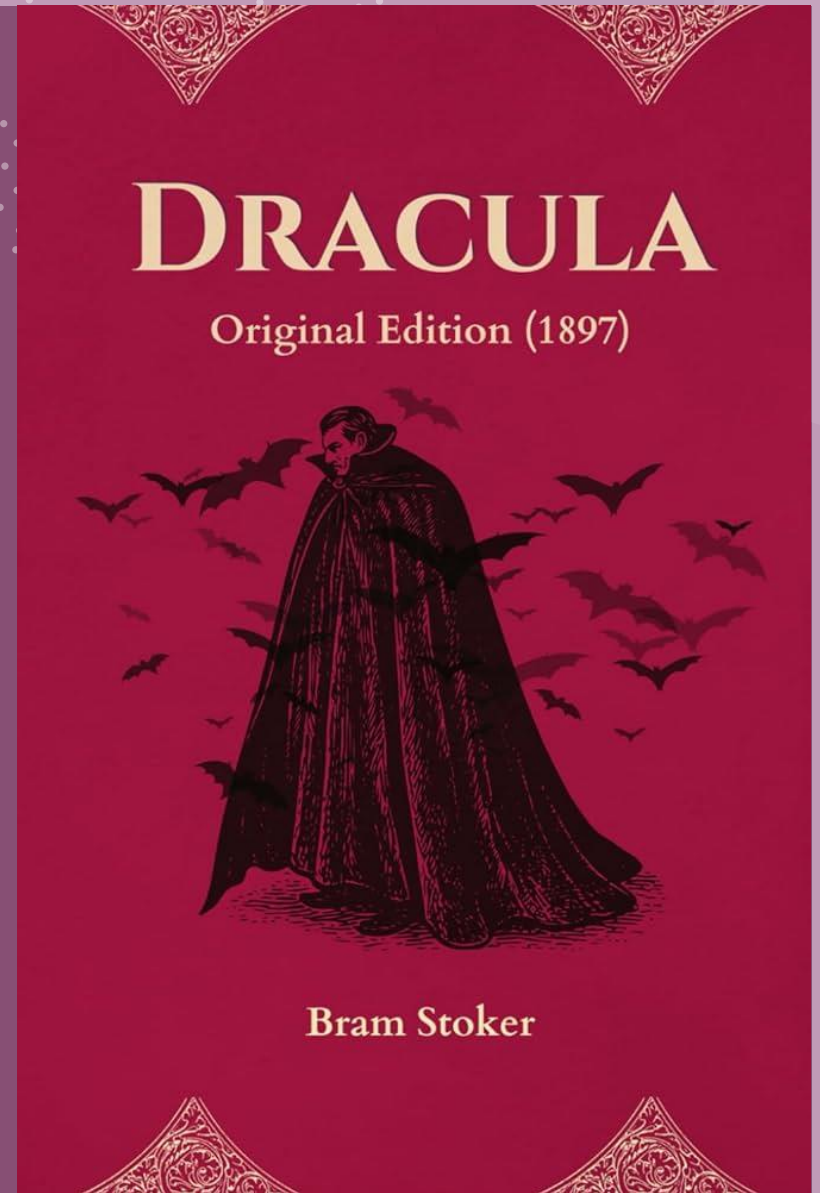


Blood: The Complexities of Sexuality in Stoker's Dracula

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Dracula (1897) Cultural Context

The era's developments and discoveries

- Darwinian theories
- Freudian discoveries
- quasi-scientific theories such as Cesare Lombroso's criminology

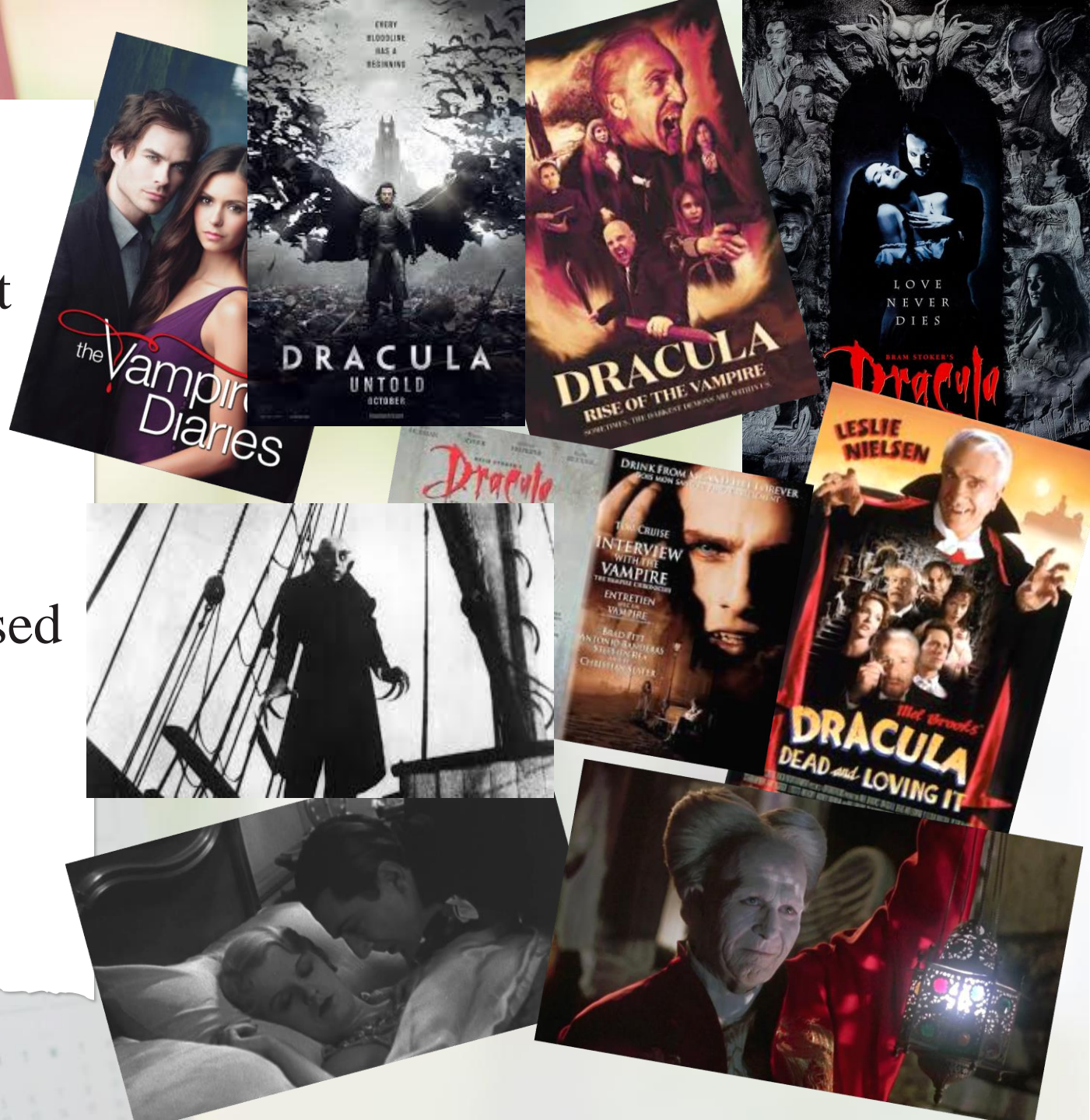
an explicit reference to Nordau and Cesare Lombroso when Mina claims that "[t]he Count is a criminal and of criminal type. Nordau and Lombroso would so classify him" (p. 363).

- theories about negative evolution - Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (translated in 1895 by Stoker's publisher William Heinemann (Hoeveler, 2006)).
- Imperialism
- New Woman movement
- scientific and medicine advancement



Dracula's Legacy

- The only fictional character that has surpassed it in film representations is Sherlock Holmes. (Guiley, 2005)
- Around 3 000 films related to vampire topics have been released so far. (Gelder, 1994)
- Around 1 000 titles. (Brown, 2002)
- [Nosferatu \(1922\)](#)
- [Nosferatu \(2024\)](#)



Why the Longevity of the Myth?

The vampire figure has perpetuated and existed “next to” humans, as part of their culture from ancient times. It has survived and transited from mythology to literature, and with the advancement of technology from literature to films and the cyberspace.

Why do you think vampires have remained such a powerful symbol in literature and popular culture?

- Humans' fascination with its erotic side
- concept of eternal life as a way to defeat the

Who is Stoker's Dracula?

- Dracula's vampiric nature is **UNIQUE** and rather **AMBIGUOUS**.
- He is partly or was once human.
- He is East European, probably Slavic—a descendant of the Szekelys.
- Initially called Count Wampyr, but during the summer spent in Whitby, he borrowed William Wilkinson's "An Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia" (1820)- a brief reference to a "Voivode Dracula". (Miller, 2006)

• Never addressed as **Vlad the Impaler** in the

Proto-Slavic *ǫpirь / *upirь →

in early Old East Slavic as упирь (upir')
1047 text →

likely related to South Slavic
forms →
(Bulgarian, Serbian, Macedonian
вампир)

borrowed into Hungarian
as vampir →

- ancient Mesopotamia-Lamashtu, 4000 years ago. - Lilitu (later Lilith in Jewish mythology) → into German as
- **Vampire** → true vampire story in a European sense—undead beings rising from the grave to drink blood—those appear in **Slavic**

What is the significance of blood?

- **Life force** – the essence of existence and survival
- **Procreation and lineage** – carrying identity through generations
- **Power and nobility** – a marker of status and inheritance
- **Spiritual significance** – the blood of Christ as salvation

"The blood is the life" -

Renfield (Chapter 21)

Deuteronomy 12:23 in the Bible

("Only be sure that thou eat not the blood: for
the blood is the life")

I was afraid to raise my eyelids, but looked out and saw perfectly under the lashes. The girl went on her knees, and bent over me, simply gloating. There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck, she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white, sharp teeth."—Jonathan Harker (Chapter 3)

- The imagery—"scarlet lips," "red tongue," "white, sharp teeth"—hints at bloodlust.
- The phrase "voluptuousness" suggests sexual temptation, while "repulsive" reflects Harker's conflicted feelings—anxieties over forbidden desire and gender roles.
- Harker's encounter with the three vampire women is

"Lower and lower went her head as the lips went below the range of my mouth and chin and seemed to fasten on my throat. Then I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the super-sensitive skin of my throat, and the hard dents of two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there."

-the bite is interrupted before blood is drawn—leaving the moment suspended in mixed tension and horror.

-more about seduction than violence, emphasizing female sexual dominance rather than the act of drinking blood.

- Mina and Lucy (passive victims), the female vampires are the aggressors.
- their dominance over Harker reverses traditional Victorian gender roles—he is paralyzed, submissive, and awaiting penetration (the bite).
- threat of female sexual agency is presented as monstrous.
- mirrors the Victorian fear of sexual temptation—desire must be controlled



When does blood first appear?

“There was a white face and red, gleaming eyes. Lucy was half reclining with her head lying over the back of the seat. Her eyes were closed and she was breathing heavily, as though in a stupor. Kneeling on the near side

Lucy's sleepwalking episode (Chapter 8), when Dracula bites her in Whitby and leaves two tiny puncture wounds on her throat.

shift from suggestion to explicit bloodletting, reinforcing the idea that blood in Dracula is

Lucy's as a vampire

With a careless motion, she flung to the ground, callous as a devil, the child that up to now she had clutched strenuously to her breast, growling over it as a dog growls over a bone. The child gave a sharp cry, and lay there moaning. There was a cold-bloodedness in the act which wrung a groan from Arthur; when she advanced to him with outstretched arms and a wanton smile, he fell back and hid his face in his hands. She still advanced, however, and with a languorous, voluptuous grace, said: "Come to me Arthur. Leave those others and come to me. My arms are hungry for you. Come, and

Blood as contamination, corruption and death

- *"The sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness."* -transformed Lucy Westenra (Chapter 16)
- Lucy's transition from an innocent Victorian woman to a sexualized, predatory vampire -Victorian anxieties about female sexuality as dangerous when uncontrolled.
- "voluptuous" - used multiple times in the novel to describe female vampires, reinforcing the idea that unrestrained



- the child Lucy holds "strenuously to her breast" is not being fed - is being fed upon.
- inversion of the natural mother instinct by perverting it from a creator and nourisher into a fatal destroyer.
- eliminating the child and stretching out for the husband, as Lucy "*callous as a devil*" invites Arthur, "*My arms are hungry for you,*" p. 302) - woman's satanic nature.
- Lucy's demonic phallicism punished



"Oh, my love, I am so glad you have come! Kiss me!" – Lucy to Arthur before her destruction (Chapter 16)

Lucy, as a vampire, inverts gender roles by taking on the role of an active seductress, rather than a passive woman.

demand for a "kiss" is coded language for sexual aggression further emphasizing the threat of

"The thing in the coffin writhed; and a hideous, blood-curdling screech came from the opened red lips. The body shook and quivered and twisted in wild contortions." (Lucy's staking scene)

stalking scene is disturbingly sexualized—described in violent, penetrative, and orgasmic terms. **WHY?**

reflects the Victorian fear that female sexuality must be violently suppressed to restore societal

"Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man's bare chest." – (Chapter 21)

- Mina's forced drinking of Dracula's blood is one of the novel's most explicitly sexualized moments.

- -her white nightdress stained with blood: loss of purity, forced penetration, and contamination—all of which align with Victorian fears about female sexuality and male domination.

- distorted inversion of Christian salvation: drinking Christ's blood in the Eucharist represents eternal life—but here, Dracula's blood signifies corruption and damnation.

"baptism of blood"

(Stoker, p. 322)

*"Flesh of my
flesh; blood of my
blood; kin of my
kin..."* Dracula to
Mina (Chapter 21)

- This scene mimics a marriage vow, reinforcing Dracula's role as a seducer, rather than just a predator.
- Blood becomes a bond, but also a form of enslavement, turning Mina into an unwilling participant in Dracula's world.

*"This is now bone of my
bones, and flesh of my
flesh; she shall be called
'woman,' for she was taken
out of man."* (Genesis 2:23,
KJB)



(1) Blood Transfusions - Mixing of "Pure" English Blood

Van Helsing Seward Holmwood Quincey

└──────────┬──────────┬──────────┬──────────┘
 | | | |
 └──────────┬──────────┘
 |
 └───▶ Lucy (Receives their blood)

(2) Dracula's Second Vampirization of Lucy

Dracula bites Lucy → Lucy fully transformed into a vampire

(3) Dracula's Blood Ritual with Mina Dracula (with mixed blood)

└──────────┬──────────┘
 |
 └───▶ Mina (forced to drink from his chest)

(4) Marriage & Possible Contamination of Little Quincey

Mina (contaminated) → Marries Harker → Gives

"even we four who gave our strength to Lucy it also is all to him"
(Stoker, p. 244).

Fight to protect English blood - survival of "bad blood"

PARADOX OF BLOOD

- none of the male characters has been bitten by a vampire in the text.
-
- blood transfusions enable the transfer of blood from Dracula to the male characters and from the male characters to Dracula.
 - male to male fluid exchange invites for a reading of elusive homosexuality.
 - Victorian fears of homosexuality: heavily repressed and criminalized (as in the Oscar Wilde trials)

- Count's bloodthirstiness when Harker cuts himself while shaving.
- *When the Count saw my face, his eyes blazed with a sort of demoniac fury, and he suddenly made a grab at my throat. I drew away and his hand touched the string of beads which held the crucifix. It made an instant change in him, for the fury passed so quickly that I could hardly believe that it was ever there. 'Take care,' he said, 'take care how you cut*

- The bloodthirstiness of the vampires: satisfies a sexual appetite, but simultaneously denotes satisfying hunger.
- What repulses Harker even more is the thought that when he moves to England, he intends to “*satiates his lust for blood, and create a new and ever-widening circle of semi-demons to batten on the helpless*” (p. 54).
- Dracula’s feeding habits are transmitters of vampirism as a disease which serves his colonizing intentions for the new land he is about to conquer. an invisible, infectious colonizing force which poses a threat on a larger scale—the extinction of a whole nation.
- within the framework of Britain’s imperialist status and the existing anxiety about the future of the empire simultaneously reflecting possibilities of reversed Imperialism. (Arata, 1990)

Conclusions

- Blood signifies: food (life/death), disease (degeneration) and marriage (creation of new vampires).
- brings degeneration of humankind as vampirism transmits degeneracy and blood lust by creating new vampires.
- arouses ideas of perverted, unconventional sex, which does not lead towards procreation, but destruction of life, marriage and moral norms.
- reverses the natural order as "the father and

Thank you!

- *The Daily Mail* (June 1, 1897) praised *Dracula* as "the most blood-curdling novel of the season," highlighting its ability to "make the flesh creep."
- *The Manchester Guardian* (June 15, 1897) was more critical, calling it "sensational" but accusing it of being too melodramatic.
- *The Athenaeum* (July 31, 1897) dismissed it as "superficial" and "too full of horrors to be taken seriously," suggesting that its sensationalism overshadowed any literary merit.
- Article published by the *Georgia Institute of Technology* on October 28, 2024. Professor Carol Senf ("Why *Dracula* Still Matters.") notes that *Dracula* has "never been out of print" and continues to address contemporary fears related to power, control, and the body

Further Reading

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* through the lens of HIV/AIDS is a fascinating modern interpretation. HIV - blood is the medium of infection, and the vampire's bite becomes a metaphor for bloodborne transmission.

Duy Dang's article, "A Disease with a Bite: Vampirism and Infection Theories in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*"

Fran Pheasant-Kelly's study, "Supernatural Surveillance and Blood-Borne Disease in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: Reflections on Mesmerism and HIV

Dracula through the lens of reverse
colonization

Stephen D. Arata - "The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization"

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