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## Dracula's Harem: Feminine Otherness and Reverse Colonization of the Male Body

### Cover Page Footnote

Amanda Shipman earned her Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her undergraduate research analyzed the Medieval hagiography of St. Audrée through the lens of Bakhtinian dialogism. She is about to complete a Master of Arts degree in English literature, while working as a Teaching Associate at San José State University. Her upcoming research project involves an Ecoqueer reading of environmental speculative fiction.

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**Dracula's Harem: Feminine Otherness and  
Reverse Colonization of the Male Body**

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In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the three vampire women reject Victorian social conventions of demure femininity while also threatening the racial purity of their prey, Jonathan Harker. In doing so, they take on the form of the monstrous "feminine other," a term I use to evoke ideas of intersectionality, being both female and "oriental." Rather than treat the vampire women as merely abominations of womankind or address the clear orientalism and anti-Semitism which informed depictions of *Dracula*, I combine the two to illustrate how they overlap to create the vampire women. Stoker's exoticization of the women's bodies and exaggeration of their sexuality is preceded by such orientalist works as Richard Burton's English translation of the *Book of the*

## *Dracula's Harem*

*Thousand Nights and a Night*, in which the lascivious eastern woman takes the form of the odalisque as well as the seductress. I argue that, rather than signifying a total refusal of femininity, the vampire women instead assert a different kind of femininity, the female version of that which makes Dracula a threat: deracination. While a great deal of work has been done on the subversive “anti-femininity” of the women,<sup>1</sup> and even more has been said regarding Dracula’s otherness,<sup>2</sup> I argue that Stoker Gothicizes the idea of the feminine other as it simultaneously threatens British colonial authority and masculinity.

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<sup>1</sup> Great works on this topic include Judith Bell’s “Deliberate Voluptuousness: The Monstrous Woman of Dracula and Carmilla,” William Hughes’ *Beyond Dracula: Bram Stoker’s Fiction and Its Cultural Context*, Laura Linneman’s “The Fear of Castration and Male Dread of Female Sexuality: The Theme of the ‘Vagina Dentata’ in Dracula,” Maria Parsons’ “Vamping the Woman: Menstrual Pathologies in Bram Stoker’s Dracula,” and Karen Winstead’s “Mrs. Harker and Dr. Van Helsing: Dracula, Fin-De-Siecle Feminisms, and the New Wo/Man.”

<sup>2</sup> For more on Dracula’s otherness, see Stephen Arata’s “The Occidental Tourist: Dracula and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization,” Bollen and Ingelbien’s “An Intertext that Counts? Dracula, the Woman in White, and Victorian Imaginations of the Foreign Other,” Stu Burns’ “Vampire and Empire: Dracula and the Imperial Gaze,” Franklin Jeffrey’s “The Economics of Immortality: The Demi-Immortal Oriental, Enlightenment Vitalism, and Political Economy in Dracula”, Kimberly Frohreich’s “Sullied Blood, Semen and Skin: Vampires and the Spectre of Miscegenation,” and Daniel Renshaw’s “Monsters in the Capital: Helen Vaughan, Count Dracula and Demographic Fears in Fin-De-Siecle London.”

Scholars<sup>3</sup> have examined Dracula from the perspective of British anti-Semitism<sup>4</sup> and reverse colonization, though few, if any, have considered the reverse colonization of Jonathan Harker's body by the empowered vampire women. Stoker's indirect characterization of Dracula paints him as a Jew colonizing London, a hoarder of wealth and women, and a racial threat due to his possession and deracination of the English female. The female vampires have been likened to the New Woman<sup>5</sup> by scholars like Maria Parsons, who also compares the vampire women to the figure of the virago, or wild woman. Because they reject passive femininity, domesticity, and motherhood, the vampire women are Stoker's Gothicized rendition of the New Woman. The horror at their independence from womanly duties culminates in their disregard for life, exemplified in the end of the seduction scene where it is implied that the three women routinely feed on babies and children. This horrific inversion of maternal femininity serves as a foil for Mina in her desire to assist the male characters while

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<sup>3</sup> Namely Stephen Arata, Franklin Jeffrey, and Daniel Renshaw.

<sup>4</sup> For examples of British anti-Semitism, see Joseph Banister's *England under the Jews* and the anonymous article "Foreign Undesirables," published in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine.

<sup>5</sup> Referenced by Mina in chapter VIII, the "New Woman" was a Victorian figure of feminine resistance to the constraining role of wife and mother. Like the vampire women, the "New Woman" challenges, even inverts, Victorian gender roles and expectations.

## *Dracula's Harem*

remaining subservient, a subservience which culminates in her embrace of conventional motherhood, thus breaking the vampire's spell on the mortal characters. The vampire women, I argue, are not embodied rejections of Victorian femininity and motherhood, but indicative of Victorian notions of eastern femininity and monstrous motherhood. They attempt to procreate with Jonathan by infecting him, just as Dracula procreates by vamping Lucy, and threatens to vamp the male characters through his newly converted vampire women (Stoker 374). The harem inmates' confinement in Dracula's castle and inability to hunt for themselves further characterizes them as oppressed "oriental" women, while their thirst for blood makes a monster of the "angel in the house," the domesticated womanly figure introduced by Coventry Patmore in 1854. As fallen angels of the house, the vampire women do not signify blatant masculinity in their sexual appeal, but their ability to seduce and penetrate Jonathan siphons the masculinity from him and threatens British hegemony.

In Gothicizing the feminine other, Stoker introduces horror to the otherwise tantalizing idea of the "oriental" woman. Drawing on Edward Said's groundbreaking work with *Orientalism*, I seek to analyze depictions of women from the east as they are uniquely represented among "orientals." At the height of Victorian imperialism, travel narratives served as the British public's overarching source of information about the Orient. Such works depicted lavish chambers adorned with precious

stones and expensive fabrics. The language of commodity goes deeper, to the contents of the elusive harem, which, according to Richard Burton, is often used by synecdoche to refer to the individuals within. Being the one place off limits to male writers, it was naturally the site of intrigue, but for female travelers who gained access, it was a place of excess and boredom (Sokołowicz 179). The odalisque is thus a quintessential image of life in the harem; she is depicted lounging on a couch, adorned with precious artifacts, awaiting the male companion whose absence allows the male viewer to imagine himself the lover, or owner, of the woman (Kalmar 187). When Jonathan falls asleep on the couch, he wakes to find a harem of lecherous women exhilarated by his presence, thus fulfilling male desire while simultaneously violating Victorian gender roles. By making Jonathan the odalisque, Stoker explores the idea of male submission to female penetration, a queer scenario that violates British hegemony.

Drawing on Victorian travel narratives of the East,<sup>6</sup> Stoker attributes a harem to Dracula to further “orientalize” him and his sister wives. The widespread Victorian English notion of the east relied on decadent travelogue imagery and paintings which depict naked or lavishly adorned women lounging on sofas. Małgorzata Sokołowicz addresses the stereotype of the odalisque as it

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<sup>6</sup> The most prominent and influential being Emily Gerard’s narrative of her travels to Romania.

appears in Victorian travel narratives, revealing many visual and linguistic similarities between Stoker's source material and his product. "La mode se renforce encore au XIXe siècle ou les peintres continuent à peindre les belles Orientales nues et voluptueuses et les poètes parlent ouvertement de débauches levantines" (176).<sup>7</sup> The use of "voluptuousness" repeats throughout 19<sup>th</sup> century depictions of the eastern woman and, like a sexually transmitted infection, is transferred to Lucy by Dracula later in the novel. Lucy then becomes one of the harem inmates, "les femmes orientales [qui] ont un appetit sexuel demesure qu'un seul homme n'est pas capable de satisfaire" (175).<sup>8</sup> The harem inmates, then, are seen as inherently sexual beings, lacking agency but brimming with mysterious allure. They cease to be individuals, much like how the two dark vampires fade into the background, accentuating the fairer creature.

However, even the fair vampire is characterized by eastern commodities, further enforcing the objectification and commodification of the eastern woman. Her eyes are "like pale sapphires," a precious stone imported from India, while "[a]ll three had brilliant white teeth that shone like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips"

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<sup>7</sup> "The style is further reinforced in the nineteenth century, where painters continue to paint beautiful, nude, and voluptuous Orientals, and poets speak openly of Levantine debauchery" (translation mine).

<sup>8</sup> "Oriental women who have a sexual appetite of such measure that one man alone is not capable of satisfying" (translation mine).



(Stoker 69). Not only are pearls often used to signify tears and seminal fluid, but as a precious commodity they are only imported from the east, and thus have a cultural significance, especially for imperial Britain, of being oriental artifacts. Ivan Kalmar's examination of the Jewish odalisque proves that white skin is no barrier to orientaling the sensual female object. "At the level of race, the imagined Jew and the odalisque were both essentially white, though both also illustrated the fact that whiteness can be a matter of degree" (183). Just as Dracula is pale from lack of blood and Jewish according to stereotypical depictions,<sup>9</sup> so too are his wives seemingly otherized despite their skin tone. The harem depicts a clear hierarchy, in which the fair and pale woman with sapphire eyes takes precedence over the darker women with "aquiline noses, like the Count" (Stoker 69). The fair vampire is a clear favorite of the Count's, and her "right to begin" suggests that she is above the other two vampire women in status, likely due to her fairness (69). Questions of conversion arise when considering the fair-haired vampire: was she a visitor from the west who fell victim to Dracula and turned into an oriental treasure? If so, the details of her fairness add to the fear that Dracula will infect

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<sup>9</sup> Jews are characterized by their aquiline noses, love of foreign labor, preference for dirt or earth, and tolerance for suffocation according to a few writers working just before and/or during Stoker's time. These descriptions mainly come from an anonymous article entitled "Foreign Undesirables" and Joseph Banister's *England under the Jews*.

pure, good women as well as lecherous dark women of the east, turning both into his sister wives.

Revisiting the pearl and sapphire imagery in the context of the Petrarchan sonnet tradition, Jonathan describes the vampire women using the language of beauty. The allure of their beauty is sexually tempting, while the knowledge of their otherness, their deviance from Victorian British values renders them racially dangerous. "I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those [voluptuous] red lips" (Stoker 69). The use of red and white, pearl and sapphire, keeps with the Petrarchan tradition of describing the beloved poetic subject. Rather than the red blush upon white skin, the vampire's white skin is more of a deathly pallor, while the redness of their lips foreshadows their bloodthirsty consumption habits. Their teeth and lips are alluring in the way that the exotic woman is alluring, temporarily enjoyable while her foreignness threatens racial contamination. Additionally, the red mouth with pearly white teeth conforms to Laura Linneman's assessment of the vampire mouth as *vagina dentata*, an irresistible orifice set with a monstrous trap. Because they possess qualities of the phallus as well as the vagina, the vampire women convey sexual domination, leaving Jonathan, as a British male, no recourse but to submit to the pleasure and pain of penetration. Jonathan's desire for the women is powerful yet wicked, because he knows that the vampire women are forbidden to him, not only because he is engaged to Mina, but, arguably more pressing, such consummation involves the

penetration of the male, signifying emasculation of the British empire.

Turning to the longstanding English tradition of orientalist literature, Sir Richard Francis Burton was a world traveler, author, translator, and orientalist. His knowledge of twenty-five different languages made him the most accurate—and most invasive—Englishman to penetrate Muslim holy lands. By disguising himself as a Muslim, he successfully infiltrated various foreign lands, prizing those which were deemed off-limits to non-Muslims such as Medina and Mecca. His extensive writings on India, Africa, and the Middle East preclude Stoker's work by approximately half a century. In addition to Sir Richard Burton, Emily Gerard produced a work of orientalist non-fiction from which Stoker is said to have drawn the greatest deal of his knowledge regarding Transylvania and the Carpathians, an area he never visited. Between Burton and Gerard, there is a clearly thriving tradition of orientalist literature within which Stoker situates the epistles of Jonathan Harker. Just as Burton penetrated the sacred lands of Islam, so too do the vampire women attempt to infiltrate Jonathan's veins.

In his English translation of the *Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, Richard Burton conveys a description of harem inmates from the tale of "The Porter and the Three Ladies of Baghdad" which closely aligns with and expounds Stoker's vignette of the three "ladies" of Transylvania. In the story, one lady in particular seduces the porter with her beauty, described in

## *Dracula's Harem*

Petrarchan language (more on that later), mixed with orientalist vocabulary.

Her forehead was flower-white; her cheeks like the [red] anemone ruddy bright; her eyes were those of the wild heifer or the gazelle, with eyebrows like the crescent-moon which ends Sha'aban and begins Ramazan [*sic*]; her mouth was the ring of Sulayman, her lips coral-red, and her teeth like a line of strung pearls or of camomile [*sic*] petals (84-85).

Just like the vampire women, there is a red mouth set with pearl teeth. There is oceanic imagery of coral and pearls, alluding to the treasures of the east which are harvested from the sea floor. Additionally, the crescent-shaped eyebrows add a great deal of eastern context to the already exotic story, reminding the reader of the principality of Islam in the region. The forehead and teeth are white like flowers, yet the eyes are dark and animalistic, suggesting lascivious intent beneath seemingly pure and innocent whiteness. The vampire women may also be pale, but their animalistic intentions of blood consumption, their red mouths with pearly teeth set to tempt their imperialist prey, portend danger.

The male desire for passivity is characterized by horror because Jonathan's precious status as an imperialist male is undermined by the vampire women's allure. As the odalisque, Jonathan occupies the feminine position, but also that of the foreigner. Though the vampire women are clearly depicted as the other, it is Jonathan who has visited

from a faraway land, and his sexual allure as a foreigner parallels imperialist dynamics of colonial men and eastern women. John Allen Stevenson discusses a trend in primary sources from the period, wherein the imperial British male is characterized by his hankering for “foreign women” (144). He then attributes this desire to Dracula, who crosses the sea in search of British women, inverting the dynamic and creating horror for a British reader. I would argue also that Jonathan expresses the typical desire for foreign women, but also that Jonathan is the foreign visitor, meaning his presence ignites sexual hunger in the vampire women while Jonathan is simultaneously aroused by the attention from eastern women. What typically transpired between a British man and one (or several) foreign women is not thoroughly documented in historical record, but the horror at its reversal is clearly displayed in the seduction scene. The women prey upon a male odalisque, attempting to penetrate him and deplete him of his blood, which can be read as both semen and race. It is the British obsession over purity and integrity of blood that allows Stoker to Gothicize seduction in a foreign land. Rather than spreading the imperial man’s blood/semen in foreign lands, Jonathan risks losing his blood, semen, and racial integrity at the hands of the vampire women.

The fear of deracination is prominent in *Dracula*, though it is most often studied through the vampire hunters’ fears for Lucy and Mina’s racial purity, rather than that of Jonathan. Stevenson examines scholarship on the miscegenation

## *Dracula's Harem*

argument regarding Dracula only, and concludes that “Dracula’s threat is not miscegenation, the mixing of blood; instead, he gives his partners a new racial identity” (144). Dracula does not mix blood or reproduce in the conventional way; rather, he depletes his victims of their blood and substitutes his own blood in its place, stripping the women of their racial identity and instilling his own. This form of reproduction is not limited to Dracula alone, because Dracula promises the vampire hunters that “through [your girls] you and others shall yet be mine” (Stoker 347). Since female vampires are also capable of deracinating their victims, it can be inferred that the goal of the vampire women was to drain Jonathan of his pure English blood, and possibly substitute their eastern blood in its place. Jonathan’s pale skin, grey hair, and degraded silence following the encounter with the vampires suggest a minor case of deracination did occur. Knowing the vampire’s power to deracinate its victim, Jonathan’s deadly experience with the vampire harem proves more dangerous than at first glance.

Not only are the female vampires capable of deracination due to their unnatural thirst for blood, but their status as foreign women further accentuates their ability to deracinate their victims. In one of Stoker’s most prominent sources of information on Transylvania, Emily Gerard explains the phenomenon of the Romanian woman and her non-Romanian partner.

...while the Magyar who takes a Roumanian girl for his wife will not only fail to convert

her to his ideas, but himself, subdued by her influence, will imperceptibly begin to lose his nationality. This is a fact well known and much lamented by the Hungarians themselves, who live in anticipated apprehension of seeing their people ultimately dissolving into Roumanians (304-305).

The vampire is not the only being who depletes their victim of racial integrity. Romanian women, by Gerard's logic, have the ability to drain away the racial identity of their sexual partners, which further heightens the danger of the vampire women, particularly the darker, aquiline-nosed women who more accurately represent Victorian ideas of the eastern woman. Jonathan's greatest threat, then, is the intersectionality of the "oriental" women, who are at once sexually tempting and racially overpowering. The desire to mate with them, or be victimized by them, is coupled with the vampire women's ability to drain their victim of his race, thereby lessening the population of Victorian Britain one "good strong man" at a time.

Considering Gerard's heavy influence on Stoker's writing,<sup>10</sup> and the equation of blood with semen and race, it is possible that Jonathan Harker

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<sup>10</sup> Emily Gerard's 19<sup>th</sup> century works, "Transylvanian Superstitions" and *The Land Beyond the Forest: Facts, Figures, and Fancies from Transylvania*, were in Stoker's possession at the time of his writing *Dracula*. Scholars who support this literary connection include Stephen D. Arata, David Allison, and Glennis Byron.

## *Dracula's Harem*

suffered a case of undiagnosed vampirism which manifested itself differently than in the female victims. While Lucy's deracination by Dracula leaves her bloodthirsty and voluptuous like the other female vampires, Jonathan's deracination presents itself in a similar way to Dracula's vampirism. He does not lose his composure, yet he takes on the deathly pallor of Dracula and suffers from "a violent brain fever" in a hospital in Budapest (Stoker 134). The details of his symptoms are not disclosed in the letter to Mina, so as not to worry her, yet Jonathan's continued weakness after six weeks' treatment is telling. The delirium, "violent" rage and ravings about blood suggest that a vamping by proxy may have taken Jonathan for the six weeks that he was abroad, and even when Mina visits him in hospital, she is told "that the ravings of the sick were the secrets of God." Thus, we cannot know what all Jonathan spoke or raged about in his six weeks of feverish delirium, but one suggestion is that, like Renfield, Jonathan succumbed to a vampirish madness spurred by Dracula and his women. This would mean that Jonathan's illness, if caused by the female vampires, would not truly come to an end until Van Helsing destroyed Dracula's wives, effectively removing the men's temptation to receive penetration and restoring Victorian gender norms.

The night before Van Helsing sets out to kill the vampire women, they appear to Mina and tempt her to join their harem. Though she does not completely fall under their spell because her vamping is incomplete, she is definitively tempted



to join their ranks as a lounging, languorous odalisque. When the female vampires appear to Mina and Van Helsing, they are described as having the “ruddy colour” and “voluptuousness,” again characteristic of the temptress of Baghdad. Additionally, their teeth are white as in the Petrarchan sonnet tradition, and their eyes are both bright and hard, suggesting playfully devilish intent. Finally, their “swaying round forms” could be a roundness to their bodily figures, or the deliberate voluptuousness of their breasts, likened to pomegranates in Burton’s translation (84-85). They call Mina their sister, and invite her to join them in castle Dracula, where she might spend eternity lounging in boredom, awaiting meager morsels from their shared bridegroom. “L’ennui se promène seul dans ces grands salons vides’, écrit Valérie de Gasparin, en déplorant la vie de ses ‘sœurs’ orientales” (Sokołowicz 179).<sup>11</sup> The harem is framed as a site of luxurious boredom rather than eastern feminine freedom. From the perspective of the harem inmates, there is camaraderie and a female support system, which Mina is now lacking in excess. If it had not been for the vampire slayers, both Mina and Lucy would be together, wandering the vast halls of castle Dracula largely undisturbed, perhaps even in the throes of Dracula’s extensive library. This option is clearly unacceptable by Victorian standards, so the vampire women are

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<sup>11</sup> “‘Boredom wanders alone in these large empty halls,’ writes Valérie de Gasparin, in deploring the life of his oriental ‘sisters’” (translation mine).

## *Dracula's Harem*

portrayed as monstrous, and their identification of Mina as “sister” intensifies the horror of Mina’s near vamping.

When Van Helsing resolves to kill the vampire women on his own, he puts himself in danger of falling under their spell similarly to Jonathan, yet his description of their beauty utilizes scientific, analytical diction. Again, the fair vampire woman is privileged over the two dark women, “in a high great tomb,” suggesting that she was Dracula’s first victim or most beloved, though the reason for her priority could be due entirely to her fairness (Stoker 411). Regardless of this clear preference for the fair above the dark in terms of beauty, Van Helsing is first tempted by the appearance of the dark vampire woman. The desire for the woman’s body is prominent in the older man, yet as a scientist, Van Helsing describes a “sweet fascination,” as though these specimens were oriental commodities, treasures of the east to be ogled and admired with morbid curiosity. Like most imaginings of the eastern treasure, they are characterized by “the dust of centuries,” and the desire felt by the western male colonizer is one to possess the ancient and dark subject. When he turns to the fair woman, Van Helsing feels “new emotion,” to love and protect rather than merely possess as an object of fascination (Stoker 411). In enacting his “wild work,” Van Helsing stimulates a violent orgasm with the “plunging” and “writhing form” of the vampire woman. In killing/raping them, he is freeing them of their unacceptable lifestyle, and Stoker attributes a look of “gladness”

to the dying women, as though their suffering under Dracula's control has finally come to an end. Had the women been given the choice to live or die, it is likely that they would not have preferred to die, to be freed of their supposed plight. However, the satisfaction of living within a harem is forbidden by Victorian standards, and thus, the women must die rather than dwell in lustful languor.

Once Van Helsing has removed the temptation to receive penetration by murdering the vampire women, Jonathan is finally able to reclaim his manhood, vanquishing Dracula by his own hand. In doing so, he also reclaims Mina as his own bride, and rescues her from the fate of the vampire women. Before the vampire women have been killed, Jonathan takes a swipe at Dracula with his Kukri blade and misses, allowing Dracula to escape (Stoker 346). This display of impotence is due to the fact that he still suffers under the vampire's spell. The pale, white-haired, emasculated Jonathan is later shown brandishing his Kukri knife in a way that makes his companions nervous for his mental health as they travel to Dracula's homeland to execute their final deed. His hands are described by Dr. Seward as "cold as ice," while his demeanor is strangely calm despite the apparent trauma associated with a return to Dracula's castle. When the moment of truth arrives, the vampire women are dead, and thus Jonathan is able to slice through the throat of the count while Quincey Morris penetrates Dracula with his American blade. In killing Dracula, Jonathan reasserts his masculinity and restores the Victorian British status quo, while the

death of Quincey Morris establishes Great Britain as the global colonial superpower.<sup>12</sup> The women no longer pose a colonial threat to Jonathan's or Van Helsing's body, and they successfully vanquish the threat of Dracula's colonization of British women.

While many scholars have argued that the vampire women reject conventional Victorian femininity, I argue that they embrace the Victorian idea of feminine otherness, the widespread stereotype of the oriental harem and its threat to English masculinity. Because he enjoys his position on the couch, Jonathan violates Victorian British gender norms as well as conventions of monogamy and sexual conquest. In this reverse seduction/bodily colonization, the vampire women may have infected Jonathan after all, because his mark of shame is worn on his body similarly to the red mark of uncleanness worn by Mina. I argue that Jonathan's paleness and white hair following the encounter with the vampires is a mark of his trauma as well as his deracination following the seduction, possibly even the kisses, of the vampire women. This spell is not broken until the vampire women are destroyed by Van Helsing, at which point Jonathan gains the strength to kill Dracula by his own hand, thus restoring hegemony. He and

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<sup>12</sup> For a comparison of British and American colonial anxieties, see Louis S. Warren's "Buffalo Bill meets Dracula: William F. Cody, Bram Stoker, and the frontiers of racial decay." For further study on Dracula and postcolonialism, see Thorell Porter Tsomondo's "The 'Nineteenth Century Up-to-Date with a Vengeance': From Dracula's 'Horrid Cargo' to 'Ghastly' Millennial Freightage."

Mina continue this resolution by procreating in the conventional way, though questions of lasting infection linger in their newborn child. Ultimately, the experience ignites fears of a diminishing race, prompting the Harkers to create new life in opposition to the spread of vampirism, and foreignness, in England.

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