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Cover Page Footnote

Dr. Holly J. McBee received her Ph.D. from Purdue University in 2007 and is currently an assistant professor at Dickinson State University in North Dakota. She teaches a range of composition and literature classes and continues her research in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British literature.

Vampires Do(n't) Exist: Using Past and Present Technologies to Make *Dracula* Real

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In a scene from the 1943 film, *Son of Dracula*, one of the characters reads Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*. Since the characters in the film are attempting to stop Dracula, the implication is that this novel is not a work of fiction, but rather one of truth. The novel has moved beyond representing Victorian fears into a "How to Kill a Vampire" handbook because vampires are real—at least within the confines of the film—and need to be destroyed. There are many other examples in twentieth- and twenty-first-century fiction, both literary and cinematic, that take this approach of making Dracula or vampires real. One of the most recent versions of this method can be found in the Sookie Stackhouse novels by Charlaine Harris, which have been adapted by HBO into the show *True Blood*. In these works, vampires are very real and have "come out of the coffin" to join the rest of the world. One of best known vampire writers, Anne Rice, also takes this approach. In her novel, *The Queen of the Damned*, the third in the Vampire Chronicles series, she writes of the author of *Interview with the Vampire* "The author's name is a pseudonym, and the royalty checks go to a nomadic young man who resists all our attempts at contact" (173). Here, Anne Rice is the pseudonym, implying that maybe these vampire stories are true. Of course the idea that vampires and other supernatural aspects are real is not a contemporary invention. Gothic novels from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries often presented some discovered manuscript that masquerades as an authentic account documenting some supernatural phenomena.

Though written in 1897, the format of *Dracula* resembles the epistolary novels of the eighteenth century since it is comprised primarily of personal letters and journal entries. *Dracula* is not the only nineteenth-century novel to use this technique. Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* uses a similar approach, and in fact reviews of *Dracula* mention this comparison.¹ The epistolary style used in the eighteenth-century novel was meant to create verisimilitude about the events described within the letters and journals. Furthermore, the eighteenth-century gothic element of the discovered or personally written manuscript was employed for the same effect. In the case of *Dracula*, the combination of the epistolary and gothic techniques is effective in making the supernatural elements of the story believable. Therefore, if the narrative methods suggest authenticity, then the content perhaps is authentic too.

For the characters, though, their individual firsthand accounts do not seem convincing enough. Critics have discussed the odd mixture of narrative styles and technologies in *Dracula*, often in the context of alleviating or containing anxiety about Victorian fears and identity. Jennifer Wicke sees the novel as a modern text that imitates mass culture and consumption through its typewriting. Leah Richards notes the novel's adaptation of journalistic styles to

¹See Review. *Anthenaeum*. June 26, 1897. *Dracula*. Eds. Nina Auerbach & David J. Skal. New York: Norton, 1997. Print. And Review. *San Francisco Chronicle*. Dec. 17, 1899. *Dracula*. Eds. Nina Auerbach & David J. Skal. New York: Norton, 1997. Print.

provide authority and authenticity. Kathleen Spencer discusses the mixing of the older gothic style with the more contemporary methods of typewriting, labeling *Dracula* an urban gothic novel. She suggests that the use of such technology is tied to modern identity. Spencer writes, “To be modern also means that science is the metaphor that rules human interactions with the universe, so the new fantastic adopts the discourse of empiricism even to describe and manipulate supernatural phenomena” (200). Other critics discuss the blending of the gothic with the modern in terms of anxiety or control. Erik Butler sees the newer writing technologies as gateways for the old ideas to come through and threaten the Victorian world. Vicki Hill takes the opposite approach and examines how the gothic structure is a way for the Victorians to deal with their contemporary anxieties.

This previous criticism has focused on the narrative’s relationship to the Victorian audience’s identity and anxieties. My concern is about how the blended narrative methods work together for the characters within the novel itself. The characters are successful in their quest to destroy Dracula because they embrace the hybridization of the gothic, epistolary style with the contemporary modes of the typewriter and phonograph. Since the gothic and epistolary methods already lend credence to the existence of vampires, the implementation of nineteenth-century typewriters and journalistic means of circulation seems unnecessary. However, these technologies also add to the realism of *Dracula*. This novel offers up something that is genuinely supernatural, the vampire, without trying to explain it in scientific terms. Other novels from the nineteenth century discuss seemingly supernatural aspects, but then offer rational explanations for them. It is the imagination run wild in Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* or the mad ex-wife in *Jane Eyre*. Science, though not explained in full detail, justifies the existence of the Creature in *Frankenstein* and Dr. Jekyll’s transformation into Mr. Hyde. *Dracula* is different though because it is written later than any of these novels and its supernatural element is real. The nineteenth-century writing/recording methods of typewriter and phonograph replace scientific or rational explanations for Dracula’s existence. Modern inventions are not used to explain the vampire as a science experiment gone wrong or just as an imaginary figure; they are there to prove he exists. The vampire is real.

The manuscript uses both eighteenth- and nineteenth- century techniques to present its content as true.² The eighteenth-century epistolary and gothic techniques provide the traditional method to make the vampire real, and the nineteenth-century methods make the vampire real in the face of modern science that usually seeks to explain the supernatural as something other than the supernatural. These styles need to be combined to provide a double layer of truth or reality, so the characters can acknowledge the genuine existence of the vampire. It is the hybridization of eighteenth and nineteenth-century narrative/writing technologies that allow the characters to accept the reality of Dracula, so they can destroy him.

The process to create and accept this hybrid manuscript is not smooth. Throughout the first part of the novel, the characters struggle with accepting the truth about Dracula, even though they use a variety of narrative technologies. The manuscript opens with a disclaimer: “How these papers have been placed in sequence will be made manifest in the reading of them. All needless matters have been eliminated, so that a history almost at variance with the possibilities of later-day belief may stand forth as simple fact” (5). Harriet Hustis discusses this disclaimer, noting

²I use the term “manuscript” in reference to what the characters are creating within the novel, and the term “novel” when discussing the fictional work that is *Dracula*.

that it is a gothic technique. She also states that unlike most gothic novels, where the manuscript is found, *Dracula's* is assembled. Hustis writes, "This strategy not only displaces the origins of the text, but also highlights the novel's status as a fictional construct" (19). However, the statement of "...a history almost at variance with the possibilities of later-day believe may stand forth as simple fact" sets up the idea that at least for the characters, what is being told is true, no matter how badly they and their "later-day" science might wish otherwise. The directness of the plea itself suggests very strongly that this is not fiction because the characters are desperately trying to convince themselves about the reality of the vampire. Early in the novel, the characters struggle with the idea that their writing is recording the truth that vampires do exist, and this doubt also underscores the realism.

This doubt is clear for Jonathan Harker during his stay at Castle Dracula. He keeps a journal, an older narrative technique, in Victorian shorthand. From the beginning, the manuscript is a hybrid. Harker uses his contemporary shorthand journal for several purposes, but one is to record the truth. He writes of his suspicions, "Let me begin with facts—bares, meagre facts, verified by books and figures, and of which there can be no doubt" (35), and after his encounter with Dracula's brides, "It is not good to note this down, lest some day it should meet Mina's eyes and cause her pain; but it is the truth" (42). Valerie Pedlar notes that the first person narratives found in *Dracula* give the story its immediacy, "and increases the sense of horror and bewilderment" (218), but they also lend an element of truth. Why would Harker lie to himself in his personal journal? Harker's remarks that this information is "facts" or "the truth" suggests that he is not certain of the supernatural events he has experienced. However, these moments of self-reassurance and questioning underscore the veracity of the situation. Hill notes that Harker writes to calm himself and maintain his sanity, but is not very successful (198). Harker's journal is already a hybrid, but he has not yet accepted the reality of the vampire.

Mina, like Harker, has an ambiguous relationship regarding the authenticity of her personal journal, which she types or writes in nineteenth-century shorthand. In a letter to Lucy, Mina states, "When I am with you I shall keep a diary in the same way [shorthand]...I do not suppose there will be much of interest to other people; but it is not intended for them. I may show it to Jonathan some day if there is anything worth sharing, but it is really an exercise book. I shall try to do what I see lady journalists do: interviewing and writing descriptions..." (55-56). Mina's journal is hybridized like Harker's in that it is written in shorthand, but she does not share Harker's self-doubt about the truth of her journal, but she does wonder about its usefulness. On one hand, Mina claims the content could not be useful, but on the other, she equates the journal's content with newspapers. Granted newspapers are not always accurate, but Mina's statement suggests that whatever she does write could be useful and truthful, like the news. Leah Richards also notes this, stating, "By appropriating the techniques and methods of the contemporary newspaper, albeit on a smaller scale, *Dracula* acquires the authority, relatively recently earned, of the newspapers..." (451). Interestingly enough, Mina does include a newspaper clipping in her journal. The story about the *Demeter* and the accompanying storm are "(Pasted in Mina Murray's Journal)" (75). There are other newspaper stories—the escaped wolf, the bloofer lady—within the manuscript, but this clipping is the only one noted as being inserted into a character's personal writing. By including a newspaper story with her own writing, Mina seems to be trying to use its credibility to enhance her own.

Mina's newspaper clipping technique is adopted throughout the rest of the manuscript. Aside from the newspaper stories, the log of the *Demeter* and several telegrams about Dracula's business and real estate in England are also included. The newspaper articles and telegrams

represent nineteenth-century technology documenting Dracula. These types of writing, interspersed between the personal diaries and letters help to verify the truthfulness of the characters' writings. This approach, though used infrequently, also demonstrates the characters' uneasiness with the reality of the vampire. They do not yet trust their own observations (or perhaps they do not trust others to believe them), so their writing is supplemented with recognized authorities. These multiple narratives from the characters and other sources enhance the realism of the vampire. Dracula's existence has been documented by so many different sources that he has to be real.

However, in Lucy's case there is a shift in the characters' faith in their own writing. On the night of her mother's death, she leaves a memo stating, "I write this and leave it to be seen, so that no one may by any chance get into any trouble through me. This is an exact record of what took place tonight. I feel I am dying of weakness, and have barely strength to write, but it must be done if I die in the doing" (130). The purpose of the memo is written in anticipation of any legal inquiry and records her mother's death and drugging of the maids. However, this is still a handwritten, personal narrative of the night's events, much like Harker and Mina's narratives, but the content is directly claimed as truthful and potentially useful for any audience. Although there is nothing to indicate Lucy is aware of a vampire, it is clear that she knows something is terribly wrong—for why else document such occurrences with the law in mind. Her memo is handwritten—no shorthand or typing—but the content still speaks the truth that vampires are real even if Lucy does not quite understand what is happening.

The other characters still need more convincing that something is not quite right, though Lucy's death and her reemergence as the Bloofer Lady point the others towards the truth. Once again, Mina leads the way on creating a useful, truthful narrative. She reads Harker's account of his time at Castle Dracula, and then writes in her journal, "...that it is all true" (163), and has this verified by Van Helsing, who tells her, "Strange and terrible as it is, it is *true*" (167). It is significant that Van Helsing's reassurance comes to Mina in a "Letter (by Hand)" (167). This is a turning point in the novel where three characters now know that Dracula is a vampire, yet this truth is announced in the eighteenth-century method of a handwritten letter despite the availability of the telegram. The characters and the different narrative technologies now begin to cooperate. This letter also marks a turning point in how the characters document their adventures; they stop questioning the veracity of their own narratives regardless of the method used to do so. The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century technologies are now combined in an effort to destroy Dracula, who is very real to them. David Seed also notes this change in the story and examines the importance of the characters sharing information and working together, suggesting it is a form of resistance to Dracula. As mentioned earlier, Richards sees the manuscript being copied and circulated with the authority of a newspaper. Judith Halberstam and Jennifer Wicke note that this new narrative also presents Dracula as "truth" as either a representative of types of monstrosity or mass culture and consumption. Glenn Morgan suggests that the typewriter and other contemporary technologies are "dead mechanical eyes" that "deliver 'true' reproductions, but at the price of real recognition" (96). There is a clear consensus about the manuscript being able to present the truth once it has more fully adopted nineteenth-century technologies of typing, copying, and circulating. This could be the point for a single, omniscient narrator to take over the story, which could improve the overall chronology and remove repetition; however, the eighteenth-century methods remain intact. The manuscript started as a

hybrid and despite some doubt on the characters' parts, it did ultimately convince them that the vampire is real. For the vampire to remain real, the manuscript must remain a hybrid.

One of the ways the manuscript maintains its hybridization is through expressing emotion. Mina transcribes Seward's phonograph recordings saying, "That is a wonderful machine, but it is cruelly true," since it records Seward's emotions about Lucy (197). Other moments of emotion come through as well. After Dracula attacks Mina and Harker offers a prayer for her, Seward states, "...he [Harker] read the simple and beautiful service for the Burial of the Dead. I—I cannot go on—words—and—v-voice—f-fail m-me!..." (288). Since the attack takes place at the asylum, Seward is most likely using his phonograph to record this information, but why transcribe the obvious emotion? The emotion that comes through is akin to the doubt expressed in the earlier journals and letters. The doubt used to underscore the realism in the eighteenth-century methods is now replaced with emotion. Susan M. Cribb also suggests that emotion adds to the authenticity of the story (136). This is further demonstrated by Mina, who writes after Dracula's attack on her, "Of course he [Harker] wanted to be with me; but then the boat service would likely, be the one which would destroy the...the...the ... Vampire. (Why did I hesitate to write the word?)" (307). Mina's hesitation could be due to Dracula's control over her, but the ellipses and capitalization of the word "Vampire" indicate a strong, emotional response. In fact, after this the word "vampire" is capitalized in the rest of the manuscript. By making "vampire" a proper noun, the characters further their belief in him. The vampire and the characters' horror are real, and this is clearly demonstrated by the intersection of typewritten emotion.

Aside from the emotion contained within the typed narrative, other elements of hybridization are still present. Each character still makes individual contributions to the manuscript and his or her writing is given its own heading, whether it is a letter, journal, or telegram, much like the individual headings in epistolary novels. At one point Seward notes, "How I miss my phonograph! To write diary with a pen is irksome to me; but Van Helsing says I must" (291). Seward expresses a preference for the nineteenth-century method on the basis of ease, but does not indicate doubt about the authenticity of what he writes. Seward trusts in the hybrid manuscript.

Perhaps the most compelling remark that demonstrates the characters' trust in the combined narrative methods is when Harker discusses their plans for Dracula's demise. While pursuing Dracula, Harker writes, "The Professor says that if we can so treat the Count's body, it will soon after fall into dust. In such case there would be no evidence against us, in case any suspicion of murder were aroused. But even if it were not, we should stand or fall by our act, and perhaps some day this very script may be evidence to come between some of us and a rope" (290). By this point in the novel, the characters no longer doubt the reality of Dracula, but Harker's statement indicates his trust in the power of the "script" itself as possible evidence at a trial. The manuscript could not only prove to the characters that Dracula is real, but also to others that vampires do exist. Here the manuscript, with its various styles and technologies, becomes a non-fiction handbook on vampires.

Ironically, it is Dracula's belief in the manuscript as non-fiction that makes the manuscript the most real. When Harker visits Dracula, he notes of the library:

The books were of the most varied kind—history, geography, politics, political economy, botany, geology, law—all relating to England and English life and customs and manners. There were even such books of reference as the London Directory, the "Red" and "Blue"

books, Whitaker's Almanack, the Army and Navy Lists, and—it somehow gladdened my heart to see it—the Law List. (25)

Dracula's library is full of non-fiction books that he uses to educate himself about England, yet despite this impressive collection, Dracula does not have any English novels. This omission indicates that Dracula's understanding of writing is that it usually presents the truth about a subject. Granted he does have Harker write three separate letters with falsehoods in them, but these are not meant to be typed and circulated like the manuscript. Dracula is the subject of the manuscript, much as English life and custom are of his library books. Given this experience he would regard the manuscript about him as truthful, which explains why he attempts to destroy it.

While Harker's faith in the manuscript is strong during the second part of the novel, his note at the end suggests that his ambivalence has returned. He writes:

We were struck with the fact, that in all the mass of material of which the record is composed, there is hardly one authentic document, nothing but a mass of type-writing, except the later notebooks of Mina and Seward and myself, and Van Helsing's memorandum. We could hardly ask anyone, even did we wish to, to accept these as proofs of so wild a story. (326-27)

The hybrid manuscript has served its purpose by providing veracity for the characters, and they have done their duty—destroy the vampire. The hybrid manuscript is necessary to provide truth, but its function is temporary. At least Harker does not doubt the reality of these experiences for himself and the Crew of Light, but he does doubt if any other person would “accept these as proofs of so wild a story.” However, Van Helsing says, “We want no proofs; we ask none to believe us! This boy [Mina and Harker's son] will some day know what a brave and gallant woman his mother this...later on he will understand how some men so loved he, that they did dare much for her sake” (327). Like Harker, Van Helsing does not seem to think others will believe their story, but he does recognize that little Quincey may find the manuscript to be a truthful version of part of his parents' lives. Like the manuscript, Quincey is also a hybrid since “His bundle of names links all our little band of men together...” (326). Little Quincey would likely inherit the manuscript and perhaps view it as it is—a manual on how to kill real vampires. Perhaps Van Helsing believes that as a hybrid, Quincey, like the manuscript, can/will destroy a real vampire in the future.

It is clear that the various narrative styles and techniques in *Dracula* contribute to its horror, anxiety, and realism. While the combination of older epistolary and gothic methods with typewriters, phonographs, and telegrams initially reveal doubt on the part of some characters, these techniques later lead to collaboration to form the hybrid manuscript, which in turn creates belief and resolve for the characters. It is this very mixture of narratives that creates the space for the question if vampires are real. The novel is of course fiction, but through fiction, we will continue to insist that vampires are real in order to keep them alive, or at least undead.

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