and, essentially, causes the deaths of three men. Like Lucy and Darling Jill, Griselda also represents society's physical and moral decay.

Despite all of the negative stereotypes that Stoker and Caldwell associate with Lucy, Darling Jill, and Griselda, each woman does not fulfill the role of the oversexed vampire and menace to society with which she has become burdened. Stoker creates through Lucy the image of a sexually deviant woman who seems unwilling or unable to commit completely to one man, especially when she says, "Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?" (81). Warwick indicates that this passage "has usually been read as indicating a dangerous (masculine) sexual independence" (205); however, she actually reads this as Lucy's "passivity" (205). Both of these conclusions neglect the fact that Lucy does choose one specific man, Arthur. Nonetheless, Lucy asserts her independence sufficiently by acknowledging that, although she has chosen a man for her husband, she does not have to deny the reality that she has had feelings for each man at some point. Darling Jill and Griselda assert themselves in a similar way as Lucy does. Although they, like Lucy, become branded as too sexualized and murderers of men and the family structure, both Darling Jill and Griselda manage to remain friends both with each other and with Rosamond, revealing that the destructive accusations against them do not hold firm. Darling Jill wants to regain her sexual independence, and does so, as a way of escaping the incestuous overtures of her father Ty Ty. Griselda desires respect for herself and her body and only receives it by denying it to disrespectful men and by dominating those men that do respect her. However, while the men destroy themselves refusing to accept the change in these women, Darling Jill, Griselda, and even Rosamond, remain united, depending

upon and loving one another. Lucy, Darling Jill, and Griselda fail to fulfill the role of the parasitic vampire because their efforts to accept themselves make them strong women rather than immoral women.

Dracula's other female victim, Mina, also has characteristics associated with the New Woman and the poor-white woman; however, unlike Lucy, Darling Jill, and Griselda, Mina does not become a sexual example of womanhood and vampirism but, instead, becomes an example of how females have begun to blur the roles commonly associated with males and females, by working hard and completely giving herself to the task at hand. Although Mina and Jonathan live a middle-class lifestyle, Mina remains dedicated to doing secretarial type work both for her husband and the other vampire hunters. She knows shorthand, keeps track of train schedules, and even transcribes the personal diaries of the hunters to make their investigation of Dracula easier. Even though Mina enjoys performing these tasks, she seemingly lowers herself socially by doing them because women of her stature usually do not work. However, the other men that she works for act amazed about her work initiative, and when Seward tries to read her shorthand, he becomes embarrassed because he fails to have the capability to do so. Ken Gelder in *Reading the Vampire* acknowledges that Mina's hard work and uncommon technological ability surpasses "Harker's archaic fantasy of blushing women" (81), but regardless of how much Mina works and tries to raise her knowledge, she always remains devoted to her husband Jonathan. While talking with the vampire hunters about their plans to attack Dracula, Mina feels a mothering force towards Jonathan rather than fear for her own life. Sitting with Jonathan, Mina says, "I feared, oh so much, that the appalling nature of our danger was overcoming him" (305). Once again, Mina focuses on the safety of others rather than on the danger possibly awaiting her. Like the New Woman and the poor-white women of the nineteenth century, Mina desires a substantial role in the workplace but also wants to maintain a presence as a calming, motherly figure in the household.

Despite Mina's efforts to increase her own self-knowledge and her knowledge of the male hunters, Stoker presents her as a victim in need of saving by making her a conquest of Dracula and by lowering her in stature to those with whom she has worked to protect. As Dracula begins to victimize Mina, she becomes more like Lucy and the New Woman because her sexuality and desire increase. The vampire hunters actually witness Mina drinking blood from Dracula's chest: "Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man's bare breast" (363). Just as Mina's "white" gown has become stained, her purity has also diminished, compelling Mina to declare herself "unclean" as she instructs herself to "touch [Jonathan] or kiss him no more" (366). Even Mina no longer trusts her own personal desire because she too has noticed her sexual change. But although Mina has started to become a vampire, she still wants to assist her husband and the other vampire hunters by allowing them to hypnotize her so that they may learn Dracula's whereabouts. This knowledge does prove useful to the hunters; however, Van Helsing still at times fears her because, as the hypnotist, he realizes that each piece of information Mina gives them connects her even more with the evil of Dracula. While Van Helsing protects her at the end of the novel, he also wants to protect himself from Mina if necessary because "the red scar on her forehead" reminds him of her underlying evil (472). Later, when the men converge onto Dracula and kill him, she never receives any credit for her role in his defeat. Instead, she praises the hunters for saving her from the terrible fate of the Un-dead: "[Quincey] must have seen the anguish of my heart in my face, for he smiled at me and said: - 'I am only too happy to have been of any service!'" (485). Her efforts seemingly do not compare to the men's work because she needs them to survive Dracula's attempt to ruin her.

After Mina becomes a victim of Dracula, she no longer exists as a New Woman searching for personal knowledge because, now, she needs men to save her and to restore her back to submissive femininity.

Rosamond from *God's Little Acre* faces many of the same struggles as Mina because Rosamond also acts as the mothering figure to a family that fails to acknowledge her importance. As soon as Caldwell introduces the Walden family, the fact that the mother does not exist becomes relevant; however, throughout the novel, Rosamond proves herself as the surrogate mother to this dysfunctional family that abuses her love for them. Although Darling Jill and Griselda confront hardships as they struggle for control of their lives, Rosamond has the most difficult challenge of all the women because she must maintain a sisterhood with the other females in her family despite their affairs with Will. First, Darling Jill betrays Rosamond when she has sex with Will after Rosamond leaves the house. Even though Rosamond attacks Darling Jill with a hairbrush when she discovers her in bed with Will, Rosamond later “[throws] herself upon the bed, hugging Darling Jill in her arms and bursting into tears once more. They both lay there consoling one another” (61). Then, when Griselda has sex with Will, both Rosamond and Darling Jill help Griselda to find new clothes, and after they put clothes on Griselda, all three of the women cook breakfast together. Despite the grief that Darling Jill and Griselda cause Rosamond, Rosamond keeps the women of her family united. Rosamond makes sure that, regardless of their differences, she and the other women continue to help and support one another. Along with remaining devoted to the women in her family, Rosamond also remains devoted to her husband Will despite his obvious extramarital affairs. After she shoots at Will for sleeping with Darling Jill and he runs away, Rosamond welcomes him back home with love: “She jumped up and ran down the steps to meet him, throwing her arms around his neck and kissing him frantically” (67). Even though Rosamond knows that her family, including her husband, shows disrespect towards her, she continues to give them unconditional love, much like a mother does with her children and like Mina does with her husband and the vampire hunters.

However, no matter how much support Rosamond shows to her sisters, Caldwell portrays her as generally unsupportive of the men in her family. Although her father Ty Ty and her brothers dream of finding gold on their land, Rosamond does not share the same enthusiasm that this dream will happen. Actually, she seems more like the dissenter of the family because not only does she marry a man who does not want to work on a farm and help them dig for gold but she also does not want to help them. She even tells Darling Jill when they come to bring her and Will back to the farm, “The Waldens are worse than the darkies, always expecting to find gold somewhere” (46). Her inability to trust their direction makes her seem, to her brothers and her father, as if she dislikes her family and, subsequently, has no use for them. Along with seeming not to respect her family, Rosamond, in Will’s opinion, does not respect him and his male right to act as the head of the household. Whatever he wants to do or say, Will thinks that she should let him do it, and in fact, her unconditional affection for Will makes her seem weak and completely dependent upon him for emotional support, just as Mina appears after she gets bitten by Dracula. When Will goes to the mill to take it over, she looks to him as her savior and as the one person who will protect her and their town: “Rosamond’s heart beat madly [...] She wished to climb up high above the mass of crying women and shout that Will Thompson was her husband. She wished to have all the people there know that Will Thompson was her Will” (170-71). Despite all that he has done to her and how badly he has treated her, Rosamond still needs Will to make her seem important and to act as her hero. Just as Mina seems weak and dependent,

Rosamond also appears to fall away from the strong poor-white female image that she seems to have in her relationships with the female members of her family.

Mina and Rosamond, however, do not actually fulfill the powerless roles that Stoker and Caldwell assign to them. Although Stoker and Caldwell make Mina and Rosamond seem weak as compared to their male counterparts, both women prove themselves to have the strength to support themselves; however, these strengths become systematically downgraded by the authors and their male characters. The destruction of Dracula by the men makes the men seem like the saviors of the novel, but Mina actually leads them in the direction of Dracula both before and after her infection. Her manuscripts give the men the evidence they need to find and destroy Dracula. Michael J. Dennison refers to Mina as “the organizing intelligence of this narrative of disorder” because “[h]er typewriter [...] transcribes” all of the other characters’ notes (84). In fact, she only becomes a mute member of the team when they decide to withhold information from her. Van Helsing even tells her, “When we part tonight, you no more question [...] We are men, and are able to bear” (311). Despite the strength that Van Helsing says they have, they even fail to protect Mina, a woman living in the same house as the other hunters. Only after she returns to the inner circle and begins to discuss what must occur to destroy Dracula does the task actually get fulfilled. Unlike Mina who does not depend upon the men as much as the end of Dracula suggests, Rosamond seems to need Will and love him deeply regardless of how he treats her. However, after Will’s death, Rosamond reveals her courage and her love for all of her family, including the men, when she returns home to the farm. Not only does she protect herself, Darling Jill, and Griselda from Jim Leslie’s dangerous advances but also, after Buck shoots Jim Leslie, Rosamond consoles Jim Leslie in his last minutes. She holds his hand until his final breath, as “his mother[,]” Ty Ty says, would have done (204). Even though the men in her family never trust her and fail to protect her from Will’s cruelty, she still comforts them and supports them as the mother figure that they have never had. Although Mina and Rosamond may seem at times parasitic and unworthy of the men in their lives, both women emerge as strong and compassionate people who want to help the ones they love, no matter what.

Stoker and Caldwell, although disconnected by time and subject matter, both attempt to categorize the emerging women of their time periods as immoral and detrimental to their society’s future. However, as these male authors reveal their cases against their literal and metaphorical vampire women, Stoker and Caldwell also reveal the personal strengths and morality that these women supposedly lack. Instead of uncovering the immorality of the New Women of England and of the South, Stoker and Caldwell uncover the male animosity towards these women’s emergence in society and, subsequently, the female triumph in the women’s decision to overturn the typically female-oriented roles in society.

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