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Elizabeth Peters March 21st, 2025

“Enter Freely”: Epistolarity as a Mechanism for Cognitive Dissonance and Inversion of the Gendered Agency/Obedience Binary in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*

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Abstract

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by Elizabeth Peters

In Bram Stoker's *Dracula,* the epistolary form acts as a mechanism through which reader and character alike are forced to confront their more ethically dubious and/or socially unconventional urges and desires. This thesis examines that confrontation, specifically in the reader, through the lens of Leon Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory, and posits that the text provokes an aroused physiological state (heightened breath rate, pulse rate, etc.) largely by generating cognitive dissonance within the reader. The epistolary form forces the reader to infer the characters' attraction to the villainous Dracula, thereby implicating the reader in the ostensible moral wrongdoing of the character. Additionally, epistolarity forces the reader to voyeuristically infringe upon the privacy of the protagonists in the same way that the novel's primary villain does. The reader is subsequently left to wrestle with the dissonance provoked by their wrongdoings, which generates an aroused physiological state easily misattributed to fear. Secondarily, this thesis argues that epistolarity acts as a tethering space for protagonists in which to perform socially acceptable behavior and desires. As exposure to Dracula, whose own performance of sexuality and gender is very fluid, increasingly untethers characters like Jonathan and Mina Harker from their own gendered selves, they simultaneously cease to become tethered to the epistolary form altogether. As narrators, they retreat from the epistolary, and the performative act of transcribing one's internal world. In essence, epistolarity symbolizes the end of their performance of social normalcy as Dracula uproots the foundations of their "civilized" Victorian world.

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Table of Contents

This thesis argues that Bram Stoker's *Dracula* utilizes the epistolary form to force its readers and characters alike to confront their repressed desire for unconventional sexuality and gender role expression. In the reader, the epistolary form accomplishes this by implicating the reader in the sexually deviant desires of the characters, which generates an uncomfortable cognitive dissonance in the reader. In the characters, epistolary letters and journal entries serve as a space to reassert the upholding of traditional gender roles. Thus, a character's departure from the epistolary form is symbolic of that character's departure from binary gender roles – in Mina Harker, for instance, a departure from femininity, and in Jonathan Harker a departure from masculinity. Ultimately, I argue, the epistolary form serves as a mechanism through which Stoker may reveal to the reader the true and enduring danger of *Dracula*: not the vampire himself, but rather the subconscious and unexpected desires within the self, with which Stoker forces both his characters and his readers to reckon. This thesis draws from and combines a multitude of concepts and analytic frameworks, which are collectively interdisciplinary, and upon which I will now expand.

Firstly, my argument draws from a long history of vampiric scholarship centered on gender and sexuality. Arguably one of the most common threads for thematic analysis of *Dracula,* and the thread most central to this thesis, is its unusual relationship with gender roles and sexuality. The homoerotic subtext of the novel has been the subject of much discourse, specifically as it pertains to the sexual attraction Jonathan Harker feels for the figure of Dracula (Demetrakopoulos; Craft; Schaffer). Though this is arguably the most prevalent queer pairing dissected in *Dracula* scholarship, there are several pairings in the novel whose relationships could be interpreted as homoerotic, including Mina Harker (née Murray) and Lucy Westenra, whose loving friendship and intimacy is reminiscent of the early days of connection between Carmilla and Laura in

Carmilla (Signorotti). Additionally, the novel alludes to the notion of polygamy at various points, capitalizing on the sharing of blood to symbolize a more sexual interchange of bodily fluids (Flood; Roth et al.). It is, ultimately, a collective love for "Madam Mina" which motivates the various male protagonists to rally together and defeat Dracula – a love shared by all, which originated with their shared blood-letting, a product of their collective love for Lucy Westenra. Through this collective male love for a feminine subject, some scholars argue, Harker is able to vent his desire for male companionship as well as female while still maintaining the facade of morally righteous British monogamy and heterosexuality (Schaffer).

Within this scholarship, scholars frequently note the novel's recurrent subversion of gender roles. Traditional "male" and "female" actions are subverted not only sexually, but societally (Craft; Smith). Nowhere is this more evident than in the marriage of Mina and Jonathan Harker, who both undergo transformative experiences throughout the novel as they interact with Dracula. While Jonathan's femininity is primarily expressed by Stoker through sexual submission (Demetrakopoulos; Howes), Mina's "masculine" agency manifests itself in numerous ways, as, despite her obvious victimization and lack of overt power, she is deeply influential to the narrative in recurrent and subtle ways (Case; Prescott and Giorgio). Mina is also present at the majority of the novel's major turning points, including Dracula's first attack on Lucy Westenra, in which Mina plays the masculinized role of protector, noting in her journal that as she retrieved Lucy, the younger girl "trembled a little, and clung to [Mina]" (Stoker 87).

In addition to drawing on scholarship related to gender and sexuality in the novel, my argument expands on analyses of the role of epistolarity in the novel – "epistolarity" referring to the epistolary form, in which the work is composed entirely of documents, including journal and diary entries, letters, and newspaper excerpts. Scholars have identified a number of purposes for

the epistolary form in *Dracula*. Pope, for instance, proposes that the "patchwork" nature of the form mimics "the novel as a parasitic and appropriating genre" (199). Wicke posits that it provides narrative space for the invasion of technology "in a transformation of the generic materials of the text into a motley fusion of speech and writing, recording and transcribing" (470). I seek to extend the work these scholars have done by connecting the epistolary literary form with the well-documented inversions of gender in the novel. This work builds specifically on a concept first presented by Alison Case in her article, “Tasting the Original Apple: Gender and the Struggle for Narrative Authority in *Dracula.”* In the article, Case argues that the epistolary form allows the character Jonathan Harker to reassert his masculine identity by recording and organizing his thoughts in his diary. My thesis builds on Case’s work by extending that argument to Mina Harker, who, like her husband, struggles to maintain a normative gender role throughout the novel. By extension, I then argue, a character’s presence as a narrator within the epistolary form is indicative of a return to gender “normalcy” – for Mina, a return to femininity, and for Jonathan, as Case posits, to masculinity. Thus, I argue, the presence or absence of a character as narrator within the epistolary form becomes an indication of their relationship with their gender identity at any given point in the novel. Long narration gaps for a given character, for instance, indicate a lapse in that character’s ability to identify with their prescribed gender identity. By extension, Dracula’s exclusion from the novel’s narration altogether makes complete sense; he is, after all, noted by many to be a remarkably androgynous villain, fluid in all senses, from his sexuality to the very shape his physical being takes. In this way, this thesis extends Case’s single argument of epistolarity as a mechanism for asserting gender as a framework through which to examine the novel as a whole.

Finally, this thesis takes an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the connection between epistolarity and gender and sexuality in the novel. I explore not only the text, but the relationship between the text and the reader's cognitive processes as they attempt to construct meaning from the text. To do this, I draw insights from the field of psychology and from reader-response theory. As a work, *Dracula* has historically inspired psychological analysis, the majority of which was psychoanalytic. Sigmund Freud, often heralded among psychologists as the father of psychoanalytic theory, posited that human nature contains two basic instincts, which are the root of all behavior: *thanatos* and *libido* (Barber). The word *thanatos*, of course, is derived from the name of the Greek god Thanatos, the personification of death. Freud, an Austrian, lived through the first world war in Europe, and came to the bleak conclusion that *thanatos*, one of two human motivators, is essentially aggression, or the desire to do harm/exert power over others. The other of the two, *libido,* was originally the only basic instinct Freud identified as innate to all people: the desire for pleasure, or, more specifically, sex. Sex and bloodlust: the core of human nature, according to one of the most renowned psychological theorists of the 20th century, are also central themes of Stoker's *Dracula.*

The violent and sexual nature of the text has historically lent itself well to Freudian interpretation. As cited by Maser, in 1956, in defense of the notion of the novel as distinctly Freudian, English writer Maurice Richardson posited that "from no other [approach] does the story really make any sense" (427). It has been argued that the vampiric figure is representative of the id, the "deepest and strongest impulses of the human psyche" (Bonilla 289), as well as the Oedipal "father figure" (Astle 99). Indeed, Freud's proposed tension between the id (impulse, desire) and the superego (conscience, control) provokes an anxiety which feels at home in any discussion of the thrill-and-chill-provoking *Dracula.*

I propose, however, an examination of that same phenomenon through a different psychological lens: Leon Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory, which emerged in 1957. Though little scholarship exists connecting *Dracula* with Festinger's cognitive dissonance framework, the concept has been applied to literary analysis in the past. Marco Caracciolo, in his book *Strange Narrators in Contemporary Fiction: Explorations in Readers' Engagement with Characters,* devotes a full chapter to the significance of cognitive dissonance theory in literary analysis, though he notes that his model is "admittedly speculative" but with many implications across a variety of literary works (34). Caracciolo chooses as a sample Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones*, noting that the book (a fictional autobiography of a Nazi officer) inspires cognitive dissonance in the reader by generating empathy for the narrator. "If the reader does empathize," notes Caracciolo, "albeit tentatively and intermittently with the narrator, and assuming he or she is not a neo-Nazi fanatic, something remarkable will happen: the perspective temporarily adopted by readers will clash with their own everyday attitudes" (46). As Caracciolo applies Festinger's model to other literature, so do I seek to apply the same principle to Stoker's *Dracula.*

Though much literary scholarship exists discussing epistolarity, reader-response theory, and the sexuality/gender-inverting nature of *Dracula* as a text, and though Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory is supported by a wealth of empirical evidence, these four prongs of my analysis (epistolarity, sexuality and gender roles in *Dracula,* reader-response theory, and cognitive dissonance theory) have never been collectively analyzed. Alison Case analyzes the impact of epistolarity on sexuality and gender expression in *Dracula* but does not extend her analysis to encompass cognitive dissonance theory or reader-response theory. Meanwhile, Marco Caracciolo applies Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory to literature through a reader-response interpretive lens but does not directly examine this phenomenon in relation to epistolarity in *Dracula.* In this

way, my thesis furthers dialogue in both scholarly fields by identifying overlapping concepts between them. No scholarly work has thus far attempted to combine and apply the framework of cognitive dissonance to the specific application of the epistolary form in the novel *Dracula*. I feel the examination offers new insights not only into the novel but into the potential application of cognitive dissonance theory in conjunction with reader-response theory.

This thesis proceeds in two chapters. Chapter One explores Stoker's use of epistolarity to generate cognitive dissonance in the reader. The use of epistolarity in this way is twofold: firstly, the epistolary form allows the novel's characters to repeatedly imply sexual attraction to Dracula without ever explicitly endorsing it. Thus, the reader becomes implicated in the moral wrongdoing associated with the inappropriate sexual attraction, because the reader played an active role in generating that attraction by inferring its existence in the first place. Secondly, the epistolary form forces the reader to engage in an act for which Dracula is roundly condemned: the invasion of privacy. The epistolary form makes the very act of novel-reading into an invasion of an intimate space. As we read Jonathan Harker's diaries and Mina Harker's personal letters, we, like Dracula, take on a voyeuristic relationship with the novel's protagonists. Both functions of the epistolary form ultimately serve to generate cognitive dissonance in the reader, forcing the reader to reconcile the incompatibilities of their positive self-image with the uncomfortable realities of all the ways in which they have sinned, simply by reading and drawing inferences from the novel. Overall, that cognitive dissonance is evidence of the real horror of the novel: not the villainy which exists within Dracula, but the villainy he forces us to confront within ourselves.

In that same vein, Chapter Two explores in more depth the literary relationship between epistolarity and characters' gender roles. This chapter builds on the work of Alison Case, and argues that for *Dracula*'s protagonists Jonathan and Mina Harker, epistolary narration symbolizes

a kind of tethering of the self to one's traditional gender identity. In other words, by recording their thoughts, Jonathan and Mina seek to reaffirm their respective masculinity and femininity. As their exposure to Dracula becomes prolonged and his influence provokes increased gender fluidity, both Jonathan and Mina retreat narratively from the epistolary form. This distancing of the self from the reader mirrors their distancing of themselves from gender performance; from the prying eyes of civilization, and the binary expectations which accompany them. In this way, narrative presence within the epistolary form becomes a signifier of the characters' respective states in relation to their societally-enforced gender role at any given point in the novel.

Thus, as readers, we are thrust into a novel in which character and reader alike are cornered into defying convention, then punished for it. The epistolary form grants *Dracula* a greater capacity for eeriness and villainy in that it forces reader and character alike to confront the fact that the villainy does not reside in Dracula alone. As Jonathan and Mina Harker confront their darker, more basic instincts and desires, so too must the reader acknowledge their own sins; sins which, unlike Jonathan and Mina's, live on within us after the book is closed and the narrative concluded. What could be more frightening?

Who Am I? Epistolarity as a Mechanism to Facilitate Reader Cognitive Dissonance in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*

The overt sexualization of villainous characters is nothing new. In an article dissecting the phenomenon, Stefanie Krüger notes, "it is intriguing that, in recent literature and film, the prototype of the attractive villain has been a particular type, namely the vampire" (Krüger 132). Krüger is correct that modern media has made great use of the vampiric figure as one of simultaneous threat and seduction. Her assertion, however, that this development is exclusive to "recent literature and film" overlooks the intensely erotic nature of Bram Stoker's *Dracula,* which not only depicts scenes of intense and taboo eroticism and attraction but capitalizes on the use of the epistolary form to implicate the reader in that expression of sexuality.

Before we can begin exploring the impact of the epistolary form on the text, however, we must first understand the notion that a reader may be implicated in the moral wrongdoings of a character. To best dissect this concept, I will begin by glossing reader-response theory. Reader-response theory, a framework for literary analysis, essentially posits that reading is a transactional act; that a reader contributes to the construction of the novel's fictional world by conceiving of that world in a way that is unique to that reader alone. Reader-response theory grew in popularity in the 20th century, but "finds its roots well before the twentieth century in the ancient Greek and Roman cultures that viewed literature as a rhetorical device for manipulating a given audience's reactions" (Davis and Womack 51-52). Pivotal representatives of reader response theory in the 20th century include Louise M. Rosenblatt and Stanley Fish. As early as 1938, Rosenblatt was laying the basis of the theory in her book *Literature as Exploration,* which posits that "the reading of any work of literature is, of necessity, an individual and unique occurrence involving the mind and emotions of some particular reader" (32), noting that literary work "gains its significance and

force from the way in which the stimuli present in the literary work interact with the mind and emotions of a particular reader" (35). Rosenblatt's later work echoes and more explicitly clarifies this notion that the act of reading – of constructing the imagined world of the novel – demands a two-way exchange of information and ideas between the reader and the novel. She writes in *The Reader, The Text, The Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* that the concept of transaction between reader and novel is what most theoretical frameworks lack (154). "Part of the magic – and indeed the essence of language – is the fact that it must be internalized by each individual human being," writes Rosenblatt, "with all the special overtones that each unique person and unique situation entail…in other words…the transactional view of the reading act is simply an exemplification…of the basic transactional character of all human activity" (20).

Stanley Fish takes application of the theory a step farther in his well-known analysis of Milton's *Paradise Lost* through the lens of reader-response theory, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in PARADISE LOST*. In *Surprised by Sin*, Fish posits that the compelling nature of Satan's counterarguments against God is designed to unsettle the reader, to force them to reckon with their own religious doubt alongside Adam and Eve. In a novel application of reader-response theory, Fish asserts that by forcing the reader to internally construct some degree of empathy for Satan, Milton transcends the basic author/reader interaction of written rhetoric. According to Fish, the rhetorical strength of *Paradise Lost* lies in Milton's ability to force the reader to confront their own perceptions; to reckon with their own sympathies for the devil. In *Surprised by Sin*, Fish cites Joseph Summers, who notes that in *Paradise Lost*, "the readers as well as the characters have been involved in the evil and have been forced to recognize and to judge their involvement" (31). The strength of Satan's rhetoric forces the reader to succumb to the temptation of uncertainty. Essentially, no sooner is the reader led by Milton to doubt the fairness of God's will than that very

same doubt is wholly condemned in Adam and Eve, who are exiled from paradise. By Fish's application of reader-response theory, Milton intends to elicit sympathy in the reader, then to condemn that same sympathy in the next breath. As a result, readers are left to reckon with the consequences of the sin of doubt embodied not only by the characters, but also by the readers themselves. As Fish writes, "Eve's eventual weakness [is] less reprehensible…than the reader's overactive and suspicious intellect" (Fish 156). Fish asserts that Milton "consciously wants to worry his reader, to force him to doubt the correctness of his responses, and to bring him to the realization that his inability to read the poem with any confidence in his own perception is its focus" (Fish 4). Fish's interpretation of reader-response theory is one in which the framework of the theory allows for the reader to confront themselves; to interpret the text, but subsequently to be made aware of the sins inherent to those interpretations. If reading is a transactional act, Fish argues, Milton forces us to become aware of what it is, exactly, that we contribute to that transaction.

In summary, Rosenblatt asserts that reader interpretation is transactional; that the unique perspective of the reader plays a role in formulating the reality of the text. Fish takes this concept one step farther by interrogating the moral implications of the reality which the reader helps to formulate, and by asserting that the author may manipulate those implications to maximize the rhetorical impact of their work.

How Does the Epistolary Form Implicate the Reader in Character Immorality in *Dracula*?

Epistolary narratives are exclusionary, in that they are written in the form of documents, and thus they lack a narrative voice with which to acknowledge the existence of an audience. "Nevertheless," writes Hanaghan in *Pliny's Epistolary Directions*, "bystanders may subsequently involve themselves, either by commenting to others on the conversation (i.e. reception) or

engaging allusively with what was just heard" (Hanaghan 138). "Bystander" in this instance refers to the reader, a passive observer of events. The forced passivity of the reader's position prevents them from seeking out direct understanding, (for instance, by asking interrogative questions of the characters, as one might in real-world ambiguous environments in which one plays an active role) forcing them to engage in allusive interpretation to gain a comprehensive understanding of the full meaning of the text. In other words, the lack of "bystander" access inherent to the epistolary genre encourages the reader to access and engage with the work on a more cognitively active level, forcing us to seek connection with the text by searching for allusive gestures. Thus, if readers consider the act of reading to be a transactional activity, in which their unique perspective and interpretation of those allusive gestures dictates the course of the constructed narrative, then readers open the door to become implicated in the character's moral wrongdoings within that text.

The epistolary form increases situational ambiguity, thereby necessitating increased reader interpretation. One term we may use to best describe this phenomenon is the scientific term *induction*, a process by which individualized, particular instances are used to extrapolate a more general principle. *Induction* differs from *deduction* in that deduction utilizes a known rule and applies it to specific instances to assume an outcome for those particular instances. Induction does the opposite, inferring a rule from specific instances which becomes applicable to the work as a whole. For instance, we may read a romance novel advertised as such, and from that general knowledge of the genre, infer a romantic subtext in scenes which are otherwise void of romantic content. This would be an instance of reader deduction. Reader induction, by contrast, refers to specific reader transaction in which the reader constructs an inferred genre or broader plot point from more subtextual or minor specific plot instances which suggest, but do not explicitly endorse, that interpretation. "The novel or poem or play exists, after all," Rosenblatt writes, "only in

interactions with specific minds" (32). When we examine the specific case of *Dracula,* Stoker's use of the epistolary form encourages the reader to induce generalizations about dynamics between characters which remain unsaid in any explicit capacity.

The epistolary form lends itself extraordinarily well to reader induction, in that it limits itself entirely to explicit statements which characters are willing either to communicate to their addressee or to confess to themselves. Thus, we are forced to read what we know is a wholly biased account of events, comprised of only those truths a character is willing to commit to paper. Take, for instance, the first true moment of alarm recorded in Harker's journal. It occurs when Harker's calèche is surrounded by wolves in the night. "For myself," notes Harker, "I felt a sort of paralysis of fear. It is only when a man feels himself face to face with such horrors that he can understand their true import" (Stoker 16). This passage demonstrates the detachment between emotion and conveyance for which the epistolary form allows. The use of epistolarity provides Stoker a perfect escape from the textbook assignment of authors everywhere to show and not tell; the story is structured such that it depends entirely on *telling.* The assumed time between the event itself and the retelling of the event allows the narrator – in this instance, Jonathan Harker – space to rationalize and comprehend his emotions, and not merely to experience them. He is able to acknowledge his fear and adapt it for the sake of the diary into a learning experience, a chance to understand the "true import" of a previously unexplored stimulus. Thus, rather than experiencing Harker's fear alongside him, we are left with a clinical, categorization-focused summary of Harker's feeling as a "sort of paralysis of fear," contextualized and optimistically reoriented. One can almost visualize Harker, poised over his journal, contemplating the best and clearest way to aptly summarize an experience which might have been described solely through sensory experience in a differently narrated book. Such is the calculated distancing of the epistolary

narrative; it creates a relationship between reader and character emotion which is consistently mediated by time and by the character's inherent need to rationalize or come to terms with their reflexive response to stimuli. In other words, there is nothing raw about narrative depiction in the epistolary form. There is a perpetual gap between the implied emotion the character ostensibly experienced and the emotion which they relay.

This "gap" creates an important space for induction to function. Through epistolary mediation, the reader is forced to draw assumptions from a filtered account of a character's emotional experience. In other words, the reader is uniquely forced to interpret, to lend meaning to the text which is not explicitly stated. Consequently, much as readers of *Paradise Lost* might induce a construction of the overall rhetoric of the piece in which Satan is ultimately the object of sympathy, readers of Stoker's *Dracula* may induce, through smaller, singular instances throughout the novel, that the work's true identity is one of, for instance, queer attraction and a romantic pull toward villainy.

A pivotal example of the use of epistolarity to force reader induction occurs when we explore Harker's attraction to Dracula, which is never explicitly verbalized by Harker but is nevertheless implied in numerous moments throughout the text, especially in the text's opening chapters throughout Harker's numerous journal entries as he visits Dracula alone in his castle as a representative of a law firm. Upon Harker's arrival, Dracula proceeds to greet and welcome Harker with remarkable charisma and consideration, carrying his luggage and offering him dinner. Here, we see a distinctly different Dracula from he who attacks blindly in the dead of night later in the novel. He describes Harker several times as his guest, (despite the normalcy of the title, note the possessive pronoun) and is acutely aware of Harker's physiological needs in terms of rest and diet,

though we know or later discover that Dracula himself has entirely different dietary needs and sleeping habits.

The sexual tension escalates, though is never directly addressed, when Stoker describes Dracula's physical features. Stoker's initial description of the Count – through Harker's eyes – recounts his face as "a strong – a very strong – aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose" (20). This description, while an obvious reference to Stoker's own antisemitism in that it relies on stereotypical Jewish features in its representation of the predatory, villainous character, also establishes the Count from the outset as striking and masculine in appearance, with markedly strong features. Harker also notes that the Count's lips bear a "remarkable ruddiness" and "[show] astonishing vitality for a man of his years" (20). The use of the word "vitality" connotes, of course, not only high energy, but specifically the notion of the capacity to pass on life – essentially, energy for reproductive purpose/sexual performance. Harker begins to silently note various aspects of Dracula's appearance, until, as Harker recounts, "the Count leaned over me and his hands touched me [and] I could not repress a shudder…the Count, evidently noticing it, drew back…with a grim sort of smile" (20). There are numerous potential explanations for Harker's shudder, as Stoker goes on to provide, including the Count's terrible breath. The picture he paints, however, is one of undeniable eroticism: Dracula's proximity to Jonathan, Jonathan's physiological response, and their shared capacity to read and respond to nonverbal, physical signals all suggest an intimacy between them, unspoken both in that moment and later, in Jonathan's retelling. And because of the work's epistolary form, we as readers have no choice but to draw these conclusions almost entirely through inference. Jonathan, our only narrator, writes in his diary, a space intended only for his own eyes (and later, Mina's). The act of "shuddering" may be interpreted as frightened *or* as erotic, but the epistolary form irrevocably shuts the door on an explicitly erotic interpretation by providing

a "sanitized" version of events, through the eyes of a Jonathan not experiencing them firsthand, but rather a Jonathan hours removed, who has had time to rationalize his own arousal as firmly stimulated by fear and disgust, as opposed to lust. In this way, in *Dracula,* Jonathan acts both as the aroused party and as the voice of reason, leaving non-explicit hints of erotic attraction, but subsequently condemning the reader for inferring a sexual connotation in the same way that Milton's narration in *Paradise Lost* condemns the reader for sympathizing with the devil.

From this point onward, Dracula and Harker's interactions become increasingly ominous and oddly intimate. Dracula appears without warning in Harker's bedroom as Harker shaves, Dracula's "eyes blaz[ing]" (28) when Harker cuts himself and Dracula grabs Harker's throat. However, almost as soon as the moment arises, Harker settles back into his familiar pattern of plausible deniability for which the epistolary form allows, noting that "the fury passed so quickly that I could hardly believe it was ever there" (28). And perhaps, his words imply, it never was. Perhaps the reader is at fault for believing in its existence. In this passage, though Harker notes the Count's passion and intensity, Stoker's use of the epistolary form gives him time as a character to react, rationalize, and minimize the Count's behavior in a way which is compatible with his civilized, heterosexual, moral sense of self. Jonathan Harker will never write explicitly that the Count desires him, because his journal is a compartmentalizing space for him; a grounding spot, at which to return to the respectable and rational Englishman he sees himself as. Thus, it becomes the job of the reader to infer in the space between; to construct the text's true meaning, transactionally.

"The Count shall not yet know my secret": The Non-Consensual Intimacy of Epistolarity

Reader induction is not the only function of the epistolary form when it comes to implicating the reader in immoral behavior in *Dracula*. There is another aspect of the epistolary

form which similarly forces the reader to perform some act of subtle moral violation: the reading of Jonathan Harker's personal texts.

One unspoken rule of Harker's stay at Dracula's castle is that he cannot write of his imprisonment in his letters to Mina, or to Mr. Hawkins. Here again is an instance in which Stoker's use of the epistolary forces the reader to confront the role their own immorality plays in the conveyance of Harker's story. Dracula hands Harker "three sheets of notepaper and three envelopes," and Harker notes that "I understood as well as if he had spoken that I should be careful what I wrote, for he would be able to read it" (33). The Count's censorship comes to full fruition when Harker attempts to send secret letters anyway. Dracula intercepts and reads the correspondence. The letter he cannot read, written in shorthand to Mina and covered in symbols which he does not recognize to disguise Harker's message, he describes as "a vile thing, an outrage upon friendship and hospitality" (42). Here, we see Dracula's auspicious goodwill falter and collapse under the weight of the inaccessible. The notion that some aspect of Harker's account is unfavorable – or perhaps simply designed to be kept from him – provokes an enraged response. As readers, we may instinctively recoil from such censorship and control, from Dracula's demand for access to Harker's innermost thoughts and feelings, reserved normally only for the eyes of those he loves the most – until we realize that, as readers of the epistolary form, we are committing an identical sin. By writing in the epistolary form and giving us access only to Harker's journal entries – arguably the most intimate, open, and honest form of writing of which a human being is capable – Stoker creates a situation whereby the narrative literally cannot be consumed without some assumption of reader culpability. In other words, as readers, the use of the epistolary form prevents us from accessing the story at all without infringing on Harker's privacy in the same way that the novel's central villain does.

In fact, arguably, the reader's sin is greater. Harker, when remarking on his attraction to the vampiric, feminine figures in Dracula's castle remarks that "it is not good to note this down, lest someday it should meet Mina's eyes, and cause her pain; but it is the truth" (38). Here, the reader is led to understand the extent of the intimacy which Harker's journal represents. In this journal, the reader is being given access to Jonathan's most shameful desires and uncertainties – aspects of himself which he actively hopes will never be revealed, not even to his own wife, whom he presumably trusts most in the world. Additionally, it is worth noting that Harker keeps the contents of his diary a secret from Dracula by transcribing his thoughts in shorthand. In this way, yet again, the reader is arguably the worst of the two evils. Dracula invades Harker's privacy by reading his correspondence, but even he is not privy to the diary. We, the reader, are given access to Harker's private language, which he shares only with his wife. The language which presumably took them years to learn and perfect, and was the result of a mutual endeavor symbolic of their commitment to one another, is cheapened in its translation. The reader is a witness, but can never forget that they are unwelcome; an "other," a third set of eyes on a page ever only intended for two. There is a forced intimacy generated there which reminds the reader of their own proximity to Harker as a character and drives home the fact that by consuming the narrative, we are, in a way, no less voyeuristic than the novel's primary villain.

Identifying and explicitly addressing the overlap between literary and psychological analysis as its own interdisciplinary field of study is a relatively new phenomenon. In 1908, Sigmund Freud, commonly heralded as the father of psychoanalysis in psychology, published *Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming.* The work was brief, a recorded talk delving into the childhood tendency to fantasize, and its relationship with adult creative writing endeavors. "A piece of creative writing," Freud asserts, "like a day-dream, is a continuation of, and a substitute

for, what was once the play of childhood" (427). Freud goes so far as to assert that belief in more widespread and popularly recounted stories such as those in mythology are "distorted vestiges of the wishful [fantasies] of whole nations, the *secular dreams* of youthful humanity" (427). Freud's assertion that the character acts, in essence, as a manifestation of the childhood fantasies of the author is the basis of several famous texts utilizing the analytical framework which has come to be known as psychoanalytic literary criticism, such as Marie Bonaparte's 1933 exploration of the psychological phenomena undergirding the work of Edgar Allen Poe (Ogden 8). Since its early days, psychoanalytic literary criticism has developed far beyond its Freudian roots.

This thesis engages the intersection of literature and psychology. But rather than using a psychoanalytic theoretical lens, I turn to reader-response theory to understand psychological aspects of *Dracula*. Psychoanalytic language contains the term “projection,” a cognitive phenomenon described by Kernberg as a "mature form of defense" which "consists of first repressing the intolerable experience, then projecting the experience onto the object, and finally separating or distancing oneself from the object to fortify the defensive effort" (796). Essentially, Kernberg is using psychoanalytic language to describe the same general phenomenon Stanley Fish identifies as so salient in *Paradise Lost.* According to Fish, projection is exactly the cognitive phenomenon which Milton writes to inspire. The crux of his rhetoric depends on it. First, the reader projects their sympathy for the devil onto Eve. Then, the reader condemns her for it. The full downswing of the rhetorical gesture becomes clear, however, when Milton shatters the "defensive effort" by actively condemning the process by which Eve came to produce that sympathy, thereby simultaneously condemning the reader. The reader is thus made painfully aware of their projection, their hypocrisy, and, ultimately, their sin.

I turn to Leon Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory to better understand what Freudian psychology describes as "projection." Cognitive dissonance is the mind's natural attempt to resolve dissonant concepts (Barber). What Freud might describe as the anxiety of unconscious self-loathing can be summarized and applied by cognitive dissonance theory as an incongruency between two one's faith in oneself as a "good" person and one's sexual attraction to the villainous Dracula. In the following section, I elaborate further on this concept of attraction and self-belief as the source of cognitive dissonance, and subsequently, arousal.

Cognitive Dissonance as a Product of Reader Induction in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*

To summarize our review thus far, the epistolary form in Stoker's *Dracula* forces the reader to take interpretive action, implicating themselves through induction and invasion of privacy. Induction, or *transaction,* if we may recall Rosenblatt's term for the application of reader response theory to narrative, is a generative act which involves both the content of the narrative and the "individual and unique occurrence involving the mind and emotions of some particular reader" (Rosenblatt, 32). Thus, if we adhere to the theoretical lens of Stanley Fish, we must acknowledge that just as sympathizing with the devil exposes the reader's own sin whilst reading *Paradise Lost,* interpreting Dracula as a sexually attractive figure despite his moral wrongdoings exposes, to some extent, the reader's own perverse attraction and immorality. This is how the reader is *implicated* by the act of literary transaction, and not merely *involved;* not only does the epistolary form force us to violate Harker's privacy, it also forces us to expose to ourselves our own capacity to observe and induce immoral expressions of sexual attraction.

Next, I posit that this subtle implication of the reader's own moral wrongdoing generates a sense of reader cognitive dissonance. By definition, the psychological phenomenon of cognitive dissonance requires, firstly, two "relevant cognitions" (Barber). "Cognition" in this instance refers

essentially to a perception or belief which generates a thought or behavior. When cognitions are "relevant," they relate to one another/are in some way codependent. An example of "irrelevant cognitions" is as given:

Cognition 1: It is Tuesday.

Cognition 2: I am a good dancer.

These two cognitions have no bearing on one another; they can coexist regardless of compatibility/incompatibility, since the fact that it is or is not Tuesday is in no way dependent on whether or not one identifies oneself as a good dancer. By contrast, relevant cognitions pertain to the same topic, and thus seek to coexist comfortably – to complement one another. Cognitions which do so are referred to as consonant cognitions. An example of relevant, consonant cognitions is given below:

Cognition 1: I donate money to charity.

Cognition 2: I am a generous person.

The above two cognitions are not only relevant, but consonant. In the case of consonant cognitions, where there is no contradiction between cognitions to resolve, there is nothing *uncomfortable* about maintaining both cognitions simultaneously. These cognitions become a source of discomfort, however, when they become dissonant, as they are in the following example:

Cognition 1: I do not donate money to charity.

Cognition 2: I am a generous person.

These two cognitions fundamentally contradict one another. One is an observed behavior; the other is a belief about the self. One would expect a generous person, on average, to be more likely to donate to charity than an ungenerous person. We seek instinctively to resolve cognitive

dissonance, due to the discomfort it causes us. There are numerous ways we may seek to resolve or mediate the tension between two dissonant cognitions.

With this heightened understanding of cognitive dissonance as a phenomenon, we may now examine how it impacts the *Dracula* reader experience. Firstly, the novel generates cognitive dissonance by inducing a sexually attractive subtext to the narrative which is never explicitly endorsed by its characters – a sexual attraction to a villainous character who performs known violent acts on the bodies of his victims. One's self-concept, one's perception of the self as "good," with healthy attractions and urges, is inevitably dissonant with the attraction we perceive for the bloodthirsty, vampiric figure. Secondly, we experience cognitive dissonance as a result of the second function of the epistolary form: forced, non-consensual intimacy through the reading of Harker's personal journals. In order to consume and comprehend Harker's story, we must read his most intimate thoughts – we have no other choice. The narrative is not recorded in any alternative way, and is thus only accessible through excessive intimacy with a character who cannot condone or give consent to our reading of his documents, as he gives to his wife later in the novel. This is a fundamental deviation from traditional, non-narrative epistolary forms, in which there is a perpetual, unspoken assumption that the narrative has been recorded for the express purpose of being consumed by a broader audience. The consent inherent to non-epistolary narratives does not exist in epistolary narratives, where the author explicitly provides an alternative justification for putting their thoughts to the page.

Ultimately, this is one of several ways in which Stoker utilizes the epistolary form to make the reader partially culpable for an action they are forced to simultaneously condemn. If we explore this notion through the language of cognitive dissonance, the conflicting cognitions the reader is forced to entertain are as follows:

Cognition 1: Dracula reads Jonathan Harker's private correspondence, thereby violating his privacy. Dracula is thus a villain.

Cognition 2: I read Jonathan Harker's private journal, thereby violating his privacy. I am not a villain.

Thus, we are left with two conflicting cognitions which create an inevitably dissonant psychological state, no matter how we seek to resolve them. That Dracula read the private correspondence is irrefutable. We, as readers, are also inarguably reading the journal. It cannot be that one act is villainous and the other is ethical. Thus, we are forced to accept one of two uncomfortable conclusions. Either Dracula is not a villain, or we, as readers, are more villainous than we initially assumed. Our moral fate is now tied to Dracula's; either we are both ethical, or we are both unethical. Thus, the epistolary form implicates us in the wrongdoings of the Count in such a way that cognitive dissonance becomes an inevitability. We must either cohabitate with the discomfort of the conflicting concepts that Dracula is a villain and we are not, despite having committed the same villainous act, or we must come to terms with our own villainy, thereby introducing an equally disquieting dissonance: the conflict of that villainy with our self-concept. In order to resolve the dissonance above, we are again forced to come to terms with our own culpability, our own villainy. It is here where the real and enduring horror of *Dracula* begins.

Arousal Misattribution: The Affective Significance of Cognitive Dissonance

The “discomfort” triggered by cognitive dissonance may more aptly be described as arousal. Dissonant cognitions are not capable of coexisting without generating negative "arousal" (Barber). This disquieting effect can be accounted for on a neurobiological level. The physiological state of being "aroused," categorized by physical symptoms like heightened breath rate and pulse, can occur as a result of numerous stimuli, including sexual attraction, fear, stress, anxiety, or anger.

Cognitive dissonance has also been shown to contribute to heightened states of arousal (Croyle and Cooper; Elkin and Leippe; Martinie et al.).

The arousal generated by cognitive dissonance plays a significant role in the reading experience. Arousal as a physiological phenomenon is hard to pinpoint, and arousal generated by cognitive dissonance could, theoretically, be mistaken by a reader for fear itself. This becomes relevant to works such as *Dracula* when we seek to understand the way in which Stoker achieves the desired affective result in his readers. If a work is truly frightening, we would expect that fear to accompany physiological symptoms of arousal such as breathlessness and increased heart rate. One aspect of the brilliance of Stoker's work is the way in which he targets multiple aspects of that arousal – fear, sexuality, and cognitive dissonance – in order to engage the reader's whole body in and to align their affective state with the heightened stakes of the work.

In 1974, social psychologists Donald Dutton and Arthur Aron brought to light new evidence supporting the claim that arousal is easily misattributed when they undertook a new experiment exploring the relationship between adrenaline and misattribution of arousal. The experiment involved sending participants, all of whom were men, out on a bridge, where they were met by a woman who, unbeknownst to participants, was assisting in Dutton and Aron's study (a role commonly referred to as a 'confederate'). The female confederate prompted each participant to write a short story which, per the Thematic Apperception Test (Morgan and Murray), would be assessed to examine the level of sexual content contained therein. The female confederate also provided the male participants with her phone number, stating that she was available to answer any questions they might have about the experiment.

The manipulated variable in this experiment was, interestingly, the type of bridge upon which the male participants were standing. One bridge was sturdy, and designed to reassure

participants of their safety. The other bridge was a suspension bridge, designed to provoke fear and, by extension, adrenaline. Fascinatingly, Dutton and Aron found that the gentlemen in the heightened fear condition (suspension bridge) were much more likely to include sexual content in the short story they wrote. Additionally, they were much more likely to indicate an interest in calling the female confederate after the conclusion of the experiment. This is a clear example of a misattribution of arousal. Dutton and Aron concluded that men in the fear condition likely felt the physical effects of fear – for instance, rapid breath rate, heightened heart rate, greater skin conductivity – and misattributed that physiological response to a heightened attraction to the female confederate.

As Dutton and Aron's 1974 arousal study exhibits, arousal is easily misattributed. The thin physiological edge between fear and attraction can easily be miscalculated – and Dutton and Aron are not the only psychologists to have documented this phenomenon. In a now-famous 1962 experiment which became central to the development of the two-factor theory of emotion (which posits, essentially, that emotion is first experienced and then attributed to an environmental factor, in that order) American psychologists Stanley Schacter and Jerome Singer elicited arousal in participants by injecting them with either epinephrine, also known as adrenaline, or a placebo. Subjects were then placed in the presence of a confederate, posing as fellow participant, who was instructed to act either euphoric or angry. Participants given the epinephrine and placed with the euphoric confederate were much more likely to report feelings of euphoria in a subsequent self-report measure, and, correspondingly, those exposed to the angry confederate were much more likely to report feelings of anger. Essentially, participant arousal was increased, and a plausible emotional explanation for that arousal was then placed in front of the study’s participants. Once

that explanation was present, they attributed their arousal to it, and adopted the corresponding emotional state.

Arousal misattribution is a well-documented phenomenon in psychologists' search to determine how, exactly, emotional states are generated and behavior is subsequently dictated (White et al.; Savitsky et al.; Marin et al.). As humans, it is easier than one might expect to misattribute physiological symptoms to the incorrect stimulus, especially when that stimulus is top-of-mind, readily available for rapid and easy recall. Dutton and Aron's experiment is a compelling demonstration of the similarity in physiological symptoms between arousal associated with attraction and arousal associated with fear, but other cognitive experiences, such as stress, anxiety, and dissonance are also known to cause arousal.

Essentially, when we are presented with an aroused physiology in tandem with a convenient explanation for that arousal, we tend to automatically attribute that arousal to the explanation. Take, for instance, a case of heightened moral cognitive dissonance while reading *Dracula.* The text takes on a power to generate cognitively dissonant states within the self; the reader must confront the fact that they do not support the villain, and yet they have implied and actively participated in the hero's sexual attraction to him. Moreover, through the use of the epistolary form, and the rationalizing distance it affords him as a narrator, the hero himself outright condemns that same sexual attraction. The dissonance is thus made salient to the reader.

Once cognitive dissonance is made salient, it provokes discomfort, and, by extension, arousal. As the above studies show, arousal is a physiological state easily misattributed; thus, the reader is thrust into a cognitive and physiological state for which they cannot account. In a state of high arousal, in the absence of an easily located cause, Dutton and Aron's research suggests we will seek the explanation for our arousal which is most readily accessible. Thus, our arousal when

reading *Dracula* could be attributed to the discomfort of cognitively dissonant moral inductions – or, as readers, we could attribute our raised blood pressure and heightened skin conductivity to a much more direct cause: fear. We could conclude – and indeed, Dutton and Aron suggest we often *do* conclude – that we are simply frightened; that the complex nature of our arousal is rooted simply in fear, and that Dracula, as a villainous and bloodthirsty figure, is responsible. In this way, we are frightened by our own cognitive dissonance, and the complex interaction of subconscious moral assumptions and associations is reduced to a single, overpowering and enduring sensation: we feel afraid. The true arousal which Dracula evokes is not a fear of death so much as it is a fear of the self, though we as readers are not always conscious of that. We are given a comprehensive experience; a beating heart, sweaty palms, and a giddy sort of fear which rides the edge between discomfort, attraction, and the simultaneous shame and thrill of wrongdoing.

In the coming chapter, I will explore this concept of shame and perceived wrongdoing as it relates to Jonathan and Mina Harker. The Harkers are an interesting example of the way in which Dracula provokes not only the reader, but the characters themselves to defy convention in accordance with their subliminal whims – largely, in the case of the Harkers, through gendered expressions of agency and obedience.

Harker v. Harker: Dracula as a Harbinger of Identity Instability in the Epistolary Form

> Ah, but hear me through. He can do all these things, yet he is not free. Nay, he is even more prisoner than the slave of the galley, than the madman in his cell. He cannot go where he lists; he who is not of nature has yet to obey some of nature's laws – why we know not. (Stoker 223)

"More prisoner" than slave or madman; a powerful assertion on the part of Dr. Abraham Van Helsing in Chapter 18 of Bram Stoker's *Dracula.* The restrictions on Dracula's movements are indeed numerous, but as a figure he represents a unique form of freedom: freedom from the gendered binary. This freedom manifests itself as a capacity to inspire that same fluidity of gendered behavior in others. Nowhere is this more evident than in Stoker's characterizations of Jonathan and Mina Harker in the wake of their respective encounters with Dracula, who, in many ways, embodies untethered sexuality and gender expression. At various points throughout the novel, both Jonathan and Mina are exposed to Dracula's unique and alluring compulsion to transcend the performance of gender. Stoker masterfully depicts this transcendence in the epistolary form through the gradual distancing of the Harkers from their respective journals, thus symbolizing not only a retreat from traditional gender roles, but also a retreat from the prying eyes of the audience, and perhaps of society itself.

The fluidity of Dracula's own gender expression is a well-documented phenomenon. Capable of taking on the form of numerous animals in addition to his male-presenting human body, Van Helsing himself identifies Dracula as one "not of nature" (223). The exact form of that seeming "unnaturalness" often manifests itself in gender, as Dracula is noted by scholars to be "neither entirely masculine nor feminine" (Butler 17). In an attempt to "elude the boundaries of gender…the text releases a sexuality so mobile and polymorphic that Dracula may be best

represented as a bat or wolf or floating dust" (Craft 111). This fluidity of gender – this supposed defiance of nature's demand that the body take on a singular form and thus, a singular overarching role – extends to Dracula's allure, the objects of his sexual attraction, and the impact he has upon his victims, as well as the physical and psychological techniques through which he targets them. As an attacker, Dracula can "disgorge blood from his breasts as much as he can penetrate flesh with his phallic teeth" (Hogle 12). The full impact of Dracula's villainous symbolism is derived not only in his violence, but in his ominous transcendence of easy categorization. As an overtly sexual character capable of transmutation, he is a physical embodiment of Victorian-era anxiety regarding defiance of traditional gender expression. As such, Dracula is, in many ways, the perfect villain to challenge the gendered conventions of Jonathan and Mina Harker.

Harker v. Harker: Inversion of Gender Roles and Sexuality in Response to Dracula

The Harkers are the beating heart of Stoker's *Dracula*. Jonathan's narration opens and closes the tale, and it is Dracula's fascination with Mina which motivates the banding-together of the wider group of male protagonists in her defense. More than anything, however, the persistence and determination of their love for one another is the driving force of the narrative. This is true in both the pathetic sense and the literal; without their commitment to communicating with one another, a large portion of the epistolary texts central to the narrative would have no reason to exist, and the scope of the story would be too limited to function. In terms of their symbolic role within the narrative, Jonathan and Mina are the heterosexual heroes of the novel – and they are ultimately rewarded for their commitment to one another with a happy ending, complete with a naturally conceived child, the idealized product of fruitful heterosexual matrimony. Fascinatingly, however, this pivotal and highly traditional heterosexual relationship is continually undermined,

primarily by Dracula, whose involvement in their lives provokes an inverted expression of gender roles.

Agency in *Dracula* is heavily dichotomized: one either moves freely, of their own volition, or they move in obedience to the whim or desires of another. This dichotomy often moves along gendered boundaries. If agency is a dichotomous, gendered concept, then the surface-level acknowledgement of gender roles in the novel *Dracula* prescribes the two sides of agency in alignment with the gender binary. This is established from the outset in the model of Jonathan and Mina Harker – him, the free agent, travelling across Europe in pursuit of professional success, and her, the obedient fiancée, learning shorthand for the purpose of assisting him in his work. In the case of Jonathan and Mina Harker, however, much of the expected distribution of free vs. submissive traits is subtextually subverted. Despite their overt acknowledgement of their respective, traditional marital roles, the novel forces them to contort to fit the shape of the *other*; a gender-inverting process which functions to reveal not only the extent to which the presence of Dracula serves to untether them from their chosen identities, but also the ways in which each character subtly suits – and perhaps even subtextually *desires* – the inverted gender role into which the Count forces them. Furthermore, Mina and Jonathan's contrasting relationships with recurrent power motifs throughout the book (e.g. hypnosis, imprisonment) chart the change in their respective understandings of the complex dynamic between gender role and agency.

This process of gradual gender role inversion begins at the outset of the novel, when Jonathan arrives at the Count's castle, and is quickly cast in the role of damsel in distress typical given to the novel's heroine, not its hero. From their first meeting, the bizarre allure of Dracula is implied through Dracula's repeated emphasis on the free will with which Harker enters. Dracula's first lines are "Welcome to my house! Enter freely and of your own will!" followed immediately

by, “Welcome to my house. Come freely” (Stoker 18). This is the first instance (but not the last) in which we are confronted with the reality that Harker, though unknowingly, plays an active role in creating the fate which befalls him. Unlike the other two central figures of Dracula's focus, Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker, there is no small degree of agency associated with Harker's initial involvement with the Count; in fact, the entirety of the first chapter of the novel is essentially a conglomeration of all the warnings issued to Harker against his traveling to Dracula's castle. Even nature itself seeks to deter him; his dreams leading up to his arrival are "queer" (6), the morning is "grey" (9), and Harker's carriage is surrounded by "a ring of wolves with white teeth and lolling red tongues" (16). In a choice more significant than any other, Harker does as Dracula asks: he enters freely. In this way, he is distinct, the only character in the novel to submit to Dracula in any way of his own volition.

The choice to enter Dracula's home freely puts Harker in a uniquely paradoxical position, agency-wise: he has freely surrendered his freedom. In other words, Harker arrives at Dracula's castle with the active agency to pursue or avoid a relationship with Dracula, a degree of freedom granted to none of the other objects of Dracula's intrigue; the choice he freely makes, however, is the least option of least agency. His choice is one of willing submission.

Harker is again granted a degree of agency by Dracula when the Count remarks in a final warning,

> Let me advise you, my dear young friend – nay, let me warn you with all seriousness, that should you leave these rooms you will not by any chance go to sleep in any other part of the castle. It is old, and has many memories, and there are bad dreams for those who sleep unwisely. Be warned! Should sleep now or ever

> overcome you, or be like to do, then haste to your own chamber or to these rooms, for your rest will then be safe. (Stoker 34)

Here, Dracula is again providing Jonathan with the freedom to make an informed decision, and we see knowledge as an expression of agency freely offered to him. Jonathan is, once again, the only character in the book granted this degree of clarity and autonomy of choice. And once again, we see Jonathan actively making the decision which leads to his own submission. Jonathan himself acknowledges, directly following the Count's warning, and explicitly using language of agency, that the resting in the bedroom is the soundest decision. He notes that "I have placed the crucifix over the head of my bed - I imagine that my rest is thus freer from dreams; and there it shall remain" (Stoker 34). The use of the term "freer" is intriguing in that it suggests some awareness, on at least a subconscious level, that the dreams Harker feels pose some sort of restrictive threat; by extension, he seems to understand that in sleeping away from the crucifix, he is willingly making himself vulnerable to that threat; and yet still, Harker falls asleep outside of his room, remarking that "the Count's warning came into my mind, but I took a pleasure in disobeying it" (37). In this way, Harker's expression of supposed agency leads to one of the most significant scenes of masculine submission in the novel.

When Harker awakens, he is in the presence of three vampiric, ghostlike women whose allure is immediate and undeniable. Throughout the entirety of the subsequent seduction scene, Harker is rendered entirely passive. Even his fantasies are free of agency; he remarks that "there was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips" (38). The specifics of this "burning" desire are notably void of agency on the part of Harker, who waits passively for the vampiric women to initiate the sexual contact. Harker notes that he "lay quiet,

looking out under my eyelashes in an agony of delightful anticipation" (38), prone and vulnerable. As Craft writes, "Harker awaits an erotic fulfillment that entails both the dissolution of the boundaries of the self and the thorough subversion of conventional Victorian gender codes" (108). In the sexual encounter which follows, the vampiric women take full initiative, kissing and biting at Harker as he is "afraid to raise [his] eyelids" and when he does, closes his eyes again "in a languorous ecstasy and waited – waited with beating heart" (Stoker 39). This scene is an unexpected inversion of traditional sexual gender roles. Throughout the duration of his time in confinement, Harker experiences a "slippage in his gendered behavior, from norms of masculinity to norms of femininity" (Smith 133).

The gender inversion of Harker's character during his time in captivity is a well-documented phenomenon, with scholars noting Harker is subjected to "isolation, helplessness, and physical and sexual threats conventionally reserved for the Gothic heroine" (Botting 183). In general, Dracula's capacity to invert traditional notions of masculinity is the topic of recurrent study by scholars: "*Dracula's* men repeatedly succumb to hysteric fits that contemporary readers would have interpreted as feminizing" (Smajić 49). Immediately following Harker's succumbing to the vampiric women of Dracula's castle, Harker again demonstrates his passivity when Dracula comes to scold and dispense with the vampiric women attempting to seduce Harker. Though Harker's eyes do open in response to the Count's arrival, they open, by Harker's own admission, "involuntarily" (Stoker 39), as if Harker's body is once again responding without conscious consent. The Count forces the vampiric women to scatter, presumably saving Harker from their clutches with a proclamation of, "Back, I tell you all! This man belongs to me!" (39), followed soon thereafter with an assuaging promise of, "I promise you that when I am done with him, you shall kiss him at your will" (40). Both statements assume a complete absence of agency on Harker's

part, eliminating his consent, or lack thereof, from the dialogue and conflict altogether. This picture of submission is completed at the scene's conclusion, when Harker falls unconscious, awakening later in his bed, to the conclusion that "the Count must have carried me here" (40). Here, Harker's agency has been so thoroughly eroded that he is not even granted the dignity of fleeing the scene of his own physical volition.

This trend becomes particularly noteworthy, however, when examined in relationship with Stoker's parallel treatment of feminine agency throughout the novel. In the same way that Dracula's involvement in the narrative elicits submission in Jonathan, it elicits a heightened degree of activity, responsiveness, and agency in Mina. Paradoxically, however, she seems on the surface to embody perfect deference to her husband. There are, however, subtle narrative hints at a deeper longing for increased agency, disguised and overlooked beneath the numerous explicit references to her goodness, sweetness, and decorum.

From our very first look at Mina, the complexity and tension between her most heralded qualities and her underlying desires is evident. In the second line of Mina's first letter to Lucy, (which doubles as her introduction, as a character, to the audience) she writes, "the life of an assistant schoolmistress is sometimes trying. I am longing to be with you, and by the sea, where we can walk together freely and build our castles in the air" (53). As introductory lines go, Stoker's choice for Mina Murray is abundant with meaning. Firstly, Mina acknowledges outright that her current position as a schoolmistress, which is very much aligned with traditional gender roles, is not, at all times, ideal. Mina is also an "assistant" schoolmistress, a position of even more significantly reduced authority and agency than the standard schoolmistress. Secondly, in this passage Mina implies some degree of restriction on her current state of being by expressing a desire to coexist with Lucy "by the sea, where we can walk together freely" (53). Here, utilizing

the dichotomous language of "freedom" and "obedience," she acknowledges a desire for direct companionship with another woman, describing that companionship as something in which they may both partake "freely." What this implies, though unspoken, is that there is something inherently "unfree," or lacking in agency, about Mina's current state of being, which inspires in her a "longing" for an alternative existence.

Scholars differ in their classifications of the gender Mina most overtly embodies. Ainsworth, in "Constructing Evil Through the Epistolary in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," asserts that Mina is the true "masculine author of the text…this may be because…Mina is not just the passive victim of Dracula – she is turned into the assailant" (10). By contrast, Mewald asserts that Mina's chastity, modesty, and emotionality are evidence of her status as "the prototype of the ideal Victorian woman" (1). Both interpretations draw significant support from the text. Therein lies the brilliance of the work: its disquieting nature lies in its uncertainty. Dracula topples an already-precarious equilibrium between an autonomous and an obedient Mina. His presence draws from Mina aspects of her character which contradict her sense of self, her prototypically chaste and obedient exterior. His arrival in the narrative of her life acts as the catalyst for the inversion of one dominant aspect over the other – from obedience to the agency for which Mina has indicated a subconscious longing.

Indeed, as the novel progresses and Mina learns, she is able to assert herself more and more in ways which impact the narrative, developing into a remarkably autonomous character. Information is a core currency of the novel, since only the cumulative experiences and testimonies of numerous characters provide all the clues and cues necessary to defeat Dracula. Mina becomes the collector and transcriber of testimonies, thereby "inserting herself as an active, thinking force" and "cast[ing] her assistance as a pooling of intellectual resources rather than merely as a

contribution of data" (Case 8). Mina's contributions are pivotal; "In a novel obsessed with the importance of careful note-taking and accurate recording, Mina is the key to the text" (Prescott and Giorgio 491). In this way, exposure to Dracula, while violent and dangerous, offers a silver lining for Mina in the form of an outlet for the claiming of increased feminine agency.

"Castles in the Air": Contrasting the Harkers' Relationships with Motifs of Agency and Submission

Mina and Jonathan's complex and counterbalanced relationships with agency and obedience are also repeatedly highlighted through Stoker's recurrent use of parallel motifs, and the ways in which their responses to those motifs converge and diverge. Recurrent motifs of captivity and power are deployed similarly but met differently. Jonathan, whose arc in Dracula's captivity is one from masculine autonomy to submission, responds to motifs of that captivity and submission first with resistance, and then with subliminal, grudging pleasure. Mina, however, responds to those same motifs in an inverted manner, as fits her alternative arc from ill-suited feminine obedience to agency. That same motif of captivity which Jonathan initially begrudges symbolizes, for her, a sense of whimsical freedom, and her ultimate "rescue" from that captivity results in a return to the submissive and obedient role in which she began.

In order to more closely examine this phenomenon, I return again to Mina's introductory few lines in her letter to Lucy. Recall that Mina writes, "I am longing to be with you, and by the sea, where we can walk together freely and build our castles in the air" (53). Stoker's choice of words in describing Mina's fantasies – "castles in the air" – conjures an inherent comparison to the castle of Count Dracula. The implication is one of freedom in captivity; of agency for Mina, associated with the place holding her one true love captive. Castle imagery, for Jonathan, suggests forced submission and obedience. For Mina, that same imagery conjures romanticized fantasies of

feminine freedom. Taken to the extreme, we could interpret Jonathan's forced submission and entrapment as a subtle motif of possibility and agency for Mina. She is, in many ways, rendered freer by her husband's absence and entrapment within the Count's castle, though this is never explicitly acknowledged in the text. Notably, Mina does not begin the novel as Mina Harker, but as Mina Murray, unwed and still retaining her own name. As soon as Jonathan is freed, they are wedded, and Mina Murray becomes Mina Harker: less a single entity, more an extension of Jonathan's name and identity. It is also noteworthy that Mina Harker, once she is married, is never referenced as the obeyed party in the novel. She is only referenced as the one who obeys.

Stoker's allusion to the castle is only one of several instances in which the novel intentionally inverts a motif's agency/obedience significance across gendered lines. Another such instance arises when we examine the Harkers' differing relationships with hypnosis. Jonathan's experience occurs first, as he sits up in wait, watching from the windows of the castle for the Count's clandestine return from an unexplained errand. Jonathan sits at the window, and "[begins] to notice that there [are] some quaint little specks floating in the rays of the moon light…I [watch] them with a sense of soothing, and a sort of calm [steals] over me. I [lean] back in the embrasure in a more comfortable position, so that I [can] enjoy more fully the aerial gamboling" (44-45). Quickly, however, Harker's pleasure succumbs to panic and discontent. He recounts,

> I felt myself struggling to awake to some call of my instincts; nay, my very soul was struggling, and my half-remembered sensibilities were striving to answer the call. I was becoming hypnotized! Quicker and quicker danced the dust…and then I started, broad awake and in full possession of my senses, and ran screaming from the place. (Stoker 45)

The explicit content of the text tells us that Harker experiences an extreme discomfort associated with hypnosis due to the loss of agency. He recounts that his soul itself protests the forced submission, to the extent that once his senses return as a product of his willpower, he runs "screaming from the place." This onset of "sense," followed by panic, seems to act in contradiction, however, to the apparent whims of Harker's body. Harker describes his initial succumbing to the hypnosis as "soothing," easing him into "a more comfortable position" in which he may "enjoy" the dancing of the hypnotic specks. Despite Harker's protests when the reality of his situation and the surrounding masculine expectations re-emerge as he regains "full possession of [his] senses," the implication is again one of subtle pleasure in the act of submission; of a body granted some degree of ironic relief in response to being bent into passive obedience.

Mina Harker's relationship with hypnosis is, in one respect, entirely the opposite: Mina actively submits to, and willingly requests, hypnosis. This occurs later in the novel, once Dracula has established a psychic bond with Mina by drinking her blood and forcing her to drink his. During sunrise and sunset, when Dracula is at his weakest, Mina and Van Helsing realize they can use hypnotism to exploit that psychic connection and track his movements. Mina is quoted in an account recorded in Jonathan Harker's journal as saying to Van Helsing, "I want you to hypnotize me!...Do it before the dawn, for I feel that then I can speak, and speak freely. Be quick, for the time is short!" (289). The hypnosis is Mina's idea, and occurs at her behest; most intriguingly, she refers to it as a conduit, allowing her to "speak freely." A later description of the ongoing process of hypnosis, provided by Dr. Seward, offers a counterpoint to this perspective, however, describing the increasing difficulty in hypnotizing Mina Harker as follows: "The hypnotic stage was even longer in coming than before; and when it came the time remaining until full sunrise was so short that we began to despair. Van Helsing seemed to throw his whole soul into the effort; at last, in

obedience to his will she made reply" (320). By the first account, Mina herself refers to hypnosis as a freeing force – speaking "freely" in this instance being used to indicate, specifically, a freedom from the thrall of Dracula. The second quote, however, reveals a secondary dimension to Mina's relationship with freedom and obedience under the hypnosis of Van Helsing. Even in freedom from Dracula, she is still expected to embody a form of obedience: obedience to the will of the ordinary men around her. According to the accounts of Seward and Jonathan Harker, when read together, Mina's own definition of "speaking freely" contains an inherent understanding that that free speech occurs only in obedience to and with explicit permission from the men in her life.

Jonathan bucks against the hypnosis, but the text implies a subconscious bodily desire to succumb to it. Mina actively seeks out the hypnosis and describes it as freeing, but it is simultaneously implied that embedded in that freedom is an acceptance of the obedience inherent to her social status as a woman. If Dracula is, as Van Helsing says, "he who is not of nature" (223), it follows that his influence upon each individual – Jonathan and Mina, respectively – would create, in a way, an inversion of the "natural" relationship with agency and obedience inherent to their genders. And indeed, we see this phenomenon occurring, as Jonathan's agency, a state inherent to his masculinity, is reduced by Dracula's thrall. At first glance, it appears that Mina, too, is made more submissive by her hypnosis, which would defy our understanding of Dracula's influence as subverting of gender norms – but we must recall that Mina's hypnosis is not actually performed by Dracula himself, but by Van Helsing, in response to the psychic connection Dracula enacts upon Mina. Mina's hypnosis, unlike Jonathan's, is an attempt to resettle her character in her gendered position along the agency/obedience lines of division – an attempt which is successful, as Van Helsing's hypnosis, at length, draws a reply from Mina "in obedience to his will," an inherent reorienting of her character in her feminized role. Thus, the dichotomy of their respective positions

is violated by the presence of Dracula, and reinstated through the efforts of their allies in the battle against him.

Overall, this is a recurrent subtextual theme throughout the work: Dracula elicits explicitly inverted gendered behavior from both Jonathan and Mina, but in neither case is he entirely responsible for its conception. Jonathan and Mina are explicitly the ideal heterosexual couple, but implicitly, both play an active role in their own gender role inversions. Jonathan Harker enters Dracula's castle, as Dracula himself states, of his own free will; he uses his agency to freely submit. Mina, in an effort not to become the dreaded "New Woman," (Victorian term for an early-stage feminist, characterized by Mina as excessively progressive) paradoxically makes herself remarkably self-sufficient long before Dracula ever comes upon her. In this way, they are the perfect pair to reiterate the novel's themes of cognitive dissonance. In seeking to defeat them, Dracula weaponizes the perceived monstrosity or wrongness which already exists within them. Dracula does not create the compulsion to rebuff the gender binary; he merely creates the context in which that compulsion can more freely operate within them. As a villain, he does not wholly alter them, but rather capitalizes upon a perceived immorality which exists already within them. Thus, they are both the ideal heterosexual couple and the ultimate inversion thereof, and indeed, if the Harkers, the novel's heroes, can be swayed to such defiance of the accepted binary, of socially accepted behavior, are we not all in danger?

Freedom in Silence: The Epistolary Form as an Expression of Gender Role Compliance and Defiance

When examining the impact of the epistolary form on Stoker's complex dynamic of inverted, gendered agency and obedience binaries, we must start again at the beginning and chart the shifts in epistolary narration as the novel (and, by extension, the characters' respective

exposures to Dracula) progresses. Stoker uses distance from the epistolary narrative form (i.e., an absence in narration provided from a given character's perspective) to represent an increase in gender fluidity. Both Harkers seem to use the written word as a tool with which to anchor themselves to their "civilized," pre-Dracula selves. As their exposure to Dracula increases, and they grow less and less dependent on their gender identities as mechanisms to dictate their behavior, their direct contributions to the narrative decrease. In this way, the reader can loosely chart the extent to which the Harkers have transcended their respective gender roles by charting the course of who is, and has been, the primary narrator at any section of the novel.

From the outset, Stoker dichotomizes Jonathan and Mina's respective degrees of agency by using differing epistolary mediums through which to introduce them to the reader. Jonathan Harker is introduced to the reader through journal entries. Certain textual forms allow for more freedom of self-expression than others. It is noteworthy, then, that Harker's writing is journalistic, exclusively his own; Mina and Lucy, by contrast, are introduced via correspondence to one another. There is an inherent restriction in the letter-writing version of the epistolary form, in that the content of the written word is mediated by the writer's awareness of their audience. Mina and Lucy are more constrained in terms of how explicitly honest their writing can be; they write with an inherent awareness of the other, and an implied need to cater to the conversational standards of that same other. Thus, from the outset, a gendered binary is established. The medium through which Mina and Jonathan take their first steps into the reader's imagined world is constrained by the epistolary form through which they are introduced; the precedent for obedience, for restriction and awareness of the viewer, the supposed other, is established from the outset. In this way, the epistolary form provides a starting point for both characters which places them firmly within the boundaries of the conventional gendered agency/obedience binary.

A complicating factor in this analysis arises when we consider the use of the epistolary form as a means for assembling information, which, as previously discussed, is the currency of the novel. If Mina, as information-keeper, is, as Prescott and Giorgio assert, "the key to the text," then it is odd that her narration becomes less and less central to the plot as the narrative progresses, but when we chart the epistolary form throughout the novel, the significance of trends in Jonathan and Mina's vocality become clear: as their involvement with Dracula intensifies and their bonds with "civilized" English society deteriorate, so does their capacity to narrate.

Dracula's first four chapters are comprised entirely of Jonathan Harker's journal. At the conclusion of those four chapters, however, following a noted descent toward madness brought on by his entrapment and exposure to the Count, Jonathan falls conspicuously silent until the fourteenth chapter. His testimonies are sporadic from that point forward, gradually increasing in regularity until he is consistently featured again in the final six chapters. Mina, by contrast, is featured sporadically throughout the novel. She only falls significantly silent toward the final chapters, during which time she is ensnared by a psychic connection with Dracula. During this time, she is silent from chapters 19 to 26, the largest gap in her narration (with the exception of one entry in chapter 24 which is almost entirely dominated by dialogue from other characters). By the novel's end, however, both Jonathan and Mina's voices have been restored, and in the proper order, given the hierarchy of their gendered relationship. Mina is given the novel's final entry – but Jonathan is awarded the closing note, a strong final word from a man whose patriarchal seat within the family has been firmly reestablished.

Jonathan Harker's numerous journal entries also ground him in a sense of self unmolested by Dracula's powers of inversion. Alison Case, in her article "Tasting the Original Apple: Gender and the Struggle for Narrative Authority in *Dracula*," asserts that among the epistolary form's

many functions lies one centrally established from the outset of Jonathan Harker's narration: journal entries are a way for the character to track and maintain their sense of self. During his harrowing experiences with Dracula, Harker describes "feeling as though my own brain was unhinged or as if the shock had come which must end in its undoing, I turn to my diary for repose. The habit of entering accurately must help to soothe me" (37). Furthermore, in what is presumably an attempt to isolate and unhinge Jonathan further, Dracula removes written evidence of his travels to the castle. Jonathan laments the loss, noting that "every scrap of paper was gone, and with it all my notes, my memoranda relating to railways and travel, my letter of credit…this looked like some new scheme of villainy…" (43). Harker's diary tethers him not only to his own sanity, but also to his relationships and connections back home, providing him with the hope that his final messages may find their way to his loved ones. As the situation grows increasingly dire, he writes, "God help me in my task! Good-bye, Mina, if I fail: good-bye, my faithful friend and second father; good-bye all, and last of all Mina!" (46). In this way, his written words connect him to his former life; to his "civilized self," his role as fiancé and protector as well as son and friend.

At first glance, it appears that Dracula's psychic link with Mina has robbed her of some degree of agency, but Stoker undercuts that assertion by limiting her agency long before Dracula ever fixates on and connects with her. Case acknowledges that the connection between Mina and Dracula is more one of the mind than of the body, writing, "while the Count views the ultra-feminine Lucy largely as a food source, Mina proves attractive for the power of her *mind"* (Case 233). Case subsequently argues that the silencing of Mina as the narrative progresses, necessitated by the Count's invasion of her mind, is Stoker's way of reasserting Mina's femininity without undermining her inherent "goodness." But prior to the Count's invasion of her mind, Mina has already been forcibly excluded from discourse on the issues at hand by the men; the "power of her

mind" has already been undermined as a result of her femininity. Van Helsing justifies her exclusion from the proceeding events by saying, "you are too precious to us to have such risk…we shall tell you all in good time. We are men and are able to bear, but you must be our star and our hope, and we shall act more free that you are not in the danger" (225). This quote is notable for two reasons: firstly, Van Helsing directly states and asserts this dichotomy of agency. Mina's exclusion – her obedience – allows the men to "act more free" in response. Secondly, it is worth noting that this exclusion is actually part of what gives Dracula an opening to approach Mina; their recurrent errands give him numerous windows of time alone with her in which to begin the process of drinking her blood. Thus, Dracula's thrall causes no real repeal of information; it only heightens the need to enforce a gendered barrier which has already been created by the novel's supposed band of heroes. In other words, it appears that Dracula's psychic link with Mina has robbed her of some degree of agency, but Stoker undercuts that assertion by limiting her agency long before Dracula ever fixates on and connects with her.

Dracula's invasion of Mina's mind is framed, at first glance at the epistolary, as an act forcing increased submission and obedience. However, when we return to Case's analysis of Jonathan Harker's original journal entries, we may recall that those entries serve a dual function: they record the ongoing events, but they also provide Harker with a stable record of his own descent into supposed madness, a thin grip of the self to refer back to when faced with an uncertain reality.

For Mina, journal entries seem to serve a similar function in that they help to ground her in her feminized identity. In her first diary entry, Lucy, (who, as a more explicitly flirtatious feminine character, seeks to emulate Mina's collected, mature, docile behavior) remarks upon opening, "I must imitate Mina, and keep writing things down" (103). Mina also uses her journal

as a space to assert her subtle derision for the “New Woman,” and her hopes that Lucy should not come to embody this “New Woman.” By extension, it becomes a place for Mina to reassert her own identity in distinction from the “New Woman.” As Prescott and Giorgio assert, it is evident through her writing that "Mina would like to understand herself as the ideal Victorian woman" (487). Mina herself also acknowledges her journal as a grounding space, noting early in the novel, "I am anxious, and it soothes me to express myself here" (69) in a journal entry not dissimilar to Jonathan's. Most notably of all, Mina remarks in a letter to Lucy that "I may show Jonathan [my journal] someday if there is in it anything worth sharing but it is really an exercise-book. I shall try to do what I see lady journalists do: interviewing and writing descriptions and trying to remember conversations" (53). This final quote is, perhaps, the most significant, as it speaks to the duality of Mina's longings. Practically, the journal is intended as an exercise-book to train her to be a better transcriptionist in order that she might be of more assistance to her husband – an obedient housewife. However, as Prescott and Giorgio acknowledge, "Mina's commitment to work positions her as something other than Jonathan Harker's passive, chivalric ideal" (490). Her remark about "lady journalists" suggests a secondary and perhaps entirely subliminal desire to join the working force in a manner unbecoming of that idealized, passive exterior – yet this, she insists, is still ultimately a function of her service to her husband, to whom she may someday show "anything worth sharing." Mina, like Jonathan, uses her journalistic entries as a medium through which to ground herself in her gendered identity, and, by extension, her expected position in the hierarchy of agency. In this way, her epistolary self-expression roots her in her role of feminine obedience, but simultaneously hints at her subtle longings for agency.

As the novel progresses and Dracula begins to prey on Mina, her journal entries devolve and contain fewer traces of her agency as they become a way to reassure her husband of her

continued transparency and reliable sameness. Importantly, this shift occurs at the same point in the novel at which the men decide, collectively, that for the sake of Mina's safety they will cease to keep her informed on their ongoing investigation. Mina writes,

> It is strange to me to be kept in the dark as I am today; after Jonathan's full confidence for so many years, to see him manifestly avoid certain matters, and those most vital of all…well, some day Jonathan will tell me all; and lest it should ever be that he should think for a moment that I kept anything from him, I still keep my journal as usual. Then if he has doubted my trust I shall show it to him, with every thought of my heart put down for his dear eyes to read. (238-239)

By this point, the function of the journal is largely to reaffirm traditional gendered expressions of agency between Jonathan and Mina. He is free to keep information from her as he wishes; she writes everything down, no longer under any sort of guise of purposeful self-expression or even practice as a "lady journalist," but solely to reassure Jonathan of the contents of her heart. Those contents are, of course, his to peruse at his will; Mina's innermost thoughts are freely submitted to him, and thus the epistolary form allows her to reassert her submissive, feminine role. Like Jonathan, the epistolary form is now allowing her to cling to her distinct, "sane" identity and sense of self even in the face of the Count's inverted reality.

By extension, then, Mina's steady descent into silence in the epistolary form can be read not as a descent into submission, but rather as a reclaiming of the self, not as an externalized identity in need of oversight or approval, but as an autonomous individual who can "speak freely," as she asserted to Lucy many chapters ago that she could not on the page. The complete absence of Mina Harker's perspective in later chapters is not indicative of a loss of agency, but rather of an untethering from the traditional self; from the obedience dictated by gender. Notably, Jonathan

falls similarly silent for many chapters after his own encounter with Dracula, and only reemerges on the page once he has been revived and has regained some degree of physical strength.

Stoker also never makes any attempt to provide narrative from Dracula's perspective. This may simply be an indication of his unwillingness to even attempt justifying a villainous and violent viewpoint – but an alternative interpretation may posit that, given Dracula's fluid gender and sexuality, his narrative silence is representative of the fact that he inhabits a space which the reader is not expected to be fully capable of conceptualizing. Furthermore, and perhaps most eerily, the novel's setup of Jonathan as having freely surrendered his own freedom, as well as its assertions of Mina's subconscious longing for agency, free Dracula, to an extent, from culpability for his own villainy. The novel's hints at their respective discomfort with their excessively traditional, heteronormative gender binary roles. Thus, once Dracula enters their lives and Jonathan is made more submissive and Mina granted more agency, the question lurks always just beneath the surface: is this wholly wrong? Is Dracula not, in some way, granting their respective subconscious desires? This lends its own degree of horror to the novel's proceedings. Dracula may be killed; his body may be staked and burned in the daylight. But we can never fully kill the subconscious desires that we are too afraid to confess live within us.

The Harkers are an example of the way in which Dracula's presence in the narrative undercuts traditional alignments of agency and gender. Bram Stoker uses the epistolary form to underscore that inversion. In *Dracula*, the epistolary form functions to underscore their respective detachments from the narrative traditions to which we, the audience, may expect them to adhere. The sudden and respective epistolary silences of the Harkers speak volumes; it implies that they no longer exist in a space which the reader can latch onto or identify. Their roles no longer fit

coherently into a traditional narrative. Thus, through Dracula's compelling powers of inversion, they transcend the epistolary narrative altogether.

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