

The “Un-dead” and the Release of Sexual Discourse: A Freudian Approach to Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*

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Resumen

Esta ponencia intenta delinear una de las muchas maneras en las que *Drácula*, de Bram Stoker, puede ser abordada. Se percibe el texto como una propuesta discursiva sobre la sexualidad, en especial desde un punto de vista freudiano/foucaultiano. Los “no muertos”, es decir, los personajes vampíricos, ayudan a elucidar cómo las perspectivas victorianas acerca de la sexualidad afectan la novela y sus temas centrales. Estas nociones se manifiestan a través de representaciones simbólicas y metafóricas, y con un poco de ayuda de Freud y su modelo psicosexual, aquí se describen y se les brinda interpretación a algunas imágenes. Así, los “no muertos” representan la *libido*, o el deseo sexual, y la liberación del *ello*, es decir, los impulsos más profundos y fuertes de la psique humana. Por otra parte, en la medida en que ellos amenazan la integridad social y moral de la sociedad victoriana, los personajes humanos a menudo sucumben a sus impulsos más oscuros e impuros, y como resultado, al menos uno se pierde irremediablemente. Finalmente, se analiza el vampirismo como una proyección simbólica de la *perversión sexual*, bajo la lupa de la definición freudiana del concepto. Para los victorianos, en todo caso, los impulsos inmorales debían ser reprimidos; los vampiros tenían que ser derrotados y toda forma de perversión sexual, erradicada.

Palabras clave: sexualidad, *Drácula*, libido, ello, perversión, Freud

Abstract

This paper attempts to delineate one of many ways in which *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker, may be approached. This work is perceived as a discursive proposal about sexuality, especially from a Freudian/Foucauldian point of view. The “Un-dead,” that is, the vampiric characters, all help elucidate how Victorian perceptions of sexuality affect the novel and its central themes. These notions manifest themselves through symbolic and metaphorical representations, and with a little help from Freud and his psychosexual model, such portrayals are described and explained here. Thus, the “Un-dead” represent the *libido*, or sexual hunger, and the release of the *id*, that is, the deepest and strongest impulses of the human psyche. Furthermore, as they threaten the social and moral integrity of Victorian society, the human characters sometimes succumb to their darkest, most impure impulses, and as a result, at least one is utterly lost. Finally, vampirism is analyzed here as a symbolic projection of *sexual perversion* under the light of Freud’s definition of the concept. For the Victorians, however, all immoral impulses were to be repressed; the vampires had to be defeated and all forms of sexual perversion, eradicated.

Keywords: sexuality, *Dracula*, libido, id, perversion, Freud

In his *History of Sexuality, Vol. I*, Foucault describes the *fin de siècle* as witnessing major changes in the treatment of sexual discourse, and locates Freud and his innovative ideas, among other factors, as both responsible for and resulting from the ideological openness experienced during this historical period. Bram Stoker's masterpiece *Dracula*, written in 1897, is one of the many literary works of the time that may exemplify both what Foucault refers to in his book and what Freud would develop later in the 1900s. The language and symbolism used in its pages make constant allusion to a kind of sexuality still not openly experienced by its characters, thus combining elements of two clashing social trends that, according to Foucault, marked the end of the nineteenth century. Under this light, the sexual discourse of the Count and its effect on the human characters of the novel are better understood if explained in terms of the Freudian conception of sexual impulse that so much affected society at the turn of the century. Symbolically speaking, the "Un-dead" stand for the *libido* or sexual hunger and at the same time cause—or at last propitiate—the liberation of the *id* and the consequent *perversion* of human sexuality.

The "Un-dead"—that is, Count Dracula and his women, later also including Lucy—symbolize the *libido*, which was first defined by Freud as "the manifestation[s] of the power of Eros" (68). In this early Freudian conception, "'libido' referred to the sexual instinctual drive in much the same way the terms 'hunger' was ordinarily used to refer to the nutritional instinctual drive" (Macmillan 289). Accordingly, the Count is frenziedly compelled by his "lust for blood" to leave Transylvania and move to London (Stoker 67), where he can feed on new blood, and his "thirst" may be "appeased" (342). Likewise, when Lucy becomes one of the "Un-dead," she expects to attract Arthur toward herself by entreating him wantonly, "My arms are hungry for you" (253). Nine years after his first definition of the *libido*, Freud revised it and referred to it as formally as "the physical energy of the sexual instinctual drive" (Macmillan 289), thus adding an energetic component that is also present in Dracula's powerful actions. "The vampire," Professor Van Helsing explains, "...can flourish when that he can fatten on the blood of the living [sic]. ...his vital faculties grow strenuous, and seem as though they refresh themselves when his special pabulum is plenty" (286). Because of their vivid presence and actions, it is not at all difficult to perceive the "Un-dead" as the true representation of the libidinal urge. Moreover, some critics have seen "anthropomorphism" as inherent in this and other Freudian conceptions (Macmillan 498), which explains why the Count's "very red lips" and his wives' "deliberate voluptuousness" have such an effect on both Jonathan and the reader (Stoker 20, 52). The dreamy materialization of air and dust into any of these human-like creatures accounts for the increasing tangibility of the *libido* and its influence on the various characters (51, 309, 436). The vampires are a monstrous, morbid, insatiable *libido* that needs to be fought against and defeated, yet their very existence, as surreal as it may seem, is so powerful because it not only represents but also actually embodies and epitomizes the sexual instinctual drive.

In Stoker's novel, there is a release of dark sexual impulses in both male and female characters, and it is the "Un-dead" who set the conditions for this to occur. In other words, Count Dracula and his women, on account of their libidinal nature, have the power to liberate—or at least threaten to liberate—the human *id*, which until then has been closely

checked by the *ego* (consciousness) and the *super-ego* (society). Freud developed the concept of the *id*—along with the other two—at the beginning of the twentieth century as part of his structural theory of the mind. He used the word *id* to designate “an unconscious mental entity” (13) whose activity is “governed by the primary process, the tendency for instinctual drives to press for immediate discharge, and for their energies to be freely mobile, capable of condensation and displacement” (Macmillan 430). In *Dracula*, the pressure to set the sexuality of the *id* free is enormous, especially because the untamed forces that build it up are purely monstrous and purely libidinal at once. This may be more clearly understood by analyzing male and female characters separately.

Regarding male characters in particular, there is already some sexual charge being put into play without the necessity of any further supernatural incentive. When Dr. Van Helsing saw Arthur for the first time, Dr. Seward relates in his diary, “...he took in his stalwart proportions and recognized the young strong manhood which seemed to emanate from him...” (Stoker 148); a somewhat similar estimate is what he also expresses when he meets Quincey Morris (180). However, these men’s sexuality is more likely to explode fully in the presence of “those weird sisters” who have the insidious power to untangle their *id* (64). Jonathan Harker confesses in his diary, “I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips... I closed my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited — waited with beating heart” (51-52). “He falls prey to lust and indulges in the orgy with the three evil vampire women, thus demonstrating that even good Victorian gentlemen may succumb to temptation of the flesh” (Bussing 136). Arthur experiences something similar when Lucy, now the “bloofer lady” (Stoker 13), entices him with her brand-new voluptuousness and her “diabolically sweet tone” (253). “...He seemed under a spell,” says Dr. Seward, “moving his hands from his face, he opened wide his arms” (254), allegedly to receive his beloved. Finally, Dr. Van Helsing’s *id* is also affected by the alluring power of these female fiends, for he also feels a dangerous sexual attraction that almost impedes his victory over them at the Count’s castle. “...many a man,” he explains, “who set forth to do such a task as mine, found at the last his heart fail him, and then his nerve” (439). “She [the last of *Dracula*’s consorts] was so fair to look on,” he admits, “so radiantly beautiful, so exquisitely voluptuous, that the very instinct of man in me, which calls some of my sex to love and to protect one of hers, made my head whirl with new emotion” (440). Although the *ego* and the *super-ego* win a final victory over the male sexual *id* in this novel—it could have not been otherwise—the latter proved to be as powerful as the most hideous vampire woman. The attempt to release the sexual impulse of the *id* may have been unsuccessful, but definitely it was treacherous enough.

In the case of the two female characters, Lucy and Mina, the release of the *id* seems to be, if not entirely accomplished in both instances, at least more effective than in the men. An attempt to justify this difference might dig deep into a perfectly valid gender discussion on female weakness versus male power; however, it is the Count’s nature as mightily and supernaturally libidinal, being the strongest vampire that he is, what most clearly accounts for a superior performance of the *id*-releaser. Freud explained his revised conception of the *id* as “a new structure containing the totality of those impersonal and uncontrollable forces that gave people the impression they were creatures of obscure powers, lived by alien drives

and urges, and acted upon as passive objects” (Macmillan 448). This is, by the by, an astonishingly accurate description of Dracula’s influence on Mina and Lucy, through the so-called “Vampire’s baptism of blood” (Stocker 383). In the case of the former, her releasing process is only partially completed, for she does undergo a series of changes that greatly upset her companions and herself but that fortunately fail to wholly transform her. Nevertheless, she is “acted upon” by Dracula, the greatest fiend, and this has a palpable effect on both her appearance and behavior. She becomes *alienated* by the mark on her forehead (429), and her hypnotic skills turn her into a kind of pseudo-monster. As she and Dr. Van Helsing approach the Count’s castle, he declares, “At his time, she become all more fire and zeal; some new guiding power be in her manifested... [sic]” (431). Luckily for her, the Vampire is defeated before he can carry his horrible subjugation plan to completion. “...Mina is an emblem of a solid super-ego and a successful negotiation of the ego,” yet conversely, “Lucy can be seen as a victory of the id” (Bussing 130). Lucy is actually predisposed to a more thorough release of the sexual impulse contained in her id. She portrays a natural tendency towards promiscuity and polygamy since early in the novel. “Why can they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?” she ardently proclaims (Stoker 76). However, it is not until her psychic encounters with the Count begin that she becomes free to roam about in her sleep, a clear manifestation of an unconscious release of the id. Her sexuality, as witnessed by Mina, is later completely unleashed by the Vampire. “I could see Lucy half-reclining with her head over the back of the seat,” her friend narrates, “[...]her lips were parted, and she was breathing, not softly, as usual with her, but in long heaving gasps, as though striving to get her lungs full at every breath” (113), like a true Fuseli. Lucy’s end as the “bloofer lady” proves the Vampire’s successful endeavor: she becomes pure libido, like himself.

One other concept, also elaborated by Freud, that contributes significantly to the understanding of sexual impulse is that of *perversion* or *perverse sexuality*. Aside from the libido and the id, Freud developed the concepts of “sexual object” and “sexual aim.” “By ‘sexual object’ [he] meant that from which sexual attraction proceeded, normally an adult person of the opposite sex. ‘Sexual aim’ referred to the act through which the instinctual drive tended and through which it was satisfied” —that is, copulation (Macmillan 289). *Perversions* —characteristic of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, according to Foucault (37) —he defined as “deviations of either sexual aim or object” (289). In Stoker’s novel, instances of these two kinds of perverse sexuality are ubiquitous. The effect of the “Un-dead” is not only the emancipation of the id but the perversion of both the sexual object —it being a vampire and not a human being— and the sexual aim —it being whatever but normal intercourse.

The inappropriateness of having a vampire as the object of any sort of sexual affection or desire accounts for what is perhaps the most wickedly twisted idea of perversion. However, Stoker’s human characters —virtually all of them— are “moved,” in one way or another, to embrace it (439). Jonathan’s sexual object, for example, is not his sweet, peaceful wife but the three female fiends that the Count keeps in his castle. So perverse are they that those same “voluptuous lips” that were about to “kiss” the young solicitor too suddenly become lustfully hungry for a little child brought to them by their husband and lord (51-52) —another instance in itself of deviation of the sexual object. Lucy’s transformation also implies her

birth into a new perverse existence, and this makes her all the more desirable for all of her former suitors. As sickly as it may seem, she becomes “more radiantly beautiful than ever,” and her lips get “redder than before” when she is lying in her coffin (240). Her effect on those who behold her is that of a perverse sexual object, just like the wicked attraction felt by Jonathan and by Dr. Van Helsing toward the “Nosferatu” women at Dracula’s castle (439). Aside from Lucy, Mina has also a “potential for perversion” (Bussing 137), and it is enhanced by the “very sweet and very bitter” presence of the Vampire (Stoker 121). She finds him “sensual” and his lips “so red” and enticing that she succumbs to his will (207). “I know,” she weeps, “that when the Count wills me I must go” (389). All the “size and splendor” of the “Un-dead,” which Mina interprets as moonlight (333), reveals much of the magnitude of the sexual deviation of which she is a victim. Like in the case of her companions, the sexual object that allures her is not an adult human being of the opposite sex but a perverse aberration.

The instances of perversion of the sexual aim in *Dracula* are likewise various. Not intercourse but three other mechanisms account for the sexual act. The first one of them is blood transfusion. Semen being replaced by blood, the idea of copulation acquires a whole new meaning in which perversion is the rule. “No man knows till he experiences it,” Dr. Seward writes, “what it is to feel his own life-blood drawn away into the veins of the woman he loves” (156). Arthur also feels strongly the warped connection that he has made with his beloved as he declares that “he felt since then as if they two had been really married” (209). However, what he ignores is that sweet Lucy’s foreseen tendency toward promiscuity has actually become real, and she has attained the sexual energy of four different men; she is now a “polyandrist,” a perverted creature (212). The symbolic link between intercourse and blood transfusion is evident in the novel, and so is the second mechanism through which the sexual aim is perverted, that is, the stabbing of the wooden stake. Having established the sexual relationship that exists between Lucy and Arthur, he is the one to liberate her from perversion by piercing her breast with this phallic symbol (258). At first he hesitates lest he will mutilate and “dishonour” the girl’s body (247), but the act of symbolic penetration is finally fulfilled, and a vicious version of the honeymoon takes place. Aside from the perforation of Lucy’s bosom with a wooden stake and the transfusion of male blood into her veins, the sucking of her blood is perhaps the most relevant instance of perverted sexuality in the novel. “[S]exual intercourse’ occurs between a woman and a ‘beast,’ thus immediately qualifying as a perversion” (Bussing 131). This sexual act, of course, is completely diverted from nature; therefore, it cannot be thought of as having to do with normal copulation. “Vampiric intercourse is artificial, anti-natura, because it ignores genitalia and conventional reproduction” (Bussing 133). Like Lucy, Mina becomes sexually perverse the moment she gets involved in a bloody “affair” with Count Dracula, an awry sexual act right on her bed, next to her sleeping husband, and this makes it all the more perverse. According to Dr. Seward’s account, the Vampire forced Mrs. Harker to drink his blood. “Her white nightdress,” he relates, “was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man’s bare breast, which was shown by his torn-open dress” (336). The scene is extremely sexual – “fluid exchange tak[ing] place but in the form of blood, not semen” (Bussing 133)– and extremely pornographic, and like transfusion and stake-hammering, an image of a perverse sexual aim.

The Vampire finally finds his end, and so does the sexual anarchy that he had come to install. He is destroyed so that moral and psychological stability are restored. As a matter of fact, as Foucault would put it, this implies a return to the repression of sexual discourse that tainted Victorian society. On the other hand, the fall of the Count also entails a Freudian victory of the ego and super-ego over the id. However, Dracula sets a paradigm for the liberation of sexuality in an obscure and insidious way. Both male Victorian chivalry and female purity are poisoned by the “Un-dead,” by the libidinal forces of darkness, which have unleashed the most sadistic instincts of the id, and as a consequence, perversion is universal. Still, as high as it may seem, this is the price for sexual emancipation. Like Freud, Stoker helped unlock the gateways for sexual discourse. His “Un-dead” may be fiendish, evil, and degenerate, but as much as they transgress the Victorian mask of sexuality, they work as a radical emblem of freedom and truthfulness against a kind of repression that Foucault criticizes as no more than hypothetical. In the end, an honest discourse has been released.

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