

Mesmeric rapport : The power of female sympathy in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*

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Abstract:

Scenes of mesmerism and hypnotism in Gothic novels are commonly read as symbolic of sexual assault that reinforce traditional hierarchies of gendered power. In contrast, Bram Stoker rejects the trope of the helpless woman controlled by the all-powerful mesmerist in his depiction of Mina Harker's psychic connection to Dracula. Rather, he presents this connection as a means by which Mina can regain power after a traumatic assault, and does so by employing nineteenth-century feminist rhetoric which presented telepathy as a powerful extension of women's natural faculty for sympathy. The word 'sympathy' appears an unusual number of times in *Dracula*, compared to other Gothic or invasion fiction of the period. In his use of this word, Stoker engages with a number of nineteenth-century discourses, including moral philosophy, feminism, and mesmerism. Each of these branches of thought viewed sympathy as an inherently *female* virtue. In the novel, feminine sympathy is presented as the means by which the vampire can be fought and destroyed without compromising the humanity of those that fight. Thus, a consideration of the depiction of sympathy in *Dracula* suggests that Stoker was far more receptive to New Women and the feminist movement of the 1890s than is often allowed.

Scenes of mesmerism and hypnotism in Gothic novels are commonly read as symbols of sexual assault that reinforce traditional hierarchies of gendered power. Yet, as critics like Dorri Beam and Roger Luckhurst convincingly demonstrate, in the nineteenth century mesmerism was associated with feminism, the New Woman, and inversions of gendered power. I argue that Bram Stoker particularly rejects the trope of the helpless woman controlled by the all-powerful mesmerist in his depiction of Mina Harker's psychic connection to Dracula. Rather, he presents this connection as a means by which Mina can regain power after a traumatic assault, and does so by employing nineteenth-century feminist rhetoric which presented telepathy as a powerful extension of women's natural faculty for sympathy. It is sympathy, I will demonstrate, which allows the so-called 'Crew of Light' to defeat Dracula, making Mina's 'woman's heart'—rather than her 'man's brain', as defined by Van Helsing—the most important weapon in the fight against vampires.

The word 'sympathy' was invoked in a number of different discourses in the nineteenth century, and was made to serve a number of different functions. In its capacity most familiar to modern audiences, it was used to mean compassion or commiseration, and was deemed a specifically 'womanly' virtue.¹ To political economists, sympathy was intimately connected with ethics and was a more active virtue—the capacity to 'enter' into another person to gain understanding of their individual situation.² Feminists of the period like Sarah Grand brought these two meanings together to suggest the potential contributions women could make to the

¹ John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* (New York: Silver, Burdett and Company, 1900), p. 101.

² Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 2nd ed (London: A. Millar, 1761), p. 2.

public sphere. In the pseudo-science of mesmerism, sympathy referred to an affinity between the mesmerist and the mesmerized, in which they were affected by the same influence (magnetism or Mesmer's vital fluid). This form of sympathy, too, was regularly deemed a 'womanly virtue'.³ The word 'sympathy' appears an unusual number of times in *Dracula*, compared to other Gothic or invasion fiction of the period.⁴ I argue that in his use of this word, Stoker invokes all three meanings of sympathy: womanly compassion, ethical action, and spiritual affinity. Bringing these various discourses together suggests that Stoker's novel is far more supportive of the late-Victorian feminist movement than is often allowed.

Mina's role in the novel deviates substantially from that of other women in late Victorian Gothic or adventure fiction; as she is engaged to Jonathan from the beginning of the novel, and marries him at the end of the first third, she does not serve the typical function of 'love interest'. Her role in the novel, then, requires more consideration. Critics have explored Mina's contributions to the 'crew of light' in the form of her 'masculine' 'intellect'⁵, her 'secretarial

³ Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (London: Virago Press, 1989), 9; Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), p. 214.

⁴ The importance of sympathy to the novel is made clear in the numbers. Other adventure or Gothic fiction of the period rarely includes the word 'sympathy' (for instance, it appears only twice in Haggard's *She*, a novel that in other respects is very similar to *Dracula*); in contrast, it appears with great frequency in the novels of New Women, like Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*.

⁵ Beth Shane, "'Your girls that you all love are mine already': Criminal Female Sexuality in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*", *Gothic Studies* 18.1 (2016), p. 21.

skills and knowledge of the latest technology'⁶, her 'commitment to work'⁷, and even 'her womanly power to procreate'⁸, but the importance of her capacity for sympathy has been largely overlooked. Charles E. Prescott and Grace A. Giorgio have considered the ways the novel 'develops Mina's complex subjectivity through her unspoken deep affinity with the vampire', but read this 'affinity' as a sign of Mina's nascent—potentially lesbian—sexuality.⁹ Jamil Khader has more promisingly considered Mina in the context of Levinas' work on radical alterity and ethical responsibility, but again focuses on Mina's 'intimate relationship with Dracula' as a sign of her 'complicity with her persecutor', and thus 'her potentiality for transgressive sexual performativity'.¹⁰ This focus on transgressive sexuality, I suggest, obscures the more direct references in the novel to the kind of sympathy championed by New Woman writers, a sympathy that was predicated not on intimacy (and any subsequent suggestion of sexuality) but on the potential for global ethical behavior. I suggest that it is precisely this capacity for sympathy, which during the period was seen as a 'woman's power', which necessitates Mina's place in the novel.

⁶ Tanya Pikula, 'Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Late-Victorian Advertising Tactics', *English Literature in Transition* 55.3 (2012), p. 290.

⁷ Charles E. Prescott and Grace A. Giorgio, 'Vampiric Affinities: Mina Harker and the Paradox of Femininity in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 33.02 (Sept 2005), p. 490.

⁸ Carol Colatrella, 'Fear of reproduction and desire for replication in *Dracula*', *Journal of Medical Humanities* 17.3 (1996), p. 180.

⁹ Prescott and Giorgio, p. 487.

¹⁰ Jamil Khader, 'Un/Speakability and Radical Otherness: The Ethics of Trauma in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', *College Literature* 39.2 (Spring 2012), p. 79, p. 94.

In *The Sympathetic Medium*, Jill Galvan usefully notes the way in which Mina's womanly sympathy constructs her as 'the emotional pivot of the group'.¹¹ However, Galvan's focus on technological communication and her association of sympathy with passive 'sensitivity' and 'fine nerves', overlooks the primary way sympathy was constructed during this period. I suggest that *Dracula* engages with nineteenth-century interest in the role of sympathy in social and ethical behavior. Theorized by David Hume and Adam Smith in the eighteenth century, the role of sympathy in social life gained new importance in a post-Darwinian world, in which social Darwinists argued that 'survival of the fittest' should be the guiding principle of modern Victorian life. In contrast, New Women particularly argued for the ethical imperative of universal sympathy. As I will demonstrate, this mode of sympathy is central to the characterization of Mina Harker in *Dracula*. Mina's sympathy is presented as a means of strengthening each individual member of the group as well as strengthening the bonds within the group. In this capacity, Mina functions as the moral strength which guides the vampire hunters. It is essential to the depiction of Mina as a New Woman, however, that her sympathy does not stop at her close circle of acquaintances, a fact that Galvan overlooks. Though Mina significantly offers sympathy to each member of the crew, it is the sympathy she extends to Dracula which allows her to manipulate the psychic connection they share in the final third of the novel. I will demonstrate that this sympathy, unlike what Prescott, Giorgio, or Khader suggest about Mina's 'affinity' to or 'complicity' with Dracula, is predicated on an

¹¹ Jill Galvan, *The Sympathetic Medium: Feminine Channeling, the Occult, and Communication Technologies, 1859-1919* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 73.

acknowledgement of fundamental difference between Dracula and Mina, which allows Mina to maintain a sense of self even while feeling for Dracula.

In recent years a significant amount of critical work has been done on the role of sympathy in the nineteenth-century realist novel; the focus on the 'other' in these discussion, however, suggests that these ideas can usefully be extended to Gothic novels of the period. Rebecca N. Mitchell, for example, has explored the 'ethical imperative of empathy' in the nineteenth-century realist novel which, she suggests, rejects 'models of identification' to focus instead on the recognition of *difference*.¹² Here she employs the terminology of Emmanuel Levinas to suggest that 'the encounter with [the] radical alterity of the other human opens up the space for ethical behavior' in a moment of 'empathy independent of identification'.¹³ Realist novels, according to D. Rae Greiner, foster 'a sympathy more approximate and virtual than identificatory and fusional', thus protecting the self while forging connections with the other.¹⁴ I argue that the model of social sympathy predicated on difference proposed by Mitchell and Greiner offers a new perspective on the role Mina Harker plays in the defeat of Dracula.

Greiner's analysis of sympathy and empathy in the nineteenth century novel suggests that Mitchell perhaps should have used 'sympathy' to describe this model of ethical social engagement, rather than 'empathy'. Greiner suggests that sympathy 'denies what empathy

¹² Rebecca N. Mitchell, 'The Rosamond Plots: Alterity and the Unknown in Jane Eyre and Middlemarch', *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 66.3 (2011), p. 309-19.

¹³ Mitchell, p. 325, p. 319.

¹⁴ D. Rae Greiner, 'Thinking of me thinking of you: Sympathy versus Empathy in the realist Novel', *Victorian Studies* 53.3 (2011), p. 424.

most highly prizes, namely the fusion of the self with other'.¹⁵ The distinction Greiner draws between empathy and sympathy highlights what I identify as the crucial difference between male and female encounters with the vampire in *Dracula*. The men in the novel are unable to defeat Dracula on their own precisely because they are too similar to him and thus cannot withstand the kind of connection that Mina endures without risking a complete loss of their own identity as they fuse with the vampire. It is Mina's *difference* from Dracula, a difference predicated on what Victorians identified as inherently feminine virtues, which protects her sense of self even while allowing for the act of sympathy with Dracula which leads to his defeat.

Previous analyses of gender in *Dracula* have tended to follow Christopher Craft's suggestion that the novel presents 'a world where gender distinctions collapse'.¹⁶ In an early queer reading of the novel, Craft suggested that vampirism masculinizes 'mobile and hungry women', who in turn emasculate the male characters.¹⁷ Craft, and the critics who pursued this line of argument after him, sees the equation of monstrosity with blurred gender boundaries as an attempt to uphold traditional Victorian gender roles.¹⁸ The novel, therefore, is read as a conservative attack on the New Woman movement of the 1890s.

The insistence that nineteenth-century feminism sought to collapse gender distinctions has led many critics to reject Mina's credentials as a New Woman. They celebrate the intellectual and

¹⁵ Greiner, p. 418.

¹⁶ Christopher Craft, "'Kiss Me with those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*", *Representations* 8 (1984), p. 125.

¹⁷ Craft, p. 115.

¹⁸ Craft, p. 126.

analytical qualities that Van Helsing labels as her 'man's brain', but insist she cannot be a New Woman because of the qualities that define her 'woman's heart'. Thus, Sally Ledger insists that by the end of the novel Mina 'settles for the "ideal" of middle-class Victorian womanhood'.¹⁹ It is Mina's role as wife and mother in the conclusion of the novel that, according to these critics, disqualifies her from New Womanhood.²⁰ However, this reading of the novel adopts a far too narrow definition of the 'New Woman'. While some New Woman writers like George Egerton or Vernon Lee adopted so-called 'masculine' dress and habits—women 'who smoke in public carriages and from the waist upward are indistinguishable from the men they profess to despise'²¹, according to Ouida's shocked 1894 account of the movement—many others did not. In fact, a number of New Women writers of the period ascribed to ideas of biological essentialism in their discussion of gender, or what we would call 'difference feminism'. Ann Heilmann has discussed this as one of the 'strategies' of the New Woman movement, in which feminists used gender essentialism to 'invert the dominant gender hegemonies' of the period.²² Thus, Sarah Grand insisted that 'True womanliness is not in danger' from the feminist movement.²³ These writers rejected the idea that the New Woman was 'masculine' in her desires for education and enfranchisement, instead focusing on the value of the 'feminine' qualities they could bring to professional and political spheres. Thus, Nat Arling countered the

¹⁹ Ledger, p. 106.

²⁰ See Shane, Pikula, and Ashley Craig Lancaster, 'Demonizing the Emerging Woman: Misrepresented Morality in *Dracula* and *God's Little Acre*', *Journal of Dracula Studies* (2004), no pagination.

²¹ Ouida, 'The New Woman', *North American Review* (May 1894), p. 618.

²² Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 18

²³ Sarah Grand, 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question', *North America Review* (March 1894), p. 274

idea that New Women ‘simulated mannishness’, insisting that ‘[t]he ‘new woman’ has no desire to imitate the bad points of the other sex: she sees no shame in womanliness.’²⁴ The new woman of the 1890s, Grand insisted, rather than aping men, was ‘content to develop the good material which she finds in herself.’²⁵ This ‘good material’, for Arling and Grand along with many other New Woman writers, was women’s natural capacity for ‘sympathy, justice, and mercy’.²⁶ The New Women who followed this strategy insisted on the need to *revalue* qualities deemed feminine during this period—particularly intuition and sympathy.²⁷ While *Dracula* has been condemned for its gender essentialism and deemed anti-feminist as a result, I suggest in contrast that the novel’s invokes and reinforces the idea of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ qualities, like the New Women quoted above, in order to revalue the feminine within the public sphere. Gender essentialism is manipulated, therefore, to break down the boundaries between the separate spheres of masculine and feminine life.

Unlike what Craft and those who have followed his argument suggest, gender in the novel is not defined by active or passive sexuality; rather, this divide establishes the line between the human and the inhuman. Vampires, male and female, are presented as sexually aggressive, while humans are rendered passive, in the sexually-charged scenes of the novel—the attack on

²⁴ Nat Arling, ‘What is the Role of the New Woman?’, *Westminster Review* (November 1898), p. 576, p. 581.

²⁵ Grand, p. 270.

²⁶ Arling, p. 576.

²⁷ Grand, p. 270.

Jonathan, the attacks on Lucy, and the attack on Mina.²⁸ Gender difference, in contrast, is defined in relation to capacity for universal sympathy. Thus, Mina insists:

I suppose there is something in a woman's nature that makes a man free to break down before her and express his feelings on the tender or emotional side ... We women have something of the mother in us that makes us rise above smaller matters when the mother-spirit is invoked.²⁹

This is in clear contrast to her assessment of man's nature: 'Manlike, they have told me to go to bed and sleep; as if a woman can sleep when those she loves are in danger!' (p. 203). To be 'manlike' in the novel, then, is to be unsympathetic, to be unable to put themselves in her shoes and imagine how she must be feeling, excluded from the hunt and worried for all of their safety. The novel suggests that the men are defined by their 'businesslike' manner which disallows an appropriate emotional response to the situation. Thus, Seward notes, 'Dr Van Helsing went on with a sort of cheerfulness which showed that the serious work had begun. It was to be taken as gravely, and in as businesslike a way, as any other transaction of life' (p. 200).

Dracula defines a 'businesslike' mind as narrow-minded and unsympathetic. This is made explicit when Dr Seward complains of the Westenra's lawyer following the deaths of Lucy and

²⁸ The moment of Lucy's staking is often read as symbolic of group rape, suggestive of a reassertion of masculine dominance over the aberrant female. It is certainly true that the Crew of Light use her unconscious and inert condition to reinstate control. However, the similarity between this moment and Jonathan's attack on the unconscious Dracula in the castle chapel undermines this argument. If the former appears to reassert Victorian gender roles, the latter would have to be read as a blurring of them. This inconsistency suggests, again, that the important division is between the human and the inhuman, rather than between male and female characters.

²⁹ Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1993), p. 193.

her mother: 'He was a good fellow, but his rejoicing at the one little part—in which he was officially interested—of so great a tragedy, was an object-lesson in the limitations of sympathetic understanding' (p. 141). A businesslike mind takes stock only of the narrow matter at hand. Similarly, Van Helsing again fails to exhibit appropriate emotions when faced of Lucy's death, finding humor instead in a minor detail of her tragic end—the idea that she committed polygamy in unconsciously receiving blood transfusions from multiple men (p. 147). These inappropriate reactions cause pain to those that witness them. 'Sympathetic understanding', the novel suggests, would allow a broader view of the circumstances, and thus an appropriate reaction to events. Mina's capacity for sympathy, therefore, is the reason she is consistently able to see beyond her own narrow sphere of experience, to keep track of all the interweaving strands of evidence and narrative, and to bring them together in order to understand the complete picture of Dracula.

By defining women's and men's natures in this way, Stoker engages with one of the core issues of the New Woman debate that raged in the popular press in the first half of the 1890s, and aligns himself with the New Women rather than against them. As Julie Kipp demonstrates, female sympathy was often conceived of during the nineteenth century as a form of tribalism, 'women's obsessive and mindless preoccupation with those things closest to them—a type of sympathy that does not approximate the kind of disinterested benevolence and enlightened cosmopolitanism advocated by writers like Hutcheson and Hume'.³⁰ Thus anti-feminists, such as Barry Williams writing for *The Quarterly Review*, suggested that female sympathy was merely a

³⁰ Julie Kipp, *Romanticism, Maternity, and the Body Politic* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), p. 65.

sign of narrow-minded selfishness: 'The "great sum of universal anguish" that has driven many a man into Pessimism will leave most women cold. Nor has it deeply coloured this story. But the individual instance, —what copious description it brings forth!'³¹ In response, feminist writers like Grand appropriated the connection between sympathy and ethics offered by Adam Smith and others in order to suggest that feminine sympathy was 'the solution to, not the cause of, the ills of modern life'.³² This is the position Grand takes, as she argues for the necessity of female sympathy to global ethics:

When we hear the 'Help! Help! Help!' of the desolate and the oppressed, and still more when we see the awful dumb despair of those who have lost even the hope of help, we must respond. This is often inconvenient to man, especially when he has seized upon a defenceless victim whom he would have destroyed had we not come to the rescue; and so, because it is inconvenient to be exposed and thwarted, he snarls about the end of all true womanliness, and cants on the subject of the Sphere...³³

The form of sympathy that Grand describes is far from the narrow self-interest commonly ascribed to women. It transcends boundaries of gender, class, race, and nation and is explicitly active and moral. This is the sympathetic impulse that Adam Smith located at the core of his theory of moral sentiments. It is a sympathy that crucially does not seek fusion with the other; the other is recognized *as* other, and it is in that difference—of circumstance—that women find their power to help. Social sympathy, which as Mitchell and Greiner have suggested relies on an acknowledgement of distance and difference, is associated solely with Mina. This form of sympathy allows for an understanding of the extreme Other which, as New Woman writers of

³¹ Barry Francis William, 'The Strike of a Sex', *The Quarterly Review* (Oct. 1894), p. 303.

³² Kipp, p. 67.

³³ Grand, p. 274.

the period argued, is presented as useful far outside of the narrow domestic sphere assigned to women.

This is not just the quality that differentiates Mina from the men in the novel, however. It is also the quality that distinguishes her from the vampires. In the nineteenth century, as Eric Daffron suggests, 'social sympathy, the period's principal theory of social interaction, came into conflict with 'possessive individualism', the century's leading theory of personal identity'.³⁴ This conflict, I suggest, plays out in *Dracula* in specifically gendered terms, enacting a conflict between what the novel sees as masculine individualism and feminine sympathy. Richard M. Coe has noted that qualities praised in the male characters—economic, political, and intellectual rationality—are 'what a modern reader tends to associate with unfeeling, unlikable bureaucracies.'³⁵ These qualities are shared by the male members of the Crew of Light—but also by Dracula. More convincing than the idea that Dracula subverts 'conventional Victorian gender codes'³⁶ is Franco Moretti's reading of the vampire as the ultimate nineteenth-century businessman. He is, according to Moretti, 'an upholder of the Protestant ethic' of work and utility, and therefore 'a true monopolist'.³⁷ Following Moretti's line of reasoning, J. Jeffrey Franklin has declared that 'Dracula may be the truest capitalist and most independent businessman in the novel', due to his business acumen, his desire for continuous growth, and

³⁴ Eric Daffron, 'Double Trouble: the Self, the Social Order and the Trouble with Sympathy in the Romantic and Post-Modern Gothic', *Gothic Studies* 3.1 (2001), p. 76.

³⁵ Richard M. Coe, 'It Takes Capital to Defeat Dracula: A New Rhetorical Essay', *College English* 48.3 (1986), p. 235.

³⁶ Craft, p. 108

³⁷ Franco Moretti, 'The Dialectic of Fear', *New Left Review* 136 (1982), p. 73-4.

his fiercely competitive nature.³⁸ It is these qualities that align Dracula with the male characters in the novel, and put them at risk of merging with the vampire in an act of over-identification.

Throughout this article, I will employ the terms 'sympathy' and 'empathy' as Greiner does, where sympathy is predicated on an acknowledgement of difference, while empathy functions as a form of identification. Here, then, empathy will encompass the dangers of sympathy which were often highlighted during the period. In much Victorian fiction, Audrey Jaffe asserts, 'sympathetic identification' is figured as 'a loss of identity, a dissolution or evacuation of an essential self that is often identified with, and represented as leading to, a loss of life'.³⁹ This over-identification, which destabilizes core identity, is associated in *Dracula* solely with the male characters, and is figured, I suggest, as a form of empathy—'feeling with rather than for others', in Greiner's terms.⁴⁰ Sympathy, which resists the dangerous loss of identity that Jaffe identifies, 'depends on an awareness that the other *is* other: not me, not my photographic image'.⁴¹

³⁸ J. Jeffrey Franklin, 'The Economics of Immortality: The Demi-Immortal Oriental, Enlightenment Vitalism, and Political Economy in *Dracula*', *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens* 76 (2012), p. 142. See also Mark Neocleous, 'The Political Economy of the Dead: Marx's Vampires', *History of Political Thought*, 24.4 (2003): pp. 668-684.

³⁹ Audrey Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 17.

⁴⁰ Greiner, p. 419.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

The danger of Dracula, as Stephen Arata and others have identified, is 'not that Dracula impersonates Harker, but that he does it so well'.⁴² Jonathan immediately recognizes himself in Dracula, from the Count's reading material to his business acumen to his commitment to research and planning. The acknowledgement of their similarities—'he would have made a wonderful solicitor' (p. 30), Jonathan remarks—destabilizes Jonathan's sense of self, and results in a complete mental breakdown once he realizes the extent of Dracula's evil. Once he is aware of Dracula's plans, Jonathan attempts to shield his mind by concentrating on facts and figures: 'I fear I am myself the only living soul within the place. Let me be prosaic so far as facts can be; it will help me to bear up, and imagination must not run riot with me. If it does I am lost' (p. 25). Unfortunately for Jonathan, it is this analytical, businesslike mind, which clings to facts in the face of what seems like incredible fictions, that marks his similarity to Dracula. By rejecting imagination in favour of prosaic facts, Jonathan only succeeds in further fusing with Dracula. He cannot protect his sense of self because he acknowledges only those aspects of himself that he shares with the vampire. This leads to further identification with the appetites and desires of the vampire, in Jonathan's infamous encounter with the three vampire women, in which he wishes 'they would kiss me with those red lips' (p. 35).

Jonathan is nearly destroyed by this fusion with the other. Renfield, who takes empathic identification with the vampire even further than Jonathan, is lost entirely. It is Renfield who forms the most compelling contrast with Mina as the only other character in the novel to share

⁴² Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle: Identity and Empire* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 124.

a sustained psychic connection with Dracula. Renfield receives surprisingly little critical attention, but he is the key to understanding the ethical imperatives of the text. From the first introduction of the character at the end of chapter five, the structure of the novel encourages readers to read Mina and Renfield as doubles: the case of Renfield, recorded in Seward's diary, is presented throughout chapters six, seven, and eight, intercut by Mina's diary. Their status as outsiders—a woman and a madman—further links them within the text. Feminist rhetoric of the period acknowledged the conflation of women with the insane in their indictment of the legal status the two groups shared until the Married Women's Property Act of 1882. Into the 1890s the bodies of married women and the insane were not their own. By the end of the novel, both characters will have been grievously injured by the very 'protection' offered to them by the men whose authority they fall under—their incarceration in the asylum leaves both vulnerable to the vampire's attack. The insidious nature of this 'sanctuary' is brought to the fore in Renfield's death scene, in which he mistakes his fatal injuries for a straitjacket, a symbol of the alleged protections of the asylum: 'He moved convulsively, and as he did so, said: "I'll be quiet, Doctor. Tell them to take off the strait-waistcoat. I have had a terrible dream, and it has left me so weak that I cannot move"' (p. 233). The treatment Renfield receives at the hands of the vampire and the human doctors is presented as troublingly similar; the anxiety this elision of hero and villain causes extends to the treatment of Mina. The safekeeping offered to her by the crew of light as they exclude her from the hunt renders her nothing more than a pawn to be claimed by either good or evil; exactly mirroring her treatment at the hands of the vampire.

The doubling of these characters raises the question of how Mina withstands the connection with the vampire that so dramatically destroys Renfield's mind. It is here that the contrast between sympathy and empathy—difference and similarity—becomes clearest. Of all the characters in the novel—professional men working as doctors and solicitors—it is Renfield who has the most 'businesslike' mind, defined as analytical, fact-driven, and acquisitive. He obsessively tabulates and calculates in his consumption of lives: 'he keeps a little note-book in which he is always jotting down something. Whole pages of it are filled with masses of figures, generally single numbers added up in batches, and then the totals added in batches again as though he were "focusing" some account, as the auditors put it' (p. 61). Despite his status as a madman, he is presented throughout the text as very reasonable. Seward notes that there is 'a method in his madness', and comments on 'how well the man reasoned!' (p. 63). It is significant that the two characters that are the most organized and analytical—Jonathan and Renfield—are the two who break under Dracula's control.

It is in the case of Renfield that the dangers of over-identification are made explicit. In the very first mention of Renfield, Seward notes that Renfield is:

a possibly dangerous man, probably dangerous if unselfish. In selfish men caution is as secure an armour for their foes as for themselves. What I think of on this point is, when self is the fixed point the centripetal force is balanced with the centrifugal: when duty, a cause, etc., is the fixed point, the latter force is paramount, and only accident or a series of accidents can balance it. (p. 54)

Over-identification with Dracula means that the self is no longer a 'fixed point', but because fluid and permeable, as it did for Jonathan.

Loss of self is presented as a danger for all the men in the novel—and the more analytical and ‘businesslike’ their minds, the more at risk they find themselves. Thus, Renfield is presented as a distorted mirror of both Seward and Van Helsing at different points in the novel. As Judith Halberstam notes, ‘Seward’s interactions with the insane Renfield fulfil a strange function in the novel; while, one assumes, Renfield should further demarcate the distance between normal and pathological, in fact, Seward constantly compares himself to his patient.’⁴³ Seward not only fears that he is more like his patient than he would like to think: he sees similarities between Renfield and the other ‘sane’ men as well. He worries that Van Helsing may be mad, subject to a ‘fixed idea’ which warped his ‘abnormally clever’ mind (p. 171). And near the very end of the novel he worries, ‘I sometimes think we must all be mad and that we shall wake to sanity in strait-waistcoats’ (p. 230). The distinctions between madness and sanity collapse just as the distinction between man and vampire do. The only identity that remains stable, in spite of traumatic assault on her body and mind, is Mina’s. As Anne McWhir has noted, the end of the novel strives to reassert destabilized category boundaries, but Mina is not subject to those destabilizations: ‘Mina, for example, remains morally good even when the vampire’s attack has left her ritually unclean.’⁴⁴ Mina’s identity remains constant even as her body and mind have both been breached by Dracula.

⁴³ Judith Halberstam, ‘Technologies of Monstrosity: Bram Stoker's "Dracula"', *Victorian Studies* Vol. 36, No. 3, Victorian Sexualities (Spring, 1993), p. 341.

⁴⁴ Anne McWhir, ‘Pollution and Redemption in "Dracula"', *Modern Language Studies* Vol. 17, No. 3 (Summer, 1987), p. 34.

Mina, too, has an analytical mind. However, she also has what Van Helsing labels her ‘woman’s heart’—sympathy which is predicated on *difference*—which allows her to keep the self as a ‘fixed point’. It is not Mina’s ‘man’s brain’ that leads to her triumph over Dracula, but her intelligence combined with her sympathetic nature. Critics who laud Mina for her so-called ‘masculine’ qualities have missed the point, as have those who suggest that the novel’s celebration of Mina’s ‘feminine’ qualities means that *Dracula* rejects New Womanhood.

The novel celebrates what it identifies as women’s sympathetic nature, but—along with the New Woman of the 1890s—insists that she use it to enact social change. If a ‘woman’s heart’ alone was the only protection a character needed, then Lucy would also have been able to withstand Dracula’s attack. She fails, however, because she does not turn her sympathetic impulses to ethical action. We see the contrast between active and passive sympathy early in the novel, when the two women encounter an abused dog. Though Mina suggests that ‘Lucy is so sweet and sensitive that she feels influences more acutely than other people do’ (p. 76), Lucy fails to turn this sensitivity into useful action:

[The dog] did not try to get away, but crouched down, quivering and cowering, and was in such a pitiable state of terror that I tried, though without effect, to comfort it. Lucy was full of pity, too, but she did not attempt to touch the dog, but looked at it in an agonized sort of way (p. 76).

Mina’s sympathy causes her to reach outwards, while Lucy’s sympathy turns inward; it does not ease the suffering of others, only increases her own.

Much of the novel focuses on what a person can bear without breaking. Van Helsing insists that men have a greater ability to 'bear' (p. 203), but the evidence of the novel contradicts him.⁴⁵ It is the men—Jonathan and Renfield at the fore—who break under Dracula's influence. In contrast to what Van Helsing suggests, the novel advocates not only for women's ability to bear, but for the absolute necessity of sympathy for all people to bear hardships and trauma. This point is made early in the novel in which Mina says, 'though sympathy can't alter facts, it can help to make them more bearable' (p. 81). This reiterates what has already been verified by Jonathan's narrative—facts alone cannot support a person in times of trouble. Throughout the novel sympathy is explicitly linked with strength. It is the strength Mina has to withstand Dracula's assault, but also a strength that she can offer to others.

'Comfort is strength' (p. 265), Jonathan declares at the climax of the novel. This phrase, an aphorism which parallels 'blood is life', is the heart of the power that the 'crew of light' bring to the fight against vampires. Mina's sympathetic strength is figured explicitly as a power for good when Seward comments on her 'rare gift or power' of 'influence' (p. 196). This gift serves to strengthen and unite the team, just as Mina's intellect and organization strengthen and collate the narrative she creates. Mina's powers are fully displayed at the mid point of the novel, when she comforts each of the men in turn. Like the women in Grand's example who cannot close their ears to the cries of the oppressed, Mina tells Seward that his diary 'was like a soul crying out' to which she responded (p. 187). A few pages later Arthur comes to her, and she says 'If

⁴⁵ Galvan, too, has noted the 'irony' of the male character's concern for Mina's nerves, in the face of their own potential nervous breakdowns. Galvan, p. 77.

sympathy and pity can help in your affliction, won't you let me be of some little service[?]' (p. 193). A page later she extends this sympathy to Quincey Morris, who says: 'No one but a woman can help a man when he is in trouble of the heart; and he had no one to comfort him', to which Mina responds, 'I wish I could comfort all who suffer from the heart' (p. 194). These interactions come at a key moment in the text, in which Van Helsing assembles the team towards the task of eradicating vampires from Britain. The strength required for each member of the crew of light to dedicate themselves to this 'terrible task' is granted to them by Mina's comfort. As Seward notes, 'Poor Art seemed more cheerful than he had been since Lucy first took ill, and Quincey is more like his own bright self than he has been for many a long day' (p. 197). Mina's comfort has made the men able to bear the horrors they will face on the hunt.

It is essential to note, however, that Mina's feminine sympathy does not render her passive or useless as some critics suggest.⁴⁶ Instead, I argue, it aligns her firmly with the ideal of the New Woman as promoted by New Woman writers themselves in the popular press. The New Woman, Arling argued, is 'the woman who, with a strong sense of her own importance, usefulness, and responsibility, longs to strengthen the cause of right and justice, to make head against evil, to help the fallen'.⁴⁷ Mina's sense of her own importance to the cause never falters, even as she is excluded from the hunt by Van Helsing's adherence to outdated chivalric

⁴⁶ Galvan has pointed to the same section of the novel as an instance of the 'tragedy' of Mina's sympathetic heart, which becomes Dracula's 'triumph' when his 'rapport' 'reforms her sentiments in monstrous ways that favor her friends' enemy' (p. 73). In contrast, I suggest that it is precisely the sympathy that Mina extends out to Dracula that allows her to track him across Europe and finally defeat him.

⁴⁷ Arling, p. 576.

models. Thus, she says 'it did not seem to be good that they should brave danger and, perhaps, lessen their safety—strength being the best safety—through care of me' (p. 203). She is aware that she is the source of the group's strength and that without her guiding sympathy they will be weaker. By demonstrating the use of Mina's sympathy, which extends beyond her family/friends to the foreign enemy, Stoker positions himself firmly on the side of the New Women.

Mina's sympathy, as her response to Morris makes clear, is a universal sentiment. It is not limited to her husband or her friends, but is easily extended to madmen and even her enemy:

I want you to bear something in mind through all this dreadful time. I know that you must fight – that you must destroy even as you destroyed the false Lucy so that the true Lucy might live hereafter; but it is not a work of hate. That poor soul who has wrought all this misery is the saddest case of all. Just think what will be his joy when he too is destroyed in his worser part that his better part may have spiritual immortality. You must be pitiful to him too, though it may not hold your hands from his destruction (p. 259).

This sympathy does not threaten Mina's own identity, as Renfield's empathy did. She recognizes Dracula as a being entirely other to her, but still one whose misery she can imagine and pity. It is this moment of sympathetic connection, I will demonstrate, that allows Mina to manipulate the psychic connection she shares with Dracula.

The question of mesmerism in late-Victorian Gothic fiction has not previously been placed in the context of the wider Victorian interest in sympathy, particularly social sympathy as a facet of ethical behavior, despite the link Grand and others drew between female sympathy and psychical power. In championing women's natural sympathy, Grand linked it to female

intuition, which she situated as a direct threat to masculine hegemony: 'Our divine intuition was not to be controlled by him, but he did his best to damage it by sneering at it as an inferior feminine method of arriving at conclusions.'⁴⁸ As Heilmann asserts, 'female spirituality offered potent grounds for justification for women who engaged in oppositional public and political activity.'⁴⁹ Sympathy, a female attribute, and mesmeric susceptibility, another female attribute, come together in the discussions of women's potential contributions to politics and society touted by the New Women. I will suggest, therefore, that it is Mina's own psychic powers—her 'unconscious influence', in Seward's words—rather than the mesmeric ability of either Dracula or Van Helsing, that allows her to manipulate her connection to Dracula to defeat the vampires. It is her power of sympathy, which she possesses from the beginning of the novel, which grants her access to Dracula's mind and movements.

As I have suggested, Stoker's depiction of Mina as a New Woman of Grand's ilk resists the typical presentation of the New Woman in Gothic fiction. The feminist rhetoric which champions women's 'natural' qualities extends to his depiction of mesmerism in the novel. Alex Owen, Jill Galvan, and Roger Luckhurst, among others, have all explored the ways in which psychic power was gendered female in the nineteenth century. While the mesmerists themselves were primarily male, women's 'finer nerves' were seen to make them more 'sensitive' to mesmeric or telepathic influence.⁵⁰ The typical presentation of mesmerism and

⁴⁸ Grand, p. 272.

⁴⁹ Heilmann, p. 93.

⁵⁰ Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy: 1870-1901* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), p. 210; Galvan, p. 12.

hypnotism in both the popular press and fiction, therefore, was of an active male practitioner and an passive, supine female subject.⁵¹ The unconscious state of the subject caused significant anxieties during the fin de siècle about the vulnerability of the (nearly always) female subject. Allegations of sexual offences by hypnotists ‘appeared routinely in the press’ during this period, according to Mary Elizabeth Leighton.⁵² In fiction, gothic and sensation narratives exploited these anxieties to present typically powerless heroines, vulnerable in both body and mind. Thus, critics like Willis and Wynne read narratives of mesmerism as conservative, tending to ‘reinforce gender hierarchies’.⁵³

Yet, practitioners of mesmerism themselves attributed significant power to the mesmerized subject. Mesmerism was viewed by its devotees as a form of ‘mental sympathy’. As Betsy van Schlun explains, Mesmer believed ‘that unless the patient wanted to be cured the *fluidum* would do him no good. So Mesmer decided there must be cooperation between doctor and patient, and he called this cooperation *rapport*’.⁵⁴ LaRoy Sunderland (*Pantheism*, 1847) insisted that all the power wielded during mesmeric trances lay with the subject, not the mesmerist. Thus he argued that all trances are actually ‘self-induced’.⁵⁵ Joseph Philippe Francois Deleuze

⁵¹ See Theresa Strouth Gaul, ‘Trance-Formations: Mesmerism and “A Woman’s Power” in Louisa May Alcott’s *Behind a Mask*,’ *Women’s Studies* 32:7 (2003), pp. 835-851.

⁵² Mary Elizabeth Leighton, ‘Under the Influence: Crime and Hypnotic Fictions of the *Fin de Siècle*,’ *Victorian Literary Mesmerism* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), p. 210.

⁵³ Willis and Wynne, ‘Introduction,’ *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*, p. 9.

⁵⁴ Betsy van Schlun, *Science and the Imagination: Mesmerism, Media and the Mind in Nineteenth-Century English and American Literature* (Berlin: Galda and Wilch Verlag, 2007), p. 35.

⁵⁵ quoted by Dorri Beam in *Style, Gender, and Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century American Women’s Writing* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), p. 89.

(*Practical Introduction to Animal Magnetism*, 1850), too, theorized that the somnambulist became independent of the magnetizer's will during the trance state.

Feminists of the period, therefore, suggested the potential for empowerment in the trance state. Dorri Beam argues that:

the trance state introduced women to the precincts of an imagined interiority, where they found the material for a new relation to the world and a new construction of woman...They held that they had access, through trance, to an essential truth, and that a concept of the feminine, free of its determination by masculinity, was the suppressed content of that truth.⁵⁶

In contrast to the physical vulnerability of the mesmerized subject often found in fiction of the day, Beam contests that enthusiasts of mesmerism used the practice to reject scientific understandings of the female sex which often reduced women to their body alone. Similarly, van Schlun has explored the ways in which mesmerism granted the subject a freedom of movement, in the form of a travelling mind or soul, that otherwise would have been closed to a woman of that time.⁵⁷ Thus, van Schlun figures the female trance as an implicitly radical act. She argues that mesmerism inherently 'raised questions about overthrowing the authorities, annihilating personality, and moral superiority'.⁵⁸

Like Grand and the difference feminists of the late nineteenth century, these women used the language of mesmerism to revalue typically 'feminine' characteristics. In mesmerist circles, van Schlun argues, 'Sensitivity, usually understood as a weakness, is but a power of another kind

⁵⁶ Beam, p. 98.

⁵⁷ van Schlun, p. 245.

⁵⁸ van Schlun, p. 8.

and a vivid imagination that envisions the invisible is not madness but an extraordinary capacity to see more than the average human.⁵⁹ Heilmann has argued that superior spirituality, once used to confine women to the domestic sphere, was invoked in theosophy and spiritualism ‘to invest [women] with social and cultural authority.’⁶⁰ The greater interiority or spirituality attributed to women as ‘sensitives’ was used to argue for women’s place in public affairs.⁶¹

This positive view of women’s practice of mesmerism is rarely account for in considerations of Gothic scenes of mesmerism. Critics like Martin Willis and Catherine Wynne have therefore suggested that ‘misogyny permeates much of the mesmeric literature’, in which ‘the female as passive agent tended to reinforce gender hierarchies’ of the period.⁶² However, Luckhurst questions the idea that *Dracula* conforms to ‘typical’ narratives of mesmerism, asserting that that ‘fin-de-siècle attitudes to trance therefore reach one of their most complex expressions in *Dracula*...[in which] hypnosis is regarded as a potentially curative force.’⁶³ In presenting hypnosis in this way, Stoker embraces the rhetoric of specifically feminist practitioners, rather than the popular depiction of the ‘science’ common in sensation and Gothic fiction of the period.

⁵⁹ van Schlun, p. 248.

⁶⁰ Heilmann, p. 91

⁶¹ See Alex Owen.

⁶² Willis and Wynne, p. 8.

⁶³ Luckhurst, p. 213.

Most obviously, Stoker upsets the typical literary representation of hypnosis as a state of 'vulnerability to the control of others'⁶⁴ by situating Mina's assault *before* her hypnosis. During the attack, Mina is fully conscious:

On the bed beside the window lay Jonathan Harker, his face flushed and breathing heavily as though in a stupor. Kneeling on the near edge of the bed facing outwards was the white-clad figure of his wife. By her side stood a tall, thin man, clad in black. His face was turned from us, but the instant we saw we all recognised the Count—in every way, even to the scar on his forehead. With his left hand he held both Mrs. Harker's hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man's bare breast which was shown by his torn-open dress. The attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten's nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink (p. 236).

It is Jonathan who is in a 'stupor', rendered insensible during the attack. In contrast, Mina actively resists—she must be 'held', 'gripped' and 'forced' to drink Dracula's blood. Stoker reverses the popular worry that hypnotism could lead to rape, to instead present it as a force that can be manipulated by Mina to regain her agency and autonomy *after* an explicit sexual assault.

In line with the rhetoric of practitioners themselves, Stoker presents mesmerism as a power that can be wielded by the subject as an extension of the sympathetic impulse. Mina's power of sympathy, so strongly foregrounded in the middle of the novel, clearly foreshadows the means by which she later gains an upper hand over Dracula. Though Van Helsing reads her as a potential victim of the connection with Dracula, I suggest that Mina actively extends her

⁶⁴ Sharrona Pearl, 'Dazed and Abused: Gender and Mesmerism in Wilkie Collins', *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*, p. 173.

sympathy to Dracula to form a mesmeric *rapport* or mental sympathy which allows her access to his mind. Van Helsing fails to understand the active power of the mesmerized subject, the necessity of the will of the subject. He views the telepathic connection as ‘a special power which the Count gives her’ (p. 285), rather than a power Mina possesses on her own. Many critics have made the mistake of agreeing with Van Helsing in this moment.⁶⁵ However, this is just one in a series of mistakes that Van Helsing makes in the second half of the novel. He admits in the final chase that he has been ‘blind’ (p. 296), where Mina could see. Van Helsing has subscribed to the typical Gothic narrative of the powerful hypnotist and the vulnerable female subject, but the novel presents mesmerism as a means of empowerment for its female subject: ‘He must hypnotise me before the dawn, and then I shall be able to speak,’ Mina asserts (p. 261). By placing this power in the subject, Stoker depicts a form of mesmerism which conforms to the one offered by Mesmer, Sunderland, and Deleuze: mesmerism predicated on ‘mental sympathy’. Mina’s insight—that she can use the connection with Dracula against him—comes in the night immediately after she has extended her sympathy to the vampire: ‘that poor soul who has wrought all this misery is the saddest case of all’ (p. 259).

As Greiner argues, in the nineteenth century sympathy was understood as a ‘complex formal process, a mental exercise but not an emotion.’⁶⁶ For Adam Smith, sympathy was an

⁶⁵ In suggesting that the power of mesmerism resides with Van Helsing and Dracula alone, critics overlook the moments in the concluding chapters of the novel in which Mina’s telepathic powers are active even when she is not under Van Helsing’s hypnotic spell, and can connect her to individuals other than Dracula. Crucially, her strongest connection is with those to whom she is the most sympathetic—namely, Jonathan. She is able to psychically track her husband’s movements, just as she tracks Dracula across Europe. (Stoker, p. 304, pp. 312-13).

⁶⁶ Greiner, p. 418.

imaginative process by which we could ‘go along with’ others, tracing their mental movements and emotions:

By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them.⁶⁷

This process of ‘going along with’ the Other is the process Mina enacts in the telepathic chase. Van Helsing misinterprets the connection that Mina shares with the vampire, viewing her—as he has done throughout the novel—as merely a receptor of information. He places her in the role of secretary, not understanding that she does not merely transcribe and assemble the various strands of the novel, but analyzes and interprets them. Similarly, in the moments of telepathic connection with Dracula, Van Helsing treats Mina as a technology, rather than an active participant:

Now my fear is this. If it be that she can, by our hypnotic trance, tell what the Count see and hear, is it not more true that he who have hypnotise her first, and who have drink of her very blood and make her drink of his, should, if he will, compel her mind to disclose to him that which she know?...Then, what we must do is to prevent this; we must keep her ignorant of our intent, and so she cannot tell what she know not (p. 271).

However, the novel makes clear that Mina is not merely *receiving* information, she is *processing* it. During her first trance, Jonathan comments, ‘The answer came dreamily, but with intention; it was as though she were interpreting something. I have heard her use the same tone when reading her notes’ (p. 262). Just as she analyzed the various diaries, newspaper clippings, and letters in order to piece together the puzzle of Dracula, Mina again actively uses her intellect to understand Dracula’s motivations and movement during this chase. She brings together

⁶⁷ Smith, p. 2.

intellect and feeling in order to locate Dracula, marrying the attributes that Van Helsing mistakenly tried to divide into 'male' and 'female' qualities. Her solution relies both on analysis, an understanding of the practical difficulties Dracula faces on his route, and emotion, or Smith's 'fellow feeling'. She confidently diagnoses his 'greatest fear', placing herself in Dracula's situation in order to 'form some idea of his sensations': 'He evidently fears discovery or interference, in the state of helplessness in which he must be' (p. 294). This is sympathy that is not just emotion or intuition, but a form of deductive reasoning. This form of sympathy, feminists argued, could (and should) be extended beyond the home to the public sphere. Far from the narrow-minded and selfish sympathy that critics like Barry Williams assigned to women, Mina's sympathy is active, ethical, universal, and logical. It is also presented as the only means of defeating Dracula. It is a form of insight and action that the men, who are so similar to Dracula in their reliance on their 'clever' 'cunning' 'brains' and 'iron resolution' (in the words of Van Helsing), have no access to. Through sympathy, but not empathy, Mina retains her hold on herself, so that even as the vampire women call her 'sister' (p. 308), Mina resists the dissolution of her identity into that of the vampire.

The ethical imperative that guides Mina's sympathetic understanding of Dracula is evident in the final moments of Dracula's life: 'I shall be glad as long as I live that even in that moment of final dissolution there was in the face a look of peace' (p. 316). Sympathy, then, is presented as the means by which the vampire can be fought and destroyed without compromising the humanity of those that fight. Sympathy, as I have demonstrated, is represented in the novel as a specifically feminine virtue, which is key to the success of the heroes of the novel. Sympathy is

the means by which Mina stabilizes her sense of self even in moments of connection with the other, it is the core strength she brings to the Crew of Light, and it is the means by which she understands and thus defeats the vampire.