

Rethinking the New Woman in *Dracula*  
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**Abstract:** The existing canon of scholarship on *Dracula* asserts that the sexually aggressive female vampires are representative of the New Woman, and thus are evidence of Stoker's conservative reaction to changing gender roles. In contrast, this article offers a reinterpretation *Dracula* in the light of key writings of the New Woman movement which sought to demonize the Victorian marriage market because of its creation of a class of female parasites: idle middle-class woman entirely dependent on fathers and husbands. A close reading of key sections of the novel demonstrates that the female vampires are characterized as traditionally subordinate Victorian housewives, in contrast to the positive presentation of Mina Harker as a New Woman. This reading reveals a text that argues that work for women is the only antidote to the degeneration inherent in traditional womanhood, through which women are reduced to nothing more than their biological functions.

**Keywords:** New Woman, *Dracula*, Bram Stoker, Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner

*Dracula* is traditionally read as a conservative reaction to changing gender roles at the end of the nineteenth century. Thus, critics assert that texts like *Dracula* reveal 'male novelists' anxieties about the sexual and social repercussions of feminism, fears reflected in predatory and monstrous females'.<sup>1</sup> In this reading, female characters like Lucy Westenra are seen to be 'positioned outside Victorian normativity'<sup>2</sup> and thus her transformation into a vampire reveals 'the threat posed to traditionally conceived British masculinity by a female sexuality that deviates from the socially proscribed norm.'<sup>3</sup> For these critics, Lucy and the three female vampires at Castle Dracula embody 'the sexually decadent New Woman'<sup>4</sup>; this 'excessively forward sexuality'<sup>5</sup> is read as synonymous with emancipation, and thus Stoker is seen to present 'self-sufficient women as parasitical and immoral.'<sup>6</sup>

There are two core problems with this reading of the novel. The first is the assumption that the New Woman was universally associated with sexual liberation; the second is the belief that Lucy Westenra's behaviour in the novel can be interpreted as sexually liberated. I suggest, in contrast, that Lucy can be read as emblematic of traditional Victorian womanhood; her gruesome death, then, can be seen as a rejection not of the values of the New Woman, but of the values of an outdated mode of femininity which feminists of the period routinely asserted put women at risk of disease and death.

The traditional reading of *Dracula* hinges on the similarities critics find between Lucy Westenra and the caricature of the New Woman presented in anti-feminist writings of the period like William Barry's "The Strike of a Sex" (1894). To Barry, the New Woman was an anarchistic, sexually abandoned proponent of infanticide.<sup>7</sup> Recent criticism of *Dracula* continues to associate the New Woman with deviant sexuality: Beth Shane argues that

'overt expressions of female sexuality' mark the vampire women as New Women, while James Khader points to the New Woman's 'perverse sexuality'.<sup>8</sup> However, this negative caricature was far from the only version of the New Woman present in the public consciousness at the *fin de siècle*. As Ann Heilmann asserts, "The semantic instability of the term "New Woman" derives in part from the multiplicity of agents who had an ideological stake in constructing her."<sup>9</sup> Though her critics at times presented her as a sexual deviant who rejected her rightful role as wife and mother, to New Women writers she was something different. Far from a sexual decadent, for many feminists of the period, the New Woman was figured as 'an agent of the "purification" of the nation, countering conservative images of decay with her vision of renovation and 'racial' advancement.'<sup>10</sup> The character of Lucy Westenra has very little in common with the image of the New Woman put forward by New Woman writers themselves. Instead, she can be seen to conform to the two types of womanhood *against* which writers like Sarah Grand positioned the New Woman.

Grounded in a more historically-informed consideration of discourses surrounding the New Woman in the 1890s, this article argues for a re-evaluation of our understanding of the ways in which images of the New Woman were constructed and received during this period. Far from the rejection of female sexuality that critics invested in a psychoanalytical reading of *Dracula* have suggested, reading Lucy Westenra in the light of New Woman writing of the period reveals a text that argues for the importance of work for women. Work is figured as the only antidote to the degeneration inherent in traditional womanhood, which reduces women to their biological functions and sells those biological functions to the highest bidder on the Victorian marriage market.

## **The New Woman**

In her 2004 work, *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird*, Ann Heilmann focuses on three key New Woman writers to counter 'assumptions about the monolithic or one-dimensional, static nature' of the New Woman at the *fin de siècle*.<sup>11</sup> Though the three writers that Heilmann discusses shared the core concerns of the movement ('inequality in marriage and professional life, the moral double standard and sexual violence, and women's political disenfranchisement'<sup>12</sup>), they made use of a number of different strategies to address these concerns. For the present discussion of *Dracula*, the work of Sarah Grand and Olive Schreiner provides the most useful template of New Womanhood against which to read the female characters of the novel. By reading the novel in the light of Grand's campaign for sexual purity and Schreiner's insistence on the need for labour to prevent female degeneration, we can see that Lucy Westenra and the three female vampires are far from the New Woman ideal.

In her 1894 article 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question', Sarah Grand (who is credited with coining the term 'New Woman') endeavoured to counter the charges laid at the feet of Victorian feminists by their critics, including the imputation that New Women sought sexual liberation. She suggested that this misconception came from the inherent deviancy in *men* of the period, not women, writing:

What a man talks about knowing the world and having lived and that sort of thing, he means something objectionable; in seeing life he generally includes doing wrong; and it is in these respects he is apt to accuse us of wishing to ape him. Of old if a woman ventured to be at all unconventional, man was allowed to slander her with the imputation that she must be abandoned, and he really believed it because with him *liberty meant license*.<sup>13</sup> [my emphasis]

In order to counter these claims, Grand, along with many other New Woman writers, positioned herself as an upholder of sexual virtue. Far from seeking the dissolution of marriage, Grand suggested that the primary goals of the women's movement were improvements in women's education and the eradication of prostitution. Blanche Crackanthorpe, too, countered the notion of abandon at the heart of women's liberation, and instead insisted that the New Woman embodied Ralph Waldo Emerson's 'three master-keys to life—self-respect, self-control, and self-reliance'.<sup>14</sup>

Viewed in the context of *this* picture of New Womanhood at the end of the century, Lucy Westenra and the three female vampires hardly qualify. Instead, Lucy Westenra and the three vampire sisters are representations of what Stoker presents as an outdated and old-fashioned womanhood: domestic, uneducated, and consumeristic.

This is evident the first time Jonathan encounters the female vampires. They appear in the midst of a daydream of the medieval women who may have once inhabited Dracula's castle: 'Here I am, sitting at a little oak table where in old times possibly some fair lady sat to pen, with much thought and many blushes, her ill-spelt love-letter....'<sup>15</sup> Jonathan continues: 'I determined not to return tonight to the gloom-haunted rooms, but to sleep here, where of old ladies and sat and sung and lived sweet lives whist their gentle breasts were sad for their menfolk away in the midst of remorseless wars' [*Dracula*, 34].

It has been commonly assumed that this is a fantasy of an ideal of traditional womanhood. Thus, Anne McWhir asserts that Jonathan 'is charmed by fantasies of leisurely romance, of ladies who know nothing of typing or shorthand labouring over illiterate love-letters to fighting heroes'.<sup>16</sup> Here she draws a clear comparison between the imagined medieval ladies and Jonathan's fiancée Mina, who is disparaged for her acumen for shorthand and typing. In this reading, Jonathan's fantasy of ideal womanhood is then shattered by the appearance of the three vampire women. Sally Ledger writes, 'His romantic dream of chaste (and suitably ill-educated) womanhood in a setting reminiscent of courtly love tales is rudely disrupted when he is visited by the three female vampires.'<sup>17</sup>

The fact that these imagined medieval ladies are read as a contrast to the vampire women who soon materialize is a misinterpretation of the significance of this moment. When the vampire women appear Jonathan writes, 'in the moonlight opposite me were three young women, ladies by their dress and manner' [*Dracula*, 35]. The imagined 'old ladies' of the past appear in the form of these 'ladies by their dress and manner', not as an inversion of Jonathan's fantasy but as an embodiment of it. The vampire women are, in all likelihood, actually medieval (though it is unclear when Dracula turned them, Dracula himself is four hundred years old), and as Jonathan's imagined women were, the vampire women are

bound to the domestic space awaiting the return of their husband and provider - at the end of this scene, Dracula returns with food for the three women, revealing that they are entirely dependent upon him. They do not hunt for themselves; they merely wait to be fed. In fact, there is no evidence that they leave the castle until the very end of the novel when they are sent to fetch Mina. Carol Senf justifies her reading of the vampires as New Women because they are 'rampant females' who 'outnumber' Dracula.<sup>18</sup> Yet when Dracula returns to the castle, he easily, and violently, subdues the threatening women [*Dracula*, 36]. They are not 'rampant females' but dependent housewives, literally parasites upon the masculine host. The parallels between them and the imagined medieval women position traditional womanhood as monstrous in the 'modern' world of the novel.

Jonathan's fantasy of medieval women further lays the groundwork for the presentation of Lucy as an outdated ideal of Victorian womanhood that leaves her vulnerable to vampiric attack. In the infamous letter in which Lucy relates the details of the three marriage proposals she has received, Lucy writes: 'I burst into tears—I am afraid, my dear, you will think this is a very sloppy letter in more ways than one' [*Dracula*, 53]. The letter is sloppy with tears, but also, it is implied, with errors that Mina the schoolteacher is bound to catch. This immediately recalls the 'ill-spelt love-letter' in Jonathan's medieval fantasy, providing a key link between Lucy at the beginning of the novel and the vampire women she will shortly join. The three marriage proposals form the core of the critical argument that Lucy is a sexual libertine, yet in this letter she is deliberately aligned with traditional femininity. She, like the fantasy medieval women and the real vampire women, is confined to the domestic sphere as she waits for the return of her lover, who has been forced to return home to his ailing father.

A single line forms the basis for the continued critical insistence that Lucy is 'positioned outside Victorian normativity', as she reacts to her multiple marriage proposals: 'Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?' [*Dracula*, 53]. Ledger reads this line and asserts, 'In wanting to marry three men and in escaping at midnight to seek the dubious attentions of Count Dracula, Lucy Westenra transgresses the boundaries laid down by Victorian gender codes in a pretty thorough-going way.'<sup>19</sup> Senf agrees: 'her desire for three husbands suggests a degree of latent sensuality which connects her to the New Woman of the period'.<sup>20</sup> Tanya Pikula, too, suggests this line is indicative of an 'immoderate desire to consume'.<sup>21</sup>

In the light of the wider discourse surrounding the New Woman during this period, however, this line may be read as being entirely in keeping with normative middle-class British values. Lucy wishes she could marry all three men, not because she wants them, but because *they want her*.<sup>22</sup> She wishes to please the men, and thus doesn't want to have to choose between them. As Barry asserted in his anti-feminist repudiation of the New Woman, '[women's] chief talent has ever been to please'.<sup>23</sup> Eagerness to please and self-denial are key traits of the ideal 'Angel in the House', not the New Woman.<sup>24</sup>

The most telling aspect of Lucy's letter to Mina is not that she suggests she would marry all three men if they wanted her, but that, after describing John Seward's and Quincey Morris's proposals at length, she says nothing of Arthur's. 'Oh, about number three—I needn't tell

you of number three, need I?' [*Dracula*, 53]. She describes neither Arthur's appearance, as she did with Morris, or his manners, as she did with Seward. After all, what do those things matter, when a man is the future Lord Godalming? It is in this moment, and not her wish to marry three men, that I believe we can find the heart of Stoker's criticism of Lucy - or the institutions that have created her. She writes, 'Oh, why must a man like that be made unhappy when there are lots of girls about who would worship the very ground he trod on? I know I would if I were free—only I don't want to be free' [*Dracula*, 53]. This is very telling - Lucy is not 'free': she is otherwise engaged but, more importantly, she is not without *cost*. She is a middle-class woman on the marriage market; she must marry the man with the greatest means.

The constraints that Lucy faces in her choice of spouse are made abundantly clear following her and her mother's deaths. Mrs Westenra's will reveals that she left her whole estate to Arthur Holmwood - not to her own daughter. The family lawyer explains: 'Frankly we did our best to prevent such a testamentary disposition, and pointed out certain contingencies that might leave her daughter either penniless or not so free as she should be to act regarding a matrimonial alliance. Indeed, we pressed the matter so far that we almost came into collision' [*Dracula*, 141]. Neither desire nor choice have any meaning, then, in the proposal scenes. If Lucy had developed an interest in someone less 'well suited' for her than the future Lord Godalming—say an adventurous American—she would have been left without inheritance. Her future was fixed. The critics are correct that it is in this letter that Lucy seals her fate. However, it is not Lucy's aberrant desire but her adherence to traditional gender codes that marks her as a future vampire.

In *Dracula* we can see Stoker addressing what Heilmann identifies as the core concerns of the woman's movement of the period: 'girls' education, the close correlation between healthy bodies and minds, the injurious effects of dysfunctional mothering, the dangers of sexual ignorance... [and] the need for a purposeful occupation besides and beyond marriage...' <sup>25</sup> This list reveals the primary differences between the two heroines of *Dracula*, which mark Mina Harker, not Lucy Westenra, as a New Woman. <sup>26</sup> Mina is educated, trained as a teacher and proficient in up-to-the-minute clerical skills and technology. Lucy, on the other hand, lacks both Mina's education and her mental stimulus. The novel suggests that it is this lack of activity or intellectual engagement that leaves Lucy vulnerable to vampire attacks; in contrast, Mina is healthiest in body when mentally active, pursuing the information needed to defeat the vampiric invasion. Mina works in a professional capacity both before and after her marriage, first as a teacher and then as a partner to Jonathan in his work as a solicitor.

In contrast, Lucy can be read as a warning about the 'injurious effects of dysfunctional mothering [and] the dangers of sexual ignorance'. Mrs. Westenra's 'dysfunctional mothering' is evident in the way she forced Lucy's hand in her marriage to Arthur, and both Mrs. Westenra and Lucy can be defined by their ignorance. Kept in the dark by Van Helsing and the other male characters, neither woman is equipped to protect Lucy against the sexual/infectious threat that *Dracula* poses. Mrs Westenra, uninformed of the threat stalking her daughter, makes a variety of mistakes in her role as carer for Lucy: removing the garlic blossoms with which Van Helsing has bedecked the room and opening the

window to allow in fresh air. Lucy is therefore left completely vulnerable to Dracula's advances. Had Van Helsing explained the situation to Mrs Westenra, Lucy would have been protected and would have survived Dracula's interest in her. The male characters, however, decide that information itself is dangerous to the women, and thus leave them to their fate. We can see, in this section of the novel, a parallel to the arguments put forward by New Woman writers about the necessity of sexual education to help women identify and fight the threats posed to them by venereal disease. Neither Mrs Westenra nor Lucy recognize the symptoms of the disease Dracula spreads with his infectious kisses, and thus they are helpless against them.

When Grand coined the term 'New Woman' in 1894, she did so in contrast to what she saw as the two 'old' types of Victorian womanhood: the 'cow woman' and the 'scum woman'.<sup>27</sup> The cow woman is man's 'domestic cattle', the housewife who never questions her situation. The scum woman is the housewife's distorted mirror image: the prostitute. At the moment Lucy is all but purchased by Arthur's title and wealth, she is a 'cow woman'. However, as New Woman writers of the period showed, both the cow woman and the scum woman were creations of - and victims of - the Victorian marriage market. Normative Victorian society attempted to position these two types of women as polar opposites; Grand reveals their core similarities. It is Lucy's overt sexuality as a vampire that marks her as 'deviant' or 'aberrant' from normative Victorian values for the majority of recent criticism. In contrast, I suggest that it is her adherence to normative British values that constructs Lucy as a sexual object. As Blanche Crackanthorpe suggested in 1894, the idle life of the middle- and upper-class woman was not just useless - it actually invited depravity:

Let the frantic pursuit of so-called pleasure—the ugly cloak for the still uglier matrimonial hunt—be abandoned as the unclean thing. In what other class do society-seeking and “going about” form the staple employment of its young women of eighteen years of age and upwards? What sort of aspect is this scheme of existence likely to wear in the eyes of that other girl, to the full as young and as attractive, who spends her days in earning her bread either as governess, clerk, or shopwoman?<sup>28</sup>

The language Crackanthorpe uses is very much the language that describes Lucy and the other female vampires, the 'pleasure' seeking that makes them 'ugly' and 'unclean'. As Crackanthorpe insists, it is the 'matrimonial hunt' that consumes Lucy's entire short life which ruins women, not New Womanhood. It is not their gender that condemns these women, but their idleness - in clear contrast to those more virtuous gainfully-employed women, the governesses, clerks, and shopwomen.

Crackanthorpe continues in her condemnation of the marriage market to point out that it creates not just idle, pleasure-seeking young women, willing to sell themselves to the highest bidder, but also a class of women who literally sell themselves. The financial demands of the marriage market, which encourage men to put off marrying until they can meet the requirements of future parents-in-law, create an environment where prostitution is considered a natural, even a crucial, part of the system. For Grand and Crackanthorpe,

the 'cow woman' and the 'scum woman' are not binary opposites, but rather two ends of one spectrum of womanhood, and both victims of sexual inequality created by men. Crackanthorpe writes, 'As long as our daughters are so brought up as to be helpless as working partners, as long as their parents demand for them ample settlements, this evil [of prostitution] will continue to confront us and to meet with cynical toleration as if it sprang from the necessities of the case.'<sup>29</sup> Sarah Grand was one of many New Women who was involved with the social purity campaign against prostitution which sought to staunch the spread of venereal disease by immoral men to their unsuspecting and innocent wives.<sup>30</sup> Throughout the critical tradition surrounding *Dracula*, vampirism has been associated with venereal disease. The fact that the women are only vulnerable to the vampire when kept in the dark by the men who claim to protect them suggests the need for female education to combat the dangers that lurk within the seemingly-happy Victorian marriage.

### **The Middle-Class Woman as Vampiric Consumer**

In her 1911 *Woman and Labour*, the New Woman writer Olive Schreiner argued that the labour crisis of the female sex at the *fin de siècle* was that of 'sex parasitism':

Again and again in the history of the past, when among human creatures a certain stage of material civilization has been reached, a curious tendency has manifested itself for the human female to become more or less parasitic; social conditions tend to rob her of all forms of active, conscious, social labour, and to reduce her, like the field-tick, to the passive exercise of her sex function alone.<sup>31</sup>

Here, the vampire, the prostitute, and the idle middle-class woman all coalesce into one being defined purely by consumption.

Schreiner continues:

Finely clad, tenderly housed, life becomes for her merely the gratification of her own physical and sexual appetites, and the appetites of the male, through the stimulation of which she could maintain herself. And, whether as kept wife, kept mistress, or prostitute, she contributed nothing to the active and sustaining labours of her society...She was the 'fine lady,' the human female parasite—the most deadly microbe which can make its appearance on the surface of any social organism.<sup>32</sup>

The idleness and materialism which was seen to define the middle-class woman at the *fin de siècle* combine to transform the emblem of traditional femininity into 'the human female parasite'. Fine dresses, beautiful houses, and a life of idle domestic pleasure - the clear markers of a 'traditional' Victorian woman - are here married to voracious sexual appetite and a rejection of motherhood - the markers of *Dracula's* female vampires. Schreiner's sex parasites unite Grand's traditional 'cow woman' with the victimized 'scum woman', the kept wife and the prostitute, amalgamated by their reduction to pure sexual function.

The second section of the novel, which consists of the letters between Mina and Lucy and Mina's account of her time in Whitby, is devoted to establishing Lucy as a passive

consumer, in contrast to the active production that defines Mina. It is this contrast that marks Lucy out as a parasite and a future vampire.

Mina writes, 'Lucy is to be married in the autumn, and she is already planning out her dresses and how her house is to be arranged. I sympathise with her, for I do the same, only Jonathan and I will start in life in a very simple way, and shall have to try and make both ends meet' [*Dracula*, 63]. Mina's marriage is predicated on work and duty; Lucy's is defined by the materialistic goods she will acquire. In the first instance in which we are introduced to Lucy she is associated a life of idleness and leisure, while Mina, in contrast, is defined by her work ethic and her commitment to being useful. Mina writes:

The life of an assistant schoolmistress is sometimes trying. I am longing to be with you, and by the sea, where we can talk together freely and build our castles in the air. I have been working very hard lately, because I want to keep up with Jonathan's studies, and I have been practicing shorthand very assiduously. When we are married I shall be able to be useful to Jonathan [48].

Thus, at the moment we are introduced to Lucy, she is associated only with 'building castles in the air' - a life of whimsy and leisure. Mina, in contrast, is defined by her work ethic and her commitment to being useful. This contrast, between work and leisure, between production and consumption, is reinforced with every letter the two women exchange. Lucy describes her life in contradistinction to Mina's busy industry: 'There is really nothing to interest you. Town is very pleasant just now, and we go a good deal to picture-galleries and for walks and rides in the park' [49]. Lucy is self-aware enough to realize that while she finds this lifestyle 'pleasant' the intelligent and industrious Mina would find nothing in it to interest her. As Tanya Pikula observes, 'many commentators ignore the fact that *Dracula* is first and foremost a text about material consumption ... consumption becomes the choice monstrosity of the text, the root of all evil.'<sup>33</sup> Pikula's essay very usefully traces the undercurrent of middle-class female mass consumption in the novel, but her insistence that the novel is a '*conservative* reaction to fin-de-siècle, female-oriented consumer decadence' [my emphasis] has led her to overlook the ways in which Stoker's rejection of female mass consumption reproduces the argument at the heart of progressive feminist writing of the period.<sup>34</sup>

The long-standing association between the vampire and the economic consumer can be traced to Marx's use of the vampire metaphor throughout his corpus to invoke 'the horror of a property-owning class that appears to be vampire-like in its desire and ability to suck the life out of the working class.'<sup>35</sup> Though traditional interpretations of the vampire therefore read him as a feudal aristocrat, critics of *Dracula* have pointed out that *Dracula* himself fails to fit the model that Marx proposes, either as aristocrat or industrialist. Thus, Franco Moretti points to the fact that *Dracula* doesn't conform to Marx's model of the parasitic upper-classes. He writes, 'Dracula also lacks the aristocrat's conspicuous consumption: he does not eat, he does not drink, he does not make love, he does not like showy clothes, he does not go to the theatre and he does not go hunting, he does not hold receptions and does not build stately homes.'<sup>36</sup> *Dracula* is depicted as self-sufficient, an experienced businessman, and a producer (of other vampires). The vampire women, on the

other hand, are only associated with consumption. Lucy eats, shops, and goes to various forms of entertainment with her mother and her fiancé. Most importantly, the vampire women do not seem to possess the power to make other vampires. They consume, but never produce.

In recent years a number of critics have reconsidered the role of consumption in *Dracula*, but these accounts routinely overlook or sideline the female characters. Thus, J. Jeffrey Franklin usefully notes that the vampire 'represents the stasis of non-exchange. He is consumption without spending'.<sup>37</sup> However, he sees Mina and Lucy as nothing more contested ground in the conflict between the East and West, and thus continues to read the novel as socially and economically conservative: 'All of the above concerns converge into these two figures [British masculinity and British womanhood], the union of which of course signifies British middle-class society and its values of marriage, progress, and prosperity, as well as the future propagation of the species.'<sup>38</sup> Franklin's narrow focus on the male characters leads him to conclude that the novel insists on 'the justified and inevitable necessity of middle-class, post-Christian, progressive, postindustrial, consumption-based society'.<sup>39</sup> A closer look at the depiction of female consumption, on the other hand, reveals a critique of women who consume without producing in the labour market.

That middle- and upper-class women were seen as society's primary consumers during the end of the nineteenth century is made clear in Pikula's work on the subject: 'That advertisers recognized housewives as primary agents of material consumption is perhaps best reflected in the establishment of forty-eight *ladies'* magazines in the period between 1880 and 1900, which consisted in large part of advertisements.'<sup>40</sup> Bram Dijkstra, in his influential *Idols of Perversity*, has also noted the association between women and consumption during this period: 'Thus woman, having been consumed in the marriage market, then having become consumptive as a wife through lack of respect, exercise, and freedom, took her revenge by becoming a voracious consumer.'<sup>41</sup> Thus, Lucy's passive consumerism as a young woman slips easily into the active consumption of the vampire.

### **The Antidote to Sex-Parasitism**

As early as 1982, Carol Senf pointed to Stoker's biography to complicate the notion of *Dracula* as a wholly misogynistic text. Stoker's mother was what Senf calls a 'strong woman' who sought to 'equalize the sexes' in Ireland, through a promotion of emigration, where she believed there was 'a dignity in labour, and a self-supporting woman is alike respected and respectable.'<sup>42</sup> David K. Skal, too, notes that Charlotte Stoker was "an educated, forward-minded woman', who 'was outspoken on public issues in a manner more typical of men'.<sup>43</sup> This background sheds light on the economic underpinnings of the novel. The women's movement of the *fin de siècle*, too, focused on work as a means to achieve equality and dignity. Thus, in 1889 Maria Grey wrote:

Within these few years, a vast and sweeping change has taken place, of unprecedented rapidity, causing a reaction from this doctrine of idleness and dependence as essential to ladyhood toward the opposite extreme of work and

independence as essential to honourable womanhood; work meaning paid work, and independence meaning life apart from the home life and free from the duties and constraining order of home.<sup>44</sup>

Work is of central importance in *Dracula*, as industriousness is one of the main weapons used to fight the vampiric infection. Ledger asserts that Stoker celebrates 'bourgeois masculinity' for its 'industry, thrift, utility and moral uprightness', yet these are also the qualities prized in Mina.<sup>45</sup> Throughout the novel, Mina is a *producer*, and in this role she is integral to the success of the vampire hunters. It is her production of the collated transcript of events (taken from diaries, letters, and newspaper clippings) that allows the hunters to track down and defeat Dracula. The importance of the full transcript, which brings all the facts together and allows the vampire hunters to trace Dracula's movements by the day, is admitted by every character in the novel: 'When I had done reading, Jonathan took me in his arms and kissed me. The others kept shaking me by both hands, and Dr Van Helsing said: "Our dear Madam Mina is once more our teacher. Her eyes have seen where we were blinded"' [296]. The difference between Mina and Lucy, which allows the one to survive to mother the coming race, and condemns the other to obsolescence in death, is Mina's commitment to work.

As the title *Woman and Labour* suggests, Schreiner foregrounds labour as the only antidote to systemic female parasitism.

In the clamour which has arisen in the modern world, where now this, and then that, is demanded for and by large bodies of modern women, he who listens carefully may detect as a keynote, beneath all the clamour, a demand which may be embodied in such a cry as this: *Give us labour and the training which fits for labour! We demand this, not for ourselves alone, but for the race.*<sup>46</sup>

Mina is not vulnerable to Dracula and his vampiric infection until she is prevented from working by Van Helsing's misguided chivalry. Once she is confined to the domestic sphere, however, Mina becomes lazy and lethargic, sleeping all day and unable to focus her attention on any task at hand. She becomes, that is, like the idle middle-class women that New Women revolted against. It is this domestic idleness that invites Dracula's attack. Critics often focus on the chivalric exclusion of Mina from the vampire hunt as a re-inscription of traditional gender norms.<sup>47</sup> However, it is impossible to read this moment as a championing of the confinement of women to the domestic; in Mina's particular situation at this point in the novel, the domestic is synonymous with imprisonment. The house she stays in, after all, is a madhouse.

In order to save herself from the infection, Mina must return to work, and, just as importantly, the men must accept her contributions. While the marriage market and traditional domesticity turned women into parasites, the solution to this situation was, as Blanche Crankanthorpe insisted, women who can serve as 'working partners' with their husbands—exactly as Mina does. As she insists early in the novel: 'When we are married I shall be able to be useful to Jonathan, and if I can stenograph well enough I can take down what he wants to say in this way and write it out for him on the typewriter, at which I am

also practicing very hard' [48]. This is not, as some critics have suggested, the traditional notion of a 'helpmeet', but rather offers a new model of marriage in which the man and woman are equally educated ('I want to keep up with Jonathan's studies'), equally skilled ('he and I sometimes write letters in shorthand, and he is keeping a stenographic journal of his travels abroad'), and can contribute equally to the economic support of the family (Mina has trained herself to serve as Jonathan's clerk and secretary) [48].

Though critics routinely acknowledge Mina's 'intellect'<sup>48</sup>, her 'secretarial skills and knowledge of the latest technology'<sup>49</sup>, and her 'commitment to work'<sup>50</sup>, there is an odd insistence that the birth of her child at the end of the novel in some way bars her from New Womanhood. Thus, Shane insists that 'while Mina does appear to be associated with aspects of New Womanhood in terms of her education and career aspirations, these qualities are ultimately muted as she assumes a maternal role in the novel's conclusion.'<sup>51</sup> Pikula, too, argues that 'in the end, when Van Helsing and his cohort have managed to purge the modern world of consuming monstrosities, Mina's appetite for clever gadgets seems quite forgotten, especially since her hands are busy holding her newborn son.'<sup>52</sup> While male commentators at the end of the century often portrayed the New Woman as childless or barren, and thus a threat to the continuation of the British nation and race<sup>53</sup>, many New Woman writers focus on the importance of motherhood to the cause. Thus, Schreiner insists that it is the 'sex parasite' who rejects motherhood, not the New Woman.<sup>54</sup> Grand figured the New Woman explicitly as a mother, not just to her own children, but to the nation at large, using women's 'natural' talents in education to guide England into a brighter future.<sup>55</sup> Nat Arling, too, insisted that 'the motherliness that is in women has made them good rulers, where men too often thought only of selfish gratification or lust of conquest; and good administrators of money and property, where men have squandered their patrimony in riotous living.'<sup>56</sup> The note at the end of *Dracula*, far from 'muting' Mina's status as a New Woman, conforms to the portrait of the New Woman offered by writers like Grand, Crackanthorpe, Arling, and Schreiner. She is 'sweet' and 'loving', but also 'brave' and 'gallant'—a word significantly applied to Quincey Morris, the gun-slinging American adventurer a mere half page earlier, and one traditionally reserved for men during this period. Jonathan celebrates her fearlessness as much as he lauds her maternal qualities.

While many critics have followed Christopher Craft's 1984 suggestion that the episode at Castle Dracula renders Jonathan effeminate<sup>57</sup>, I suggest instead that Jonathan is presented, not as a cautionary tale, but as a progressive model of masculinity. He is the 'New Man' to Mina's 'New Woman', able to accept her as an equal in their relationship. Mina's knowledge of shorthand becomes not just a marker of her status as a New Woman, but a shared code between Jonathan and Mina in which they pass secret messages (none of the other characters in the book can read shorthand). The journal and the shorthand it is written in are representative of their synchronicity and mark their relationship as a partnership. Throughout the novel, the Harkers are presented as most useful to the cause when working together, and most vulnerable to attack when separated. Their partnership is explicitly defined by their commitment to work and to complete openness between them. Thus, Mina insists at multiple times throughout the novel, that she and Jonathan had always shared 'full confidence' [215]. The ideas of both Sarah Grand and Olive Schreiner are apparent in

the insistence on a rejection of any secrets within the Harkers' marriage and on the celebration of marriage as a full working partnership.

## Conclusion

By repositioning *Dracula* within the context of the New Woman's proponents, rather than her critics, similar concerns and intents become apparent. Stoker follows New Woman writers like Sarah Grand and Olive Schreiner in the condemnation of the virtual prostitution of the marriage market and the literal prostitution it fosters in his depiction of the vampire women. Through the passive and materialistic Lucy Westenra, Stoker insists that the traditional ideal of Victorian womanhood cannot survive in the modern world. He presents Mina Harker as the antidote to these unhealthy gender relations in his focus on her equal partnership with Jonathan and her commitment to work and duty.

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> Charles E. Prescott and Grace A. Giorgio, 'Vampiric Affinities: Mina Harker and the Paradox of Femininity in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*,' *Victorian Literature and Culture* 33:02 (2005), 500.

<sup>3</sup> Beth Shane, "'Your girls that you all love are mine already': Criminal Female Sexuality in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*,' *Gothic Studies* 18:1 (2016), 18.

<sup>4</sup> Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siecle* (Manchester: MUP, 1997), p. 101.

<sup>5</sup> Shane, 21.

<sup>6</sup> Ashley Craig Lancaster, 'Demonizing the Emerging Woman: Misrepresented Morality in *Dracula* and *God's Little Acre*,' *Journal of Dracula Studies* (2004), 1.

<sup>7</sup> William Barry, 'The Strike of a Sex,' *The Quarterly Review* (Oct. 1894), 293, 311, 313.

<sup>8</sup> Shane, 24; Jamil Khader, 'Un/Speakability and Radical Otherness: The Ethics of Trauma in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*,' *College Literature* 39:2 (Spring 2012), 94.

<sup>9</sup> Heilmann, 2000, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Heilmann, 2000, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird* (Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Heilmann, 2004, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Sarah Grand, 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question,' *North America Review* (March 1894), 273.

<sup>14</sup> Blanche Crackanorpe, 'The Revolt of the Daughters,' *The Nineteenth Century: a monthly review* (March 1894), 428.

<sup>15</sup> Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1996), 34. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition. Page numbers will follow in brackets.

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<sup>16</sup> Anne McWhir, 'Pollution and Redemption in "Dracula",' *Modern Language Studies* 17:3 (1987), 31.

<sup>17</sup> Ledger, p. 102.

<sup>18</sup> Carol A. Senf, 'Dracula: Stoker's response to the New Woman,' *Victorian Studies* 26:1 (1982), 36. In 2007, Senf reconsidered this position in the light of her reading of Stoker's *Lady Athlyne*, concluding: 'Rather than a creator of monstrous, devouring female characters Stoker should be seen as the creator of interesting, surprisingly modern women characters'. Her 1982 article is cited far more often than this reconsideration, however. Carol A. Senf, 'Rethinking the New Woman in Stoker's Fiction: Looking at *Lady Athlyne*,' *Journal of Dracula Studies* 9 (2007), 7.

<sup>19</sup> Ledger, p. 101.

<sup>20</sup> Senf, 42.

<sup>21</sup> Tanya Pikula, 'Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Late-Victorian Advertising Tactics,' *English Literature in Transition* 55:3 (2012), 287.

<sup>22</sup> Jean Lorrain has pointed to the fallacy in assuming that Lucy is a sexually liberated woman from this letter to Mina, as well: 'Notice how the idea of three husbands, even if parallel to Dracula's three wives, actually distorts the concept [of the New Woman]: the independent intellectual New Woman lives alone, not with three men to cater to!' Lorrain's chapter in *The Blood is the Life* attempts to move the conversation surrounding Lucy and Mina beyond the critical obsession with sexual liberation, which is to be commended. Unfortunately, this very brief chapter never has a chance to develop much beyond the "facts" of the case. Jean Lorrain, 'Dracula Meets the New Woman,' *The Blood is the Life*, ed. Leonard G. Heldreth and Mary Pharr (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), p. 34.

<sup>23</sup> Barry, 292.

<sup>24</sup> See Book I, Canto IX of *The Angel in the House*, 'The Wife's Tragedy'.

<sup>25</sup> Heilmann, 2004, p. 32

<sup>26</sup> Despite the many similarities Mina shares with the New Woman of the period, critics of *Dracula* have tended to associate her with traditional Victorian gender roles, simply because she is a wife and mother. Thus, Khader calls Mina 'the emblem of proper Victorian womanhood' (94); Franklin suggests she is the idealized figure into which all other motivations [of the Crew of Light] are condensed' (141); and Prescott and Giorgio suggests Mina represents 'passive femininity' (490). J. Jeffrey Franklin, 'The Economics of Immortality: The Demi-Immortal Oriental, Enlightenment Vitalism, and Political Economy in *Dracula*,' *Cahiers victoriens et éduardiens* 76 (2012): 127-148.

<sup>27</sup> Grand, 270.

<sup>28</sup> Crackanthorpe, 427.

<sup>29</sup> Crankenthorpe, 428.

<sup>30</sup> See Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies* (2004).

<sup>31</sup> Olive Schreiner, *Woman and Labour* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1911), p. 78.

<sup>32</sup> Schreiner, p. 81-2.

<sup>33</sup> Pikula, 287.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

<sup>35</sup> Mark Neocleous, 'The Political Economy of the Dead: Marx's Vampires,' *History of Political Thought*, 24:4 (2003), 668.

<sup>36</sup> Franco Moretti, 'The Dialectic of Fear,' *New Left Review* 136 (1982), 72.

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- <sup>37</sup> Franklin, 139.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.
- <sup>40</sup> Pikula, 286.
- <sup>41</sup> Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity; Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 355.
- <sup>42</sup> Senf, 1982, 38.
- <sup>43</sup> David J. Skal, 'Bram Stoker: the child that went with the fairies,' *Bram Stoker: Centenary Essays*, ed. Jarlath Kileen (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014), p. 39, p. 50.
- <sup>44</sup> Quoted in *Women's Voices 1880-1918: The New Woman*, ed. Juliet Gardiner (London: Collins & Brown, 1993), p. 98.
- <sup>45</sup> Ledger, p. 108
- <sup>46</sup> Schreiner, p. 33.
- <sup>47</sup> Cf. Senf, 1982; Judith Halberstam 'Technologies of Monstrosity: Bram Stoker's "Dracula",' *Victorian Studies* 36.3, *Victorian Sexualities* (Spring, 1993), pp. 333-352; Prescott and Giorgio, 2005; and Shane, 2016, for example.
- <sup>48</sup> Shane, 21.
- <sup>49</sup> Pikula, 290.
- <sup>50</sup> Prescott and Giorgio, 490.
- <sup>51</sup> Shane, 21.
- <sup>52</sup> Pikula, 290.
- <sup>53</sup> See Grant Allen, 'Plain Words on the Woman Question', *Popular Science Monthly* (1889), pp. 170-81.
- <sup>54</sup> Schreiner, p. 81-2.
- <sup>55</sup> Grand, 276.
- <sup>56</sup> Arling, 584.
- <sup>57</sup> See Christopher Craft's "'Kiss Me with those Red Lips": Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*,' *Representations* 8 (1984), 107-133.