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# Recording Angels: Examining Female Narrators in Vampire Fiction and Film

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# Recording Angels: Examining Female Narrators in Vampire Fiction and Film

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### Abstract

Authors of vampire fiction often grapple with the shifting gender norms of the late nineteenth century. They explore these shifting tensions through the creation of complex narrative structures, some of which incorporate female narrators. By making these women narrators, these authors carefully consider female perspectives and the authority women can wield, both as narrators in their respective texts, and as women in late nineteenth-century British society who were confined to rigid gender roles. The narrative tension that arises between the narrator and the text then allows these authors to use literature to explore and theorize about broader societal tensions.

This thesis examines Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's novella *Carmilla* (1872), Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* (1897), F.W. Murnau's film *Nosferatu* (1922), and Werner Herzog's remake *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (1979). These texts and films explore the female perspective, granting these women authority or denying them a voice to challenge the gender norms to which women were confined. While the women of vampire fiction have often been analyzed to determine what Gothic roles they conform to, much less attention has been paid to the role these women play as the writers and editors of their own stories. When these narrative roles are taken into consideration, we can better understand these complex women and the roles they play.

**Introduction:**

Throughout my Oxford tutorial on English Literature from 1830-1910, I repeatedly encountered female characters that could be classified into types: the pure and innocent Angel in the House (in poet Coventry Patmore's words), the enigmatic New Woman, or the threatening fallen woman. As I read *Dracula* (1897), I puzzled over Bram Stoker's Mina Harker, who seemed inconsistent, given the rigid gender norms for which the nineteenth century is known. Although these norms were metamorphosing and deteriorating by the late 1890s – and were never as fixed to begin with as Victorian commentators might at times make them sound – the genre of Gothic fiction has long insisted on employing types; *Dracula* itself largely does this, rendering Mina's incongruous portrayal still more mystifying. The men that battle Dracula fit the heroic, masculine type, while Lucy (as one critic puts it) adheres to “the trope of the degenerate female” (Chaplin 125). But Mina does not easily conform to a single type. Like many critics, Susan Chaplin tries to fit her into one box and writes that she most closely fits the “stereotype of ideal Victorian femininity.” At times, indeed, she seems a submissive, pure housewife, but Mina demonstrates throughout the novel that she is not merely a traditional Victorian woman (125). She also functions in the text as an authoritative narrator, exercises her formidable intellect, and ensures Dracula's demise. With these contrasting characteristics, how could Mina be understood within the English Gothic tradition? As a twenty-first century reader, I wanted to believe that she was empowered and authoritative, and found plenty of evidence to support this interpretation. However, it still did not encapsulate every aspect of Mina. In determining to explore her portrayal in my thesis, I hoped to address the broader question of how Gothic conventions, particularly of narration, might be enlisted as well as modified to express tensions surrounding the shifting views of gender in 1890s Britain.

There are only a handful of significant female narrators in nineteenth-century British fiction, a structure that is surprisingly rare in non-epistolary English fiction generally, and especially in Gothic fiction. However, vampire fiction provides us with two notable examples: Mina Harker, and her predecessor, Laura, a young woman who appears in the 1872 novella *Carmilla* by Stoker's fellow Irishman Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu. Intrigued by Le Fanu's decision to write from the perspective of a female narrator, I decided to begin my questioning of how these writers adapted Gothic conventions to address shifting gender norms by considering how Laura compared to Mina, since between 1872 and 1897 the role of women in Britain changed significantly and both Le Fanu and Stoker were writing with a British audience in mind. If Mina was portrayed indeterminately and assumed a complex narrative role, how would Laura compare? With this in mind, I also reconsidered Mina's narrative role. What did her own complex narrative style and structure reveal about how a female character, and her narrative, could be both confined and stifled, and yet vocal and empowered? Gothic narratives are known for their complex frame narratives, but how do Stoker and Le Fanu use these traditional frame narratives with unexpected female narrators to break the very conventions to which they initially seem to adhere? Thus my thesis was born, examining female narration in vampire fiction and how it is used, largely as an innovation, in the late nineteenth century to explore the increasing instability of gender norms. While the women of vampire fiction have often been analyzed to determine what Gothic roles they conform to, much less attention has been paid to the role these women play as the writers and editors of their own stories. Le Fanu and Stoker both reflect the identities and capabilities of these women in their roles as narrators and therefore in the texts they write and compile. While Laura is constructed as a meek, unbelievable narrator, correlating with her portrayal as a frail, domestic Angel in the House, Stoker insists on Mina's accuracy and credibility, revealing the more radical, empowered role she plays as a character in the novel as

well. Especially in Mina's case, the conundrum that one woman might embody more than one stereotype of femininity at a time – the proper wife, the immoral temptress, the independent professional woman – led both Stoker and Le Fanu to reflect these tensions in their female characters *and* the complex frame narratives in which they supposedly write.

At the time *Dracula* was published, women's roles had been going through a tumultuous period of revision. For much of the nineteenth century, middle-class women in Britain were told that they should be confined to the home and be “tender and submissive, self-sacrificing, deeply religious, and untouched by sexual desire” (Smith-Rosenberg 1). This last expectation was key. Women could not acceptably possess any sexual desire or inclination,<sup>1</sup> and it was their responsibility in turn to prevent those feelings or urges from arising in their husbands. As Steven Marcus notes, “the only hope of salvation for man [lay] in marriage to a woman who [had] no sexual desires...sexual responsibility [was] projected onto the role of the woman” (Marcus 32). The protection of England's morality in the nineteenth century therefore depended on the denial of female sexuality among the middle classes, putting immense pressure on the preservation of strictly defined gender roles. Anxiety about both these social pressures and their demise is evident throughout the literature of the day, including vampire fiction.

Indeed, the interest in vampire fiction at the end of the century reflects how, as the nineteenth century progressed, women's roles began to shift more and more throughout Britain. While *Carmilla* worries that the sexual, fallen woman will wipe out the Angel in the House, by the 1890s more middle class women were leaving the home to find work. Between the middle and end of the nineteenth century the number of women in the workforce nearly doubled.<sup>2</sup> The emerging feminists at the time, such as novelists Sarah Grand and Mona Caird, fought for greater

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<sup>1</sup> Degler 1477.

<sup>2</sup> Richardson 4.

freedoms, both in their daily lives and for their long-term futures. Women fought for “the right to walk without a chaperone, to hold a job, to live alone in a flat, to go to college, and to wear sensible clothing” (Schaffer qtd. in Rodensky 730). These women also opposed the notion that they were responsible for their husband’s actions and sexual desires, and worked to gain greater marital freedoms, such as the right to seek a divorce. Their vocal opposition, however, prompted others to oppose disruption to the social norm. The *Westminster Review* predicted in 1889 that, “the ego of woman ‘will yet roll over the world in fructifying waves, causing incalculable upheaval and destruction,’” illustrating the pressure that was placed on the stability of women’s roles (Dowling 439). Since women were the defenders of morality in the home, for some, any departure from this role proved alarming – even apocalyptic – for both men and women, as it jeopardized the moral fate of England. Stoker and Le Fanu use their narratives to expose and explore these clashing points of view regarding the social role of women. They include complex women in their narratives, but also correlate the power these women have in their social spheres – to influence their male counterparts, to challenge the forces of evil, to voice their own opinions and speak for themselves – with the authority they have over the narrative.

Critics have taken varying approaches to Mina’s uniquely indefinable role, but most presume that Stoker portrays Mina as a submissive, angelic woman. Nicholas Daly views Mina as a typically repressed Victorian, arguing that she is inferior to the novel’s men, while Andrew Maunder, a biographer of Stoker’s, agrees that Mina becomes the model Victorian woman.<sup>3</sup> Critics who identify Mina as a submissive domestic woman tend to focus on the parallels between Mina and Lucy that undermine the surface distinction between their chaste and sexualized qualities; they largely ignore Mina’s subtle and radical role as a narrator and the sole compiler of the novel. Carol Senf provides a more multi-faceted view of Mina; she argues that

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<sup>3</sup> Schlüpmann, Grant, and Milbank also endorse this interpretation.

Mina cannot be reduced to either a radical, powerful woman or a repressed, traditional housewife, but that Mina rather falls between the two recognizable types. While Senf interprets Mina as a combination of “the traditional and the new,” (“Stoker’s Response” 49), she does not focus on Mina’s vital role as a narrator. In my own interpretation, then, I have found that Stoker not only juxtaposes Mina’s radical, professional aspirations with her traditional, moral role, but that he also interweaves these qualities to an extreme extent, particularly in the novel’s religious imagery. While Mina at times resembles the Virgin Mary, guiding the men through tragic events that they cannot handle, Stoker also likens her to Jesus, and her male companions act almost as her disciples. Likewise, we learn halfway through Stoker’s novel that it is Mina who serves as the ultimate frame narrator who has compiled this composite, epistolary narrative, a narrative used to testify to the destruction of evil – a worthy, Christian goal. Stoker thus repeatedly embraces female intellect – albeit as long as it does not detract from a woman’s moral responsibilities as a wife and mother.

Vampire fiction has invaded the bloodstream of international pop culture, and Mina has been endlessly reinvented since *Dracula* was published in 1897. I theorized that these adaptations would, like the original text, use Mina’s role to reflect the unique tensions of the era in which they were each made. Yet it is always challenging to reinvent an epistolary frame narrative structure on screen, and, in this case, especially without diminishing Mina’s role. Intrigued by these questions, I considered other quandaries: how directors were forced to condense the text, given the constraints of film, as well as how F.W. Murnau, director of the silent film *Nosferatu* (1922), was able to adapt the novel without sound. When Stoker’s world became silent, how would Mina’s role as a narrator and editor translate on screen? I also was intrigued by a later remake of *Nosferatu*, Werner Herzog’s *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (1979). Given

that *Nosferatu* already proved an adaptation, how would an adaptation of an adaptation function? How did Herzog reinvent Murnau's reinvention, and to what purpose?

Thus my thesis focuses on how the shifting role of women in the late nineteenth century manifests in the narrative structures of vampire fictions. In chapter one, I examine how Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, in depicting the struggle between two types – the innocent, submissive Laura and the sexualized vampire Carmilla – enacts a struggle for both physical and sexual dominance, as the fallen woman, Carmilla, consumes and seduces the weak, angelic Laura's body, using her for both pleasure and sustenance. Narratively, Laura's authority also ebbs away throughout the text as Carmilla grows stronger, confusing and ultimately silencing Laura. Thus while Le Fanu vilifies the fallen woman type in an expected way, throughout this novella he also surprisingly allows us to enjoy her illicit sexuality through the very process of reading the narrative. In chapter two, I demonstrate how, in *Dracula*, this struggle between types of women is instead played out inside one woman – Mina Harker. Stoker portrays her as an empowered, radical figure as an author and editor, but her text has a moral, Christian aim, telling of Dracula's defeat and the victory of good over evil. The contradictory roles Mina assumes manifest in her narrative, as well, reiterating that Stoker is celebrating traditional morals through radical means. Finally in my third chapter, I argue that both *Nosferatu* and its adaptation, *Nosferatu the Vampyre*, preserve Mina's complexity, and particularly her narrative authority, despite the tendency of twentieth-century vampire films to present simplified and often silenced female characters. While Mina loses her narrative voice and editorial role, Murnau and Herzog use the camera's omniscient perspective to capture and affirm her point of view.

While critics have acknowledged vampire fiction as a subgenre that explores the tensions regarding women's roles,<sup>4</sup> much less attention has been paid to the role these women play as the writers and editors of their own stories. Ultimately, these works reveal how, as differing notions of femininity clashed in the late nineteenth century – and continue to do so – Gothic works of film and fiction explore the ways women might gain, and still be denied, the power to narrate.

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<sup>4</sup> See Botting's *Gothic (The New Cultural Idiom)*, especially chapter 1 and 7, and Chaplin's *Gothic Literature*, especially chapter 3 and chapter 4, section 2.

## Chapter I: The Struggle for Narrative Authority in Le Fanu's *Carmilla*

### I. Introduction

Laura, a young woman living in Styria, a remote region of Austria, becomes the primary narrator of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) as she describes her encounters with Carmilla, a seemingly young, beautiful female vampire. As she recalls a prayer she used to recite, she writes, "I think these were the very words" (Le Fanu 247-248). In this emblematic sentence, Laura reveals the struggle she encounters throughout her entire narrative as she attempts to uncover the truth by telling us of her murky memories. While Le Fanu emphasizes that she tries to portray her experiences accurately and record "the very words," she continually stumbles. Her narrative is not entirely factual, but instead contains holes and omissions that reveal the influence Carmilla exerted over Laura when she was alive, and the influence she continues to exert over her as Laura supposedly recalls them. While Le Fanu gives Laura the authority of a female narrator, a structure that had little precedence in the Gothic tradition, the traditional frame narrative he uses, the constraints of Laura's memory, and the strong influence her experiences still hold over her constantly challenge her reliability. It is precisely through Laura's weak reassurances of her narrative's reliability that Le Fanu begins to expose how Carmilla has hindered, and continues to hinder, Laura's ability to understand and relate the truth.

Critics have interpreted Le Fanu's portrayal of Carmilla and Laura's relationship in differing ways, from restrictive to liberating. Le Fanu was a newcomer to vampire fiction – as Melada notes, "*Carmilla* is one of a kind, an aberration in the scheme of [Le Fanu's] total activity" (Melada 99). However, Le Fanu often borrowed inspiration from the Gothic tradition and, like the older Gothic novelists, wrote both to entertain<sup>5</sup> and to discuss moral issues (Bernal

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<sup>5</sup> Melada writes, "The reader senses that Le Fanu's chief purpose in [writing "The Evil Guest"] was the exposure of the evil wrought...and that the murder is an example of...moral degradation,

76). Most critics view *Carmilla* as a commentary on women's roles in the 1870s, though what Le Fanu wishes to communicate about these roles is sometimes contended. Critics Marilyn Brock, Amy Leal, Donna Mitchell,<sup>6</sup> and Victor Sage<sup>7</sup> focus on Carmilla's villainous role. For example, Brock focuses on Carmilla's portrayal as a signifier of reverse-colonization, arguing that Carmilla, as a racial other, threatens Laura. However, Signorotti argues that Le Fanu's novella is liberating, as he portrays a same-sex relationship free from the interference of men. Ultimately, I argue that Le Fanu both conforms to Gothic types while subverting them. Le Fanu portrays Laura as an unrealistically pure and submissive woman, such as Coventry Patmore wrote of in his poem in praise for his wife, titled "The Angel in the House." Laura is an archetype: she adheres to this angelic role of the delicate, moralizing Victorian woman (even though she lives in modern-day Austria, her father's lineage attests to her British heritage, and Le Fanu, though Irish, wrote for the much larger British audience for fiction). Carmilla is equally archetypal, as Laura's antithesis – Le Fanu portrays her as the sexually and spiritually immoral 'fallen woman,' who infects others with her immorality. As Carmilla's illicit yet alluring actions and words invade Laura's body and her narrative, Laura's narrative begins to symbolize a struggle between traditional and radical female archetypes; although these women are portrayed as exaggerated, symbolic figures, rather than realistic characters, their struggle mirrors the growing controversy that arose regarding shifting perceptions of women in Britain in the late nineteenth century.

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rather than a puzzle set forth for the reader to solve" (Peterson 126). Le Fanu therefore sets a precedent of writing entertaining mysteries, but he uses these tales to impart more specific morals to his readers.

<sup>6</sup> "Her arrival at Laura's home instantly changes the social dynamics of the novella to a world of gender imbalance that is ruled by femininity and is filled with passive men and oppressive women." (Mitchell 3)

<sup>7</sup> Sage, Victor. *Le Fanu's Gothic: The Rhetoric of Darkness*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. Print.

## II. Female narrators and Gothic frame narratives

Female narrators are scarce in British fiction, and so Le Fanu's use of Laura becomes all the more noteworthy. Female narrators do figure relatively often in the early eighteenth century, in such novels as Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Roxana* (1724), and such epistolary novels as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748), Pierre de Marivaux's *La Vie de Marianne* (1731-1745), and John Cleland's *Fanny Hill: Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748).<sup>8</sup> However, in the later half of the eighteenth century, male narrators returned in full force. Lanser writes, "It does not seem impossible that this subsumption of the 'feminine' was in some part a reaction to the increasing presence of female voice in fiction," indicating that even the presence of these few female narrators threatened traditional gender norms (Lanser 157). Although female narrators flourished for a brief period, the backlash Lanser describes reveals how tenuous this authority was and the fear of the female voice that remained. By the late nineteenth century, though, the mainstream realist tradition included some female narrative voices again, as in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (1852-1853), and Charlotte Perkin Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892).

But the demographics of Gothic narrators remained little changed. Although the Gothic novel as a genre first rose to popularity in the 1790s, emerging from earlier literary traditions and finding its sources in ancient romances, folklore, and the novel, Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, written almost a century later, fits the true Gothic mold (Botting 17, 23, Chaplin 32). Gothic novels are often set in semi-exotic locations beyond Western Europe, such as Transylvania or Italy; they often feature some ambiguous confrontation with a monster or the supernatural; and most importantly, they often reflect some specific fear or anxiety about society. For example, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) expresses concerns about the

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<sup>8</sup> Lanser 25

growing influence of technology. While Gothic texts often feel archaic in style, describing isolated, foreign locations and ancient battles between good and evil, they in fact tend to reveal more modern cultural fears. Gothic novelists also established new narrative techniques and conventions that better reflected these dichotomies, portraying these battles between good and evil in narratives that teeter perilously between fact and fiction. *Carmilla* adopts these traditions – Le Fanu specifically uses Gothic narrative techniques to explore growing tensions in modern culture between two exaggerated types of women: the pure and innocent angel, and the aggressive, sexualized monster.

Gothic novelists frequently use elaborate frame narratives, essentially narratives nested within narratives, as both Le Fanu and Stoker do. Often, Gothic novelists will use this technique to create levels of separation between the reader and the text that have the potential to heighten confusion, mystery, and doubt: as narrators begin to contradict one another and disagree about the truth of certain events, it becomes much more difficult for the reader to ascertain the true sequence of events. By including multiple layers of voices, these frame narratives seemingly authenticate and, at the same time, bring the narrators' authority into question, which is fitting in works which feature supernatural, fantastic elements. Contrasting first-person accounts recorded in letters and various other documents create a dissonance between fact and fiction as a vital part of the experience of reading this genre. Botting notes that Gothic novelists,

do not close the novel in a conventionally moral manner, but produce a distance from the different figures in the tale to leave a sense of uncertainty and irresolution...fragmented, assembled from bits and pieces, the novel is like the monster itself. (Botting 93)

Gothic narratives are designed to confuse: when these novelists create multiple first-person narrators who constantly contradict one another, they disorient the reader. Thus these Gothic novelists craft not only threatening characters, but also threatening, suspenseful texts.

As Chaplin notes, Gothic authors tend to incorporate these multiple conflicting

perspectives through the use of prefaces by supposedly more reliable narrators, who comment on the following narrative and help establish how the reader should perceive such a tale, and this is the technique Le Fanu implements. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) is a prime example: Shelley uses Walton, the credible explorer, to introduce the more far-fetched Dr. Frankenstein's narrative, who in turn introduces Frankenstein's monster. As Shelley moves from the outer frames of the novel towards the monster's narrative, the reader gradually moves from a realm of reality and normalcy into more and more bizarre narratives. The content of the narratives grows progressively weirder, as do the narrators themselves. By distancing the reader from their works, these authors create a venue to freely discuss what would otherwise be seen as horrifying or socially unacceptable content (Chaplin 180). Yet while Le Fanu initially adheres to convention, framing Laura's narrative with the secretary's preface, he does so not to establish Laura's credibility. In fact, both Laura and the secretary prove unreliable; instead of creating a sense of safety, they fiercely challenge our sense of moral safety. Although *Carmilla* never explicitly begins her own separate narrative, she usurps Laura's narration. She becomes the most nested, most horrifying and fantastical narrator, while also disturbing any distance between the reader and this monstrous woman because she has, in an alarming, eerie, murky way, invaded Laura's narrative.

### **III. Le Fanu's frame narrator**

*Carmilla* begins with a traditional frame narrative structure: a preface written by a seemingly authoritative narrator – a medical secretary. *In a Glass Darkly*, the collection of short fiction in which Le Fanu formally published *Carmilla*, is comprised of narratives allegedly written by the patients of a mysterious Dr. Martin Hesselius, with prefaces to these narratives, written by Dr. Hesselius's secretary. This secretary writes that he publishes *Carmilla* to interest and entertain the "laity," or "lay reader"; likewise in the preface to "Green Tea," he specifically

warns us that he publishes the story to intrigue “an unlearned reader” (Le Fanu 5, 6, 243). This narrator therefore immediately establishes himself in a professional and intellectual position that is superior to an imagined audience of lay readers. This Gothic frame narrative technique gives Le Fanu the freedom, as Chaplin notes, to portray alarming and morally suspect situations and characters while also giving the reader the license to enjoy these tales from a safe, morally comfortable distance. However, in *Carmilla* any semblances of the secretary’s narrative authority quickly begin to deteriorate as Le Fanu strays from these conventions, foreshadowing the unreliability of Laura’s own narrative and the eventual collapse of the readers’ moral safety.

The secretary at first appears to use an authoritative voice to gain the readers’ trust and direct how we are to view these tales. He writes:

Upon a paper attached to the Narrative which follows, Doctor Hesselius has written a rather elaborate note, which he accompanies with a reference to his Essay on the strange subject which the MS. illuminates. (Le Fanu 243)

Despite this elaborate depiction, the narrator tells us fictions, in more ways than one. The secretary, a narrator in an obviously fictional tale, describes another fictional manuscript, “a paper” that remains intangible to the reader: Le Fanu’s novella does not include Hesselius’s “rather elaborate note,” nor does Le Fanu give any proof of what it entails (nor, for that matter, does he give us the doctor’s “Essay”). As a fiction writer, Le Fanu works in a medium that obviously implies a suspension of reality, but Le Fanu unsettles the reader by pushing the limits of our disbelief, asking us not only to believe a fictional story that occurs miles away, but also heightening the inconsistency between the novella immediately in front of us and the fictional text the secretary has access to. However, the secretary’s narrative voice encourages us to see him as authoritative – he never asks us to believe that this manuscript exists, or expresses any doubts at all about its contents. Because this secretary asserts unverifiable details as fact, Le Fanu begins to develop tension between narrative authority and reality on the very first page.

This first page, although told by this confident narrator, is not written clearly, a deliberate obfuscation that Le Fanu uses to at once reiterate and challenge the secretary's authority. The narrator attempts to assert his authority and intellectual superiority by assuming a pedantic, convoluted tone. Though he claims to be writing for lay readers, he writes elaborate, often-disjointed sentences, and refers extensively to a mysterious, unknown narrative and narrator. For example, the secretary writes,

I shall forestall the intelligent lady, who relates [the case, in these volumes], in nothing; and, after due consideration, I have determined, therefore, to abstain from presenting any *précis* of the learned Doctor's reasoning, or extract from his statement on a subject which he describes as 'involving, not improbably, some of the profoundest arcane of our dual existence, and its intermediates. (Le Fanu 243)

This long sentence is choppy, incorporates foreign terms and complex quotes, and is almost incomprehensible without careful analysis. Le Fanu uses this tactic to achieve two seemingly opposite effects. He first reiterates the secretary's intellectual prowess over the reader all the more, as he can write and comprehend complex, seemingly important statements, such as "the profoundest arcane of our dual existence, and its intermediates." The secretary even assumes his own superiority, noting that he has "determined, therefore, to abstain from presenting any *précis* of the learned Doctor's reasoning" – by editing the doctor's summaries out, he places his own intellectual and narrative authority over even that of the doctor. The readers are therefore reminded of their inferiority to the secretary, and are inclined to defer to his assessment of Laura as a reliable narrator. However, Le Fanu also produces the opposite effect, simultaneously jeopardizing the narrator's credibility since he writes in extremely elaborate, confusing sentences that almost become incomprehensible.

Le Fanu challenges the secretary's authority, but also emphasizes that the secretary does not provide the reader with a sense of security and distance when he gives sharply contrasting

reasons for publishing these shocking medical cases. If these tales are to be viewed as entertainment, they are non-threatening – but, if they are true medical cases, the reader may be foolish and even imperiled if they ignore these realities as mere diversions. Le Fanu initially adopts Gothic narrative conventions, using this preface to assimilate the narrator into this bizarre, fictitious world, but he also strays from convention when he challenges the reader's sense of security and prepares the reader to become an acute questioner of narrative authority by creating an unusually unreliable frame narrator.

#### **IV. Laura's narrative insecurity**

Laura's story comprises the bulk of the novella, but the reader soon realizes her status as a narrator, like the secretary's, does not ensure her unquestioned authority. Laura's weak narrative voice is not at first surprising, as she is portrayed as a pure, submissive nineteenth-century British woman. But as her narration commences, her authority is doubly challenged as Carmilla begins to exert her own influence over both Laura and her story. Carmilla does not serve as a narrator, but instead hijacks Laura's, infiltrating her mind and her writing until Laura not only fails to describe Carmilla's malevolence, but also even begins to praise her. The reader therefore sees *Carmilla* not as a tale of one woman's perspective, but the convoluted tale of two women in disharmony – the innocent, quiet British woman, and the threatening, sexual fallen woman. As a Gothic novelist, Le Fanu responds to the anxieties of his time, and *Carmilla* directly responds to the shifts in women's roles in the late nineteenth century. Le Fanu uses these Gothic narrative techniques to demonstrate how little actual separation can exist between these drastically different portrayals of women. Laura, a pure, innocent, domestic woman, cannot stave off the influence of the fallen woman. Conversely, as Le Fanu demonstrates Carmilla's malevolence through the insidious power of Carmilla's voice, he also exposes the reader to her spell. The reader enjoys her illicit narrative, at least for the duration of the narrative, and is

infiltrated by her presence, just like Laura. Thus while on the surface Le Fanu sets these two archetypal figures against each other to impart a seemingly conservative view, he exposes, in exaggerated terms, how the real threat in modern times is the difficulty of separating women into types at all.

From the very first lines of the story, Le Fanu wants the reader to see Laura's credibility as questionable. The secretary vouches for her intellect and accuracy, deeming her an "intelligent lady" and a "clever and careful...informant," before concluding that she writes with "conscientious particularity" (Le Fanu 243). However, the reader also knows that the unreliable secretary only publishes this story about "mysterious" and "strange" subjects that will entertain (243). Therefore it is unclear what the reader should expect – it may be an entertaining work of fiction, or a realistic story full of worrying conclusions. The secretary uses his own skewed authority to vouch for Laura's own, undermining her voice and revealing the contradictory aims of her tale. Laura likewise proves a very dubitable female narrator, writing at least eight years before the secretary<sup>9</sup> from a mysterious, isolated region on the border of Eastern and Western Europe. This is in keeping with the traditions Walpole, Radcliffe, and Lewis started in the late eighteenth century, of Gothic tales of distant lands full of supernatural power, and Le Fanu consciously invokes this tradition with this geographical reference.

Laura's struggle as a narrator is that she anticipates disbelief, as Le Fanu exhibits her insecurities about her narration from her very first line. While the secretary uses first-person perspective and is unafraid of making claims about himself, Laura begins her narrative with, "In Styria, we, though by no means magnificent people, inhabit a castle, or schloss" (Le Fanu 244). In these lines, Laura relies on the pronoun "we" to assert her accuracy, assuming her own inferiority as a typical young woman. And yet even in her attempts to validate her claims and

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<sup>9</sup> "I, at the date of my story, only nineteen. Eight years have passed since then." (Le Fanu 245).

bolster her authority, she weakens her narrative authority by directing attention away from herself to a collective “we,” and therefore diminishing her own power as a narrator. While the secretary’s narrative authority proves dubitable, Le Fanu crafts Laura’s narrative voice as still less authoritative because she tries too hard to prove her credibility. Writing of her home, she elaborates excessively because she anticipates doubt:

I have said that this is a very lonely place. Judge whether I say the truth...The nearest inhabited village is about seven of your English miles to the left...I have said “the nearest *inhabited* village,” because there is, only three miles westward...a ruined village. (244)

In its entirety, Laura devotes fourteen lines to this clarification, perfectly nuancing her exact meaning. But just as the secretary’s elaboration fails to assert his authority, Laura’s overblown attempt to prove her trustworthiness reveals her insecurity and the weakness of her narrative, as well. She ardently challenges the reader to disagree with her on just the second page of her narrative, but chooses to reiterate a detail – the isolation of her home – that many readers would never think to question, inviting scrutiny. In traditional Gothic novels, these narratives would gradually become more and more disorienting layer by layer. But by crafting not one, but two consecutive narrators who cannot be trusted, Le Fanu reinvents these traditions to jeopardize any sense of moral safety by amplifying the confusion the reader experiences from the start.

As Laura reflects on her young adulthood, Le Fanu reveals her tendency to evade anything frightening, an ironic twist that challenges our trust in Laura as the narrator of a Gothic novella. When Carmilla first formally meets Laura, she arrives in a carriage that hurtles dangerously along the road. Anticipating the carriage’s crash, Laura writes, “I knew what was coming. I covered my eyes, unable to see it out, and turned my head away...Curiosity opened my eyes, and I saw a scene of utter confusion” (Le Fanu 252). Laura’s movements here reveal her stereotypically feminine fragility, fulfilling the Victorian archetype of the innocent young woman, but also her aversion to any frightening stimuli. Because Laura writes from a first-

person perspective and Le Fanu offers no other narrator to comment on or explain her tale, the reader only sees what she sees. Therefore when she shrinks from reality, the reader is prevented from seeing this truth, too. When she does open her eyes, she sees “confusion,” emphasizing that even when Laura is brave enough to see, she does not always understand. Because she avoids this horrifying scene, she reveals that she puts herself, and the reader, at a disadvantage to understand the aftermath of this event. Thus Le Fanu leaves the reader to wonder what other details are lost as Laura tells the horrifying events of her narrative in its entirety.

Le Fanu reveals that Laura does not understand the literal confusion before her, but also that she is unaware that Carmilla is trapping her as she witnesses the crash. One important aspect of the narration is Le Fanu’s insinuations that Laura may still be ‘confus[ed]’ as she writes about the event years later. Laura makes such statements as, “The disappearance of Carmilla was followed by the discontinuance of my nightly sufferings” (Le Fanu 315). For the reader, the conclusion is clear – Carmilla was the source of Laura’s sufferings. However, Laura never explicitly makes such a connection. Instead, she leaves just enough ambiguity in her text for us to wonder if she ever fully understands what has happened to her. At the end of her narrative she writes that she “saw all clearly a few days” after the events (315). However, she then writes, “My father has a copy of the report of the Imperial Commission, with the signatures of all who were present...It is from this official paper that I have summarized my account of this last shocking scene” (316). Thus while she says she “saw all clearly,” she still needs to summarize “[her own] account” of the entire event from the accounts of others, and therefore never proves that she understands what happened to her. Le Fanu then forces the reader to question Laura’s accuracy in describing her interactions with Carmilla because Laura innately shies away from harsh realities and may not understand the full course of the events she describes, even years later.

In fact, Le Fanu reveals that Carmilla physically influences Laura, and that this physical

control affects Laura's ability to speak. When Laura and Carmilla first talk, Laura writes, "There was a silence of fully a minute, and then at length *she* spoke; *I* could not... 'How wonderful!' she exclaimed... 'Wonderful, indeed!' I repeated, overcoming with an effort the horror that had for a time suspended my utterances" (Le Fanu 259). In this first interaction, Carmilla silences Laura until she can only mimic Carmilla. Carmilla controls Laura's voice, and does so by using her own powerful voice. Every time Laura resists, Carmilla whispers to regain control:

I used to wish to extricate myself [from Carmilla's embraces]; but my energies seemed to fail me. Her murmured words sounded like a lullaby in my ear, and soothed my resistance into trance, from which I only seemed to recover myself when she withdrew her arms. (264)

Carmilla uses her voice to soothe Laura, draining her of "energ[y]" and will until she succumbs to her desires. She does not simply "recover" after Carmilla has withdrawn, but recovers "*herself*" – Carmilla not only exerts her control over Laura, but also claims her identity in some way. In this description, Laura appears helpless and infantilized, almost as Carmilla's child. Since Laura's mother has died, Carmilla's occupation of this role is almost perverse, given that Carmilla is not a life-giving maternal force, but the very opposite – the Undead.<sup>10</sup> But this scene also paints Carmilla in a positive light as a maternal figure, subverting the reader's expectations. Laura is innocent and pure, but she is so submissive that she cannot protect herself at all. Carmilla, meanwhile, is malevolent and cruel, but to demonstrate this, Le Fanu makes her maternal – hardly what the reader expects from a "fallen woman." Thus while Le Fanu works with these exaggerated types, neither type seems viable in the modern age.

Le Fanu also notes that Carmilla exerts her soporific control over Laura through touch.

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<sup>10</sup> "The vampire...rather than being read as a threat to identity seems to function much more as a trope for the identity of horror and as such as the horror of a concept of identity that fuelled by anxiety, has to refer constantly to that eternal combat with the maternal, reproductive body...In *Carmilla* vampirism is explicitly linked to reproduction and identity." (Michelis 19)

At the tale's conclusion, Baron Vorenberg reveals how vampires exert their power physically: "One sign of the vampire is the power of the hand...But [the vampire's] power is not confined to its grasp; it leaves a numbness in the limb it seizes, which is slowly, if ever, recovered from" (Le Fanu 319). This seemingly mundane additive, briefly mentioned at the novella's end, alters our perception of Laura's previous interactions with Carmilla. While Laura directly acknowledges the effect of Carmilla's voice, Carmilla has also urged Laura to grasp her hand in an almost sexual manner six times throughout the novella. After hearing a hymn and growing distressed, Carmilla seeks comfort from Laura, saying, "It has made me nervous. Sit down here, beside me; sit close; hold my hand; press it hard—hard—harder" (267). As Laura holds Carmilla's hand, Carmilla undergoes an almost orgasmic seizure in which "[she] tremble[s] all over with a continued shudder as irrepressible as ague" (267). This passage attests to Carmilla's role as the sexualized fallen woman and reveals that it is this sexuality that endangers Laura. By emphasizing this sexual relationship specifically through Laura's hand, Le Fanu unites Laura's sexual corruption with her narrative's invasion. Carmilla attacks both Laura's body and her narrative – she leaves Laura both unable to find a husband or have children, and unable to narrate her own story, even years later. Laura writes, "I now write, after an interval of more than ten years, with a trembling hand." Carmilla seems to exercise an influence over Laura's "hand" throughout the text that alters her very ability to write – jeopardizing Laura's authority to tell her own story.

*In a Glass Darkly* – the title of the novel in which Le Fanu includes *Carmilla* – also hints at how evil comes to live inside of Laura. Le Fanu reinvents a quote from 1 Corinthians, which reads, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." O'Malley believes this line implies that, "the human condition is constituted as a dark glass through which the glimmers of the sacred can be faintly and imperfectly detected" (O'Malley 142-143). Therefore, everyone can glimpse the

sacred in humanity. However, in Le Fanu's reimagining, O'Malley asserts that the edit Le Fanu makes to the line, from "through a glass" to "in a glass," implies that "rather than being a lens through which the object can just be seen, that glass has become a mirror" through which everyone see themselves (143). Accordingly, Laura's narrative becomes a mirror in which Carmilla and Laura reflect one another. Carmilla infiltrates Laura's narrative until the two women share the same narrative voice. They reflect one another physically, as young women living in Austria, but also narratively – the reader does not know what Laura has written and what Carmilla has written or omitted. Thus even in his title, Le Fanu indicates that Laura and Carmilla mirror one another as they share this corrupted narrative. The reader is also mirrored with Laura – since she is the narrator, the reader hears her thoughts – and so when Carmilla invades Laura, she invades the reader, as well.

#### **V. Carmilla's narrative voice**

While this narrative invasion suggests, conventionally, that the fallen woman threatens the domestic angel, it also grants Carmilla an unexpected narrative voice. While Laura writes to expose how Carmilla attacked her, she exposes the reader to Carmilla's fascinating influence, as well, and in turn allows Carmilla to threaten us. In a novella in which the lines between fearful truths and entertainment are blurred, the reader may mistake *Carmilla* for mere entertainment and fall under Carmilla's spell, just like Laura. Carmilla invades Laura's mind in a lasting way and shapes her characterization of the vampire. She writes, "I told you that I was charmed with her in most particulars. There were some that did not please me so well" (Le Fanu 262).

However, despite this introduction, she devotes an entire paragraph not to Carmilla's faults, but to her beauty. "I said there were particulars which did not please me," she repeats, attempting to focus on Carmilla's defects, but all she can discuss is her frustration that she knows so little about Carmilla's history (262). Laura does not accuse or expose Carmilla as the reader expects

her to, but instead focuses on how enthralling Carmilla is. The reader therefore wants to know more about this figure, too – while Laura is distracted by Carmilla’s beauty, the reader begins to share this distraction and sees Carmilla as a beautiful, seductive figure.

By creating such an alluring figure in Carmilla, Le Fanu begs us to question whether he intends this type of woman to appear appealing to the reader, as well. As mentioned, Signorotti views *Carmilla* as a sort of lesbian fantasy, in which Le Fanu allows these two women to love one another until they are separated by Laura’s male guardians. Signorotti argues that Le Fanu’s tale is one in which women are empowered and able to exist beyond the confines of male-dominated society. Carmilla does appear beautiful by day, but Laura’s visions at night – her nightmares of a cat-like “black animal” of Carmilla “in her white nightdress, bathed, from her chin to her feet, in one great stain of blood,” and her mother’s message to “beware the assassin” – reveal what Le Fanu wants us to read as Carmilla’s true nature (Le Fanu 283). The reader is drawn in by Carmilla’s powerful, enthralling voice, like Laura, but realizes her malevolent nature well before Laura does. The reader knows from the secretary’s preface that they are to read this narrative either as a medical case, or as entertainment – Le Fanu ultimately endorses both interpretations, urging his readers to heed this cautionary tale, while also allowing us to partake in our own divergence from morality as we enjoy Carmilla’s seduction.

Yet while the reader escapes Carmilla’s insidious nature when the novella ends, Le Fanu’s conclusion reveals that the Angel in the House cannot return to her once so clearly defined role. Laura’s concluding pages reveal that Carmilla never leaves her. While Laura recovers from Carmilla’s attacks to some extent, she reveals that the task of writing her narrative has almost brought Carmilla back into her life. On the very last paragraph, Laura writes, “often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing-room door” (Le Fanu 319). Clearly, Carmilla still haunts Laura. While she may “fancy,” or imagine,

that she hears Carmilla, this line could also prove a double entendre, revealing that Laura still fancies, or likes and cares for, Carmilla. Furthermore, the secretary's preface notes that Laura has died – therefore, Laura either commits suicide, becoming a vampire, or she simply dies. Laura's death represents the death of the Angel in the House – Laura never has children or marries after Carmilla's attack, and so Laura's domestic roles are never fulfilled. Le Fanu's ambiguity about her death leaves room for fear that the fallen woman will be the death of the angel and can convert these angels into fallen women – leaving no separation between them.

## **VI. Conclusion**

We have seen how, as Le Fanu slowly allows Carmilla to speak through Laura's voice, Laura's narrative truly becomes Carmilla's. The text becomes both a site of vampirism, as well as a tool for the *perpetuation* of vampirism. The reader falls prey to Carmilla, just as Laura does – Laura's mind is permanently invaded, and so is the reader's own mind, temporarily, as they read the novella. The novella shares many traits with Carmilla, and vampirism as a whole – both are foreseeably immortal, both spread their influence (books from copy to copy and to their readers, Carmilla to those she preys on), and both haunt those exposed to them long after they have concluded, or been destroyed. Even in the title of the novella, the tale almost entirely focuses on the illicit Carmilla. Le Fanu's text then, while an attempt to expose vampirism, becomes an almost vampiric medium itself, infecting the reader with Carmilla's influence through Laura's biased, corrupted narrative. Le Fanu adopts these Gothic types and narrative conventions, but reconfigures them to bring the reader face to face with this alluring evil.

## Chapter II: Mina Harker: Recording Angel

### I. Introduction

Sitting atop a cliff in Whitby, Mina Harker, the most complex female character in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), surveys her surroundings. Commenting on the afternoon in her journal she writes, "The band on the pier is playing a harsh waltz in good time, and farther along the quay there is a Salvation Army meeting in a back street. Neither of the bands hears the other, but up here I hear and see them both" (Stoker 66). In this symbolic instance, Stoker reveals the dualistic role Mina plays in the novel. Mina sits above the world, physically occupying a space in between two opposing forces – the traditional band, playing a measured waltz to entertain the public in a conventional way, and the brass band of the Salvation Army, a musical form that had emerged twenty years earlier. The Salvation Army bands encouraged the "revival of religion," but also represent a more modern force in this scene (OED). Mina in this scene sits in between the modern and the traditional, observing these opposing forces as she does throughout the novel, in which she occupies a uniquely dichotomous role herself. She is both a traditional and radical woman, resembling both the conventional "Angel in the House" and the "New Woman," a controversial literary figure of that emerged in the late nineteenth century – like the Salvation Army bands. Stoker portrays Mina observing these unique opposing musical forces in this scene, but he also explores the tensions between these opposing types of women in her character, and more importantly, her narrative.

While Le Fanu employs traditional Gothic narrative techniques to bring out modern tensions about gender in *Carmilla*, Stoker creates a complex frame narrative to uniquely reinvent these metamorphosing gender norms. However, while Le Fanu questions the divide between the Angel in the House and the sexual, fallen woman through Carmilla and Laura's relationship, Stoker unites the Angel and the New Woman in one figure – Mina. Mina's unique character and

narrative both unite radical and traditional elements until these seemingly opposed qualities become almost indistinguishable. Mina uses her radical qualities as a schoolteacher, author, editor, and logician to assert the traditional morals of a religious, innocent, submissive wife and mother. As a woman she is prevented from taking physical action against Dracula, a role she accepts – and instead employs her intellect and logic to join the fight. She begins compiling the documents – memorandums, journal entries, newspaper articles, and letters – that form the epistolary novel, carefully logging the Londoners’ encounters with their foe. Yet even in this intentionally passive role, she radically emerges as one of Dracula’s fiercest opponents. Mina becomes an amalgam of many traditions and anxieties all woven together, illustrating the blurring definition of femininity in nineteenth-century Britain.

Critical opinion has often disagreed about how Stoker intends to portray Mina, whether as demure and submissive, or as a fierce intellectual who alone saves the men from Dracula’s advances. Roger Daly writes, “Mina, evidently, is not part of the ‘little band of men’; rather she is meant to be the ideal centre around which it revolves,” categorizing her as an Angel in the House, the preservation of which motivates the men to fight Dracula (Daly 40). Many critics have agreed with this interpretation historically, including Grant, Maunder, Milbank and Schlüpmann, indicating that critics of *Dracula* tend to view Mina as occupying a domestic role as a wife and mother, coinciding with nineteenth-century gender norms. More importantly, this trend also indicates that Mina’s role as a narrator and compiler of the novel has often been overlooked. Two of the critics that do more closely examine the role of the narrative structure – Wicke and Halberstam – focus more closely on the consumption of text and the technology used in creating the text, respectively. I bring these two concerns together to show how Mina’s narrative role and her character complicate one another.

One notable way shifting gender roles appeared in literature in 1890s Britain was the emergence of the New Woman, a type of character who figured in over 100 novels from 1883 to 1900.<sup>11</sup> This popular figure is not easily defined, however. The New Woman not only drifted between fact and fiction, reflecting the lives of real women and their concerns, but also metamorphosed drastically from one portrayal to the next. For example, popular nineteenth century New Woman author Sarah Grand depicted the New Woman as a self-sufficient individual, a moral exemplar whom men must learn to emulate, while Grand's contemporary George Egerton wrote of seemingly idyllic women who harbor grotesque and monstrous impulses.<sup>12</sup> In other manifestations, the New Woman seems almost mannish and devoid of any sensuality. This new figure, not yet hardened into one type, allowed each author to voice his or her own perspective on shifting gender roles, so authors in favor of female empowerment portrayed New Woman figures as capable and admirable, while others portrayed this figure as mannish, unappealing, and grotesque. In deviating from these common portrayals, Stoker himself also reinvents this endlessly malleable figure.

The New Woman proved a popular and profitable figure. “[The New Woman’s] presence in a novel could virtually guarantee good sales,” Willis writes, indicating both the popularity of this figure and its permeation in the literature of the time (Richardson 54). Yet this figure also worried readers. As authors examined real social changes, such as the movement of women into the workforce, their at times exaggerated portrayals fed readers’ anxieties. Those who favored the preservation of rigid roles for women criticized New Woman literature for the dangerous ideas they believed these works proliferated – ideas of greater freedoms for women. They

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<sup>11</sup> Richardson 1.

<sup>12</sup> “Sarah Grand...depicted women as wise, high-minded guides to help man...Meanwhile, George Egerton infamously descried ‘the eternal wildness, the untamed primitive savage temperament that lurks in the mildest, best woman.’” (Schaffer qtd. in Rodensky 732).

believed these texts would corrupt those who were exposed to it, and especially young women, whom they feared would abandon their domestic roles after reading these texts.<sup>13</sup> Thus the New Woman was inspired by unrest as real women campaigned for greater freedoms, but also provoked unrest of its own accord. It was in this turbulent social and historical landscape that Stoker published *Dracula*.

Mina Harker deviates from any of the recognized types for women in the nineteenth century as well as Stoker's other portrayals of women in the novel. Modern critics nonetheless often attempt to categorize Mina as either a repressed Angel in the House, or as straying from the norms of this type. Carol Senf offers the most nuanced assessment of Mina's dual character in the article, "Dracula and the New Woman":

By emphasizing Mina's intelligence, her ability to function on her own, and her economic independence before marriage, Stoker stresses certain aspects of the New Woman; but by negating her sexuality, having her adopt a more traditional feminine role, and by showing her decision to abide by the group's will instead of making an individual decision, he also reveals that she is not a New Woman. (Senf 48)

Senf acknowledges the independent, industrious, proto-feminist aspects of Mina's character, but argues that she is not a New Woman and that she "adopt[s] a more traditional feminine role" as a pious wife by the novel's end. I argue that Mina is neither wholly a maternal figure nor overtly liberated, but an amalgam of illusions and allegories that in many ways seem to contradict each other. She appears at times the embodiment of the mannish, brainy, professional New Woman as the narrator and editor of this text, but also occupies a religious role of great power as she begins to resemble both the Virgin Mary and Jesus, assuming a surprisingly masculine role. Mina's text, irrevocably linked with her portrayal, symbolizes this struggle between the Angel in the House and the New Woman that is waged in her character, becoming both a signifier of her angelic

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<sup>13</sup> (Dowling 444).

purity and her radical role as a narrator and editor. Her text unites these diverse roles, and is heralded even within the text, by other characters, as a work of societal and religious significance.

## **II. Other women in *Dracula***

Stoker creates a diverse spectrum of femininity in *Dracula*, from elderly, maternal women to youthful, hyper-sexualized female vampires. A female's sexuality corresponds to her metaphysical state in the novel: the maternal women who conform to traditional notions of femininity are human, while the hyper-sexualized and uncontrolled become supernatural. Mina is the only woman to defy these classifications, occupying a position between the maternal humans and the sexual vampires. Human and maternal, she is often seen comforting her husband and male friends; however, she literally comes nearer and nearer to vampirism throughout the novel, with all of its connotations of immorality and sexual deviance. Mina, who does not fit any one type, jests about herself by invoking such a label in describing how she and Lucy take tea one afternoon, writing to Jonathan, "I believe we would have shocked the New Woman with our appetites. Men are more tolerant, bless them!" (Stoker 85). Mina here distinguishes herself, and Lucy, from the New Woman, yet despite her protests, her portrayal, like a New Woman figure, subtly defies what one would expect from a late Victorian wife: she is a powerful intellectual and a leader among the men. Therefore although Stoker creates these archetypal characters throughout his novel, he also reveals the impracticality of such rigid types – especially in the late nineteenth century.

Stoker's conflicted use of stereotypical characters is evident in his portrayal of the elderly, maternal women in *Dracula*. Typical, traditional nineteenth-century mothers might be described as narratively unsuccessful in that they are quickly killed off and denied a voice in a narrative that includes nearly everyone else's voices. In the novel's preface, an unknown narrator

– perhaps Mina or Stoker, although it is ultimately left unattributed to any single voice – writes that, “All needless matters have been eliminated,” and indeed Mrs. Westenra is eliminated early on in the novel (Stoker 5). Mrs. Westenra seems the perfect example of a good, God-fearing, traditional woman according to the standards of her generation, yet in this novel, the most purely maternal type is the least enduring type of woman. She lives with Lucy and cares for her with compassion. Lucy writes from her sickbed, “[Mother] said to me even more sweetly and softly than her wont, ‘I was uneasy about you, darling, and came in to see that you were all right’” (134). These lines indicate that Mrs. Westenra has a sweet and kind disposition – despite her ailing health, she acts even *more* compassionately than usual toward Lucy, establishing that she is self-sacrificing and an exemplar of maternal behavior. Even her last name indicates that she represents the ideal Western woman. However, Mrs. Westenra also proves the impracticality of the maternal ideal, even as she embodies it. In her motherly care for Lucy, she removes the garlic from her neck and opens her bedroom windows, unwittingly leaving Lucy more vulnerable to Dracula’s attack. Mrs. Westenra is also significantly the novel’s first fatality. Her death, although due to illness, is also influenced by her confrontation with Dracula. As Mina foreshadows, “a sudden shock would be almost sure to kill her,” and indeed the shock she endures in encountering Dracula dooms her (91). Stoker implies that Mrs. Westenra, though virtuous, cannot protect herself or future generations from the threat Dracula poses.

On the other end of Stoker’s spectrum lie female vampires, evil seductresses who become symbolic of unbridled sexuality in the novel – murderous, sexualized heathens. In declaring them “devils of the Pit!” Harker even refuses to identify them as women at all – they are merely female (Stoker 52). Yet while Stoker vilifies these women and Van Helsing eventually slays them, when Lucy becomes a vampire, Stoker suggests that this condition has a human origin. Lucy seems to inherently possess immoral sexual inclinations that necessitate her eventual

transformation into a vampire, as well as the silencing of her narrative, which appears through her journal entries and the letters she frequently writes to Mina. After three men to propose to her, she writes to Mina, “Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble? But this is heresy, and I must not say it” (58). Lucy recognizes that her polyamorous desires are taboo and immoral, since she notes that she may not discuss such inappropriate topics, even within the confines of her private letters to Mina. However, her frequent somnambulism and unbecoming comments indicate that, while she knows such behavior is unacceptable, she is unable to repress her more sensual desires. Her lamenting the constraints of nineteenth-century society that limit her sexual freedom, “indicates her susceptibility to vampire attack early on,” Schmitt writes, as well as allies her with the female vampires in the novel (Schmitt 143). When Dracula identifies Lucy as his first victim upon his arrival in Whitby, Stoker never establishes why he chooses this woman. Certainly Stoker does not suggest that Dracula attacks Lucy for any connection she may have to Jonathan; we are left to assume she is a more ready victim than someone like Mina, given Lucy’s burgeoning sexual desires. Though humanized, then, Lucy represents the familiar type of fallen woman who embodies sexual immorality – but in Stoker’s treatment, she loses her narrative authority immediately, and soon thereafter is killed.

### **III. Mina’s religious role**

In contrast to the novel’s emphasis on Lucy’s sexuality, Stoker repeatedly portrays Mina as a religious figure, and even likens her to the Virgin Mary and Jesus. But while Stoker uses this traditional allusion to emphasize her spiritual purity and righteousness as a virtuous wife and mother, he also uses this image to emphasize the power she wields over her male counterparts. Stoker takes what is traditional – the use of religious imagery in the Victorian era to encourage the ideal of a pure and submissive woman – and instead repurposes Christian imagery to offer

Mina agency in an acceptable and subtle way. When Stoker uses this imagery to describe Mina, one anticipates that he is merely praising her virtue, as other Victorian authors did, but Mina in fact breaks gender stereotypes and exerts great agency in these roles.

Throughout *Dracula*, Stoker describes Mina as the archetype of the domestic Angel. Van Helsing describes her as, “that sweet, sweet, good, good woman in all the radiant beauty of her youth and animation” (Stoker 286). The men view Mina as highly feminine and celebrate her beauty and goodness, demonstrating that she appears to be the pinnacle of womanly virtue. Van Helsing’s repetition here all the more emphasizes her angelic qualities, her extreme radiance seeming to lead him to gush. When Jonathan first mentions Mina, it is in reference to a dish he wishes her to prepare for him (“*Mem.*, get recipe for Mina” he writes), illustrating that she adheres to this conventional domestic role – she is literally expected to reside in the home, and more specifically in the kitchen, appearing a proper, doting fiancée who attends to Jonathan’s wishes (5). Later, Van Helsing praises Mina again, writing, “Ah, that wonderful Madam Mina... pearl among women!” (203). In these lines Mina is praised for her virtue and goodness, but appears to even exceed Van Helsing’s expectations; she is even more virtuous and outstanding than the average woman. Stoker does this to emphasize that, as an angelic figure, Mina is not passive and demure, as we expect from Laura and typical Gothic versions of idealized femininity, but plays an active, acknowledged religious and moral role. With such a role established, Stoker can portray Mina as an industrious, professional woman without raising questions about her status as a virtuous, morally irreprehensible religious exemplar.

Van Helsing’s celebration of Mina as an angelic figure strengthens Mina’s resemblance to the Virgin Mary, and yet even in this distinctly feminine religious role, Stoker still challenges traditional gender norms. Mina often comforts various members of the committee, and especially soothes Arthur Holmwood after Lucy’s death as he grieves the loss of his fiancé; in such

moments, Stoker suggests she emulates the loving and nurturing image of the Virgin Mary. Mina reflects on this experience, writing:

We women have something of the mother in us that makes us rise above smaller matters when the mother-spirit is invoked; I felt this big, sorrowing man's head resting on me, as though it were that of the baby that some day may be on my bosom, and I stroked his hair as though he were my own child. I never thought at the time how strange it all was.  
(Stoker 214)

Mina's recollection of this maternal interaction connects her with the Virgin Mary. She is childless, but comforts Arthur as if he were her child. Even though this "big" masculine figure rests on her, she looms over him and compares him to a small child, illustrating the motherly wisdom she possesses. Though herself in mourning for Lucy, her best friend, she appears a figure of strength: she is portrayed above Arthur, both physically, as she imagines he is her child, and spiritually, as she "[rises] above" the trivialities that he cannot. The image evoked calls to mind a Pieta statue. As this guiding, maternal force, imbued with the "mother-spirit," and yet childless and potentially a virgin herself, Mina resembles the Virgin Mary.<sup>14</sup>

Yet while Stoker employs this imagery to indicate her moral purity, the pronouns that Stoker uses in connecting Mina to the Virgin Mary also challenge conventions of femininity, identifying her as a masculine force. As Mina comforts Arthur, she curiously urges him to call upon her, "If ever the future should bring to you a time when you need a man's help" (Stoker 215). Stoker's pronouns seem to clash as Mina becomes both maternal and masculine in the power she exerts. She is a feminine, nurturing woman imbued with the "mother-spirit," as well as one equipped to offer "a man's help." When Mina exhibits power over the men, or identifies herself as an equal, Stoker often identifies these qualities as masculine – in this instance, her power to aid Holmwood and others is deemed masculine. Rather than allow this strong role to

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<sup>14</sup> "Strangely, Mina may still be a virgin. After all, she married her husband while he was still in hospital so that they would be able to travel together" (Bloom 157).

detract from Mina's femininity, Stoker separates her female attributes from the more unconventional attributes she possesses. The guidance and support she offers, her "man's brain," including her logic and practicality, and the allusions applied to her become masculine (218). Through this portrayal, Stoker preserves the feminine ideal – he divorces Mina's intellect and power from her feminine identity, declaring that intellect and emotional strength is the realm of men – but in doing so, he still allows Mina to possess masculine qualities.

After Dracula attacks Mina, Stoker introduces additional religious allusions as she gradually begins to resemble Jesus, likening her to a distinctly male figure of self-sacrifice. Stoker therein accentuates her unconventional role as a wise and exemplary woman. Although this correlation between Mina and Jesus is not often made explicit, Milbank, discussing religious symbolism in *Dracula*, also notes Mina's role as a Jesus figure briefly.<sup>15</sup> Stoker makes this connection most obvious when Dracula attacks Mina, forcing her to drink his blood:

[Dracula's] 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. (Stoker 262)

This scene is one of the most famous and graphic in the novel and a focal point for criticism of *Dracula*. Dracula holds Mina to his chest, forcing her to drink his blood so that she will transform into a vampire, metaphorically indicating sexual violence – Dracula almost seems to force Mina to perform oral sex on him. Daly describes this scene as a "(displaced) oral rape... followed by the beginning of Mina's metamorphosis – into a sexually assertive, sensual woman – and this the men cannot allow" (Daly 71). Mina's conversion into a vampire is very different from Lucy's, however, suggesting that Stoker wants to maintain a more chaste image of

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<sup>15</sup> "[Mina's] bearing of the mark [on her forehead] becomes Christlike" (Milbank 305).

Mina. While Lucy goes to Dracula in her sleep and seems drawn to him, Mina resists his attack, and the language Stoker uses in describing this scene indicates the violent nature of the scene – he grips Mina and “[forces] her face down on his bosom” (Stoker 262). Mina, who is never as sexually curious as Lucy, demonstrates her purity in this scene, and by comparing her to a kitten Stoker only reiterates her innocence. I suggest that rather than implying her metamorphosis into a sensual woman, this scene instead seems to reveal the beginning of Mina’s transformation into a stronger, more radical type of woman. Mina is attacked because the men preserve her innocence by leaving her at home, a supposed “angel in the house,” but it is in that position that Mina is attacked. Stoker again, as with Mrs. Westernra, reiterates that this domestic model of wifely behavior is no longer practical or wise in the modern age. While Stoker does not portray Mina as complacent earlier in the novel, she hereafter begins to take more aggressive action and personally fights to end Dracula, accompanying the committee on their forays, pitting her intellect against Dracula’s cunning, and destroying him entirely.

It is during the attack that Stoker most significantly implies that Mina begins to emulate Jesus. Mina later recalls that as he forced her to drink, Dracula said, “you, their best beloved one, are now to me flesh of my flesh; blood of my blood; kin of my kin;” (Stoker 267). While this reference alludes to the union of Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis and implies that Mina will become Dracula’s unwilling vampire bride, this scene also can be read with other religious connotations in mind. O’Malley reads the scene from a religious perspective, in which “the Count reenacts the Catholic Eucharist; kneeling before a black-clad man, Mina is placed in the position of the Catholic communicant before the priest” (O’Malley 159). The scene also parallels typical portrayals of the Madonna and Child; she is held to Dracula’s “bosom” and his “bare breast,” two terms that typically refer to a woman’s chest, implying Dracula’s connection to the Madonna, and that her position parallels that of the baby Jesus. While Dracula does seem a

Christ figure, or perhaps an anti-Christ figure, particularly in his relationship with Renfield, a mentally ill man who refers to Dracula as his “Master,” this scene also marks the beginning of Mina’s own conversion into a Christ figure (Stoker 98). After this attack, Mina realizes that she cannot be protected – just as Jesus fought against the forces of sin and evil, Mina becomes an active player in the fight against Dracula.

Even before she is attacked, Stoker strengthens the suggested link between Mina and Jesus through the praise Van Helsing offers her. Van Helsing, the character most able to recognize Mina’s significance, praises her brain and acuity at the same time that he notes the significance of her spiritual role. When Van Helsing first comes to London, Dr Seward describes him to Arthur, writing:

He is a seemingly arbitrary man, this is because he knows what he is talking about better than anyone else. He is a philosopher and a metaphysician, and one of the most advanced scientists of his day, and he has, I believe, an absolutely open mind. (Stoker 106)

Given Van Helsing’s varied background, he seems perfectly poised to be the one most able to acknowledge and accept Mina’s complexities. When he arrives after this introduction, it is already established that his opinions will be some of the most insightful. His “open mind” allows him to accept things that others cannot relentlessly throughout the novel – he must convince the Londoners of the existence of vampires, fighting against their skepticism. Furthermore, Van Helsing’s illustrious education implies that he is accustomed to diverse perspectives. He is a philosopher and metaphysician as well as a scientist, and possesses more than three degrees (106). Having Van Helsing, one of the most educated men in Europe, praise Mina’s intellect gives credence to this new perspective on how femininity can co-exist with mental acuity.

Indeed, it is through Van Helsing’s praise that Stoker upends traditional gender roles and implies that her traditional purity and radical mind work best together. He says of Mina, “She is one of God’s women fashioned by His own hand to show us men and other women that there is a

heaven where we can enter, and that its light can be here on earth” (Stoker 176). This praise, using such religious language, portrays Mina in a role akin to that which Jesus served – he died to allow sinners to enter heaven, and served as an example of morality, teaching his disciples how to conduct themselves while on earth. Similarly, Van Helsing asserts that Mina is not an average woman. He continues, “It will be pleasure and delight if I may serve you as a friend... There are darkneses in life, and there are lights; you are one of the lights” (171). Firstly, this reference to Mina as a light is reminiscent of Jesus’s own words. He says, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (NIV “Jn 8:12”). There are many references to darkness, light, and shadows throughout *Dracula*, but from this line alone we can see that the language Jesus uses is certainly akin to the descriptors assigned to Mina. Secondly, Van Helsing’s offer of service can be seen as akin to an offer of discipleship. Van Helsing argues that God specifically crafts Mina to guide the men around her, just as he did Jesus. Through Van Helsing’s claims, Stoker reiterates Mina’s pious nature, but also surprisingly invokes them to make Mina more radical than we initially realize.

In addition to her impressive logic and reasoning, Stoker allows Mina to stand out as the only character able to pity Dracula, demonstrating further that she emulates or represents Jesus, and therefore becomes a role model, standing above her male counterparts. After Dracula has bitten Mina and she has in turn drunk his blood, Dr Seward notes, “[Mina] with all her goodness and purity and faith was outcast from God” (Stoker 286). While she is “unclean” after the attack, it is this attack that allows her to vanquish Dracula (264). Because she is hypnotically connected to Dracula after the attack and because of her strength and intellect, she vanquishes him and saves humanity, just as Jesus battled Satan and suffered to atone for the sins of the world. Yet despite Mina’s status as an outcast, she is better able to express and abide by God’s teachings than the other members of the committee. She says:

I know that you must fight—that you must destroy...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. (286)

Mina is the only character to propose that Dracula, and vampirism as a whole, may not be entirely evil. Mina declares that there is some good even in vampires – their “poor soul[s]” may still have a chance at immortality, she declares, while Jonathan diminishes vampires as “Devils of the pit!” (52). She exhibits compassion and understanding, while the others are devoid of any sympathy. In this role, Mina subverts typical allusions applied to women and adopts a position of influence over the men. However, this position is also distinctly moral – as a Jesus figure, Mina teaches her companions how to act, emphasizing her position as their moral guide. Therefore while Mina’s dual role is subversive and unconventional, Stoker indicates that her traditional feminine role and her radical masculine role work together in a positive, even exemplary way.

Upon Dracula’s death, Stoker emphasizes the unique religious role Mina plays as one who emulates Jesus. Mina writes, “The sun was now right down upon the mountain top, and the red gleams fell upon my face, so that it was bathed in rosy light... With one impulse the men sank on their knees, and a deep and earnest ‘Amen’ broke from all” (Stoker 350). In this moment of salvation, the men are united in their religious victory. By uttering “Amen” at this moment in unison, the men identify their mission to defeat Dracula as a mission to perform God’s work. Yet when the men collectively kneel together, they indicate their reverence not only for God, but also for Mina. Stoker leaves the mechanics of this moment ambiguous – Mina’s positioning is not explicitly stated because she is the one narrating – but it can be ascertained that she stands as the men kneel before her, with the “rosy light” illuminating her face alone. Given Mina’s penchant for accuracy, she would write that the glow illuminated all of their faces if this were so. Instead, the glow that surrounds her implies her unique religious purity, and physically and spiritually

differentiates her from the men, who resemble Jesus's apostles. This parallel goes beyond typical portrayals of the Victorian woman as pure angels in the house and preservers of morality. In this radical and almost sacrilegious portrayal Mina almost seems a god, straying far from typical uses of Christian language to illustrate pure women. Stoker creates a radical woman among inferior men, but this bold, revolutionary figure is crafted from traditional iconography and language. Stoker therefore repeatedly allows Mina to break the mold of a typical Victorian woman, and he works the system, a system of religious language, allegories, and imagery, in order to do so.

This comparison that Stoker creates between Mina and Jesus continues even in the book's final lines, when Mina becomes a mother. Critics typically tend to read Mina's metamorphosis into motherhood as a restoration of traditional gender roles, now that the threat Dracula posed has been eliminated and the Angel in the House has survived untainted. However, it can also be read as an indication that Dracula's malevolence survives – Mina has drunk Dracula's blood, and so her child can be seen as Dracula's son. However, I read this scene differently – Mina does give birth to Dracula's son, but this does not imply that this child is vampiric. Throughout *Dracula*, Stoker has shown that having a combination of qualities – masculine and feminine, for example in Mina's case – can not only be positive but holy and salvific. Thus Mina's child, Quincey Jr., represents the peaceful remediation of all the novel's evils and even purifies Dracula's bloodline. Milbank identifies five “parents” through his bloodline;<sup>16</sup> I note seven, as Quincey Jr. also has the blood that Mina drank from Dracula, which Dracula drank from Lucy after her transfusions. He therefore has the blood of Mina, Jonathan, Dracula, Lucy, Arthur, Van Helsing, and Quincey Sr. in his veins. So while Dracula's lineage lives on in Mina's son, as Daly notes, it is Mina's brain and body that together successfully

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<sup>16</sup> Milbank 307

vanquishes Dracula and neutralizes the threat of vampirism.<sup>17</sup> We even learn that Stoker emphasizes the goodness that passes into Quincey Jr. and that Mina believes her child is untainted when Harker writes, “His mother holds, I know, the secret belief that some of our brave friend [Quincey’s] spirit has passed into him” (Stoker 351). It is significant, too, that Quincey intertwines the bloodlines of seven people. Seven used “symbolically, often [denotes] completion or perfection ([especially] in echoes of biblical phraseology),” again deterring any notion that Quincey’s birth is a threatening event (OED). Stoker therefore allows us to conclude that Mina’s childbearing has wiped this child clean of the sins of his villainous ancestor. Quincey Jr. may even be seen as a benevolent Christ figure, too, given Mina’s correlation to the Virgin Mary and the salvific implications of his birth. Therefore Mina’s maternal role is not submissive, despite her role as a loving mother and wife. Instead these roles in fact become as radical as her roles as an inheritor of the New Woman tradition and Stoker’s own version of a New Woman. Stoker portrays her body as a means for reproduction and the suppression of rampant male sexual desire, as well as a powerful tool she uses to survive and save humanity.

Mina therefore occupies this seemingly angelic, domestic role, but as Stoker emphasizes Mina’s religious qualities and her resemblance to the Angel in the House, this role becomes more and more radical. The religious allusions applied to her demonstrate her purity, but also allow her to subvert traditional gender norms. Yet Mina’s role as a narrator and compiler must still be considered to fully understand her character. As a domestic figure, Stoker allows Mina to defy expectations, but in a seemingly already radical role as a secretarial, industrious New Woman figure, Mina yet again defies expectations, proving surprisingly traditional.

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<sup>17</sup> “The celebration of the mother of the future generation dissimulates the text’s investment in producing an exclusively male (and disembodied) model of social reproduction. The female body becomes in fact the exemplary for the expertise of the team of men” (Daly 37).

#### IV: Mina as narrator and compiler

As a Gothic novelist, Stoker adheres to certain Gothic conventions, but as an Anglo-Irish author, influenced by the rapidly shifting social climate of fin-de-siècle England and the early stirrings of modernism, he uses these techniques unconventionally. While he employs a frame narrative, like Le Fanu, Stoker's is much more fragmented than a traditional Gothic frame narrative, in which one narration is nested neatly inside of another. *Dracula* is instead comprised of hundreds of letters and diary entries provided by multiple characters, recorded in forms ranging from handwritten to typewritten to audio recordings, as well as memorandums and invoices. Stoker includes ship logs, telegrams, and even fabricates newspaper clippings that we are to believe originated from real nineteenth-century London newspapers, such as the *Pall Mall Gazette*, that supposedly report on the events taking place in the novel.<sup>18</sup> Stoker creates a novel that is essentially an entire fictional history about Dracula's journey to London, all recorded through carefully curated documents. However, while Stoker is the author of the text, Mina Harker is one of the many narrators of the text and – we eventually learn – is its fictional editor and compiler. By granting Mina significant narrative authority and aligning her with the new league of professional women in nineteenth-century England, Stoker makes her appear to be a modern and radical New Woman figure.

Though the novel's first mention of Mina takes the domestic form of Jonathan procuring recipes for her, Mina's first appearance as a narrator, in a document written by her own hand, reveals her industrious and hard-working nature. Yet this first instance of writing – a letter to Lucy – is not without its own unique history. Lanser writes that the epistolary form of writing

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<sup>18</sup> “‘*The Pall Mall Gazette*, 18 September. The Escaped Wolf: Perilous Adventure of our Interviewer. *Interview with the Keeper in the Zoological Gardens*.” (Stoker 127)

was not, in the eighteenth century, necessarily a liberating means of giving voice to the female perspective, but instead confines the female voice to a realm of secrecy and silence:

The eighteenth-century attraction to epistolarity through which the reader becomes (privileged and permitted) voyeur may have as one of its agendas the restriction of oppositional voices to discourses privatized in both content and form and the simultaneous resexualization of the woman (and by implication the woman writer) as a secret to penetrate. (Lanser 33)

Therefore, while the epistolary narrative gave women a voice, these narratives still endorsed the objectification of women as secretive and mysterious – especially in letters between two female friends. As an epistle, Mina’s letter writing at first appears linked to this tradition in which female narrators emerged. By confining Mina and Lucy to the realms of letter writing, Stoker provides a dramatic, more sensational discourse between these two women, particularly as Lucy discusses her romantic endeavors. However, while Stoker may emulate this tradition through the letters they exchange, he departs from it in two crucial ways.

First, while Lucy discusses her suitors at length in these letters, as was typical of eighteenth-century epistolary female narrators,<sup>19</sup> Mina is excluded from this discussion as Jonathan’s loyal fiancée. Lucy writes to Mina, “We met some time ago a man that would just *do for you*, if you were not already engaged to Jonathan,” trying to include Mina into her amorous discussions (Stoker 54). Mina’s letters instead emphasize her work as an assistant schoolmistress and her attempts to learn shorthand – she writes one page to Lucy about her work, and Lucy replies with five pages about her love life, to which Mina never responds. She does not resemble the domestic angel or the female narrator of the eighteenth century, but instead connects herself as a writer to the New Woman, writing, “I shall try to do what I see lady journalists do” (53). Stoker therefore does not use this epistolary frame to confine Mina, but to align her with the

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<sup>19</sup> “...the heroine tells her personal, usually amorous history to a private, usually epistolary narrate.” (Lanser 26)

radical, vocal New Woman figure, whose professional aims mirror Mina's.<sup>20</sup> Second, Stoker applies this epistolary frame narrative to every narrator in the novel, regardless of his or her gender. There is no author whose text is prioritized, or deemed more authentic or relevant, and so Stoker allows each document to assume an equal level of importance, whether authored by a man or a woman. Vampires are deprived of any narrative power, but equal authority is granted to male and female narrators alike. Each narrator communicates through supposedly found documents, which Stoker seems to use to enhance the pseudo-factual nature of the story, rather than to voyeuristically peer into the lives of the characters. Therefore while Stoker calls to mind this epistolary tradition established in the eighteenth-century, he ignores tradition by creating a democratic epistolary frame narrative that reiterates the accuracy with which *all* of his narrators write, no matter their gender.

While Stoker first introduces Mina as a narrator through informal letters and journal entries, he emphasizes that she is accurate and authoritative, not gossipy and secretive. When she simply records an old sailor telling her myths to practice her shorthand, she writes, "I must try to remember [the conversation] and put it down," before recording a detailed, line-by-line, three-page account of the conversation, in which she even captures the sailor's unique accent (Stoker 63-66). Even though she treats her writing as a hobby at first, Mina is a detailed and forthcoming narrator. This is a departure from the conventional portrayal of women in Gothic novels – typically, they are deprived of a narrative voice, and if given one, as Le Fanu's Laura is, their authority is tenuous at best. Mina's accuracy, however, allows her to be seen as a credible, trustworthy narrator. As a whole, Stoker's collage-like narrative structure creates an intricate

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<sup>20</sup> "It was particularly in the 1890s...that educated "New Women" were charged with having become "unsexed" for seeking professional and public lives that put them in the hurly-burly of the masculinized marketplace." (Weber 548)

fictional world that is adamantly precise, both in the writing of these documents and in their organization. The typical Gothic ambiguity we see in Le Fanu's text is gone – instead, we know exactly what is happening, where, and when; at the beginning of each journal entry a date and location is provided. For example, Jonathan Harker begins the novel writing “3 May Bistritz – Left Munich at 8:35 pm on 1<sup>st</sup> May, arriving at Vienna early next morning; should have arrived at 6:46, but train was an hour late” (5). Just from these first lines, Stoker emphasizes the precision with which his characters write – male or female.

Yet Stoker goes even further than portraying Mina as an authoritative narrator when he reveals halfway through that the text she assembles is the very text we are reading – Mina's compilation *is* Stoker's *Dracula*. By delaying this revelation and only revealing it subtly, Stoker leaves the reader to assume that Stoker himself arranges the text, or some unknown editor – presumably, a male. Stoker seems to welcome the assumption that this narrator is male, as tradition has taught us to expect, but then subverts expectation by placing Mina in this authoritative, traditionally masculine role.<sup>21</sup> However Mina's authority is not diminished because she as a woman does not “[conform] to this dominant social power” (Lanser 6). Instead, Stoker's preface, composed by an unknown author, and perhaps Stoker himself, reads:

How these papers have been placed in sequence will be made clear in the reading of them. All needless matters have been eliminated, so that a history almost at variance with the possibilities of latter-day belief may stand forth as simple fact. There is throughout no statement of past events wherein memory may err... (Stoker 4)

The author of this note is unknown – perhaps one of his characters, or even Stoker himself, has written it. By leaving the author unidentified, Stoker again divorces narrative authority from

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<sup>21</sup> In Western literary systems for the past two centuries...discursive authority has, with varying degrees of intensity, attached itself most readily to white, educated men of hegemonic ideology. One major constituent of narrative authority, therefore, is the extent to which a narrator's status conforms to this dominant social power. (Lanser 6)

traditional gender identities, and uses this preface to vouch for Mina's authority as the compiler and editor. He therefore places the onus of understanding on the reader – if the reader is not able to understand the “sequence” of these papers “in the reading of them,” it is not any fault of Mina's. When the preface states that, “All needless matters have been eliminated,” it does not even present the possibility that Mina may have erred in her judgment, instead presenting this statement as an absolute. Stoker therefore creates not only a credible narrator of Mina, but also an authoritative and precise editor and compiler.

However, Stoker oddly refutes the authenticity of Mina's text in an addendum at the novel's close, but this can be read as a call to faith rather than a refutation of Mina's accuracy as a narrator and editor. A note from Jonathan Harker concludes,

We were struck with the fact, that in all the mass of material of which the record is composed, there is hardly one authentic document. Nothing but a mass of typewriting... We could hardly ask anyone, even did we wish to, to accept these proofs of so wild a story. (Stoker 351)

Deeming the text “a mass of typewriting” seems wildly inaccurate, considering the text's careful organization and the precise chronology it follows. In fact, this declaration only calls attention to Mina's keen editorial skills in compiling the novel; while these “proofs” are “of so wild a story,” these proofs have also been detailed and numerous. However, this declaration seems a test of the audience's faith. Throughout the novel, Van Helsing especially reiterates the need for faith relentlessly – the committee must have faith to believe in Dracula, to abandon their skepticism about his existence, and to vanquish him: “I want you to believe...in things that you cannot,” Van Helsing says (180). After making this declaration, Jonathan quotes Van Helsing, who exclaims, “We ask none to believe us!” reiterating that Stoker does not challenge Mina's accuracy, but simply wants his readers to have faith in this tale, and the greater battle of good and evil (351). Stoker therefore emphasizes that Mina's editorial role is united with her angelic role. While her

compilation asserts her connection to the New Woman, it also serves a higher religious aim, attesting to Dracula's defeat and our need for faith.

Mina's accuracy also becomes a way that Stoker encourages skeptical readers to develop faith in this supernatural world. Because Mina shares the reader's skepticism and enters this supernatural world cautiously, she earns the reader's trust. When Mina begins to describe Lucy's interactions with Dracula, she uses the verb "seem" and its variations nine times alone on page ninety-three. This repetition of "seems," occurring twenty-four times from page 86 to 93, illustrates that Mina's perceptions are shifting. She is trying to balance her skepticism with this newfound supernatural realm to discern the truth that lies in between, and so while the truth initially proves elusive, she uses the verb "to seem" to avoid inaccuracies. By acknowledging the limitations of her perspective in these pages, Mina reveals how fervently she is dedicated to producing a factual, credible narrative. In one instance as she looks up at Whitby Abbey, trying to find Lucy, she writes, "I was now close enough to distinguish [the white figure] even through the spells of shadow" (Stoker 86-87). Mina's language here works exactly the same way, as she tries to "distinguish" reality through the "shadows" – she writes about what "seems" to be, but is not yet sure what is there. She acknowledges her own limitations and provides as careful a description as she can of these events, focusing on her own perspective to avoid making guesses or unsupportable claims. Yet once Mina is sure of the existence of the supernatural, she ceases to rely on "seems." The reader, knowing that Mina is staunchly factual, is comforted by Mina's discomfort. Because Mina is skeptical we embrace and share in her distrust, but believe all the more once in the supernatural once she is convinced. Stoker crafts Mina as staunchly accurate to encourage his readers to overcome their skepticism, but in doing so Stoker creates an unconventionally authoritative female narrator.

Stoker therefore adopts these traditional Gothic types and the modern type of the New Woman, but modifies them for the purposes of his tale and to reflect shifting attitudes in the late nineteenth century. Mina's secretarial role illustrates her intellect and demonstrates that her brains outwit those of her male counterparts. Van Helsing, despite his extensive education, reveals that even he does not understand shorthand, demonstrating that Mina's fierce intellect is by no means average or expected.<sup>22</sup> However, this radical, professional and intellectual role never negates Mina's feminine, domestic qualities. Instead, these roles exist in harmony. Dr Seward writes, "After lunch Harker and his wife went back to their own room...Mrs Harker says that they are knitting together in chronological order every scrap of evidence they have" (Stoker 209). Mina is the one who first initiates the commencement of this compilation when she transcribes Jonathan's journal. Yet Mina does not work alone, instead partnering with her husband. She and Jonathan work together on this compilation, revealing that their marriage can coexist with Mina's independent, intellectual role. Furthermore, when Seward writes that she is "knitting" "evidence" together, he speaks to both her domestic and radical roles. Stoker unites Mina's unconventional intellect with connotations of her more traditional qualities, carefully reminding us that while Mina resembles the New Woman in her secretarial role, she does not completely conform to the typical portrayal of a New Woman.

### **V. The Recording Angel**

As both a traditional Angel in the House and a modern New Woman figure, Mina unites these dueling roles in her text to create a document testifying to the existence and destruction of evil. When all these allusions coalesce, I suggest that Stoker allows Mina's text, as a radical document with a specifically moral aim, to resemble the Bible. Critics may have read Mina as a traditional figure because it is Stoker who uses her ultimately amalgamated, modern portrayal to

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<sup>22</sup> "Alas! I know not the shorthand." (Stoker 171)

further his text's religious message.

Stoker shapes Mina's text to structurally resemble the Bible. She compiles an accurate, detailed, and chronological view of the events that took place on the committee's quest to defeat Dracula, just as the apostles did. For example, one passage from the Book of Jeremiah reads,

In the fifth month of that same year, the fourth year, early in the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, the prophet Hananiah son of Azzur, who was from Gibeon, said to me in the house of the LORD... (NIV "Jer 28:1-2")

This passage provides a time stamp – the “fifth month of...the fourth year,” – and is intensely detailed. We know where the speech is made and who makes it, what the lineage of this man is and where he is from, whom he speaks to, and what the statement is. Mina adheres to this extreme level of detail, precisely quoting her comrades and always attempting to provide as much information as she can about every piece of evidence she includes. She also incorporates multiple different viewpoints to do so, just as the Bible does, in order to present the most holistic and all-encompassing view of the events that she can. Just as the apostles recorded testimonies of Jesus's works, Mina records testimonies of Dracula's existence and the havoc he wreaked on London. Formally and factually, Stoker therefore has Mina's text mirror the Bible, although it is born out of her industrious, independent role. While the Bible describes the battle between good and evil and Jesus' victory over the malevolent forces of the world, Mina's text also attests to the victory of good over evil – the committee's defeat of Dracula. Although the victory of Stoker's committee takes place on a smaller scale than the biblical victory of good over evil, both works describe such victories and urge their readers to model moral behavior and in turn engage in this battle between good and evil in their own lives.

Stoker emphasizes the salvific role of Mina's text when multiple characters comment that her documents, were they compiled earlier, might have saved Lucy's life. As Mina begins to compile the sources that form the final text, three separate comments are made that indicate that

this text may have been able to prevent Lucy's death. First Dr Seward writes in his diary, "Oh, if only we had [the bundle of letters relating to the purchase of [Dracula's] house] earlier we might have saved poor Lucy! Stop; that way madness lies!" (Stoker 209-210). While Seward avoids drawing such conclusions, presumably because he realizes that these insights would only inspire negative emotions, his very mention indicates that such a conclusion is tenuously probable.

Later, when Van Helsing learns of the letters regarding the purchase Dracula's estate, he exclaims, "O that we had known it before! ...for then we might have reached him in time to save poor Lucy." (219). He then returns to the same conclusion on the next page, stating, "Had I known at the first what now I know...one so precious life had been spared to many of us who did love her. But that is gone; and we must so work that other poor souls perish not, whilst we can save" (220). Mina's text serves this salvific role – the compilation of evidence that she provides not only attests to the committee's good works after Dracula is defeated, but also serves a more practical role in the timeframe of the novel. Yet although Van Helsing laments that Lucy's death may have been prevented, he also emphasizes the moral aims of the committee – to "so work that other poor souls perish not." Mina's text retroactively could have served this salvific role, preventing Lucy's death, but Van Helsing herein emphasizes that this text will now contemporaneously allow them to fight the forces of evil that Dracula embodies. Stoker therefore illustrates that Mina's text not only has this salvific potential, but also exerts a powerful moral influence over the committee's actions during the events of the novel and thereafter. Thus this text intertwines Mina's two clashing roles: its physical construction attests to Mina's radical industrious role, while its content attests to her moral, religious role.

Throughout *Dracula*, the two things Mina produces – her book and her baby – indicate her dichotomous radical and traditional roles, but both ultimately indicate Mina's salvific, moral nature. Mina's child represents her maternal, domestic role, while her novel symbolizes her

industrious, professional aspirations. However, Mina's text also assumes angelic qualities, and the construction of her text mirrors the birth of her child. Quincey Jr. has the blood of seven people – but while Dracula's blood runs in Quincey's veins, Mina's text does not contain Dracula's writing, and instead includes Van Helsing's. Mina's text then contains the ink of the novel's seven prime narrators – Mina, Jonathan, Van Helsing, Dr Seward, Arthur Holmwood, Lucy Westenra, and Quincey P. Morris. Therefore just as Mina's child serves as the peaceful and holy remediation of Dracula's malevolence, so does her text. The text allows its own characters the necessary evidence to vanquish Dracula, but also serves the modern reader as an inspiring tale of good versus evil. The text functions like the bible, proving both historically and contemporarily relevant, and mirroring Mina's unique character, proving both radical in its assembly and morally righteous in its content and influence.

Stoker, while certainly working with subtle allusions, almost seems to imply that Mina's text can serve as her mirror. After Van Helsing has read Mina's diary, she tells him, "doctor, you praise me too much, and—you do not know me" (Stoker 171). Van Helsing replies,

I have read your diary that you have so goodly written for me, and which breathes out truth in every line. I, who have read your so sweet letter to poor Lucy of your marriage and your trust, not know you! Oh, Madam Mina, good women tell all their lives, and...such things that angels can read; and we men who wish to know have in us something of angel's eyes. (172)

Van Helsing herein states that Mina's writing is a way to understand her character. He personifies her diary, writing that it "breathes out truth," just as he believes she does in reality. By noting that her diary is breathing, Mina's diary becomes a living entity – an extension of her own being. This text almost comes alive, and Van Helsing states that he learns just as much from her text as he would from a discussion with Mina. Stoker herein sets the precedent that one's text is correlated to one's identity, alluding perhaps not only to Mina and her shorthand diary, but to

the tie between Mina and the entire text she compiles.

Stoker unites Mina's religious, domestic role with her radical role, and mirrors this union in the text she compiles. As Jonathan hears Mina stating that she must travel to Transylvania to help ensure Dracula's defeat, he writes in his journal, "if there be indeed a Recording Angel [the look Mina gives to Jonathan] is noted to her everlasting honour" (Stoker 303). Jonathan herein identifies Mina as one who honors the tradition of the Recording Angel – a Judaic, Islamic, and Christian tradition in which angels transcribed and copied down events, producing histories of religious events. Jonathan notes Mina as one who would please such an angel, indicating that she is an inheritor of this tradition. Furthermore, his statement that Mina's glance "is noted to *her* everlasting honor" – the honor of the Recording Angel – also invites Mina into this tradition all the more as a woman because Jonathan identifies this angel as female. Stoker therefore identifies Mina as, if not a Recording Angel herself, the inheritor of this tradition. Stoker portrays her as a moral and righteous woman, both due to her traditional, religious role, but also due to her skills in documenting and compiling that ensure Dracula's defeat.

Stoker uniquely responds to the tensions regarding the shifting gender norms of nineteenth century Britain. Stoker seems to hypothesize through Mina's portrayal that a peaceful remediation can be found between the New Woman and the Angel in the House. Stoker admittedly refuses to incorporate female sexuality into this remediation – the female vampires are completely vilified, and Mina's sexuality is largely ignored. She is married to Jonathan, but the sexual nature of their relationship is never discussed. But nevertheless, although Stoker still vilifies female sexuality and ignores this aspect of Mina's character, Mina's portrayal and her text together indicate that Stoker at least does not view the rise of professionalism and greater independence for woman negatively. Furthermore, Mina's industriousness is not at all an apocalyptic indication of Great Britain's impending moral decay, although some feared the

movement of women into the workplace signified such an event. Instead, Stoker acknowledges the benefits of female industriousness. While Mina is an incredibly idealized figure and the committee's victory comes at great cost, he still indicates that this industriousness may not be entirely incompatible with a more traditional, angelic view of femininity.

### Chapter III: The Silent Narrator: Mina on Screen

#### I. Introduction

In one scene of F.W. Murnau's 1922 film *Nosferatu*, one of the first adaptations of *Dracula*, Murnau's reincarnation of Mina Harker, Nina, sits on the shore pining after her husband, Hutter, who is travelling in Transylvania. She receives a letter from him that reads: "Do not be troubled that your beloved is far away! The mosquitos are a terrible nuisance. Two just bit me on the neck, side by side, quite close together...One dreams deeply in this desolate castle, but don't let that frighten you." Nina, however, is frightened. She snatches the letter from her friend to read it again, looks worriedly out to sea, and clutches the letter to her chest before she literally runs away, leaving behind her now-bewildered, carefree friends who view her reaction as hyperbolic and extreme. At this point, however, we, the viewers, have already been introduced to Orlok, the vampire responsible for the "mosquito bites" that plague Hutter, and so we know her fear is warranted. Murnau uses his lens to mimic Nina's perspective, preserving the complexity of the original Mina Harker as far as possible and giving her a voice, even while she is inaudible. Although Nina is not a narrator, Murnau highlights her perspective through the frame narrative he employs, the sympathetic camera angles he creates, and the almost supernatural intuition he grants to Nina.

Film was simultaneously emerging as a medium as *Dracula* circulated in print throughout the late 1890s. *Dracula* quickly became a popular source of inspiration for the new medium, and *Dracula* has been brought back from the dead and onto the silver screen over 200 times (IMDB). Although *Dracula* may have also inspired a now lost Hungarian silent film, *Drakula halála*, released in 1921, F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu*, released in 1922, is the first confirmed film adaptation still in existence today (IMDB). *Nosferatu* is a silent film that stays fairly true to Stoker's original text – particularly, in its recreation of the complexity of Nina. Many notable adaptations have

followed, such as Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931), Terence Fisher's *Horror of Dracula* (1958), and Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1997). In general, their plots are simplified, they feature fewer characters, and significantly, the female character – Mina Harker's ancestors in film – is so changed that she resembles Lucy, Mina Harker's best friend, who succumbs to Dracula's advances. In one particularly telling scene of Browning's 1931 adaptation, Dracula, portrayed by the handsome Bela Lugosi, hypnotizes the beautiful Mina, who stands statuesque and adorned in a flowing gown. He walks behind Mina as they descend in unison down a long staircase, her arms held up to indicate that she is completely under his control. Throughout the film she perfectly plays the damsel in distress, heeding Dracula's commands until the men come to her rescue. Critic Carol Senf comments on the simplification of Mina Harker in film in an article discussing the vampire films released from the 1930s to the 1970s; she notes, "the passive female victim becomes a veritable staple of the vampire film" ("Brides of Dracula" 67-68). Vampire films from the 1930s onward typically portray women, in varying degrees, as damsels in distress. These women succumb to Dracula's hypnotism and heed his wishes until their suitors, fiancées, or husbands heroically save them. Senf, however, overlooks *Nosferatu*, only acknowledging it as "the first cinematic interpretation" (67). She theorizes that the films produced during this period are based not on the novel itself, but on Hamilton Deane's melodramatic 1924 stage adaptation of the novel.<sup>23</sup> Since *Nosferatu* was released before Deane's play was staged, it is free of the play's influence and therefore warrants greater consideration.

*Nosferatu* at first appears to be at a disadvantage in adapting such a narratively complex novel as *Dracula*, even though it is praised today as a landmark silent film and horror film.

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<sup>23</sup> Senf writes, "Based on Hamilton Deane's highly successful play, which was influenced by the conventions of melodrama, instead of on Stoker's novel, Browning's film treats women as little more than passive victims." ("Brides of Dracula" 67)

Every film adaptation of *Dracula*, with or without sound, faces the challenge of adapting Stoker's intricate frame narrative. Typically, the film director pieces together these fragmented epistles into one cohesive narrative. However, *Nosferatu* encounters the particular challenge that, while *Dracula* features numerous narrators, Murnau's characters are not even audible. This challenge was not unique to *Dracula*. As McFarland notes, literary adaptations became more popular in the late 1920s because, "the introduction of sound in 1927 allow[ed] movies to more fully recreate literary and theatrical dialogue, character psychology, and plot complexity" (Cartmell 35). Thus Murnau's task appears nearly impossible. However, in this chapter I argue that Murnau better adapts the complexity of Stoker's original novel than his successors – that he creates a complex narrative structure, juxtaposing multiple perspectives, and even affirms Mina's viewpoint within this structure, even though she has no audible voice. Murnau presents *Nosferatu* as an amalgamation of theater, literature, and music, and thus preserves both the narrative complexity of Stoker's original and Mina's unique, insightful perspective. Although Nina physically appears in the film as a pure, domestic wife, she is the only one to recognize the threat Orlok poses. However, her warnings go unheeded. Murnau emphasizes Nina's insightful perspective to criticize this society for its dismissal of female perspectives, and to illustrate that such rigid, gendered types are no longer viable in the modern age.

In the end of the chapter, I discuss Herzog's 1979 adaptation – not of *Dracula*, but of *Nosferatu*. Herzog drastically simplifies Murnau's film, removing the frame narrative. Instead, he presents his footage without commentary or explanation, allowing the omniscient lens of the camera to become the sole perspective offered. Yet Murnau uses this omniscient perspective not to refute Nina's own, but to focus on Nina and to demonstrate the validity of her perspective. As we saw on the beach, her reactions may seem hyperbolic to her companions, but the camera affirms to the viewer that Nina is justified because the audience already knows that the threat of

vampirism is real, due to the footage the omniscient lens has shown us of Hutter's interactions with Orlok. These films take different approaches to the unique challenge of adapting fiction, and particularly the challenges of adapting vampire fiction with its historically complex narrative structures. At times, these directors even use perspective shots, in which the camera literally adopts Nina's perspective, so that the viewer can see what she sees, attesting to the value of her perspective and allying her with the viewer. The audience, endowed with Nina's insights, begins to see her male counterparts as blind to obvious realities, and observes them disregard Nina's perspective as a hysterical woman. Murnau contrasts Nina with these figures to reiterate her own acuity all the more, and to criticize her townspeople for adhering to simplistic views of women, and particularly, female intellect.

## **II. Murnau's *Nosferatu***

Murnau, a famous German expressionist director, not only simplified the plot of *Dracula* due to the constraints of this new medium, but also intentionally made changes because this adaptation was unauthorized. He attempted to alter the film significantly enough to avoid infringing on the novel's copyright, held by Stoker's widow Florence. However, Florence still fought – and won – a lawsuit against Murnau. Although Murnau's film company Prana Films went bankrupt to avoid compensating Florence and the film was banned for a time, *Nosferatu* survived this fiasco and today remains one of the most famous silent films ever released. While Florence attempted to gain authority over the narrative and receive the money she was owed, she was ultimately unsuccessful; the real-life battle to retain control of the narrative ironically mirrors Mina's more successful manipulation of her male colleagues for control over the narrative.

*Nosferatu* is simplified from Stoker's original novel, but Murnau preserves Mina's complexity. There are fewer characters, and the ones that Murnau kept adopt different names and

become even more archetypal – Harker becomes Hutter, a young naïve German man; Mina becomes Nina, Hutter’s beautiful, anxious wife; and Count Dracula becomes Count Orlok. The plot is also simplified: after encountering Orlok in Transylvania, Hutter rushes home to save Nina. However, Nina learns that Orlok’s defeat can only be secured through her the sacrifice of her blood, and she gives her life to vanquish this monster. No committee ever forms, and Nina must face Orlok alone as the sole person able to recognize that Wisborg is facing a true vampire, not a plague. The individual changes that Murnau makes even to the plot still emphasize Nina’s complexity: the men appear much less powerful as Nina emerges as the heroine.

Murnau emerged as a director in Germany in 1919 – a time when women’s roles were shifting throughout Europe in the wake of World War I. Yet while women did migrate into the work force during World War I, the perceived economic impact of this migration was exaggerated; although Bridenthal notes that in fact “women were not displacing men,” they were blamed for this economic downturn (Bridenthal 158), and inspired some to reassert the need for women to play a more traditional, private social role. However, Schmid notes that the newfound economic influence of women in the Weimar Republic still allowed them to gain some semblance of independence (including suffrage) – a previously foreign notion when women were expected to move from their familial home to their husband’s home.<sup>24</sup> Thus the tensions facing the Weimar Republic, when Murnau emerged as a film director, were similar to the tensions that existed in England in the late 1800s that inspired both *Carmilla* and *Dracula*. Just as in nineteenth-century Britain, women of the Weimar Republic were supposed to be “guardians of morality” (Myers 57): as Dowling notes, there existed in England, “the deeply held Victorian

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<sup>24</sup> “The significance of this period of life in Berlin was that the intermediary stage of personal independence between adolescence and marriage and motherhood became socially acceptable in Weimar society.” (Schmid 8)

conviction that woman was the inspiration and guardian of civilization,” and this principle seems to have permeated German society, and to have been shifting in this period, as well (Dowling 440). Situated amidst societal change, Murnau, like Stoker, was in a position to portray complex and conflicted views of femininity through a popular medium.

Murnau released *Nosferatu* as the end of the silent film era approached in the mid to late 1920s, but he recreates an image of an earlier moral time in his film, which is set at the very beginning of the Victorian era in 1838. Women were diversely portrayed in silent films, but Haskell concludes, “for the most part, Victorian values prevailed” (Haskell 45). Since silent films do not have the auditory tools necessary to create complex dialogue or intricate characters, they often rely on allegorical characters who fulfill more linear, easily defined roles – Orlok is the foreign monster, Hutter is the disbelieving husband, and Nina is the devoted, selfless wife. However, Murnau does not show nostalgia for the Victorian period; instead, he creates these allegorical characters and a homogeneous society to subvert these norms. He portrays these characters as archetypes, but makes the limitations of such figures obvious – as Nina grows more complex, her comrades are unable to escape their simplicity and naiveté, and it leads to Nina’s death. Murnau places Nina in a community comprised of simple, archetypal figures, illustrating their ignorance by emphasizing her complex, insightful, and unique perspective.

### **III. Murnau’s narrative structure**

Murnau draws on multiple mediums in the presentation of *Nosferatu*, and this unique interweaving of mediums creates a frame narrative that allows Murnau to incorporate multiple perspectives into his film. The work is a silent film, but the film’s full title is *Nosferatu: Eine Symphonie des Grauens*, meaning “A Symphony of Terrors,” and features an orchestral score composed by Hans Erdmann. The film is also divided into five acts, like a play, and emulates a storybook, hinting at the literary tradition of vampire fiction. This introduction to the film,

relying on pre-existing forms of artistic expression and particularly linking the film to its literary ancestry, also allows Murnau to build a more complex frame narrative. We expect a different narrative structure from each medium; a play emphasizes the actions and dialogue of its characters; a symphony encourages us to focus on the musical score; a story relies on a narrator to tell it. Yet just as Stoker presents multiple narratives without a visible hierarchy to guide us through them, Murnau does not prioritize a certain medium or its correlating narrator. Instead, all of these mediums, these narrative sources – the characters, the score, and the narrator – appear equally important. This unique juxtaposition of mediums allows each narrative – and our expectations of its form – to challenge the other. The literary narrator Murnau introduces at first seems the most reliable choice as he provides us with authoritative information about the events on screen. However, as Murnau begins to juxtapose the literary narrator – the frame narrator who comments on the events as they take place – with his footage, this literary narrator proves less and less reliable and knowledgeable. Instead Murnau emphasizes the unobstructed, omniscient, and ultimately more reliable perspective of the camera, which provides us footage in which we can see what the narrator cannot.

Like other films in the era before sound, Murnau relies on intertitles – frames of text that were inserted into silent films to provide more context – to give life to his frame narrator (OED). Murnau employs both dialogue intertitles, frames of text that illustrate what his characters have said, as well as expository intertitles – frames that may recreate book pages, documents, ship logs, and so on.<sup>25</sup> But Murnau specifically uses these expository intertitles, which read like the first pages of a novel, as a kind of reinvention of the Gothic frame narrative, from which Murnau's unidentified narrator introduces the story and then intermittently reappears throughout the film to comment on or explain the events that took place. This frame narrator is also a

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<sup>25</sup> Chisholm 137

character, though. Murnau writes these intertitles as if from the first-person perspective of one who has grown up in Wisborg some time after Orlok's invasion in 1838, presumably in the 1920s when the film was released. This narrator has often heard stories of this invasion from the townspeople, even from Hutter himself, and so relates to us a compilation of the oral narratives he has accrued growing up in Wisborg – he begins his tale with an intertitle that reads, “An Account of the Great Death in Wisborg: anno Domini 1838.” This page appears almost as the cover of a novel would, with an intricate font and three crosses appearing under “1838.” These intertitles physically look like book pages, and as in a novel, the narrator interrupts to provide crucial information about the plot. However, it is unclear at first whether the footage in between these intertitles is intended to equally represent the narrator's retelling of the events that took place, or, if the scenes are told from an omniscient perspective, belonging to no one.

However, Murnau gradually reveals that his narrator is unreliable and contradictory. In one later scene, before Nina peruses the Book of the Vampires that Hutter brought back from Transylvania, the narrator prefaces the scene in an intertitle that reads, “Hutter had made Nina promise not to touch the book which had caused him to have such frightening visions. But she found its strange force irresistible.” However, when Hutter first finds the book earlier, it is not the source of his frightening visions. Instead, the narrator writes, “As soon as Hutter crossed the bridge, he was seized by the eerie visions he so often told me of...” Hutter misattributes these visions to the book, when it seems obvious that his visions arise because he enters Orlok's territory. However, it is unclear whether the narrator realizes Hutter's mistake – he summarizes Hutter's dialogue and so repeats the inaccurate claims he makes. Perhaps the narrator simply intends to explain Hutter's reasoning, but it is also possible that the narrator has been equally misled by his discussions with Hutter and is just as unreliable. The viewer, however, knows from the footage we see that Hutter's visions arise due to his proximity to Orlok – after he crosses the

bridge and enters Orlok's territory, Hutter begins to encounter the supernatural, literally and visually. Images blur in and out of focus, the colors of images are inverted and appear all the more eerie, and Murnau employs jump cuts as Orlok's carriage moves, making it appear that the carriage is moving supernaturally quickly. However, Hutter is often blind to these realities that we see so clearly – a blindness that the narrator may share. After showing us that this book is not in fact the source of these visions through the film techniques he employs, Murnau illustrates the narrator's unreliability because he may adopt Hutter's misguided perceptions in these intertitles.

The ambiguity of these intertitles also reveals that Murnau's footage is divorced from the narrator's limited, first person perspective, and is instead taken from an omniscient perspective that is more reliable, allowing the viewer to trust this footage. When Nina falls under Orlok's spell, experiencing a "strange [irresistible force]" such as Hutter and the narrator attribute to the book, she appears to sleepwalk – her arms are outstretched, and she stands on the balls of her feet as she walks outside in a white nightgown. However, in the instance in which she reads this text and is supposedly transfixed, she is seated, alert, and wears a dark dress. Therefore the narrator still appears biased towards Hutter's perspective since he states that it is the text she finds irresistible when we know this may not be the case – he does not account for details, and instead appears to rely on Hutter's skewed oral history of the events. Thus this narrator reveals that he is not a reliable narrator, but instead seems a member of the community of disbelievers who refuse to heed Nina's warnings of Orlok's arrival. The narrator's multiple references to Orlok's arrival as a "plague" also evokes the disbelief of the townspeople – they believe their troubles are due to a plague, as they are unaware of the vampire's influence. By titling this text "An Account of the Great Death in Wisborg, anno domini 1838" and by making repeated comparisons between the arrival of Orlok and the arrival of the plague – "It spread like a scourge through the ship. The first sailor that was infected pulled the whole crew down into a dark, watery grave" – the viewer

cannot help but wonder if the narrator truly realizes that “Nosferatu” refers not to a disease, but a vampire. Furthermore, by sequestering this narrator to these intertitles, Murnau also physically separates his perspective from the omniscient perspective of the footage. Murnau’s frame narrator therefore does not shed light on the events that took place, but instead suggests that the ignorance of those residing in Wisborg in fact never dissipates, and reaches presumably even to the present day as the narrator recalls the events.

#### **IV. Nina’s supernatural and insightful perspective**

In contrast to the unreliable narrator of the intertitles, the footage of the camera offers a fluid, omniscient perspective, portraying events with great detail that could not be wholly known by any living person. The narrator himself hints at the existence of this omniscient perspective when he writes, “Here is its story” as he introduces the footage of this “Account of the Great Death in Wisborg,” which does not belong to the frame narrator, or to any one member of the town, but represents the accumulated perspectives of the events as they take place. However, Murnau quickly begins to pay special attention to Nina’s perspective, complicating her role to preserve the depth of Stoker’s original character. At first Nina appears simplified: a seemingly conventional nineteenth-century wife who wears frilly gowns with her hair curled into ringlets; her musical theme is bright and innocent, played on a flute. Like Laura, she is rarely unaccompanied and only leaves the safety of home to sit and look out to sea, anxiously awaiting her husband’s return. Yet Murnau emphasizes Nina’s unique acuity through the film techniques he employs. He reveals that she is the only clear-sighted citizen of Wisborg, especially when he contrasts Nina with her male counterparts, and gives her an almost supernatural level of intuition about Orlok.

Though Murnau uses the camera’s omniscient lens to emphasize Hutter’s idealistic perspective at the film’s beginning, he quickly orients the audience – who know they are to

watch “a symphony of horror” – towards Nina’s darker, pessimistic perspective. When we first see Nina, Murnau uses sympathetic camera angles, allowing the camera to precisely adopt Hutter’s perspective in looking out his window and peering down at her. This clever shot introduces Nina to us as a romantic, maternal figure from the very beginning, because Murnau aligns our perspective with Hutter’s and he observes her with joy. As delicate flute music plays, she stands by the window, holding a kitten, symmetrically framed by a windowpane. The flowers that grow in the window box surround her, and even as she moves into her home, she is surrounded by paintings of flowers that rest on floral wallpaper. By framing Nina as he does, as if she were sitting for a portrait, Murnau uses his background as an art historian to reiterate Hutter’s view of Nina – she is a loving, angelic wife, and he loves her immensely. However, Hutter’s ideal image is clearly exaggerated, and as we know this comprises the beginning of a horror film, his perspective seems doomed to crumble by the film’s close. When Hutter cuts flowers for Nina, beaming with joy, Murnau foreshadows this impending darkness that Nina foresees. She cradles the flowers and gently strokes their blossoms, asking Hutter, “Why did you kill them... such beautiful flowers...?!” With this exaggerated, seemingly unnecessary concern that Nina expresses, Murnau foretells the darkness that is coming, as well as Nina’s almost supernatural ability to anticipate and recognize evil that will soon allow her to save Wisborg.

When Hutter travels to Transylvania and Nina awakens, sensing that Hutter is in danger, Murnau uses crosscutting to contrast Hutter’s inability to recognize danger with Nina’s own supernatural insight. As Orlok approaches Hutter in Transylvania, Hutter closes his eyes and hides in his bed – an action remarkably similar to that taken by Laura in *Carmilla*. Murnau therefore imbues Hutter with a stereotypically feminine fear of confronting a dark reality. Nina, however, miles away in Wisborg, senses what she is physically incapable of seeing and adopts a more masculine role as she must come to her husband’s defense – she cries out to him and urges

him to act. Murnau here uses crosscutting, moving between these two different and seemingly unrelated scenes and intertwining them. This technique, also known as intercutting, allows the audience to realize that these scenes are happening simultaneously. Nina appears on the right side of the frame and reaches her arms out to the left. Orlok, attacking Hutter on the left side of the following frame, seems to intercept her cry – he turns to the right, looking back towards where Nina was in the previous frame, as if he can sense her presence. In this pivotal scene, Murnau complicates Nina's portrayal by swapping traditional gender roles – Nina realizes Hutter is in danger and tries to aid him, while Hutter cowers in fear. Murnau also reveals the depth of Nina's insight. As Nina awakes from this attack her puzzled companions surround her – they do not know that Hutter is truly in danger. The audience, however, does not share their bewilderment because Murnau's sequence in this scene affirms that Nina's fears are warranted and that she indeed has unique insight.

Murnau strongly emphasizes Nina's clear-sightedness when she tries to tell Hutter that Orlok haunts her. She points out her bedroom window to where Orlok stands, in his home staring ominously at them as eerie music plays. Murnau first shows us Nina's perspective, using a point of view shot to show us exactly what she sees. He also focuses in on Orlok through the use of an iris shot – a dark vignette that narrows around the frame. Murnau frequently uses iris shots, at times to punctuate a moment, and at other times to accentuate certain perspectives, as he does here. The iris shot narrows in on Orlok, reiterating that Nina clearly sees him watching her from the third story of his home. "This is what I look at – every night!" she exclaims, reiterating that the image we have seen demonstrates her perspective. However, even though Nina points out Orlok and the audience sees him clearly, Hutter cannot. As Hutter peers out the window, the building that we just saw perfectly from Nina's perspective now appears dark and out of focus, and the lattice on Hutter's window precisely covers the third story windows. He walks closer and

presumably can then see Orlok without the lattice obstructing his view, but Hutter never sees such a clear image of Orlok as Nina saw. Hutter looks out the window again after Nina has left and backs away, assuming a much more stereotypically feminine reaction, collapsing in fear on his bed. However, Murnau still leaves what Hutter sees ambiguous – his reaction implies that he sees Orlok, but we do not see what he sees, leaving such a conclusion indefinite. Murnau again lends credibility to Nina’s perspective by allowing the camera to mimic her perspective.

Erdman’s sinister music heightens the tension in the scene and confirms that Nina is not imagining Orlok, but that something ominous truly waits for her – eerie, dissonant chords are heard, and eerie melodies are played on a clarinet or bassoon. Because Murnau highlights Nina’s perspective through the use of these overlapped point of view and iris shots, Nina appears more clear-sighted than her husband and allows Murnau to invert and challenge Victorian gender roles even as he recreates them in her character.

Yet while Nina’s death indicates her innocence, Murnau also emphasizes the supernatural aspect of Nina’s complex character in her death, and seems to borrow directly from Stoker’s novel to do so. At the film’s close, Nina enralls Orlok, allowing him to drink her blood until the sun rises and he disintegrates – drained of blood, she dies a martyr. Nina’s death reiterates her purity, because the *Book of the Vampires* writes that only “an innocent maiden” can kill a vampire. Her death again subverts traditional gender roles – she sends Hutter away to fetch Doctor Sievers, facing Orlok heroically alone. But the circumstances surrounding Nina’s death also reveal more about her supernatural role. In *Dracula* when Van Helsing encounters Dracula’s vampire brides, he muses:

I doubt not that...many a man who [tried kill these vampires] found at the last his heart fail him, and then his nerve. So he delay...till the mere beauty and the fascination of the wanton Un-Dead have hypnotize him...till sunset come, and the Vampire sleep be over. Then the beautiful eyes of the fair woman open and look love, and the voluptuous mouth

present to a kiss—and man is weak. And there remain one more victim in the Vampire fold. (Stoker 343)

In adapting this specific scene *Dracula* in the finale of *Nosferatu*, Murnau interestingly shifts this hypnotic power from the female vampires to Nina, a human woman. Just as Van Helsing imagines these females may seduce a man to his death, hypnotizing him until sunset, Nina seduces Orlok to his own death. Given this description, Nina begins to possess an almost vampire-like level of power – she is the “fair woman” who weakens Orlok, keeping him captivated until the sun rises. Through this inversion, Murnau portrays Nina as a much more elaborate woman than we initially expect from her angelic introduction. He creates archetypal Victorian characters, as Stoker and Le Fanu do, and similarly questions the modernity of such rigid types, both socially and artistically. Like Stoker, Murnau instead celebrates straying from rigid types.

#### **V. Herzog’s *Nosferatu the Vampyre***

While Murnau adapted Stoker, *Nosferatu the Vampyre*, directed by Werner Herzog and released in 1979, is a careful remake of Murnau’s *Nosferatu*. Herzog’s plot and often the exact images he creates directly pull from Murnau’s original, but for a few significant details. Herzog paints a much more sympathetic view of Orlok, here renamed Dracula, and the film also ends in the death of Nina, now deemed Lucy. Hutter – now Jonathan – survives the attack, but instead becomes a vampire, taking Dracula’s place. Lucy’s sacrifice is less effective because vampirism is not entirely eradicated by the film’s close and Herzog’s choice of name seems to ally her with Stoker’s Lucy, who appears much more of a damsel in distress than Mina. However, Herzog still accentuates Lucy’s acuity and complexity, and does so even more dramatically than Murnau. Herzog adopts a much more simple narrative style and employs even more dramatic techniques to emphasize how Lucy foresees Count Dracula’s arrival and attempts to rally her community

against him. Mimicking Murnau, Herzog also uses certain camera angles to focus on Lucy's perspective, and emphasizes her powerful insight through his use of dreams, music, and religious imagery. Yet Herzog here also takes a significant departure from Murnau's original – whereas Murnau's Nina acts alone, Lucy actively seeks help, emulating Van Helsing and therefore adopting a masculine role. It is because Lucy's pleas for help go unanswered that Lucy dies and Dracula lives on in Jonathan Harker. The power to defeat the forces of evil – Dracula, in this instance – relies on one's ability to recognize evil, and only Lucy can see reality clearly in *Nosferatu the Vampyre*. Like Murnau, Herzog employs various film techniques to highlight Lucy's perspective, but unlike Murnau, he more radically challenges gender norms by likening Mina to Van Helsing, offering a much harsher criticism of society's distrust and dismissal of the female perspective.

By simplifying Murnau's narrative structure, Herzog allows the viewer to ally more closely with Lucy's perspective from the very beginning of the film. Since the introduction of sound into film allows Herzog to remove Murnau's frame narrator, the events we witness become more immediate and unmediated. Rather than relying on intertitles or music to convey meaning, Herzog now relies on the perspectives and dialogue of his characters, as well as various film techniques, to highlight Lucy's perspective. Without Murnau's narrator, the viewer immediately feels a closer connection to Lucy because our access to her is not directly mediated by anyone – no one can tell us how to interpret the omniscient footage we see, or bias us to certain conclusions. Additionally, Murnau encourages a sense of antiquity in *Nosferatu*, creating a frame narrative from which we view Nina's tale as archaic and mysterious, written in old-fashioned fonts and told from a perspective with immense hindsight. Herzog instead pulls us directly into Lucy's time period – presumably the 1840s as in Murnau's original, though it is never explicitly stated. The viewer therefore does not view the film as archaic, but instead is

pulled directly into Lucy's world from the very first scenes. With these slight changes to the narrative structure, Herzog allows us to see Lucy's perspective more clearly and to ally with her.

While Lucy still appears the idyllic wife, Herzog enhances the insight Murnau offered us into her unique perspective through the montage he uses to introduce the film. This montage of skulls, corpses, and other sinister footage, accompanied by dark, ominous music, at first seems merely a disturbing introduction to a horror film. However, Herzog reveals that we have in fact seen Lucy's dream from the first-person perspective. We therefore unknowingly adopt Lucy's perspective from the very beginning of the film, and simultaneously see exactly what she sees. While Jonathan dismisses her concerns as a mere dream, we know that she has reason to be afraid and therefore ally with her even from the first scene of the film because we have been experiencing this disturbing nightmare along with her. Herzog therefore creates closeness between Lucy and the viewer from the very beginning of *Nosferatu the Vampyre*. By uniting the audience's perspective with Lucy's, Herzog reiterates her acuity and frustrates the audience when Lucy's community refuses to face reality. Herzog herein exacerbates the tensions that Murnau creates in *Nosferatu*, recreating Lucy as a complex and credible woman at odds with her society, but giving even greater credence to her insights by allowing us to see what she sees.

*Nosferatu the Vampyre* most significantly differs from *Nosferatu* because Lucy seeks assistance from her townspeople in her battle against Count Dracula and begins to resemble Van Helsing. While Herzog's Van Helsing is the opposite of Stoker's original, Lucy instead begins to resemble the original Van Helsing as Herzog puts his lines from the novel in her mouth to challenge traditional gender roles and to illustrate her fervor and fearlessness. In her attempts to convince Van Helsing of Dracula's existence she says, "Faith is the amazing faculty of man which enables us to believe things which we know to be untrue. You must come with me and help me to crush this – this monster!" Stoker's Van Helsing offers the exact same remarks, as he

pleas with Dr. Seward for help: “I heard once of an American who so defined faith: ‘that *which enables us to believe things which we know to be untrue...* Dare you come with me?’” (Stoker 180-181, italics mine). Thus Herzog equates Lucy with Van Helsing, allowing Lucy to repeat Van Helsing’s claims verbatim and adopts Van Helsing’s role – a traditionally masculine one – as an assertive, persistent, and vocal figure. Yet when Lucy attempts to form a committee, as Van Helsing does in *Dracula*, her pleas are met with belittlement. “But my child, these are only the products of your imagination,” Herzog’s Van Helsing replies, referring to Lucy as a “child” in an attempt to paint her as a simple, delusional, infantile wife. These are exactly the simplistic assertions that Herzog criticizes. Throughout *Nosferatu the Vampyre*, Herzog criticizes society’s distrust of women, illustrating that these citizens must have faith and should heed Lucy’s claims. It is the ignorance of this society that allows Dracula to arise again through Jonathan – Lucy tries to enlist help, as Van Helsing does, but as a woman she is unsuccessful. Herzog emphasizes Lucy’s insightful perspective and complex role, as both Stoker and Murnau do before him, but particularly focuses on the challenges that hinder Lucy’s female voice by exactly likening her to Van Helsing.

As Lucy’s attempts to seek help repeatedly fail, Herzog embellishes Lucy’s desperation through film techniques he uses – particularly, through the tracking shots and blocking he employs. Once Dracula begins to take more lives, Lucy runs through the town square to alert the town council of Dracula’s arrival, but is stopped by a procession of coffins. Frustrated, Lucy cries, “I know the reason for all this evil, I know the reason for all this. Why don’t you listen?” Herzog uses a tracking shot to follow Lucy closely as she walks through the square, surrounded by coffins and pallbearers, distressed and disturbed. Following Lucy through this claustrophobic crowd, using close-up images, makes the viewer, too, feel trapped in this parade of death. Herzog’s blocking – how he positions the actors – reiterates Lucy’s clarity when she seeks Dr.

Van Helsing's counsel, exclaiming, "You see what has happened to [Jonathan]. It's getting worse here everyday." Herzog visually emphasizes his refusal to believe her: she looks out the window towards the town, but Van Helsing sits facing away from the town: while she accepts the truth about the town's "plague," Van Helsing refuses to face this reality. Through the use of these techniques, Herzog allows us to feel and share in Lucy's frustration and desperation, and in turn creates a more harsh criticism of her community. By illustrating the depth of Lucy's isolation, Herzog critiques the townsfolk who disregard her, particularly because she is a woman.

As Lucy returns to the town square before sacrificing herself to Dracula, Herzog also introduces music to reveal the depth of Lucy's isolation and to emphasize the disconnect between Lucy's insightful perspective and the ignorant one of the townspeople. Herzog uses an aerial shot, in which we see Lucy walk through the square surrounded by revelers, who believe they must enjoy their remaining time on earth given the inevitable onslaught of "the plague." As Lucy runs from the revelers who try to entice her to join them, we hear a Georgian song, "Zinskaró," which is entirely vocal and chant-like. Yet we simultaneously see people singing, one man playing a horn, and another playing the violin. Herzog therefore disconnects the music we hear from the sounds of the square to represent the dissonance between Lucy and the townspeople, and to unite the viewer all the more with Lucy's perspective – a perspective that we know is valid because we see that Dracula poses a very real threat to the town. Through this juxtaposition, Herzog also subverts gender norms yet again, contradicting what we expect of this seemingly angelic woman – she does not hear this joyous music, but a mournful, ominous chant. Herzog criticizes Lucy's community even more fervently than Murnau does by allying us with her perspective, but by likening her to Van Helsing and highlighting her isolation, and desperation Herzog specifically emphasizes that Lucy's perspective is disregarded because she is a woman who does not conform to traditional gender norms.

Herzog, like Murnau, reveals the unique perspective Lucy maintains. Like Nina, she exhibits a preternatural, and almost supernatural instinct about the ominous fate she faces, as evidenced by her disturbing dreams. Yet while both of these women die as martyrs, Herzog strays from Murnau's original – although Lucy defeats Dracula, Jonathan becomes a vampire and flees Wismar to wreak his own havoc. Thus the tension between these women and their disbelieving societies that is resolved at the end of *Nosferatu* carries on in *Nosferatu the Vampyre* and is left unresolved. This certainly owes to Herzog's tendency to create a sense of futility through his films, also known as the Herzogian circle of futility (Casper 20), but also perhaps intends to highlight just how detrimental this community's ignorance becomes. Lucy's martyrdom has a much less optimistic connotation – instead, her sacrifice is fruitless. By exaggerating Lucy's struggle to find help in this adaptation, Herzog demonstrates that not only does Jonathan ignore Lucy's pleas, but so do the people of Wismar, to their detriment.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Adaptation is a technique fraught with challenges, and silent films were seen particularly as a medium ill-suited to adaptation, but Murnau and Herzog defy the odds. Twenty-five and eighty-two years after *Dracula's* original publication, respectively, these directors impressively uphold Stoker's original portrayal of Mina. Since Mina occupies such a crucial role as the narrator and compiler of *Dracula*, and because her role is so interwoven with the presentation of the text, it might be nearly impossible to adapt Stoker's narrative structure into film without in turn diminishing Mina's portrayal. However, through the careful film techniques Murnau and Herzog use, from the narrative structures they create, to the perspectives they explore through the lens of the camera, to their unique use of music, dream sequences, and supernatural elements, both directors manage to preserve Mina's multi-faceted identity and in doing so ultimately preserve the lifeblood of *Dracula* itself.

### **Afterword:**

*Dracula* still proves a malleable source for film adaptation today, and the directors of these works still must grapple with the complexities of portraying female characters first conceived in the Victorian era. Because Stoker portrays a diverse array of women and characterizes Mina so carefully, directors must carefully consider how they adapt his female characters to their own interpretations and aims. Directors often simplify Mina's character, or resort to different techniques to reinvent her identity with the specific narrative confines of film. In one notable instance, her identity has even been split into two parts to portray the clash of the Victorian Mina and the modern, "liberated" woman.

Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1997) in its very title establishes itself as a more faithful adaptation to Stoker's original, and succeeds in many ways. Coppola recreates Stoker's committee, a crew usually too complex for directors to include, and incorporates Lucy's storyline as well as Mina's. Coppola also uniquely maintains the complexity of Mina's character by splitting Mina into two different women. He criticizes the Victorian age, portraying Mina as repressed, but also reveals that a more sensual woman lurks inside of her, as well as the reincarnated spirit of Dracula's former lover, Elisabeta. Mina not only physically mirrors Elisabeta – both women are portrayed by Winona Ryder – but also seems to share her spirit or mind in some supernatural way. When Dracula enters Mina's life, he brings out this repressed, sensual woman inside of her. Coppola portrays Mina's coming to terms with her own role as a sensual woman as empowering, and in doing so criticizes the Victorian era's repressive views of femininity. As the film ends, Mina says, "There in the presence of God I understood at last how my love could release us all from the powers of darkness. Our love is stronger than death." Mina's empowerment is therefore linked to her ability to embrace love and her own sensuality, refuting Victorian ideals. Instead, Coppola reflects the twentieth century's more liberal notions

of femininity and sexuality. He urges Mina to eschew custom and propriety, and instead encourages her to acknowledge and celebrate the power of her love, and the sensual side of Mina that this love reveals.

Mina also serves as a narrator, sharing this role with Jonathan and Van Helsing, among others, emulating the original narrative structure of Stoker's novel. Because both Coppola and Stoker allow Mina to serve as a narrator, despite the differences in their portrayals of her, both crucially allow her power over the story she tells. Coppola exacerbates this power, granting Mina the last lines of the film, and in doing so again correlates a female's authority to her narrative role. Thus although Stoker's Mina may appear a repressed, Victorian woman on the surface, much like Coppola's interpretation, her role as a narrator, and how she uses her narrative, negates this oversimplification and hints at her underlying power. In *Dracula*, as well as in the works of Stoker's predecessors and on-screen successors, a women's power correlates to her narrative authority.

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