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# A Biting Concealed in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*

Hiroshi Muto

In this paper, I argue that the narrative of Bram Stoker's vampire classic in one way attempts to hide the vampiric biting of its English hero during his stay at Castle Dracula, which is in other ways suggested by numerous pieces of evidence, both in and outside the text. Although the biting of the hero, Jonathan Harker, by the novel's eponymous villain is not mentioned in the text, it most certainly takes place on the night of 29 June, the day before the vampiric Count's departure for England. The concealment results from the author's homosexuality. The simultaneous hiding and suggesting of the biting is related to the latent duality of the novel's narrative consisting of the original information and the typed transcript of it.

One of the most obviously suspicious scenes is the description of Count Dracula on the morning of 30 June. The Count, whose extraordinary pallor struck Harker when they first met, is depicted as follows:

[He] look[ed] as if his youth had been half renewed, for the white hair and moustache were changed to dark iron-grey; the cheeks were fuller, and the white skin seemed ruby-red underneath; the mouth was redder than ever, for on the lips were gouts

of fresh blood, which trickled from the corners of the mouth and ran over the chin and neck. (67; 53)<sup>(1)</sup>

It is clear from this passage that Dracula fed on the night of 29 June. The text, however, does not record who the victim was. It is possible that the Count fed on one of the locals, either a child or an adult, but the text elsewhere suggests that children are mostly for female vampires, and there is nothing in the text that indicates a special connection between Dracula and any adult woman or man in or near the castle, except Jonathan Harker. Mariko Enomoto writes that Harker might have been bitten by Dracula.<sup>(2)</sup> No one is surely more likely to be the victim than Harker. This paper, however, goes further than Ms. Enomoto's article, in that it argues that Harker was most certainly bitten by the Count not only for the above reason but for a number of other reasons that are to follow.

Two readings, heterosexual and homosexual, are possible about the interrelationship among Dracula, the three vampiric women, and Jonathan Harker; of the two, I argue, the latter is the stronger. The heterosexual reading, apparently more justified, is as follows: Dracula's aim in keeping Harker at the castle is to gain information about the U.K., which he is about to visit for the blood of English women; he intends to leave Harker to be victimized by the female vampires after he has left for England. In short, Dracula is to attack women in England while Harker is to be fed on by the female vampires in Transylvania.

However, this reading is rather weak, or there are elements in the text that challenge it, leading the reader to adopt a stronger, if less obvious, interpretation that can be termed the homosexual reading. In this reading, the heterosexual love is taken as a cover for the

homosexual attachments between male characters, particularly Count Dracula and Jonathan Harker, which in turn is a reflection of Stoker's own homosexuality. A famous scene in *Castle Dracula*, among others, points to this reading, suggesting the triumph of homosexual attraction over heterosexual one. In it, when one of the three vampiric women is about to attack Harker, Dracula holds her back and says in fury: "How dare you touch him, any of you? [...] This man belongs to me" (53 ; 43). The central significance of this scene for the novel is attested by the fact that it was, as indicated by Stoker's working notes for *Dracula*, the germ out of which the whole work was to be created. As early as March 1890, the following words mark the beginning of the conception of the vampiric classic: "young man goes out—sees girls one tries—to kiss him not on the lips but throat. Old Count interferes—rage and fury diabolical. This man belongs to me I want him" (Frayling 301). The motif of 'This man belongs to me' recurs again and again in the notes, suggesting that the whole novel, in its genesis, evolves around this scene.

There are also other traces that support this reading. Among them is Harker's misogyny at *Castle Dracula*. He loathes the three female vampires more than anything else. In the entry of his journal just after the above scene at the castle, he confesses his preference of the Count over the female vampires, saying: 'It is maddening to think that of all the foul things that lurk in this hateful place the Count is the least dreadful to me; that to him alone I can look for safety' (50 ; 41). Harker's hate for women is reiterated several times. For example, having fainted after the aborted attack of these female monsters, he finds himself in his own bed the morning after, and surmises from several pieces of evidence that Dracula himself has taken care of him, carrying and undressing him. Immediately after this passage,

suggestive of homosexual attachment, he again notes his loathing for women: 'nothing can be more dreadful than those awful women,' against which even the bedroom allotted to him by Dracula is 'a sort of sanctuary' (55 ; 44).

Another significantly and latently homoerotic scene during his stay at the castle is the one in which Harker makes an attack on Dracula in his coffin. The former uses a shovel, striking with it at the latter's face and makes a deep gash on his head. As Talia Schaffer rightly notes, this is the first of the symbolic male-to-male penetrations committed by Harker.<sup>(3)</sup> The importance of this penetration motif is indicated, at the climax of the novel, by the way in which Harker kills the vampire. Significantly, not the correct way of destroying Dracula earlier explained in the text, which is to 'cut off his head and burn his heart or drive a stake through it' (249 ; 181), but Harker's symbolic penetration (thrusting a knife through the throat of the Count) unaccountably but successfully crumbles Dracula's body into dust (443 ; 325). Harker's earlier symbolic penetration during his imprisonment at the castle, therefore, comprises a serious challenge to the heterosexual reading.

A look at 'Dracula's Guest,' a posthumously published story based on the notes for *Dracula*, is helpful here for a couple of reasons.<sup>(4)</sup> Firstly, it is of interest to us because, as in *Dracula*, the two kinds of attraction, heterosexual and homosexual, are juxtaposed and in conflict. The plot of the story is like this: the English protagonist, on the way to Castle Dracula, takes a short excursion around Munich on the day of Walpurgis Nacht; he wanders into a graveyard in a deserted village; a female vampire first draws him to herself, but, when he is about to enter her tomb, Count Dracula prevents it, hurling the Englishman outside ; Dracula, then, in the form of a wolf, performs a

symbolic intercourse, laying himself on him, licking his throat, making him 'feel its [the wolf's] hot breath fierce and acrid on [him].' The protagonist is eventually rescued by a group of local men.

Secondly, and more importantly, as in *Dracula*, the concealment of a vampiric biting in conjunction with the homosexual attachment is suggested by paradoxes in the narrative. Having found the Englishman, the local search party exchange the following conversation :

'There was blood on the broken marble,' another said after a pause—'the lightning never brought that there. And for him [the Englishman]—is he safe? Look at his throat! See, comrades, the wolf has been lying on him and keeping his blood warm.'

The officer looked at my throat and replied : 'He is all right; the skin is not pierced.' (19)

The first point that requires consideration is the identity of the blood. It is true that the mention of the marble connects the blood to the vampiric countess lying in a tomb of marble, but a vampire spilling the blood of another vampire is somewhat irrelevant in a vampiric story, which normally evolves around the obtainment of human blood ; therefore, it could well be that of the Englishman.

Secondly, there is a mystery as to an injury on the protagonist's throat. The above quotation suggests the non-existence of a physical injury, or at least of a wound that involves biting and bleeding. A later passage, however, indicates otherwise :

The officer [the leader of the search party] was telling the men to say nothing of what they had seen, except that

they found an English stranger, guarded by a large dog.

'Dog! that was no dog,' cut in the man who had exhibited such fear. 'I think I know a wolf when I see one.'

The young officer answered calmly: 'I said a dog.'

'Dog!' reiterated the other ironically. It was evident that his courage was rising with the sun; and, pointing to me, he said, 'Look at his throat. Is that the work of a dog, master?'

Instinctively I [the Englishman] raised my hand to my throat, and as I touched it I cried out in pain. (19-20)

The sharp pain suggests an injury of such a degree as to be caused by a vampiric biting rather than by a severe licking as mentioned earlier.

In addition, there is a suggestion of homosexual attachment in the physical contact between the officer and the English traveler, the former taking the place of Dracula who has disappeared: after the discovery of the English hero, the officer raises him to a sitting posture and takes him in his arms on a horse on the way back to town. Significantly, it is this latently homosexual officer who denies the vampiric piercing of the hero's throat and orders secrecy about the vampiric biting among his men. For these reasons, it can be said that the narrative of the story contains the concealment of an essentially homosexual vampiric biting. That there is a tendency in the vampiric world of Bram Stoker's imagination to keep the homosexual biting from the reader's sight is now clear.

Another clue to the topic of the present paper is provided by the novel's epilogue which takes the form of a note written by Jonathan Harker seven years after the encounter with and destruction of

Dracula. In it, Harker says concerning the record of the Dracula incident :

I took the papers from the safe where they had been ever since our return [from Transylvania] so long ago. 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 type-writing, except the later note-books of Mina and Seward and myself, and Van Helsing's memorandum. We could hardly ask any one, even did we wish to, to accept these as proofs of so wild a story.

The passage above reveals self-consciousness about the distinction between the original information and the typed transcript of it, and suggests the connections between the former and truth and between the latter and falseness. The text of the novel is based on the typescript for two reasons: firstly, the major part of the original information is not in normal alphabet but in shorthand and phonographic journals; secondly, these vessels of the original information are destroyed by Dracula during his raid upon Seward's mental hospital. The implication of the epilogue, therefore, is rather serious: the falsehood of the whole novel. The prologue to the novel also suggests some excision of the original data: 'All needless matters have been eliminated' (xxiv; 5). The relationship between the original information and the typed transcript of it in the novel, therefore, deserves scrutiny and is helpful, as we will see, for our exploration of the question of the concealed biting.

The narrative of *Dracula* consists of a series of writings by



several characters in the novel. The major writings are the journals of three characters, Jonathan Harker, Mina Harker and Dr. John Seward; these are interspersed with other diaries, letters, newspaper articles, a logbook, telegrams. It is to be noted that the three major journals are all characterised by a high degree of vocal consciousness, which is important in its relation to the question of homosexuality and secrecy. Seward's journal is literally vocal in that it is recorded on a phonograph. Harker's and Mina's are mostly kept in shorthand. Concerning her shorthand diary, Mina makes the following remark that is of much interest to us: 'it is like whispering to one's self and listening at the same time. And there is also something about the shorthand symbols that makes it different from writing' (96; 72). Mina's inexplicably strong response when she first hears Seward entering his phonographic journal also attest to her vocal consciousness: her comment then—'this [phonograph] even beats shorthand'—indicate that she is comparing the two in terms of voice.

The shorthand used by Harker and Mina is most certainly the Pitman system. It is notable that his shorthand system was called 'phonography' at the time. Isaac Pitman was from the beginning highly conscious of his shorthand being phonographic: the first name he gave his system was 'stenographic sound-hand.' The publisher of the first of Pitman's books of shorthand wrote a piece of light verse like this: 'Artists and scribes no more delight, / Their arts imperfect found, / Daguerre now draws by rays of Light, / And Pitman writes by Sound' (Baker 52). In view of the irregularity of English spelling in relation to the sounds represented, Mina's attitude toward the phonographic shorthand is understandable.

There is, however, something more than that in Mina's vocal consciousness. There are two significant points that require

consideration in her attitude toward Seward's phonographic voice. Having heard some of Seward's journal, Mina comes to his room, with her eyes flushed with crying. The following is a part of the conversation that takes place then, recorded by Seward ;

'I greatly fear I have distressed you.'

'Oh, no, not distressed me,' she replied, 'but I have been more touched than I can say by your grief. That is a wonderful machine, but it is cruelly true. It told me, in its very tones, the anguish of your heart. It was like a soul crying out to Almighty God. No one must hear them spoken ever again!' (271 ; 197)

Firstly, we need to think about the reason why Mina is so greatly impressed by Seward's voice. At the point of the above passage (before dinner, 29 September), she has only heard Seward's journal from 25 May up to 7 September. Strangely, there is not much in that part that justifies such a strong response. Only the last entry (7 September) contains a record of the beginning of the first victimization of English females, which might cause a shock to the listener. Even that entry only records the first of blood transfusions for the victim, Lucy Westenra, upon the discovery of her emaciation ; the existence of the vampire has not yet been suspected. It is also difficult to take what Mina means by 'your [Seward's] grief' to refer not to his anguish over Lucy's mysterious emaciation but to his own brokenheartedness over her rejection of his proposal: there are only a few references to his own misery owing to the disappointed love. Rather, most of the journal up to 7 September concerns a mad patient in his charge called Renfield.

With regard to Seward's relation to Renfield, it is notable that

there are parallelisms between Seward and Dracula. Like Dracula, Seward is a bloodsucker: he has once sucked out Van Helsing's poisoned blood from a wound made by a knife (148; 106). Dracula is called 'Master' by Renfield while Seward is Renfield's master in the sense that the latter is an inmate at the former's mental hospital. Seward, too, is called 'master' in Van Helsing's broken English (157; 112). The most important of parallelisms lies in Seward's and Dracula's respective relations to Renfield and Jonathan Harker. As Dracula takes an interest in Harker and imprisons him in the castle, Seward is intrigued by Renfield and confines him in his asylum; Harker and Renfield are both under the power of their respective masters. Still, both of them rebel in a similar way, too: Harker attacks and cuts Dracula once with a shovel and once with a knife; Renfield attacks and cuts Seward with a dinner knife (67-8, 181 and 443; 54, 129 and 325). Considering the homosexual attachment in the relationship between Dracula and Harker, it is natural to conclude that Mina's inexplicably strong response to Seward's voice in the diary, too, points to the homosexual attraction, this time represented by the relationship between Seward and Renfield.

This reading enables us to understand some otherwise unaccountable places in the text. Firstly, Renfield somehow knows about his doctor's intimate life: in a conversation with Renfield, Seward is surprised by the madman's knowledge of his proposal to Lucy (282; 205). This can only be explained by the existence of a relationship that goes beyond that of doctors and patients. Secondly, when he hands Mina his phonographic journal, Seward says to her: 'Take the cylinders and hear them—the first half-dozen of them [the part of the journal up to 7 September] are personal to me, [...] then you will know me better' (270; 196). It is now clear that the word

'personal' and the better knowledge of him the journal is to give her indirectly refer to Seward's homosexual identity. Thirdly, it deserves attention that the first entry of Seward's journal, in the first edition of the novel, is mistakenly dated 25 April, instead of the logically correct 25 May.<sup>(5)</sup> The slip could well be Freudian. 25 May is the date when Oscar Wilde was sentenced to two years' hard labour. The homosexual panic caused by it, as Talia Schaffer argues, stimulated Stoker to start writing the vampire novel in August 1895, seeing the 'Wilde-as-threat' in the novel's villain (398). The perhaps unintentionally intentional avoidance of that date suggests the secrecy over Seward's homosexuality.

There are other instances in Stoker's life and writings that illustrate the interconnection among voice, secrecy and homosexuality. Among them are the two passionate letters by this normally self-effacing man addressed to Walt Whitman, a then cult figure among the fin-de-siècle English gay men. In them, speech is related to sharing the secret of the gay identity, while the act of writing is ridden with anxiety; Stoker confesses his desire to meet him and 'say what I [he] cannot write' ('Bram Stoker's Correspondence with Walt Whitman' 490).

What is possibly the most important incident in Stoker's life is also characterised by voice, homosexuality, and secrecy. According to his *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving*, it happened like this. In 1876, when he attended Henry Irving's personal recitation of a poem, Stoker was so moved by Irving's inspired recitation as to fall into a fit of hysterics. The reciter was also so excited that he 'collapsed half fainting' at the end of it (19). The incident marked the beginning of Stoker's life-long dedication to the great actor. What sort of emotional exchange really occurred between them is a mystery; at the same time,

however, there is little doubt that some mutual attraction stronger than the ordinary kind of friendship arose between them. Stoker described it somewhat evasively: 'soul had looked into soul' (21). It is to be noted that Stoker's expression-'soul had looked into soul'-is similar to how Mina describes Seward's phonographic voice: 'it was like a soul crying out to Almighty God.' In the poem Stoker dedicated to Whitman, too, he describes the American homosexual poet's voice as quenching the soul's thirst (Haining 33). The content of the poem recited (Thomas Hood's 'The Dream of Eugene Aram') is also significant in that it centres around the secret of a murder and the hiding of the body, which an old male academic confesses to a book-loving boy. These instances teaches us how to interpret Mina's otherwise unaccountable emphasis on secrecy in the above-quoted passage: 'No one must hear them [Seward's words] spoken ever again.' It can be paraphrased as 'no one must know your homoerotic feelings.'

Interestingly, voice and the vampiric biting also seem to be interconnected in Stoker's mind. In his *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving*, Stoker writes extensively about Alfred Tennyson and Richard Burton. Both of them are described as having at the same time a powerful voice and a prominent canine tooth, the latter, according to Stoker the physiognomist, indicating the militant character. Particularly, the depiction of Burton's canine tooth could be that of Dracula's: 'his canine tooth showed its full length like the gleam of a dagger' (229). The aurality of human voice and the orality of vampirism are, for Stoker, akin to each other.

The second point worth considering is Mina's handling of Seward's phonographic voice, that is, her typewriting of it. The part of the conversation between Mina and Seward that follows the above quotation is relevant here:

No one must hear them [Seward's words] spoken ever again! See, I have tried to be useful. I have copied out the words on my typewriter, and none other need now hear your heart beat, as I did.'

'No one need ever know, shall ever know,' I said in a low voice. She laid her hand on mine and said very gravely :—

'Ah, but they must!' (271 ; 197)

As the passage shows, her act of turning the phonographic diary into the typescript results from her insistence that Seward's voice must be kept secret while the content of the diary should be shared by others. What she is suggesting as a reason for it is the poignancy of the emotion expressed by his voice. In view of what we have discussed so far, particularly of the prominence of Renfield in the part of the diary in question, the poignant emotion 'no one must hear' most certainly relates to homosexuality. Therefore, we can conclude that there are two different kinds of information in the novel: one is the original information kept in the mostly vocal media and is related to the secret homosexual identity; the other is that which is carried by the typed transcript of it, the largely expurgated text to be shared by others (the readers as well as other characters). It is the latter kind that provides the basis for the text of the novel, leaving only occasional traces of homosexuality in it.

Significantly, Dracula destroys the vocal media (the phonographic diary and the shorthand journals) in his raid upon Seward's mental institution, and the text of the novel is naturally reticent about the reason why Dracula takes the trouble to do that. His

motive, however, is now clear: the concealment of the vampire as homosexual. Dracula also burns Harker's shorthand letter to Mina. Interestingly, in one of the letters he wrote to Whitman, Stoker, having hinted at his gay identity, asked the poet to burn the letter if he did not like it.

We would now like to consider Jonathan Harker's shorthand journal, the most important part of which concerns his experience at Castle Dracula. When Mina and Jonathan wed in Buda-pest after the latter's escape from the castle, they treat the journal in a strange way. In a letter to Lucy reporting their wedding, Mina writes thus :

When the chaplain and the Sisters had left me alone with my husband—oh, Lucy, it is the first time I have written the words 'my husband'—left me alone with my husband, I took the book [Harker's shorthand journal] from under his pillow, and wrapped it up in white paper, and tied it with a little bit of pale blue ribbon which was round my neck, and sealed it over the knot with sealing-wax, and for my seal I used my wedding ring. Then I kissed it and showed it to my husband, and told him that I would keep it so, and then it would be an outward and visible sign for us all our lives that we trusted each other ; that I would never open it unless it were for his own dear sake or for the sake of some stern duty. (139 ; 100)

Again, the reason why their marriage should be founded on the sealing of the journal is not given in the text. From what we have discussed so far, however, we know it as part of Stoker's homosexual narrative

strategy: the aim of the sealing of the journal upon the wedding is, of course, the validation of the heterosexual relationship by the concealment of the homosexual one.

There are other instances that support this reading. Firstly, Harker refers to the journal as the secret he does not want to know. He also wants Mina to share this ignorance while, at the same time, saying that there should be no secret between husband and wife. Secondly, the nurse who has taken care of him while he was still raving in a state of shock keeps reticence about what he said then. She only suggests that there is no other woman involved, which gladdens Mina (138-9; 99-100). The reticence and the suggestion of no woman involved, however, points to the homosexual presence of the vampiric Count. Harker might well have raved about the biting he received.

Later, Mina reads the journal, but it is only after the reappearance of Dracula, transformed this time, however, into a distinctly heterosexual predator observing a very beautiful girl in central London (215; 155). The heterosexual vampiric Count means the removal of the homosexual threat to the marriage. Whatever the superficial reason given by the text, the disappearance of the threat enables Mina to read and make the typed transcript of the journal.

Van Helsing, then, reads the typescript and believes it. The acknowledgement of the truth of the typed information by this intellectual authority liberates Harker from the anxiety about his experience at the castle, that is, from the homosexual fear of the Count and himself; in his own words, 'it seems to have made a new [i.e. heterosexual] man of me' (232; 168). The typed transcript of all the data about the vampire, consisting mostly of the three vocal journals, is then made, to be shared by every member of a predominantly male anti-vampiric group. The typewriting having removed the homosexual



element from the original information, the typically modern homophobic male solidarity, based on the typed information, is now foregrounded. The division of the 'healthy' male solidarity on one hand and the 'perverse' homosexuality on the other, what Sedgwick calls 'the gaping and unbridgeable homophobic rift in the male homosocial spectrum,' is, from then on, established (Sedgwick 201). The voice of the homosexual vampiric biting is thus silenced by the typewriter.

To quote again from the epilogue (Harker's concluding note): 'there is hardly one authentic document ; nothing but a mass of type-writing [...] . We could hardly ask any one, even did we wish to, to accept these as proofs of so wild a story' (444-5 ; 326-7). As Schaffer says, the term 'wild' can sometimes be read for 'Wilde' in this novel. Naturally, the typescript cannot serve as proofs of so 'Wilde' a story; it is in the original shorthand journal that the homosexual vampiric biting is registered.

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## NOTES

- (1) The two different paginations of *Dracula*, given for the sake of convenience, are those of the editions by Leonard Wolf and by Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal in that order.
- (2) Mariko Enomoto, 'Cannibalism Genso-Dracula to Muishiki Kyofu,' *Eigo Seinen* 143.3 (June 1997), 147.
- (3) Talia Schaffer, "'A Wilde Desire Took Me": The Homoerotic History of Dracula,' *ELH* 61 (1994), 415.
- (4) Exactly what kind of relationship there is between 'Dracula's Guest' and *Dracula* is not clear. The author's widow, Florence Stoker, when the story was first published in a collection of stories, said in its preface that it was an excised episode from the vampiric novel. Leonard Wolf, who has included the story as an appendix in his wonderfully annotated edition of the novel, calls it 'The Deleted Original First Chapter of *Dracula*' (1). Christopher Frayling disagrees, giving his own surmise that it is a freestanding story based upon the working notes (352). What is certain is that the outline of the story is recorded as an episode during Harker's stay in Munich in the manuscript notes for the novel.
- (5) The Norton edition of *Dracula* retains the date of the first edition for an unstated reason.