

Proposal (Book Quest: Part I)

Choose a book from our [list](#) of classics. It is preferable to choose one with which you are already familiar as, even though the contents of the book may be secondary to our concerns, you still need to know what it is about in order to analyse it properly.

If you choose a book with which you are unfamiliar, then you must **read it** before you begin.

Each one of these books is special to the History of the Book, and it will be up to you to place it in that context and to explain what aspects of its creation, manufacture, dissemination, or survival, make it of interest to our course. As you know, all of these aspects are of interest to us (if you are not sure, check the Darnton circuit and the Adams & Barker's map.) You may look at several of these phases, or focus on a single one, but do keep in mind that Blake's poetry *per se* is only of interest to us as the fuel that fed the composition and printing of his books.

On November 1, you will submit a **two- or three-page proposal**, explaining what you intend to do in the seven or eight page paper you will submit **on January 10**.

This will be accompanied by a scholarly bibliography containing **eight peer-reviewed titles** available *in or through* our library, at least **three of which will be books**.

A discussion of how these scholars will serve the needs of your discussion should be **included in your proposal**, so you do not need to annotate your bibliography.

Please submit a paper **and** an electronic copy.

[Some questions to ponder...](#)

Due: November 1

Value: 10% of essay's worth

Essay (Book Quest Part II)

This essay will be the result of your research and proposal (and the comments I made about them). Your quest is to explain what makes a book special in the context of the history of the book.

Please note that this is a formal essay, not a personal response paper. It must contain serious academic analysis, not impressions, feelings, musings or editorial comments. The use of "I" is allowed, but is usually unnecessary and a distraction for the reader. Focus on the content of your findings.

It will be 7-8 pages (not including the bibliography), in MLA format and should be submitted in **both electronic form (emailed) and paper copy**.

To give clarity and authority to your points, you will use both **primary quotes** and **secondary quotes**. Look here for more on [quoting](#).

Advice

Do review the [questions pondered](#) in Phase I.

While the history of the book is not interested in literary analysis as an end point, you do need to look at what **content, style, message, etc.** make your book special in order to then look at how it has made its appearance, how it was received, etc., and why this particular book matters to our society.

Do not tell me how great this book is and what a great success it has had. It wouldn't be on the list if it wasn't part of the Western Canon.

Do not tell me about TV or film adaptations. Focus on the book.

Beware of biographies:

The use of biographical information must be **justified**. Information about where the author went to school, his family (parents, lovers, children, etc.) are generally unimportant (and a blatant page-filler), unless you point out why they are relevant to this paper.

Biographical information should **not** have a section of its own, as each item should be incorporated wherever it is relevant.

Sources for biographical information should be **scholarly**, not some neutral entry on the net, even from a "reliable source" such as an institutional site.

Avoid looking at film/video/clip versions of your book as it is a re-interpretation (more or less faithful) of the text.

Long quotes are always suspect, as they are either padding or are not being examined and unpacked properly, which would necessitate breaking them down. Since they are not your words, you don't get any points for them. Integrate short quotes in your own text to support your points. Look here for more on [quoting](#).

To avoid accidental **plagiarism**, always write with all your sources closed. Open them to insert your in-text citations as soon as your text is written. Don't wait and go back to it later.

The **introductory paragraph** is a contract with the reader and sets up the entire paper. It must contain the topic in space and time (where? when?), some notions of where the paper is going to go, as well as what it is going to argue, how, why, etc. **You can't know that when you begin to write, so write it last, when you do know what you are going to argue.**

Start early, even if you have to put it aside for a while. You cannot go on an intellectual quest without giving your mind time to grasp the text and its life, to grow with it, and articulate worthwhile thoughts.

This essay is due on January 10

When in doubt, email me at domino@yorku.ca

The Evolution of Dracula and the New Woman

Misogyny, Eroticism, and Female Sexuality in Stoker's *Dracula* and its Descendants

Blood, darkness, danger: three ingredients for the infamous *vampire*, one of the most famous and popular creatures in modern media. For almost two centuries, since John William Polidori's *The Vampyre* in 1819, vampires have been a staple of gothic fiction. They have evolved to suit their time, from a terrifying representation of foreign corruption to a more glamorized, modern form as a popular love interest in romance novels. Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the most well-known vampire novel, published in London, 1897, and sometimes mistaken as the origin of the vampire mythos, provided a basis for our modern vampire genre. Stoker's epistolary prose, told as a horror tale through the eyes of ordinary, kind English folk, played on the social fears of his day (Clasen 378), and incorporated an underlying eroticism which developed further in later, romantic adaptations. Notably, *Dracula*, and the numerous adaptations that it spawned, began a movement of vampire literature dedicated largely to a female audience, and established it as one of the most well known and profitable genres. The fears it explored, and the suggestive subtext of the novel, evolved alongside a turbulent period in women's rights—and in our modern context, that subtext has adapted to suit our own society's views on female sexuality.

If we examine *Dracula's* birth, and its reception and popularity in the Victorian era, we can see how the novel parallels the mentality of the society in which it was written. In Stoker's time, the advent of the "New Woman" and a society resistant to foreign influence created the

perfect monster: non-English, sexually aggressive, and dominating (Clasen 378). The popularity of Stoker's vampire may not have come only from his supernatural powers or his physical strength, but also from the way he seemed to embody both the fears and hidden desires of the Victoria era. Far from being the product of a simple horror tale, the dark, illicit themes of Stoker's vampire may have gained traction not only for the fear they evoked, but also for their eroticism.

In Stoker's time, sexuality and eroticism in mass literature were, by and large, hidden in subtext or metaphor (Pikula 290). This is not to say that there was a lack of discussion of sex in the Victorian period, as this sort of conversation was notable in the 19th century, but that its treatment in publications was controlled differently as it is now (Pikula 290). Even Stoker, who wrote about the censorship of publication, did not argue for a prohibition of risqué matters—rather, he advocated purity of intention when dealing with such material, or in other words, for an author's ability to “control his own utterances” (Pikula 290). This may have been caused by the more sensitive attitudes towards sexuality at the time, in part motivated by religious factors and propriety, but also by the social view of women's sexuality and pleasure, which were seen as obscene and dirty (Wilson 146).

The Contagious Diseases Acts, first passed in 1864, exemplify the Victorian view of female sexuality, and were passed, amended, and then repealed, in accordance with women's status in England. Originally, the CD Acts were an attempt to curb the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (The British Medical Journal 619), primarily the deadly syphilis, which affected a staggering amount of people: at Bartholomew's Hospital in London, one half of the patients were infected with venereal diseases, while in other hospitals, the rate was anywhere

from one-fifth to 43 percent (Wilson 146). The Acts attempted to curb the diseases by preventing women, whom soldiers had long paid as prostitutes, from going near any military garrisons on pain of incarceration (sometimes indefinitely) and invasive medical examination. Though it was well known, and accepted, that soldiers paid prostitutes, the CD Acts were the first time the law enshrined that the diseases were caused by women. They branded women as contagions, as problems needing to be locked away, and any woman within proximity of the garrisons was treated as such—even if she was not a prostitute. However, and perhaps most importantly, no attempt was made to punish the men who hired prostitutes. The CD Acts, essentially, codified that the sin of a woman was “much greater than the man’s” (Wilson 146).

The CD acts led to an association of women’s sexuality (especially those of the lower classes) with disease and filth, and gave promiscuity the image of the “fallen woman,” those who were a source of contamination and who had no available treatment for sexually transmitted infections (Wilson 146). The acts were so damaging, and so overtly damaging only to *women*, that the abuses caused by the Acts provided a stimulus for burgeoning women’s movements (Wilson 146). By the time the CD Acts were repealed in 1886 (Wilson 145), the Women’s Movement was in full force, and these influences permeated much of the literature of the time, including Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, first published in 1897.

The influence of the CD Acts is seen several ways in *Dracula*. Firstly, an association can be drawn between Count Dracula and contagion (Clasen 389), based on a Victorian fear of syphilis, as he “infects” Lucy and Mina, and others whom he bites. The repulsion that central characters of the novel experience while encountering Count Dracula feeds on a fear of sexually transmitted diseases to make the scenes more visceral and relatable to a Victorian audience

(Clasen 389). Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the CD Acts' influence on *Dracula* can be seen in how the novel treats both its central female characters, and the female vampires. Twenty years after their inception, the CD Acts and the feminist movements they spurred began to affect a great social change in the status of women, and the image women had of each other and themselves. One of these changes, seen in literature and other publications of the time (Walls 230), was the advent of the "New Woman," which signaled an important shift in women's status in society—and also, to authors such as Stoker, a new societal fear that could be explored in their work.

The "New Woman," a *fin de siècle* (1880s and 1890s) phenomenon in Victorian England, was a representation of women as intelligent, educated, independent, and without need of men (Walls 229). The significant cultural changes of the era saw a redefinition of gender roles, especially as they pertained to a woman's place in the household and her legal rights. Of course, alongside any women's liberation movement comes changes in how society views female sexuality—and, invariably, a blowback to this sexuality. Opponents of women's movements may depict women's sexuality as mandatorily chaste, in service of a husband, or obscene; in accordance with this, they may also present narratives in which women who rebel against these ideals are mocked or degraded. Stoker, utilizing both sides of women's movements—those opposed and those who promoted them—sought to incorporate the changing of the times in *Dracula*. In Stoker's work, the New Woman presented a backdrop for his female characters, and the way he presented their domination at the hands of Count Dracula.

In *Dracula*, the women of the novel are not, importantly, New Women. The principal female characters, Lucy and Mina, are examples of “proper” Victorian women: innocent and loyal to their men, mouthpieces for Victorian ideals of female nurturing qualities, and sexually prudish. However, as Tanya Pikula writes in her article “Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and Late-Victorian Advertising Tactics: Earnest Men, Virtuous Ladies, and Porn,” as the novel progresses “even these seemingly conformist women seem to be changing—and that is where the horror lies” (289). Count Dracula, a foreign terror from Transylvania, utilizes the Victorian fear of foreign invasion and corruption of English morality (Hughes 3); he uses his supernatural powers to influence several people in the novel, namely Jonathan Harker, a young Englishman who visits his home to negotiate a land purchase, and, most significantly, the women Jonathan is familiar with: his fiancée Mina and Mina’s friend Lucy.

Mina exemplifies some qualities of New Women, even if her attitudes do not reflect them. She is a skilled typist, intelligent, and works as a schoolmistress, even if, as Pikula writes, she “acquires practical knowledge in order to ‘be useful to Jonathan’” (289). In Chapter 18, the Professor Van Helsing (one of the novel’s most skilled vampire hunters) says of Mina “She has a man’s brain, a brain that a man should have were he much gifted, and a woman’s heart,” and yet, even though Mina expresses much willingness to help in the fight against Dracula, Van Helsing also says that “it is no part for a woman. Even if she be not harmed, her heart may fail her in so much and so many horrors and hereafter she may suffer, both in waking, from her nerves, and in sleep, from her dreams” (Stoker Chapter 18). Some readers might see Mina as an important evolution for women in literature—intelligent, if still obedient to her husband—but Stoker subjects Mina to Count Dracula’s domination all the same, despite her skills and

countenance. The change of gentle, prudish Lucy and clever Mina, both of whom are caught by the allure of the supernatural Count Dracula, and both of whom act less properly because of it, appeals to a very specific fear of Victorians: that of foreign corruption of women's morality, and the increasingly discussed sexuality of women (Hughes 3).

Of course, the evolution of vampires was not simply one of fear, but of desire. *Dracula* exemplifies the early use of vampires as erotic potential. Most notably are Stoker's descriptions of the female vampires, often told to be "voluptuous" in all ways (their bodies, smiles, lips, beauty, grace), a word very often found in Victorian pornographic texts (Pikula 292) and associated with sensuality. Stoker's passages describing how the vampires fed—the drinking of blood—were written similarly to Victorian erotic texts, focusing carnal sensations or heavy in repetition to create a sense of rhythm. Jonathan Harker, after his encounter with a female vampire, describes it thusly: "I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the super-sensitive skin of my throat, and the hard dents of two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I closed my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited—waited with a beating heart." (Stoker Chapter 3) The language used by Stoker, and continued through the evolution of the vampire genre, uses its eroticism to appeal to darker desires, often hidden below the surface. The blend of fear and danger, coupled with erotic language, has appealed to its audiences—especially, in both Stoker's time and ours, women (Pikula 287)—for well over a century.

Even as we examine Stoker's text, it is difficult to pinpoint, with utmost certainty, an exact reason for why Stoker's society loved his vampire, or why this love of his monster has continued today. It may be our attraction to the illicit, or to the mysterious, or to horror—but, undoubtedly, one of the most enduring factors that keep vampires in the limelight is their

ability to change and adapt over time. Their mythos, rules, and even roles in fiction (hero, friend, lover, or villain) change as society evolves and goes through social revolutions. If we fast-forward to our modern era, we see a trend of using vampires to appeal to social fears, and their usage as sexual devices, translated quite clearly.

Take, for example, the themes of the most famous modern representation of vampire sexuality, Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight*. While the novel's representations of vampires are much different from Stoker's, an attraction towards the dark and illicit remains—especially as it pertains to sexuality. In fact, a central conflict in the series is human Bella's relationship with the vampire Edward, and the danger (of Edward not being able to control the bloodlust) which prevents them from exploring a sexual relationship with each other. Most importantly, they are not willing to take this risk until after marriage. This is a reflection of our modern context and fears: of a society (especially American, where the book was written) with an inclination towards abstinence education for teens (Perrin and DeJoy 445), and a fixation on the protection of the "delicate" virginity of teenage girls (Carpenter 127). Just as Stoker's work reflects his society's concerns and fears, and the advent of the New Woman, *Twilight* reflects it as well. Both use the monstrous vampire to explore fears of women's sexuality, and show a clear progression from Stoker's work to the modern vampire-romance genre that he produced.

Twilight is hardly the only novel that uses vampires to represent sexual repression and explorations of female sexuality. A simple search calls hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of titles with erotic subtext: *Interview with the Vampire*, *The Vampire Diaries*, *The Saga of Darren Shan*, *The Radleys*, *Vampire Academy*, *House of Night*, *I ... Vampire*, and the *Blue Bloods*, to name a few. While the sexual or erotic tones of *Dracula* may not have been widely discussed in

the Victorian period, they are so well known today that they gave birth to an entirely unique genre of romance—one focused, almost entirely, on a female audience (Frayling 106). In these titles, erotic language similar to Stoker’s appears frequently, their scenes of bloodlust and blood-drinking written similarly to those of sex or repression (of sexuality, or, paralleled through the vampire, of bloodlust). These erotic vampire themes, though still primarily directed to a female audience, have broken their traditional confines of literature. They appear in comics, in screen, and in theatre, as well as virtually every other media type (such as music, art, and poetry). The vampire genre has even escaped its original English confines, spreading not only throughout the Western world but to East Asia and what seems like everywhere in-between, from Japan’s *Hellsing* and *Vampire Knight*, to Sweden’s *Let the Right One In*, among a catalogue of spin-offs from both the original and derivative source material. The genre is only growing, with ten or more books published every month through Amazon’s “vampire romance” category alone, as well as countless others through various presses (such as erotica giant Harlequin, who publishes several every few months) (“Harlequin Nocturne”). The genre shows no sign of stopping, or of losing popularity.

Stoker’s Dracula, widely regarded as the masterwork of the vampire literary genre, is as inseparable from its time as it is transcendent of it. To remove it from its time, and not consider the social influences that led to its fame, does it a great disservice; it is *because of* the restrictive sensibilities towards women of the Victorian era that the book excelled, not despite them. However, we cannot look at Stoker’s vampire as something that must remain in the Victorian era—or even has. His representation of societal fears, especially those surrounding women, make his vampire a monster that can shift and change to suit its surroundings, and so,

remain as relevant today as it was during its first publication. Its elements of darkness, eroticism, domination, loss of morality, and female sexuality spawned millions of derivatives and led to one of the most profitable, widespread genres of supernatural romance. Today, a hundred years after *Dracula's* first publication, authors continue to employ his vampire's adaptable horrors, sensuality, and sexual taboos in their own novels to the delight of millions of readers, not only in the West, but across the world.

Works Cited

- "Books: Romance: Vampires: Last 30 Days." *Amazon.ca*. Amazon Inc, n.d. Web.
<https://www.amazon.ca/s/ref=sr_nr_p_n_date_0?fst=as%3Aoff&rh=n%3A916520%2Cn%3A%21927726%2Cn%3A955190%2Cn%3A51284011%2Cp_n_date%3A12035756011&bbn=51284011&ie=UTF8&qid=1493257592&rnid=12035755011>.
- Carpenter, Laura M. "The Ambiguity of 'Having Sex': The Subjective Experience of Virginity Loss in the United States." *The Journal of Sex Research*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2001, pp. 127–139., www.jstor.org/stable/3813703.
- Clasen, Mathias. "Attention, Predation, Counterintuition: Why Dracula Won't Die." *Applied Evolutionary Criticism* 4th ser. 46.3 (Fall/Winter 2012): 378-98. *JSTOR*. Web.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/style.46.3-4.378>.
- Frayling, Christopher. *Vampyres: Genesis and resurrection from Count Dracula to Vampirella*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2016. Print.
- "Harlequin Nocturne." *Harlequin*. Harlequin Novels, n.d. Web.
<<https://www.harlequin.com/shop/brand/harlequin-nocturne.html>>.
- Hughes, William. *Beyond Dracula*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Print.

Perrin, Karen, and Sharon Bernecki DeJoy. "Abstinence-Only Education: How We Got Here and Where We're Going." *Journal of Public Health Policy*, vol. 24, no. 3/4, 2003, pp. 445–459., www.jstor.org/stable/3343387.

Pikula, Tanya. "Bram Stoker's Dracula and late-Victorian advertising tactics: earnest men, virtuous ladies, and porn." *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920*, vol. 55, no. 3, 2012, p. 283+. Academic OneFile, 2017.

Meyer, Stephenie. *Twilight*. London: Atom, 2013. Print.

Mowat, Diane, and Bram Stoker. *Dracula*. Oxford: Oxford U press, 2008. Print.

Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. London: Archibald Constable and Company, 1897. Print.

"The Contagious Diseases Acts." *The British Medical Journal*, vol. 2, no. 569, 1871, pp. 619–619., www.jstor.org/stable/25230879.

Walls, Elizabeth MacLeod. "'A Little Afraid of the Women of Today': The Victorian New Woman and the Rhetoric of British Modernism." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2002, pp. 229–246., www.jstor.org/stable/3093009.

Wilson, A. N. *The Victorians*. London: The Folio Society, 2008. Print.