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Cover Page Footnote

Lindsay Dearinger received her M.A. in English in 2011 and is currently an Adjunct Instructor at the University of Central Oklahoma. Her research interests include Anglo-Jewish authors of the nineteenth century, as well as representations of vampires and animals in literature. She plans to pursue a Ph.D. in English.

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“Great Scott! Is this a game?”

“It is.”⁹

In most vampire narratives, vampires must engage in play to distract, divert, or mislead humans for the purposes of self-preservation. Vampire stories also incorporate play as it relates to games and rules. Vampires and humans alike must play by sets of rules, and the rules depend upon the game being played. To analyze the use of play in vampire narratives, I look to the earliest English language vampire-as-genre stories: *Varney the Vampire; or, the Feast of Blood*, the prototype for vampire stories since its appearance in the 1840s, and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, perhaps the most famous vampire narrative.¹⁰ Relying on Derrida’s conceptualization of play, this essay examines play as it relates to the structure of the texts and the characters’ relationships to the rules of the vampire game in order to

⁹ Bram Stoker, *Dracula: A Norton Critical Edition*, eds. Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal, (New York: Norton, 1997), 186.

¹⁰ I exclude consideration of John Polidori’s tale *The Vampyre* since Lord Ruthven’s status as vampire, at least in terms of “vampire rules,” is less clear than that of Sir Francis Varney and Count Dracula.

determine subversion of the “serious vampire” archetype.

Derrida’s Concept of Play and Decentralization

My analysis of play in *Dracula* and *Varney* requires an explication of Derrida’s notion of play and the decentralization of conceptuality. In “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” Derrida relates the history of the concept of structure; he considers structure in terms of before and after a rupture, or the interruption of classical thought with the onset of structuralism. Derrida explains that, before the rupture, structure has been “neutralized or reduced, and this by a process of giving it a center or of referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin” (278). The center, which “grounds” the structure, limits play.

The center focuses and organizes the structure. Though the center “permits the play of its elements inside the total form,” the presence of the center also “closes off the play which it opens up and makes possible” (Derrida 279). In classical thought, since the center acts as a foundation and limits play in the “total form,” according to Derrida, “[t]he concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play” (279). Play is an unplanned, unordered event occurring within the structure; play is spontaneity, perversion, deviance. The center’s moderating of play within the structure implements order and stability of the structure. While the center regulates play, it avoids the effects of play.

In order to regulate play, the center must be both within the structure and outside of or beyond the structure, a paradox which contributes to the rupture, or the decentering of the structure. After the rupture, it

becomes necessary to think “that there was no center” in the first place (Derrida 280). The loss of center causes the concept of structure to disintegrate, and play becomes important to a conversation about structure that directly relates to the loss of center.

In vampire narratives, the center is analogous to the “rules” followed by vampires and hunters. For example, some rules traditionally observed in vampire stories and folklore include the fact that vampires are repelled by crucifixes, cannot ingest any substance other than human blood, and can be killed with a stake through the heart. The center, here represented by the vampire rules, organizes the structure of the texts. The vampire rules control or confine the structure of the text. Derrida’s concept of unregulated play creates a space for the subversion of archetype and form to occur, and this decentralization of conceptuality allows me to argue that unregulated play subverts literary motif and narrative structure. It is the loss of center indicated by Derrida’s concept of unregulated play as subversion that allows me to contradict Bette Roberts’s assertion that “Varney’s contributions to the [vampire] myth are superficial and physical rather than substantial and psychological,” that Varney is “more silly than serious” (4).

Dracula’s Narrative Strategy and Structure

Despite more than a century of parodies, *Dracula* resists being classified as anything but “serious.” Critics engage with Stoker’s *Dracula* more readily than other vampire texts of the nineteenth century, perhaps, as Roberts insists, because *Dracula* is “mysterious,” “inhuman,” and “terrifying” (1, 2). In other words, *Dracula* is a proper villain, not a buffoon like Varney. For Roberts, Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* is the only nineteenth-century literary vampire to rival *Dracula* in villainy, and

Varney occupies a subordinate position to these more “serious” vampire stories.

Stoker’s narrative strategy creates the “serious” aesthetic of the titular character. From Stoker’s prefatory comments to Jonathan Harker’s end note, Stoker deliberately plans all narrative events. Consequently, *Dracula* provides no space for spontaneity, and all events occur according to plan, which is understood as the narrative progresses. Nothing is more deliberate than the slow unfolding of Dracula’s true nature, the very fact that he is a vampire, and his relationship to characters like Renfield and to events like the wreck of the *Demeter*. Stoker’s construction of his vampire’s story cloaks Dracula in shadow and secrets. Jean Marigny argues that, in order to achieve suspense, Stoker bases his narrative strategy on secrecy. That vampires are real, and that Dracula *is* a vampire, is intentionally kept a secret by Stoker from the reader in order to achieve a serious, suspenseful, and planned aesthetic.

Stoker’s secret-keeping begins early with Jonathan’s journey to Transylvania, the first section of the novel. Carol Senf concurs with the idea that “Stoker is *careful* to reveal the truth about Dracula slowly” (31) and I emphasize her use of the word “careful” to highlight Stoker’s intentionality with regards to the unfolding of the plot. Jonathan transcribes events and conversations from his time spent at Dracula’s castle in his journal, committing Dracula’s strange behavior to print. But Dracula maintains facades and excuses for his behavior. For example, Jonathan is led to believe that Dracula keeps servants, but he catches Dracula cooking and cleaning for his guest in secret.

The longer the skeptical solicitor remains a guest/prisoner at Dracula’s castle, the more secretive, mysterious, and terrifying Dracula becomes. Dracula transforms from a quaint foreign businessman into a

monster who makes enigmatic and threatening comments (“Take care how you cut yourself. It is more dangerous than you think in this country”), kidnaps children for three women, or “devils of the Pit,” to prey upon, and climbs facedown the castle wall wearing Jonathan’s own clothes (Stoker 31, 55). Senf points out that “it takes Harker, who—like most of the other characters in the novel—is a rationalist and a skeptic, some time to realize the truth about Dracula” (31). Though Jonathan questions his own sanity, he never suggests that Dracula is a vampire, despite all that he has witnessed. After all, why would Jonathan assume that Dracula is a vampire when, as Senf reminds us, Stoker “doesn’t reveal his character’s supernatural abilities until the novel is well established” (58)? Stoker deliberately builds suspense without divulging the secret.

Stoker also employs carefully chosen words to underscore *Dracula*’s serious and secretive aesthetic. Van Helsing—more than once—informs Seward that Lucy’s condition is “no jest,” but a matter of “life and death.” Seward observes that Van Helsing is “very serious” (Stoker 107). When Mina and Jonathan are reunited in Budapest, Jonathan “very solemnly” and in “deadly earnest” asks Mina to take his journal from his time at Dracula’s castle, which contains “the secret,” and keep it from him, though he prefaces his request with the claim that “there should be no secret” between husband and wife (99).¹¹ Like Van Helsing, Jonathan and Mina refer to the pursuit of Dracula as a “solemn” and “stern duty” (100).

Van Helsing does not mention the existence of vampires until the middle of the narrative, directly before Arthur stakes Lucy. To the frustration of Seward,

¹¹But of course, as many critics have pointed out, Jonathan and the others continue to keep secrets from Mina throughout the remainder of the narrative.

Van Helsing keeps the truth of Lucy's "illness" a secret from his former student. After his first examination of Lucy, Van Helsing refuses to "give [Seward] any further clue," cloaking his suspicions in cryptic metaphors, explaining that he will "later [...] unfold to [Seward]" the secret at a time he will choose (Stoker 107, 111). Van Helsing's use of the word "unfold" parallels Stoker's narrative strategy: all secrets will unfold for the reader at a point in the narrative chosen by Stoker. Throughout the ordeal with Lucy, Van Helsing continues to assure Seward, Arthur, and Quincey that the truth will be made known to them, that they "shall know and understand it all in good time; but it will be later," and that "there are things that [they] know not, but that [they] shall know" (137, 149).

When the time comes, Van Helsing reveals the truth, that there are "such beings as vampires" and that Dracula is among the Un-Dead (Stoker 209). Marigny observes that when "Van Helsing finally tells the truth about vampires, there is a drastic change in the novel." For Marigny, Van Helsing's revelation initiates the reader, and the act of keeping secrets is dropped: "[the reader] is told everything about what is happening as if Stoker had decided to renounce his narrative strategy." Though the act of keeping secrets from the reader may be dropped by Stoker, I argue that Stoker *does not* renounce his narrative strategy, and that Van Helsing's revelation serves as Stoker's deliberate unfolding of the narrative. Van Helsing's revelation and the formation of the group of vampire hunters is not a place where the narrative falls apart; rather, it is the center, or the place containing the delineation of vampire rules.

The center controls and confines the structure of *Dracula*. The narrative does not fall apart here. Play is grounded because the revelation of vampire existence means the conscious initiation of the rules. Play is

allowed, but it is limited in that the characters must follow the rules as outlined. In fact, the rules have been followed all along, though the characters might not have realized it. James Twitchell claims that in *Dracula*, “all the pieces are used and all the pieces fit” (134), and Van Helsing’s delineation of the vampire rules reveals to the reader exactly how all these seemingly disparate narrative pieces fit perfectly together.

Van Helsing enumerates vampires’ strengths. Vampires are immortal. Dracula is “so strong in person as twenty men.” He can, “within limitations,” appear and disappear at will (Stoker 209). He can take the forms of certain animals, such as wolves and bats, and he can command these and other animals, including owls, foxes, and rats. Dracula can also control the elements, though he is limited; for example, Dracula can create mist, but the mist can’t disperse far beyond his own body.

Dracula, it seems, is nearly invincible, but his power has limits because he too is subject to the rules of the game. Vampires must drink the blood of the living to survive. Dracula “cannot flourish without this diet; he eat not as others” (Stoker 211). Vampires cast no shadows and their images are not reflected in mirrors. Vampires cannot enter a human home without first being invited in, though, as Van Helsing points out, “afterwards he can come as he please” (211). Vampires are afflicted by certain items, such as garlic, crucifixes, and other holy objects.

Finally, Van Helsing claims that perhaps the most important limitation is that Dracula’s “power ceases, as does that of all evil things, at the coming of the day” (Stoker 211). This does not mean that Dracula’s movements are restricted during the day, as popular interpretation assumes. The Harkers observe Dracula out in the park during the middle of the day, and Dracula is

comfortable moving about during the daylight. This limitation is important for the hunters; with Dracula's power diminished during the daylight hours, the hunters have twice as much time to find and kill him.

Van Helsing emphasizes the strict and reverent following of the rules. Following the rules of the game is the only way to destroy vampires, who can only meet "true death" when a stake is driven through the heart, followed by the cutting off of the head (Stoker 212). Dracula and Van Helsing mutually engage in the vampire rules, providing the narrative with organization and stability. But more importantly, the rules provide the promise of an end: an end to Dracula and an end of the text. Only in following the rules can the hunters kill Dracula and put an end to the narrative.

Gothic stories of the nineteenth century often claimed to be true accounts of strange events. In constructing a narrative composed of diary and journal entries, letters, telegrams, and newspaper clippings from different narrative perspectives, Stoker emulates Gothic conventions. These disparate texts are then placed in chronological order to achieve a particular effect: the characters narrate events as they happen. In his prefatory comments, Stoker assures his reader that "[h]ow these papers have been placed in sequence will be made manifest in the reading of them" (5). David Skal and Nina Auerbach call this effect "temporal immediacy," a "familiar device in English fiction" (5 n.1). The audience senses that the events happen contemporaneously and is kept in the dark about events that occur outside of the character's experiences.

Dracula's epistolary enclosure relates to secrecy as a narrative strategy. While the reader hears directly from Van Helsing once in the novel, his ideas are usually narrated by other characters. When Van Helsing keeps secrets from Seward-as-narrator, secrets are kept from

the audience. We can't know that Dracula is a vampire because we are not privy to his or Van Helsing's thoughts. I have explained that Stoker deliberately chose to structure his novel thus, and I argue that *Dracula's* planned, enclosed form leaves little space for spontaneity or subversion, or the type of play that occurs when there is no center. Play within the structure is limited and happens in accordance with the vampire rules. When we realize that the center, or the rules, controls the structure, we can see how all narrative events are related, and the revelation of the secrets allows us to see the sense in the structure's organization.

The epistolary text that includes multiple narrative voices reveals how the pieces fit together; the seemingly disjointed narrative provides evidence of the rules being followed. The rules structure the narrative in that the events would not make sense without the revelation. Marigny suggests that "the narrative framework of *Dracula* is meant to confuse and puzzle the reader," and that much of the information, events, and characters in the documents comprising the text of *Dracula* "have no link whatsoever with the main plot"; the lack of an omniscient narrator leaves the reader unable to understand connections between events and characters. Certainly, the reader does not *at first* see how Jonathan's sojourn in Transylvania affects the events that immediately follow it: Mina's letters, Lucy's engagement, the presence of Mr. Swales, the *Demeter*, the wolves, Renfield's behavior, and Lucy's mysterious illness. But Stoker clearly intends all these events to connect to Dracula.

Stoker reveals how the characters have already gained knowledge of the rules through interactions with vampires. Mina, Lucy, and Quincey see Dracula in the form of a bat. Berserker the wolf's midnight rampage and the rats that swarm upon the men in Carfax Abbey

evinced Dracula's ability to control animals. We understand that the events on board the *Demeter* were orchestrated by Dracula, and that Dracula drinks Lucy's blood, causing her "illness." Mina, Jonathan, and Lucy all experience vampires controlling mists, and Jonathan observes Dracula abstain from food and drink, a quirk that is later clarified by Van Helsing. Even Seward begins to note connections, especially those between Renfield and Dracula: "As it is, I am darkly suspicious. All [Renfield's] outbreaks were in some way linked with the proximity of the Count" (Stoker 200). While I think Marigny's claim that elements of *Dracula* "have no link whatsoever with the main plot" is misleading, I acknowledge that Stoker intends those unclarified connections that "confuse and puzzle the reader" to force the reader to make those connections along with the characters. "Temporal immediacy" aligns the reader with the characters: all must discover the meaning of the vampire rules as the events that evince the rules occur.

Among *Dracula*'s contributions to the vampire myth are the rules that limit vampires and hunters. Neither the characters' strict adherence to the vampire rules or the tight structure of the text of *Dracula*, in which all narrative events are planned down to the smallest detail, allow for subversion of the serious vampire aesthetic. Despite Van Helsing's comical speaking patterns, *Dracula* presents nothing humorous in playing the vampire game. Dracula's vampire act is dramatic, almost theatrical, yet not quite comical. The pursuit of the vampire is deadly serious, which we understand when we read about the hopes and fears of people whom the "editor" of the texts purports to really exist. Dracula is serious because he is real. The proof is in the documents.

A novel that is meant to be read as a unified whole written by a single author with a clear plan and the promise of an end, *Dracula* draws to a close with the

death of the vampire. The epistolary form is enclosed, confined, and the revelation of the rules via the narrative structure proves that only by following the rules, in playing the vampire game, can Dracula be killed. Play in *Dracula* is regulated play, or “play constituted on the basis of [...] a reassuring certitude” (Derrida 279). The reader is reassured that following the rules guarantees an end.

Play as Subversion in *Varney*

Varney the Vampire; or, the Feast of Blood is a seemingly endless text. Not only does the story span 868 double-column pages (Roberts 1), but this popular serial ran for two years (Auerbach 27). Called “penny dreadfuls,” chapbooks like *Varney* covered sensational topics “considered too gruesome for serious literature,” were issued weekly, and cost a penny each (Fonseca 388). *Varney*’s 237 chapters appeared from 1845 to 1847 for a total of 109 issues. That *Varney* ran for two years attests to its popularity since penny dreadfuls, like contemporary television programs, were subject to cancelation if popularity declined. Penny dreadful readers valued sensational stories, and *Varney*’s endless exploits were so popular that his story was published in book format in 1847 (Herr 16).

The question of *Varney*’s authorship remains unanswered. Recent criticism favors James Malcolm Rymer over Thomas Peckett Prest as the author of *Varney*. According to Michael Sims, scholars originally believed that Prest, author of the penny dreadful *A String of Pearls*,¹² composed *Varney*, but now attribute authorship to Rymer (168). Nina Auerbach and Curt Herr support the Rymer theory, excluding the possibility of Prest’s contribution. Roberts asserts that “many

¹² *A String of Pearls* features the infamous demon barber of Fleet Street, Sweeney Todd.

different writers probably had their hands in the writing to meet publication deadlines” (3), and Tony Fonseca concurs, claiming that Rymer and Prest, both “prolific writers of weekly chapbooks, often working for the publisher Edward Lloyd of Salisbury Square in London” collaborated on *Varney* (388). Senf suggests that *Varney* could have been written by either by Rymer or Prest (42), and James Twitchell observes that the work “seems the result of composite authorship” (123), though he appears to favor Rymer as author. Judging from discrepancies in the text, *Varney* exhibits the work of more than one hand.

The production of penny stories differed from the writing of novels, and it stands to reason that *Varney* had multiple authors. The confusion concerning Rymer and Prest is understandable, according to Sims, because both writers worked for Edward Lloyd’s “thriller factory” (168). Penny dreadful writers produced stories, as Senf points out, “at breakneck speed for an unsophisticated literary audience that was apparently more interested in fast pace and galloping suspense than in coherence or subtle character development” (42). Twitchell attributes *Varney*’s “oxymoronic nature” to “composition and audience” (123). *Varney* is structurally incoherent and inconsistent, especially as it concerns *Varney*’s origins as a vampire and the following of vampire rules. Not only was *Varney* possibly written by two people, but also “episodically and in a hurry” (Twitchell 123), with little attention paid to details.

Varney lacks cohesion, an author, and as we shall see, rules, all of which contribute to the loss of center that causes the structure to disintegrate. This decentering promotes unregulated play and subversion of the vampire character/narrative archetype, which I will first examine in the context of secrets. Loss of center allows

for secrets to be kept at the same time that all secrets are known.

The authors of each text reveal their vampires' secrets differently. Stoker does not initially reveal the existence of vampires. But Rymer explicitly informs the reader at the end of chapter one that Flora Bannerworth has indeed fallen prey to a vampire: "*The girl has swooned, and the vampyre is at his hideous repast!*" (38). This announcement instantly dispels any notion of secrecy. Some characters, like Flora's brother Henry, Dr. Chillingworth, and Flora's fiancé Charles Holland, question whether or not a vampire is responsible for the attack. But for Flora, Robert Marchdale, and George Bannerworth, there is never a doubt that a vampire attacked the fair Flora. In fact, it is such an accepted idea that, once the servants catch wind of it, news of a vampire attack is disseminated across the country.

The question becomes, *who* is the vampire? The Bannerworths' cadaverous new neighbor Sir Francis Varney becomes the primary suspect when the author reveals that he resembles a portrait of a deceased ancestor in Flora's chamber. It takes little to convince Henry, Charles, and Charles' uncle Admiral Bell that Varney is the vampire who attacked Flora. At first it appears that the plot disallows secrets. The main characters and the readers know that Varney is a vampire. Varney knows he is a vampire and that the Bannerworths suspect, but when Varney is confronted about being a vampire, he denies it. Varney's humorous attempts at avoiding a discovery already so obvious undermine the carefully planned secrets and serious aesthetic of *Dracula*.

Henry, Marchdale, and Charles attempt to keep their suspicions secret from Varney under the auspices of propriety. Because Varney is impeccably polite, the men assume he is a gentleman and hesitate to accuse him of

vampiric activity. When Henry decides to confront Varney, Marchdale reminds him that “it is scarcely civil to tell Sir Francis to his face, that he resembles a vampyre” (Rymer 88). The men recognize that calling a gentleman a vampire is ridiculous. Varney seems “at his ease” among his neighbors, and Charles finds it an insurmountable difficulty to approach “a well-bred, gentlemanly man, and saying, ‘Sir, we believe you to be a vampyre’” (101). In fact, Charles is so obsessed with observing the rules of polite society that he is almost paralyzed with indecision:

Charles felt himself compelled to behave with courtesy, although his mind was so full of conflicting feelings as regarded Varney; but there was no avoiding, without such brutal rudeness as was inconsistent with all his pursuits and habits, replying in something like the same strain to the extreme courtly politeness of the supposed vampyre. (102)

Though Flora is positive that Varney is the vampire, the men fear insulting a gentleman, a fear that produces scenes of (perhaps) unintentional hilarity.

I attribute what is perhaps Varney’s greatest kept secret, his resemblance to Marmaduke Bannerworth’s portrait, to authorial oversight. The vampire resembles the portrait hanging in Flora’s room, and Henry is shocked when he meets Sir Francis and recognizes that “the expression of the features -- all were alike” (Rymer 87). Charles stops short of divulging the secret of the portrait when Varney later visits the Bannerworths, but Varney insists that Charles tell all. When Charles admits that Varney resembles the portrait, Varney, always polite, acts as though this fact is inconsequential: “Now I reflect a moment, Mr. Henry Bannerworth did incidentally mention something of the sort. It’s a most singular coincidence” (101). Varney maintains that any

similarity between his person and that of the portrait is coincidental. We never learn the secret of the resemblance, perhaps because the author forgot to tie up that loose end.

In *Varney*, secrets cannot remain secrets, and yet secrets abound. Once Dracula's secret is known, he drops all friendly pretensions. But though it is quite clear to the men that he is a vampire, they face difficulty in breaking the secret to Varney, who maintains a friendly and polite facade. The ambiguity of the vampire rules allows Varney to act as a friend and subvert the traditional vampire/human relationship. The secret that Varney is a vampire is known, but tension exists because ambiguity exists.

The authors force the readers to question whether or not we truly know what we think to be self-evident. Despite our original certainty that Varney is a vampire, Donna Heiland argues that “[o]ne of the most astonishing things about Varney is that for a considerable portion of the novel, readers cannot be sure whether or not he is really a vampire” (109). The authors establish Varney as a vampire in the second volume, but for much of the novel, his identity is ambiguous. For example, Varney insists that he never drank Flora's blood, though chapter one clearly depicts that event. Varney exhibits feats of superhuman strength, but is wounded by bullets. The reader might question if Varney's status as a vampire is ever fully resolved.

If Varney is a vampire, then we assume he'll play by the rules. Varney explicitly obeys two rules: revival by moonlight and drinking human blood. Like Dracula, Varney subsists on the blood of young female virgins, possesses fangs and superhuman strength, and uses hypnotic powers. Charles claims that Varney's “preternatural powers” are “of more avail to him” at midnight than at any other time (Rymer 133), a

phenomenon also present in *Dracula*. The authors of *Varney* reiterate that vampires are killed with a stake through the heart, though fire is also a suggested method for dispatching a vampire. Finally, as Flora points out, “those who in life have been bled by a vampyre, become themselves vampyres” (49). As in *Dracula*, women’s “contamination” by vampires motivates much of the action of *Varney*’s first volume.

Unlike *Dracula*, *Varney* does not fear Christian iconography or garlic, nor can he transform himself. He must appear as he is to the Bannerworths. He can’t rely on supernatural trickery; instead, he must resort to “human” methods in order to deceive, a drastic departure from the mysterious aesthetic of *Dracula*. *Dracula* uses humans in his business transactions, but his terrorizing of the band of heroes is utterly supernatural. It is *Varney*’s affectation of not only human qualities, but also vampire qualities that subverts traditional vampire lore. For example, *Varney* is not killed or weakened by the sunlight, but goes out of his way to avoid exposure. Henry first meets *Varney* in a “sick room” devoid of light, and *Varney* subsequently appears to the Bannerworths when the sun is obscured by clouds. This avoidance is irrelevant; it is for show. *Varney* affects vampiric attributes to the point of hyperbole. And though *Varney* is injured numerous times, he is never killed by the Bannerworths or the angry mob that hunts him. The moonlight revives him time and time again, to the delight of audiences and to the frustration of *Varney* himself, who wishes for death.

That *Varney* breaks more rules than he follows raises questions. Marchdale explains that vampires abstain from food and drink, and at first glance, it appears as though *Varney* complies. When Henry offers *Varney* refreshments, he refuses, claiming to be “under a strict regimen,” and that the “simplest diet alone”

suffices (Rymer 89). Henry concludes that Varney refuses in accordance with vampire rules. Varney pretends to drink a glass of wine, which provokes a confrontation between Charles and himself concerning his refusal to drink. Varney feigns offense under the guise of propriety, but jokes that if Flora were present, he “could then drink on, on, on” (105). Twitchell observes that “[i]n one chapter we are told that [Varney] cannot eat meat; then a few pages later he is seen having a steak dinner” (123). Fonseca concludes that “Varney eats and drinks like a normal human when he wishes to conceal his true self” (390), but I question Fonseca’s claim. Varney eats, drinks, and acts like a human when it suits him, not necessarily to conceal his “true self,” which is supposedly his vampire self. Unlike Dracula, Varney’s identity is fluid. Despite the characters’ early conclusion that Varney is a vampire, his adherence to vampire rules is ambiguous, leading the audience to question his true identity as vampire.

Varney mimics and rejects the vampire rules. Where Dracula plays by the rules, Varney plays against the rules, subverting the serious vampire image. Dracula never admits to being a vampire. To entertain the idea, especially when trying to hide his identity, would dispel mystery. Dracula only makes enigmatic statements that allude to his vampiric nature (“My revenge is just begun! I spread it over centuries, and time is on my side. [...] you and others shall yet be mine, my creatures, to do my bidding and to be my jackals when I want to feed”) (Stoker 267). Stoker does not transgress his narrative strategy by allowing Dracula to explicitly identify himself.

Varney mocks the notion of secrecy when he plays with the Bannerworths’ suspicions. When Charles presents the portrait to him, Varney admits a likeness, and points out that if he stands next to it, one would “be

more struck with the likeness than before.” Charles presses him, pointing out the similarity between the vampire and the portrait. Varney banally replies “perhaps, then, that accounts for [Flora] thinking that I am the vampyre, because I bear a strong resemblance to the portrait,” to which Charles remarks, “I should not be surprised,” relaying the suspicions of the household. But Varney refuses to be defeated. He laughs and exclaims, “If ever I go to a masquerade again, I shall certainly assume the character of a vampyre” (Rymer 103). In a final push to reveal Varney’s secret, Charles insists that Varney’s costume would likely confirm that he is a vampire. Varney simply applauds Charles’ “enthusiasm.” Charles recognizes that in the game of wits, he has lost: “This was, Charles thought, the very height and acme of impudence, and yet what could he do? What could he say? He was foiled by the downright coolness of Varney” (103). Varney pushes secrecy to the limits and comes out the victor in the game of wits.

Varney’s vampire rules are less clear than those delineated in *Dracula*; consequently, the structure loses ground, center, and organization. When the authors of *Varney* abandon the vampire rules, they allow structural cohesion to disintegrate and open up space for unregulated play. But *Varney* is more than the mistakes committed by the authors under pressure to complete a work for a demanding audience or a slapstick comedy that conforms to the tastes of the audience. Varney’s silliness serves a serious purpose; his story challenges and subverts the tropes of traditional vampire narratives in both structure and strategy, paving the way for innovations in future vampire narratives. Though many critics claim there is no evidence to suggest that Stoker was directly influenced by *Varney*, the texts exhibit undeniable similarities. Perhaps the most interesting example is that the authors of both texts purport to be

merely the recorders of true events. And though both vampires could really exist, Varney is perhaps a more frightening villain than Dracula because there is no grounding, no clear lines drawn between vampire and human.

In *Varney*, characters keep and divulge secrets simultaneously. There are rules, but the rules are not always binding. Varney's narrative strategy and structure directly create the possibility of a deferred ending. If the rules for dispatching Varney do not hold, then there is no guarantee that Varney can ever be killed. Since *Varney* was a popular serial, the readers had no guarantee of an ending; like a contemporary television program, *Varney* had the potential to be endless.

The End?

All authors have a purpose in writing. I argue here that, though *Varney* may at first seem planned, any overarching plan for the plot resembling that of *Dracula* quickly falls apart, especially when the narrative devolves into series of hijinks following one pattern: Varney, disguised as a nobleman, tries to marry a wealthy girl; Varney is discovered to be a vampire, usually by Admiral Bell; and Varney is chased off by an angry mob. I specify Stoker's narrative structure as deliberate, not to suggest that *Varney's* authors had no purpose in writing, but to highlight how quickly the tightness of *Varney's* plot unravels. The multiplicity of the authors contributes to the disintegration of a tightly controlled plot.

Varney lacks the cohesive structure and unified plot of *Dracula*. Herr argues that “[o]ne of the major flaws in *Varney* scholarship has been the fact that many critics mistakenly hold Rymer's serial to the same standards they would apply to a novel,” which he claims is “a great disservice to [. . .] its contribution to vampire literature”

(17). I agree with Herr's statement, and further suggest that *Varney's* inconsistent structure is not a detriment to the story or its contribution to vampire literature. Since *Varney* adheres loosely, if at all, to the vampire rules, keeping a tight and defined structure like that of *Dracula* is irrelevant, and unregulated play is a possibility. The ending of *Varney*, a serial, is meant to be deferred, which creates opportunities for the unregulated play engaged in by *Varney*. *Varney* isn't limited by rules; his long life span gives the audience the chance to know him in a human way, to know his human limits and sympathize with his unending plight in the way we are able to with contemporary vampire characters.

The characters in *Dracula* and *Varney* play the vampire game, but they play differently. *Dracula* engages in the game, and both he and Van Helsing are obsessive, almost puritanical, followers of the rules. *Varney* doesn't take the game seriously—he plays with the concept of the serious game—and follows rules when it suits him. The structure of each text mirrors the way the characters play. *Dracula* plays a game that adheres closely to established conventions, traditional vampire rules and the epistolary gothic novel form, while *Varney* is inconsistent, too close to the human characters, and the text is serialized and self-referential. *Varney* creates a series of deferred endings, and *Dracula* makes no allowance for deferral; its epistolary structure contains the promise of ending, a tactic a serialized novel can't structurally accomplish. It isn't that the texts either do or do not allow play, or that one story is more "legitimate" than another, but that the structure of each text leads to radically different tellings of the vampire myth.

But in the end, we perhaps should question Stoker's ability to ground his text. Twitchell suggests that *Dracula* is almost undecipherable, that the text "seems

to depend on its very inexplicableness, its non-sensibleness, to generate a kind of tension that is unrelieved and ultimately unexplained” (133). Perhaps *Dracula* is not as tidy as is first suggested. The men of *Dracula* break social and professional norms (and even human laws) in their pursuit of the Count, but the men of *Varney* seem obsessed with observing social rules. And despite the tight epistolary enclosure that limits play, Auerbach and Skal note several inconsistencies and slips in Stoker’s chronology. Does Stoker lose ground, or as Derrida suggests, was there never a center to begin with?

The turn is located in the vampires’ deaths. At the end of Varney’s exhausting journey, more than one hundred years of life, as well as two years running in the press, he finds he can’t abide his miserable existence any longer. Varney, weary, does what no mortal can accomplish; he kills himself in accordance with his text’s rules for dispatching a vampire, with fire.¹³ Varney’s suicide ends his vampire life, the serial, and the legacy of *Varney the Vampire*, a text that is only just beginning to really surface in contemporary criticism of vampire narratives. Despite all the seemingly deferred endings, *Varney* (and Varney) ends. Varney’s willingness to end his own life exhibits his nonchalance regarding the vampire game. The vampire of literature is a character driven by self-preservation. *Dracula* maintains clear goals throughout his novel; his actions can all be ascribed to his desire to preserve himself. *Dracula* is driven to live, and he will continue on at all costs. *Dracula* plays the vampire game because playing is the only way to ensure his survival. But Varney has no such goals or desires. Varney’s suicide is clear evidence of his perspective on vampire self-preservation. He plays

¹³ Technically, Varney uses lava from a volcano.

the game for as long as it is fun for him. When the game ceases to amuse him, he finds himself willing to die.

Varney has a definitive ending, both narratively and in publishing, but because of its final failure to adhere to its own rules, *Dracula's* (the vampire and the story) ending is continuously deferred. Throughout the text of *Dracula*, Van Helsing insists on following the rules of the vampire game with much ritual and strictness. The slaying of Lucy is drawn out and precise. Dracula's death is perhaps a letdown for readers as it spans all of one page at the end of the novel. Dracula is not killed according to Van Helsing's rules, but is struck down haphazardly and quickly by Jonathan and Quincey. The characters abandon the rules at the last moment, and some suggest the idea that Dracula did not really die in the end because his death was not performed according to ritual. Stoker has perhaps created the ultimate deferred ending because Dracula's ending has spawned many literary and film sequels to his story—a fate with which I think Dracula would have been pleased.

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