

2005

"Betwixt Sunset and Sunrise": Liminality in Dracula

Mark M. Hennelly Jr.
California State University, Sacramento

Follow this and additional works at: <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/dracula-studies>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), and the [Film and Media Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hennelly, Mark M. Jr. (2005) "'Betwixt Sunset and Sunrise": Liminality in Dracula," *Journal of Dracula Studies*: Vol. 7: No. 1, Article 2.

DOI: 10.70013/31p7q8r9

Available at: <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/dracula-studies/vol7/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Research Commons at Kutztown University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Dracula Studies by an authorized editor of Research Commons at Kutztown University. For more information, please contact czerny@kutztown.edu.

"Betwixt Sunset and Sunrise": Liminality in Dracula

Cover Page Footnote

Mark M. Hennelly, Jr., a Professor of English at California State University, Sacramento, has published fairly widely on Victorian fiction, including several liminal readings of Dracula.

“Betwixt Sunset and Sunrise”: Liminality in *Dracula*

Mark M. Hennelly, Jr.

[Mark M. Hennelly, Jr., a Professor of English at California State University, Sacramento, has published fairly widely on Victorian fiction, including several liminal readings of *Dracula*.]

In various ways, among widely different primitive peoples, the marriage customs go to show that the home threshold cannot be passed except by overcoming a barrier of some kind, and making an offering, bloody or bloodless, at this primal family altar. (H. Clay Trumbull, *The Threshold Covenant* 35)

“Welcome to my house! Enter freely and of your own will!” [The Count] made no motion of stepping to meet me, but stood like a statue, as though his gesture of welcome had fixed him into stone. The instant, however, that I had stepped over the threshold [of Castle Dracula], he moved impulsively forward. (Bram Stoker, *Dracula* 2:25-26)

[T]he door is the boundary between the foreign and domestic worlds in the case of an ordinary dwelling, between the profane and the sacred worlds in the case of a temple. Therefore to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world. (Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* 20)

When Van Helsing instructs the occidental vampire hunters about the gnostic powers of the Count in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), he also announces the primary liminal premise of the occult: no demon can “enter anywhere at first, unless there be some one of the household who bid him to come; though afterwards he can come as he please” (18:308). In other words, an “evil” spirit cannot cross a threshold unless first invited by an indweller, just as *Dracula* understands above that no “innocent” outdweller can be forced unwillingly to cross a demon’s threshold. Each must voluntarily and chiasmically “unite oneself with a new world” as Stoker’s contemporary Arnold van Gennep puts it – that is, accept the other in what another contemporary, H. Clay Trumbull, calls “the covenant of union” or Janusian exchange, if not liminal self-extension

and discovery. Such an insight significantly challenges past anthropological readings of *Dracula*, like Kathleen Spencer’s relevant analysis of “rituals of cleansing,” which finds the novel questioning but ultimately “reaffirm[ing]” the “crumbling boundaries between certain key categories”: “what is inside is good, what is outside is bad: The group boundary is therefore a source of magical danger and the main definer of rights: you are either a member or a stranger” (218, 207).

Again, when Van Helsing chants “In manus tuas, Domine!” while “crossing himself as he passed over the threshold” (19:321) of the Count’s English estate at Carfax, his speech act performatively reinforces the ritualistic significance of liminal crossings in the text. Since Carfax etymologically signifies that “the house is four-sided, agreeing with the cardinal points of the compass” (2:35), it also recalls da Vinci’s celebrated “Canon of Proportions” drawing with its mandalaesque cruciform, in which the nude male suggestively links the four “cardinal points of the compass” with the crucified Christ, the new Adam who sacrificed himself to save the world and thereby “allowed” the vampire hunters in *Dracula* to “go out as the old knights of the Cross to redeem more” souls (24:412). The ideally proportioned human limbs or somatic thresholds of da Vinci’s figure further suggest the boundless spiritual potential of Everyman and woman, old Adam and Eve who have enjoyed “the taste of the original apple” (14:236), while “the cardinal points of the compass” liminally figure the *urbs quadrata* or ancient ground plan of quaternary wholeness whose cityscape or cultural spacing replicates the unbounded possibilities of life, besides the harmony of the spheres.

In “*Dracula’s Guest*,” believed by some to have been a dropped early chapter of the novel, Jonathan Harker even rests at the *Quatre Saisons* hotel in Munich before advancing to Castle

Dracula, implying that his rite of passage can potentially transform him into a man for all seasons. Indeed, this liminal code of crucial correspondences linking the macrocosm, mesocosm, and microcosm in *Dracula* provides comparable ways of seeing other ritualistic implications in the text. For example, the four horsemen (Harker, Morris, Godalming, and Seward) climactically “rid[e] at break-neck speed” from north and south in order to seize Dracula’s four-sided cart (cf. quatre) and unseal his coffin before sunset (27:480), suggesting the liminal value of the apocalyptic Seventh Seal, as well as dramatizing a fin de siècle version of Götterdämmerung.

Such textual possibilities seem especially relevant since the anthropologist Victor Turner, the founder of liminal theory, repeatedly posits that “Liminality is the realm of primitive hypothesis, where there is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence.” More specifically, he develops the “widely distributed initiation theme: that the human body is a microcosm of the universe” (*Forest of Symbols* 106-107), which Susan Broadhurst extends to the “retriev[al of one’s] chthonic identity,” like Dracula’s, “by direct corporeal insertion in the creative act” (170) during liminal performances. Turner further stresses that liminal initiates may confront a “company of masked and monstrous mummers representing, inter alia, the dead, or worse still, *the undead*” (my emphasis), Stoker’s early title for *Dracula*. Turner also suggestively references the seasonal “teachings of the Eleusinian” rites (*Forest* 96-97) surrounding the Great Mother Demeter – the name of the ship which transports Dracula to England – as well as William Blake’s seasonal mythology in *The Four Zoas*. The Zoas correspond to the primally recessed limbic material of the “the four brains,” including the reptilian and mammalian brains, as unveiled both in Dracula’s exploration of that “most difficult and vital aspect [of science] – the knowledge of the brain” (6:96) and, for Turner, in recent neurophysiological studies (*On the Edge of the Bush* 283-85). The point here is that Stoker’s ritualistic insights represent much more than his merely dabbling in “armchair anthropology” (259) as R.F. Foster insists.

Turner accepts the three stages of initiation rituals that van Gennep posited in *The Rites of*

Passage: the separation of (hitherto culturally constructed) neophytes from structured society; the limina or threshold experience of the ritual itself; and the reconstructed neophytes’ aggregation or return to society as adults (and now adepts in its cultural codes). “[P]rejudiced against system-building, though seduced by it” (*Bush* 206), Turner then deconstructs this fairly homogenous tripartite structure by emphasizing the destabilizing mundus inversus of liminal heterogeneity and its series of “antistructural” motifs which approximate Dracula’s own “sort of orderly disorder” (22:387). These relevantly include the threshold crossing itself, the “statuslessness” of the neophytes in ritual limbo, the ambiguous role of their guardians, the subjunctive mood or mode of the ritual, the bonding communitas shared by the neophytes, the sacra or holy symbols that prepare for their enlightenment, and finally the generative gnosis which reconstitutes the initiates and thereby renews their culture and world(view).

The liminal period “betwixt sunset and sunrise” (25:429) provides the most darkly illuminating threshold crossing in *Dracula*, though it is noteworthy that the corollary phrase “between sunrise and sunset” (20:353) is repeated much more compulsively, suggesting the Victorians’ occidental fear of the occult and uncanny when, as Turner would have it, “the past has lost its grip and the future has not yet taken definite shape” (*Blazing the Trail* 132). So many of the novel’s initiatory episodes occur while “crossing over” to a grave site that it is easy to miss the liminal significance of such ritualized entrances – not to mention the fact that the gnostic crisis often heralds an entrancing crisis in representation. Jonathan Harker, for instance, makes much of his riddling rite of passage “through the door in the corner and down the winding stair and along the dark passage to the old chapel” which housed the coffin of the ancient “monster” (4:70-71) at Castle Dracula. Mina similarly describes and then deforms her dreamy rite of passage through “the entrance of the churchyard” at Whitby where she discovers the vamped Lucy under “a bright full moon, with heavy black, driving clouds, which threw the whole scene into a fleeting diorama of light and shade” (8:121, 120). But Van Helsing’s repeated scriptural metaphor perhaps most paradoxically

sums up liminal initiations in *Dracula*: “We ... will have to pass through the bitter water before we reach the sweet” (13:221).

Such entrancing entrances not only betoken altered states of consciousness and of mimesis in the Celtic twilight, they also recall Turner’s etymological forays into the liminal: threshold “is derived from a German base which means ‘thrash’ or ‘thresh,’ a place where grain is beaten from its husk, where what has been hidden is thus manifested” (*Bush* 198). In this sense, Jonathan and Mina encounter an alterity and heterodoxy (in the Count and Lucy) at the liminal grave site, which thrashes their own bourgeois status and “secure” selfhood. In “Different Spaces,” Foucault relevantly discusses such “‘crisis heterotopias’; that is, ... privileged or sacred or forbidden places reserved for individuals who are in a state of crisis with respect to society and the human milieu in which they live” (179). These liminal spaces include “the curious heterotopia of the cemetery,” especially as connected with the Victorian “cult of the dead.” In urban graveyards, “each person began to have the right to his little box for his personal decomposition; but, further, it was only then that people began putting cemeteries at the edge of cities. In correlation with this individualization of death and the bourgeois appropriation of the cemetery, there emerged [the] obsession with death as a ‘disease’” (180-181) that appears in *Dracula*.

In “Fors,” Derrida also liminally interrogates the “heterogeneity” of death, not to question the initiate’s cultural status but to deconstruct the personal construction of any enduring sense of psychic presence: “I would say that this heterogeneity comes from heterogeneity itself, from otherness: not so much from the commonly accepted otherness of the Unconscious but, more radically, the otherness that will soon make possible the definition of the crypt as a foreigner in the Self, and especially of the heterocryptic ghost which returns from the Unconscious of the other, according to what might be called the law of another generation” (92). In other words, the home host both inherits and generates the parasitic seeds of its own encrypted demise, the vampirish “heterocryptic ghost,” and thereby becomes death’s hostage. Leopold Bloom’s belief that “The Irishman’s house is his coffin” (*Joyce* 110) consequently seems as true of post-colonial

Ireland as it is of Count Dracula. And the literally dying older generation of Lucy’s mother, Arthur’s father, and Jonathan’s paternal employer Mr. Hawkins suggests as much. Their liminal role casts them as Janusian figures whose cryptic secret is not so much that all love stories, like Demeter’s and Orpheus’s, inevitably become detective stories, but rather that all love stories ultimately generate ghost stories like those of vampires, whose “hideous bodies could only rest in sacred earth, so the holiest love was the recruiting sergeant for their ghastly ranks” (22:383). “Sunrise and sunset” may well be liminal “times of peculiar freedom” for entranced Mina “when her old self can be manifest without any controlling force subduing or restraining her” (25:423). Still, even after her sacral scar (which doubles Dracula’s) vanishes, Mina’s “old self” and absent bourgeois status have been so liminally thrashed and literally incorporated by heterogenerative vampirism that they can never again share the same self-serving presence.

It is this loss of structural selfhood and this “statuslessness” which typify the novices’ condition during liminal rituals. The vamped Lucy, like the violated Mina, repeatedly swoons “in a half-dreamy state” (8:125) and finds it increasingly difficult to resume “her old self again” (8:130), while John Seward even “feel[s] like a novice blundering through a bog in a mist” (14:249) as he tries to comprehend vampirism’s gnostic gospel. Seward undergoes this trial under the tutelage of his old mentor Van Helsing, who instructs the occidental Victorians as if they were “the ‘Ugly Duck’ of my friend Hans Andersen,” which must liminally transform into “a big swan thought that sail nobly on big wings, when the time come for him to try them.” Since Van Helsing easily transfers the mental-development metaphor to Dracula – “He is clever and cunning and resourceful; but he be not of man-stature as to brain. He be of child-brain in much” (25:438-39) – he suggests comparable if not chiasmic resemblances between Western and Eastern initiates.

As with Mina’s liminal “agony of abasement” (22:381) when she is held hostage and violated in her own bedroom by her unholy host, all of the neophytes are disempowered and deconstructed at either a spatial threshold like a doorway or a temporal threshold like a sunset. Indeed, when

Mina is vamped, Van Helsing and company significantly stand “[o]utside the Harkers’ door” (21:362). Mina’s rite of passage actually begins, though, after Lucy’s initial vamping in heterotopic Whitby cemetery when she “daubed my feet with mud ... so that as we went home no one, in case we should meet any one, should notice my bare feet” (8:122). And this act ritualistically confirms that the “neophyte may be buried, ... may be stained black.... The metaphor of dissolution is often applied to neophytes; they are allowed to go filthy and identified with the earth” (Turner. *Forest* 96). Paradoxically, though, Mina’s purpose is to preserve the propriety (the “cleanliness”) of her covered feet even while she is polluting and humbly debasing herself with mud. In one sense, this act performatively returns her to the primordial condition of clay – of Adam; in a more feminist reading of liminality, like Barbara Babcock’s, though, “mud” removes the female initiate “from man-made structures back to” the “primal matrix” (“Mud, Mirrors, and Making Up” 93) of female earth-diver myths. In either case, Van Helsing later stresses that Dracula chooses certain “earth because it has been holy” (22:383).

Besides dramatizing the initiation rites of neophytes, *Dracula* also rehearses some of the major scenes of midlife liminality, as discussed by Murray Stein, and some of the liminoid or post-liminal motifs of group pilgrimages, discussed by Turner. Stein’s *In MidLife* diagnoses the intensely disruptive but potentially redemptive “experience of psychological liminality” suffered during midlife, which becomes a transformative “crisis of the spirit. In this crisis, old selves are lost and new ones come into being” (7, 3). The mythic psychopomp or figurative “guide of the soul” here is the trickster Hermes, the “god of journeyers, of boundaries and of boundary situations,” who, like Dracula, leads followers into and through “the experience of the midlife transition and its Inferno of liminal existence” (6-7).

Seward and Van Helsing both significantly experience such midlife crises. After Lucy rejects him, the older Seward “[c]annot eat, cannot rest” and suffers “a sort of empty feeling; nothing in the world seems of sufficient importance to be worth the doing.” In fact, he identifies with Renfield’s infernal madness at “the mouth of hell” (5:82-83) and repeatedly complains of being “weary tonight and low in spirits” even in the midst of his “night

adventure[s]” (8:134, 143) with Renfield. Such “night-consciousness” recalls the midlife “liminal world of ambiguity and unclear borders.... Nighttime, then, this rich and evocative symbol of liminality, is the proper element of Hermes” (Stein 20-21). Like Seward’s, Van Helsing’s “life is [also] a barren and lonely one, and so full of work that I have not had much time for friendships ... and it has grown with my advancing years – the loneliness of my life” (14:239). Both men consequently seem as lacking in soul-saving *communitas* – as disembodied and spectral – as Dracula, whose symptomology typifies the midlife transition during which the “journeyers, or floaters, feel ghostlike, even to themselves.” “‘Ghost,’” however, “is equivalent to ‘soul,’ and in liminality the soul is awakened and released, so it happens during this transitional period a person is led by Hermes and ventures into psychological regions that are otherwise unknown, inaccessible, or forbidden.” Through the mentoring of Dracula, this is also exactly what happens to the scientists Seward and Van Helsing when they detach themselves “from the somnolent effects of psychological habits, patterns, and identifications” (Stein 136-137) and learn to practice (and not just preach) Van Helsing’s gnostic gospel of the “open mind” as they attempt to counter the Count.

The neophytes in *Dracula* can be further viewed as a group of pilgrims touring a significant series of liminal shrines or grave sites much like the Transylvanian peasants Harker sees “kneeling before a shrine ... in the self-surrender of devotion” (1:15). According to Turner and his wife and colleague Edith Turner in *Image and Pilgrimage on Christian Culture*, “Pilgrimage provides a carefully structured, highly valued route to a liminal world where the ideal is felt to be real, where the tainted social persona may be cleansed and renewed” (30). In this sense, not only is Mina’s “Unclean” and “polluted flesh” (22:381) cleansed and renewed after she shares blood with Dracula, but through a kind of ironic synecdoche or strange heteropathic magic, all her fellow palmers are likewise cured by her sacrificial incorporation of the Count (just as Lucy is temporarily cleansed with the transfused blood of the male vampire hunters). As Turner notes, “consonant with the corporate character of morality, it may not be the actual culprit who is

afflicted [in related rituals of affliction], but another member of his family, lineage, or clan, someone with whom the culprit shares bodily substance or ‘blood’” (*Pilgrimage* 12). Recalling such bloody sacrifices and exchanges, “the sacraments most closely associated with pilgrimage are the Eucharist and penance” (32) and both rituals significantly inform *Dracula*.

In fact, Mina’s bloody “martyrdom” as an Undead transforms the figurative pilgrimage into a penitential rite of passage: “it is only death on the way to or at the shrine that makes a pilgrimage a true rite of passage.... Therefore the move into liminality is here a death-birth or a birth-death” (*Trail* 29, 32). In this sense, it is also appropriate that Mina’s child is born on the anniversary of Quincey’s martyrdom and conversely apropos that Dracula sees himself as “the father or furtherer of a new order of beings, whose road must lead through Death, not Life” (23:389). Consequently, when Renfield “repeat[s] over and over again: ‘The blood is the life! The blood is the life!’” (11:184), he ironically illustrates Turner’s point that “both in initiation rites and in the pilgrimage process, the dead are conceived of as transformative agencies and as mediating between various domains normally classified as distinct” like birth and death, good and evil, or christian “faith” and pagan “superstition.” And when the captain of the Czarina Catherine “swore polyglot – very polyglot – polyglot with bloom and blood” (23:409), he likewise liminally illustrates that the text’s various heteroglossia interface the womb and the tomb. Further, (Van Helsing’s) Catholic “salvific belief and practice” – in phenomena like eucharistic transubstantiation, penitential pilgrimages, and miraculous apparitions – provide “the homologue of the liminality of major initiations in tribal religions.” And the miraculous Knock apparition (1879) of the Virgin flanked by St. Joseph, St. John the Evangelist, a lamb, a cross, and an altar, which Turner discusses in detail, was still fresh in Irish imaginations by 1897. In fact, the miracle at Knock – and its celebration of “the in-between state of life-in-death” – prompted an incredible series of pilgrimages. These eventually grew to “at least 700,000 people each year” and, like Dracula, significantly implied “that Catholic ideas about the fate of the dead ... have received most reinforcement from pre-Christian religious beliefs

on the western fringes of Europe, in the surviving haunts of the Celtic peoples” (*Trail* 35, 47, 43).

The role of liminal guardians in initiation rituals is to play tormenting mentors to their neophytes, to thrash them into a kind of prima-materia statuslessness so that the initiates can then be reconstructed as adults adept in esoteric tribal codes. “Uncleanliness” like Mina’s is actually next to liminal godliness since to be unclean is also to be boundlessly “unclear and contradictory” (Turner, *Forest* 97), that is, beyond categories and hence potentially capable of anything and everything much like the heteroglossic text of *Dracula* itself. For Turner, liminal guardians subject the initiates to “[u]ndoing, dissolution, [and] decomposition [which is] accompanied by processes of growth, transformation, and the reformulation of old elements in new patterns” (*Forest* 99). In their role as “thrashers,” though, the guardian elders also frequently perform a trickster role, or at least they paradoxically waver between helper and trickster functions – indeed, Turner posits that tricksters personify “many aspects of liminality,” particularly in their “uncertain sexual status” (“Myth” 580) like Dracula’s. Exu, the representative two-headed crossroads guardian most resembling Dracula, “is both potential savior and tempter. He is also destroyer, for in one of his modes he is Lord of the Cemetery” (Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 77). In deritualized cultures, beginning in the nineteenth-century, “solitary artist[s]” (*Theatre* 52) like Stoker himself often inherit the function of guardian trickster, which function has all but evaporated with the waning of tribal societies.

In *Dracula*, the liminal categories of neophyte and guardian mentor are themselves often ambiguously reversed. As Mina tells Lucy, “[i]t was my privilege to be your friend and guide, when you came from the schoolroom to prepare for the world of life” (9:140). The initiate Van Helsing has also been Seward’s mentor, neophyte Mina teaches etiquette and decorum, and demiurgic (necromantic) Dracula, an initiate himself, performatively educates “howling” wolves “just as the music of a great orchestra seems to leap under the bâton of the conductor” and can further “within his range, direct the elements” and “command all the meaner things” (4:69, 18:305). As the formal initiation proceeds, however, the liminal stakes are metaphysically

raised for each initiate/guardian. Van Helsing begins “teaching” his “pet student” and “novice” Seward an advanced liminal “lesson” in the “possible impossibilities” of vampiric gnosticism so that, as his initiate self-reflects, “I may apply your knowledge as you go on” (14:248-249). Both Van Helsing and Dracula also stage an hypnotic theomachia over and through Mina, while she, in turn, instructs the vampire hunters in the liminal ways and means of the dark Lord of the Cemetery. And Van Helsing emphatically recognizes and celebrates Mina’s mentoring function: “Our dear Madam Mina is once more our teacher. Her eyes have seen where we were blinded. Now we are on the track once again” (26:454).

Dracula’s ambiguous role as liminal guardian, though, seems more in the trickster vein, especially as defined by Karl Kerényi: “His nature, inimical to all boundaries, is open in every direction. He enters into the beasts, and because his own sexuality knows no bounds, he does not even observe the boundaries of sex. His inordinate phallicism cannot limit itself to one sex alone ... he cunningly contrives to become a bride and mother – for the sake of the wedding feast and also, no doubt, for the fun of it” (188). After discussing Turner, Babcock relevantly adds that the trickster is “a ‘creative negation’ who introduces death and with it all possibilities to the world” (“A Tolerated Margin of Mess” 185). In these liminal senses of trickster ontology, not only can the monstrous “Thing, which was still imprisoned [in its coffin,] ... take new freedom” at sunset and “in any of many forms elude all pursuit,” but Dracula can also provide “spiritual guidance” to Mina in her “dreams” (27:479-480, 19:333). This exchange or (con)fusion betwixt and between neophyte and guardian is obviously not restricted to overdetermined literary liminality, however, since in tribal societies some ritualized neophytes must, in fact, eventually transform into guardian elders.

During liminality, initiates are detached from structural matters of affirmation and negation, fact and coercion – the indicative and imperative moods of Stoker’s “scientific, matter-of-fact nineteenth century” (18:307). They are immersed instead in the yeabynay antistructures of the subjunctive mood “of pure possibility” (Turner, *Forest* 97), in *Dracula* the “possible impossibilities” of vampirism. There liminal

subjunctivity becomes an earthy, seminal darkness or “fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness, a storehouse of possibilities, not by any means a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structure” (Turner, *Bush* 295). In “the liminal phase in initiation rites,” such a negative capability or “via negativa” is “possibly the best approach to the problem of cracking the code of myth” (Turner, “Myth” 578) because it unleashes the limbic system of primitive emotions and instinctual survival skills. In the text, the limbic system, ambiguously figured as vampirism, countermands the commands of “Church law” (13:227), Mina’s self-styled “pedantry” of “teaching etiquette and decorum” to young “girls” (13:222), and especially Seward’s imperative need for “some rational explanation of all these mysterious things” (15:262). And just as the liminal guardian Van Helsing enigmatically answers some questions with both “Yes” and “No” (25:438), so, too, Turner often cites Jakob Boehme’s version of subjunctivity, “In Yea and Nay all things consist” (*Forest* 97).

Harker’s liberated subjunctive power at Castle Dracula allows him to defy the laws of Newtonian physics and activate the most primitively evolved reptilian brain when he imitates his liminal master by crawling up and down the Castle battlements “in his lizard fashion” (4:70, 3:49). At the same time, Renfield’s subjunctive “moods have so followed the doings of the Count” that his bipolar swings between hysteria and reason chart the advances and retreats of Dracula, who himself again represents “the full ambiguity of the subjunctive mood of culture.” Such instances liminally illustrate not only Seward’s general theory of “unconscious cerebration” (6:94), but more particularly Van Helsing’s “revolutionized therapeutics” involving, much like P. Broca’s contemporary discovery of the limbic system, a “discovery of the continuous evolution of brain-matter” (18:313). Valdine Clemens, in fact, believes it “quite likely Stoker would have been aware of Broca’s discovery in 1878 of the phylogenetically older section of the brain beneath the neocortical mantle, which he named the ‘limbic load’” (165). Further, Mina’s sacrificial *communitas* with the vamped Lucy and the nearly vamped Jonathan allows her to “love you [both] with all the moods and tenses of the verb” (12:201), thus embodying Turner’s point that

“Sacrifice often occurs in the liminal phase of the ritual, so that we may perhaps trace the grammatical mood to a cultural mood, a mode of thought to a mode of action. Ritual liminality, containing sacrifice and stressing wishes and vows, here seems to underlie a grammatical mode of framing language” (*Trail* 134). Mina’s subjunctive “grammatical mood” most dramatically demonstrates the liberating via negativa, though, only after her own (almost) undead vamping when her “mood or condition [of peculiar freedom] begins some half hour or more before actual sunrise or sunset... At first there is a sort of negative condition, as if some tie were loosened, and then ... absolute freedom quickly follows” (25:423).

One of *Dracula*’s most telling signs of liminality is its repeated focus on *communitas*, whose mutual trust collapses cultural divisions between genders, classes, and nationalities as neophytes together confront the common denominator of a dark antistructural crisis. As Mina characteristically puts it when the English, Dutchman, and American face “this dark mystery” of the “terrible monster” Dracula, “[w]e need have no secrets amongst us; working together and with absolute trust, we can surely be stronger than if some of us were in the dark” (17:286). Turner describes this rewarding “relationship of neophyte to neophyte,” especially “[d]eep friendships between novices,” their “familiarity, ease and ... mutual outspokenness” (*Forest* 100-101) as one of the most open-minded, redemptive, and long-lasting benefits of liminal initiations.

Consequently, *communitas* is also one of the most pressing needs of the Victorian and modern, deritualized, existential wasteland, where the lonely crowd “can go crazy because of *communitas*-repression; sometimes people become obsessively structural as a defense mechanism against their urgent need of *communitas*” (Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* 266). As Van Helsing (again) freely admits, “I have not had much time for friendships” (14:239). And his dark double Dracula, paradoxically bound by the antistructures of antisocial vampirism, likewise looks to Mina as “my companion and my helper” (21:370). Such liminal *communitas*, this “modality of human relatedness” (Turner, *Theatre* 45), creates

particularly crucial bonding when the westerners reunite for their ultimate journey east and final assault on Dracula. As Seward sums up their common trials, “[our] sense of companionship may have helped us” (23:396). Related to rituals of affliction, in which “ancestral shades” like Dracula must “be placated” (or somehow exorcised), these “reviving feelings of an underlying bedrock *communitas* ... , which is also vouched for by myths” (Turner, *Bush* 233), seem incidentally relevant to Victorian Ireland’s colonial status since it is so bereft of *communitas*. And yet the development of cultural *communitas* also presupposes an intrapsychic potential in *Dracula* where one’s microcosmic family of inner limbic powers corresponds to the cultural mesocosm and cosmic macrocosm. James Hillman explains such a gnostic concept: “familiarity [with one’s dream world] after some time produces in one a sense of at-homeness and at-oneness with an inner family which is nothing else than kinship and community with oneself, a deep level of what can also be called the blood soul” (241).

Turner believed that the limbic system empirically documented Jung’s collective unconscious (*Bush* 282), and Turner’s *sacra*, what the text terms the “most sacred of things” (16:270), generally correspond to Jung’s archetypes. Such sacred symbols represent “the heart of the liminal matter” and include the (bodily fluid) color combinations of “white, red, or black” and “symbolism both of androgyny and sexlessness,” besides “tombs and wombs” or wounds and wombs, mirrors and monsters, “lunar symbolism,” “snake symbolism,” and other “coincidence[s] of opposite processes and notions in a single representation” like the undead (*Forest* 102, 98-99). This “bizarre and terrifying imagery” (“Myth” 577), often “representing the journeys of the dead or the adventures of supernatural beings,” provides corresponding “multivocal symbol[s] with a fan of referents ranging from life values, ethical ideas, and social norms, to grossly physiological processes” (*Forest* 103, 107). In *Dracula*, its ultimate purpose is pedagogical, that is, to instruct the neophytes in their culture’s esoteric gnoses. As Van Helsing puts it, “[w]e shall go to make our search – if I can call it so, for it is not a search but knowing” (24:405).

Sacral color combinations specifically recur in the Count's color-coded funereal black costume, livid white skin, and ruddy red lips, which chromatic scale itself charts some of the major color transformations in gnostic alchemy, ultimately resulting in the rosy (or golden) dawn of the "aurora consurgens." (Douglas Menville, in fact, has argued "that Stoker was probably a member of a splinter group of the famous occult society, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn" [vii].) In this connection, the dreamy "blue flame," or demiurgic Pentecost, which marks the liminal boundaries of Castle Dracula, could suggest the alchemical sacra of the caelum as "unio mentalis." In *Blue Fire*, Hillman discusses this alchemical "transit from black to white via blue" (154) in a way that clarifies Dracula's gnostic correspondences and particularly Harker's initiation, heralded by the spectrally "strange optical effect" (1:21-22) of the blue flame: "The caelum does not of course take place in your head, in your mind, but your mind moves into the caelum, touches the constellations, the thick and hairy skull opens to let in more light, their light, making possible a new idea of order, a cosmological imagination whose thought accounts for the cosmos in the forms of images" (Hillman 34-35). The androgynous links between Dracula, who both penetrates and nurses, and Mina, who represents the "good combination" of a "man's brain" and "a woman's heart" (18:302), further suggest the gnostic ideal of the unus mundus. Indeed, Dr. Seward connects all the text's various sacred (crucifix, holy wafer) and profane (garlic, wild rose) "sacra" to this ideal, which figuratively approximates the collaboration within the bicameral (then "triune") brain that so intrigued Turner: "we each held ready to use our various armaments – the spiritual in the left hand, the mortal in the right" (23:391).

The violent love among the tombstone ruins at Lucy's beheading graphically dovetails wombs and tombs, but the sacral and more subtle connection between wounds and wombs is even more telling. A standard Freudian take on Dracula and Mina's double red wounds would see them as signs of male castration and the related "bloody gash" of female lack. For Turner, though, all wombs are not wounds. Rather, all sacral wounds are liminal wombs generating a new life-affirming gnosis, as Mina's wise wound does, especially

when it disappears upon Dracula's death and is thereby internalized or encrypted. Even Jonathan's figurative "old wound" from Castle Dracula must be "reopen[ed]" (17:293), liminally speaking, for him to heal. As Hillman writes of Ulysses' famous wound (like both Dionysius's and Christ's), "his woundedness is also his hidden understanding and grounding support" (91). Similarly, Harker's failure to see the Count's monstrously libidinal reflection in the sacral mirror at Castle Dracula projects an absent presence which triggers a startling and then haunting mirror stage of liminally dizzying self-repression which leads to self-reflection and self-development.

D. W. Winnicott's work on transitional objects significantly influenced Turner's liminal theory. And Winnicott's summary of this kind of fort-da interplay between the subject (and subjected) I and the transitional or sacral object helps place Harker's lengthy initiation process in a context which again challenges "realist" or "objective" conventions: "We experience life in the area of transitional phenomena, in the exciting interweave of subjectivity and objective observation, and in an area that is intermediate between the inner world of the individual and the shared reality of the world that is external to individuals" (64). We have seen how Harker's observation (and practice) of Dracula's reptilian power suggests his own subjective limbic potential. Here we might only note Harker's related connection with shapeshifting and transformative "lunar symbolism" when he observes the peculiar effect of the moonlight on the terrified ring of wolves near Castle Dracula – and then its equally "strange and uncanny" saturnine effect on him as "a heavy cloud passed across the face of the moon, so that we were again in darkness" (1:22-23). Once more, the neophyte's identity is deconstructed to "fruitful darkness" (*Forest* 110) so that it can be reconstructed during the enlightening liminal phase, which begins at Castle Dracula.

Such lunar (and paired solar) "outward and visible sign[s]" (9:139) later liminally influence other neophytes like Seward when he wonders whether "there is a malign influence of the sun at periods which affects certain natures – as at times the moon does others?" (9:153). Renfield analogously compares Dracula's trickster

shapeshifting to the way “the Moon herself has often come in through the tiniest crack, and has stood before me in all her size and splendour” (21:360). And the represented “terror of the vault” at Lucy’s crypt more specifically reflects how lunar symbolism assumes liminal (and alchemical) proportions: “the passing gleams of the moonlight between the scudding clouds crossing and passing – like the gladness and sorrow of a man’s life” lead ultimately to the “humanizing ... red lighting of the sky beyond the hill” (16:269). Again, such sacral reflections document and demonstrate the redemptive power of discovering correspondences between the macrocosm, mesocosm, and microcosm: “During the liminal period, neophytes are alternately forced and encouraged to think about their society, their cosmos, and the powers that generate and sustain them.” Sacral monsters like Dracula (with his lunar, lupine, and reptilian avatars) particularly shatter the complacency of a structured worldview and “startle neophytes into thinking about objects, persons, relationships, and features of their environment they have hitherto taken for granted” (*Forest* 105).

Therefore, sacra lead ultimately to esoteric knowledge (a word significantly repeated throughout *Dracula*) or gnosis, specifically the “knowledge of that terrible Being” (17:284) and all that his vampirism liminally represents. The (self-) discovery of such gnosis heralds “a return to the deep sources of psychosomatic experience in a legitimized situation of freedom from cultural restraints and social classifications” (Turner, “Myth” 581). Initiates like Jonathan and Mina learn the limitations of cultural categories such as nation, race, religion, class, gender, and self -- indeed, as that knowing madman Renfield puts it, “conventional forms are unfitting” in dealing with limbic “evolution” (18:313). Subsequently, initiates also learn to transcend such categories during their liminal debasement: “the human cultural order is a kind of painted veil over a deeper, superhuman order, the mysteries of which begin to be accessible only to those who have been stripped during initiation of profane status and profane rank” (“Myth” 581). I have previously discussed the novel as cultural “allegory of rival epistemologies in quest of a gnosis which will rehabilitate the Victorian wasteland; and this rehabilitation demands a

transfusion, the metaphor is inevitable, from the blood-knowledge of Dracula” (Hennelly 79-80). My point here is that the “gnostic quest” in *Dracula* more specifically develops as a liminal rite of passage.

Van Helsing’s gospel of the “absolutely open mind,” for example, leads to gnostic “views [that] are as wide as his all embracing sympathy” (9:147-148) or cooperative communitas. His gnosticism especially includes ancestral arcana, “the lore and experience of the ancients” regarding “the powers of the Un-Dead” (16:275). Consequently, as liminal guardian, Van Helsing tells Seward that their Victorian science is “no good ... to human knowledge”; and “there are things that you know not, but that you shall know, and bless me for knowing, though they are not pleasant things” (13:214). In fact, “it is the fault of our science that it wants to explain all.... But yet we see around us every day the growth of new beliefs, ... which are yet but the old, which pretend to be young” (14:246). The contemporary Cambridge School of Anthropology, traced the same pagan-to-christian-to-grail-to-romance evolution of gnostic epistemology. As Van Helsing summarizes this general development, “to superstition we must trust at the first; it was man’s faith in the early, and it have its root in faith still” (24:421). He further realizes, however, that Dracula himself becomes the “living” sacral model, if not liminal mentor, of this mysterious gnosis: “Do you not see how, of late, this monster has been creeping into knowledge experimentally” (23:389).

The highly significant mystery element of vampirism may thus remind us how difficult it is to categorize the Count within any definite and definitive boundaries. Indeed, as we have suggested, contemporary criticism of the novel compulsively repeats the rhetoric of uncanny boundary violations of various kinds. For example, the essays from different theoretical perspectives collected in John Paul Riquelme’s recent Bedford edition of *Dracula* (2002) include representative statements such as “the crossing of various boundaries provide one memorable culmination for some of the book’s major tendencies” (Riquelme 560), or the novel’s “expanded gender roles and fluid boundaries are part of a healthy future” (Eltis 464), or Stoker “threatens to undermine the very foundations of

binary thinking” (Castle 535), or finally, *Dracula* “haunt[s] ... the borders of what is accepted as ‘high modernism,’ the high art tradition of its literature” (Wicke 579).

Unlike the book’s vampire hunters, such critical seekers do not wish to “box” *Dracula*, but to unpack his various powers, which seem to block any consistent or coherent textual reading. We have documented throughout this essay that a liminal reading’s inherent interdisciplinary concern with boundary violations makes it particularly useful for such an unpacking and for crossing various critical and textual gaps. Still, a liminal reading, which appreciates the “widely distributed initiation theme” that “the body is a microcosm of the universe” would also be the first to recognize (with the initiate Harker) that inevitably “the Count’s body stood in the gap” when “the door ... slowly” (4:69) opens at Castle *Dracula*. In this ultimate sense, Stoker’s embodied border patroller always already functions somewhere betwixt and between a blocking agent and a bridge both for involved textual initiates and for readers of the textual corpus alike.

Works Cited:

- Babcock, Barbara A. “Mud, Mirrors, and Making Up: Liminality and Reflexivity in *Between the Acts*.” *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism*, ed. Kathleen M. Ashley. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990. 86-116.
- _____. “‘A Tolerated Margin of Mess’: The Trickster and His Tales Reconsidered.” *Journal of Folklore Institute* 2 (1975): 147-186.
- Broadhurst, Susan. *Liminal Acts: A Critical Overview of Contemporary Performance and Theory*. London: Cassell, 1999.
- Castle, Gregory. “Ambivalence and Ascendancy in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*.” *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, ed. John Paul Riquelme. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2002. 518-537.
- Clemens, Valdine. *The Return of the Repressed: Gothic Horror From The Castle of Otranto to Alien*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1999.
- Derrida, Jacques. “Fors.” Trans Barbara Johnson. *Georgia Review* 31 (1977): 64-116.
- Eltis, Sos. “Corruption of the Blood and Degeneration of the Race: *Dracula* and Policing the Borders of Gender.” *Dracula*, ed. Riquelme, 450-465.
- Foster, R.F. “Protestant Magic: W.B. Yeats and the Spell of Irish History.” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 75 (1989): 243-266.
- Foucault, Michael. “Different Spaces.” *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, trans. Robert Hurely, ed. James D. Faubion. Vol. 2. *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*. New York: New York Press, 1998. 175-185.
- Hennelly, Mark M., Jr. “*Dracula*: The Gnostic Quest and the Victorian Wasteland.” *Dracula: The Vampire and the Critics*, ed. Margaret L. Carter. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988. 79-92.
- Hillman, James. *Blue Fire: Selected Writings by James Hillman*, ed. and intro. Thomas Moore. New York: Harper, 1989.
- Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. New York: Modern Library, 1961.
- Kerényi, Karl. “The Trickster in Relation to Greek Mythology.” *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*. Paul Radin. New York: Greenwood Press, 1956. 173-191.
- Menville, Douglas. “Introduction.” *Under the Sunset* by Bram Stoker. San Bernadino: Borgo Press, 1978. v-ix.
- Riquelme, John Paul. “Doubling and Repetition/Realism and Closure in *Dracula*.” *Dracula*, ed. Riquelme. 559-572.
- Spencer, Kathleen L. “Purity and Danger: *Dracula*, the Urban Gothic, and the Late Victorian Degeneracy Crisis.” *ELH* 59 (1002): 197-225.
- Stein, Murray. *In MidLife: A Jungian Perspective*. Dallas: Spring, 1983.
- Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*, ed. with intro. Maurice Hindle. New York and London: Penguin, 1993.
- Trumbull, H. Clay. *The Threshold Covenant or The Beginning of Religious Rites*. New York: Scribner’s, 1896.
- Turner, Victor. *Blazing the Trail: Way Marks in the Exploration of Symbols*, ed. Edith Turner. Tucson: U Arizona P, 1992.
- _____. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1974.
- _____. *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1967.
- _____. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982.
- _____. “Myth and Symbol.” *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 10, ed. David L. Sills. New York: Macmillan, 1968. 576-582.
- _____. *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience*, ed. Edith Turner. Tucson: U Arizona P, 1985.

- _____ and Edith Turner. *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives*. New York: Columbia UP, 1978.
- Van Gennep, Arnold. *The Rites of Passage*. Trans. Monika Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee. Intro. Solon T. Kimball. Chicago: U Chicago P, 1960.
- Wicke, Jennifer. "Vampiric Typewriting: *Dracula* and its Media." *Dracula*, ed. Riquelme. 577-599.
- Winnicott, D.W. *Playing & Reality*. New York: Routledge, 1971.

