

Birthing modernity: the BBC's Count Dracula (1977)

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**Birthing modernity:
the BBC's *Count Dracula* (1977)**

Ben Jonson famously said of Shakespeare that he was not of an age, but for all time; thus Hamlet, for instance, has been moved to locations ranging from Japan to Los Angeles without suffering any loss of meaning or of resonance. As has often been observed, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is partly descended from Hamlet, by way of his employer Irving's performances of the role at the Lyceum Theatre,¹ where Stoker was stage manager. The vampire, however, is very much a creature of nineteenth-century London, the child of fog, the Ripper murders (associated in the popular mind with the Lyceum), the Labouchère amendment, the degeneration theory of Edwin Ray Lankester (a Lyceum habitué) and the Contagious Diseases Acts. So closely is the creature tied to its context that the first fictional vampire, Lord Ruthven, was found in the pages of a *roman-à-clef* and was himself a transparently obvious portrait of Byron. Unlike the *Dracula* of the book, though, the *Dracula* of the popular imagination did not die at the end of the nineteenth century: he has gone on, gaining in strength as fresh victims fall for his fascinations, and abetted by a growing group of us academic Renfields he has come to stand as a metaphor for anything from homosexuality to Jewishness to AIDS. For the adapter, this presents a problem: should one seek to draw out the pastness of *Dracula*, or his contemporaneity? This is a question affects every level of an adaptation, from costume to dialogue to less tangible questions of tone and feel. In this essay, I want to examine how the balance between past and present was negotiated in the BBC's 1977 adaptation *Count Dracula*, which marked eighty years since the publication of Stoker's novel. I shall argue that this is an adaptation which brings out both the periodicity and the topicality of *Dracula*, and indeed invites us to read Stoker's novel as part of the process by which the past became the present. First, though, I want to look at an adaptation which took

precisely the opposite approach, Cole Haddon's 2013 version for Sky Atlantic, as a way of teasing out what is at stake.

The 2013 Sky Atlantic *Dracula*, written principally by Cole Haddon but with others also involved in the script and with a variety of directors at the helm, is a desperately disappointing piece of work, characterised principally by an impoverished imagination and a depressing tendency to think in clichés. A vast amount of extra narrative has been created to pad out its ten episodes, but the symbolic and ideological import of the original is diluted rather than developed; the dialogue is perverse and leaden, with Mina's 'He hasn't arrived' capped limply by Jonathan's 'No, not yet. He's still to arrive'; and above all, this is an adaptation of a nineteenth-century text that has no patience with the nineteenth century itself. Lucy calls Harker 'a twit' (not without cause, but she could not have said so). Renfield is black and no one remarks on it. Mina is a medical student who is rebelling against the fact that 'People would always say to me "Are you going to be a nurse when you grow up?"', a question which no one could possibly have addressed to a lady in the Victorian sense of the word. Lucy and Mina drink absinthe on their own in public and roll home at daybreak, which has nothing in common with the book's emphasis on Mina's terror of being seen barefoot, and later Mina proposes to Harker, even though the Mina of the book is openly scornful of such inversions of gender norms when she says 'I suppose the New Woman won't condescend in future to accept; she will do the proposing herself'.² Harker meanwhile is apparently a journalist, though he has to repeat the word 'interview' several times as if he does not understand it, something which may perhaps be a knowing glance at *Interview with a Vampire* but has the immediate effect of making him appear a mental defective. This is an adaptation which catches the novel's interest in technology - 'nineteenth century up-to-date with a vengeance' (p. 36) - but can't be bothered to ground it in period; it has also perversely

displaced that interest from the Crew of Light onto Dracula himself, who aims to 'demonstrate the viability of geomagnetic technology' because his mortal enemies, the evil Ordo Draco - the masons on acid - have big investments in oil. Indeed the emphasis on technology, together with the dissection we see Mina perform and which is apparently motivated by the early death of her mother, gives the series the air of adapting *Frankenstein* rather than *Dracula*, though that is by no means the only influence: Jonathan Rhys Meyers' American Dracula strongly channels Gatsby, and for A. A. Gill, the effect of the first episode was 'Bram Stoker arm-wrestles F. Scott Fitzgerald at the Olympic closing ceremony' (and not in a good way).³

Not only does none of this have anything to do with the nineteenth century, it has little to do with Stoker's novel. What it does have to do with is the Francis Ford Coppola adaptation, because that is in many respects a model for Haddon, not least in that Dracula is explicitly identified with Vlad Tepes and that the modern Mina is the exact image of his dead wife. Other elements which Haddon's adaptation has in common with Ford Coppola's are the absence of an excursus to Whitby and the presence of Christ imagery: Gary Oldman's Dracula offers Mina 'life eternal, everlasting love' and dies asking 'Why hast thou forsaken me?' before adding 'It has finished', upon which his head falls back in a clearly Christological pose. (He also dances with Mina just as Jonathan Rhys Meyers does, and in both Van Helsing is a decidedly ambiguous figure.) However there are also debts to the BBC's 1977 *Count Dracula*, written by Gerald Savory and directed by Philip Saville. In both, Dracula disguises himself as a coachman in London rather than just in Transylvania, as in the book. In both, there is no Arthur Holmwood, though there is an unrelated character called Lord Godalming in the Haddon (admittedly there would hardly be scope for one because the Lucy of the Haddon is a lesbian.) In the Haddon, too, the light of the cross projected onto

his face deters Dracula when he is tempted to bite Mina, echoing a moment in *Count Dracula* when the cross casts a shadow of light on the Count's face.

The parallel ends at these superficial similarities, however, for *Count Dracula* is a patient and careful adaptation which seems to have two clearly defined and complementary aims. In the first place, it is cast firmly in the mould of a BBC classic serial, privileging frocks and location shots: the DVD case proudly announces to the prospective purchaser that there are scenes filmed at Whitby Abbey and in Highgate Cemetery. In the second, it is largely committed to fidelity. This is an adaptation which foregrounds the fact that it knows and likes the book; although it was produced at a time when no one would have dreamed of calling it *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, it comes far closer to being that than Coppola's film ever does. When Louis Jourdain's Count says to Jonathan Harker 'English literature is the richest in the world', we are openly invited to think of the original novel, an emphasis underlined when Harker notes that 'I slept by mistake in the library', which draws our attention to the idea of books. Someone who did consult the original book before sitting down to watch *Count Dracula* would certainly not be very much surprised by what they saw. Almost all the major characters of the original book are there (I shall come later to the one big exception to this). The narrative moves from Eastern Europe to Whitby to London and then back again to Eastern Europe. As in the book, too, the overall effect is one of dramatic tension rather than of shlock horror (in this respect it is very different from the Haddon in which there is a horrific scene of Renfield being tortured); indeed since *Count Dracula* was first screened on 22 December, it could well be seen as inhabiting a distinct paradigm of what one might be tempted to term 'Christmas Gothic', which offers just enough of a frisson to titillate at a time when the presence or imminence of visiting relations might heighten one's interest in the idea of killing. Moreover the subtitle of 'A Gothic Romance' offers yet another way of packaging

the story as familiar and understandable. In particular, making the vampire French (something which is emphasised when Louis Jourdan's *Dracula* offers a perfectly pronounced 'possibly a corruption of the French *quatre faces*') unmistakably injects sex: Jourdan, famous for playing romantic leads both in films and in stage productions such as *Gigi* and, in the same year as *Count Dracula*, D'Artagnan in *The Man in the Iron Mask*, is much younger than Dracula as described in the book, and considerably better looking. Normative paradigms are evoked even more strongly by the fact that the sex in question is resolutely heteronormative: Dracula keeps Harker alive because he has a purpose for him rather than for his own uses, whereas the equivalent scene in the novel is clearly susceptible of a homoerotic interpretation⁴ - when the Count finds the women with Jonathan 'Never did I imagine such wrath and fury, even in the demons of the pit' (p. 38); Jourdan's *Dracula*, though, is not angry when he interrupts the three sisters and Harker; he merely says 'I need him for a while'. Although we do hear the three vampire sisters reproach him 'You never loved me', 'You never loved', 'You never love', and he (like the the male characters in general) is largely emotionless, Jourdan's *Dracula* offers his Mina adventure and immortality. He seduces her to drink from him rather than forcing her, and caresses her as she does so. Casting a Frenchman rather than an Eastern European might also seem to remove race, or at least the invasion-from-the-East motif which is so prominent in both Stoker's book⁵ and the first cinematic response to it, Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922).⁶ So far, so neutral and normalised; however, in this essay I shall argue that a surprising degree of cultural work is done by the adaptation's few but striking deviations from its general principle of fidelity.

One of these is signalled from the outset: rather than being friends, Lucy and Mina are sisters, whose mother watches benevolently from a window as Mina says her goodbyes, in contrast to Lucy, who interrupts Mina and Jonathan's farewell kiss. This changes the nature of their

relationship, removing the possibility of any erotic charge, which is arguably present in the book and certainly so in the Haddon adaptation. However, although sisters, Mina and Lucy are very different: Lucy, a knowing minx who groans orgasmically when Dracula feeds from her in the graveyard, is established from the outset as the more assertive and demanding of the two whereas Judi Bowker's Mina, famous from the children's serial *Black Beauty*, looks like a china doll. However, she is more subtly incriminated. In the novel, when she follows Lucy to the churchyard in Whitby she does not even explicitly identify what she sees there as humanoid: 'I called in fright, "Lucy! Lucy!" and something raised a head, and from where I was I could see a white face and red, gleaming eyes' (p. 90); when she later sees Dracula she is confident that this is her first sight of 'a tall, thin man, all in black. I knew him at once from the descriptions of the others' (p. 287). The Mina of *Count Dracula*, though, sees the Count quite clearly in the churchyard, but does nothing about it. Her lack of response or action may work to suggest that she too is not quite such an innocent and uncomplicated figure as she may appear, not least given that unlike the novel where Jonathan declares 'Faugh! Mina is a woman, and there is naught in common' (p. 53), the three vampire women of this adaptation are obviously parodic versions of both Mina and Lucy (all five women wear white, though the vampire sisters' dresses are much lower cut than Lucy's and Mina's and Jonathan sees the vampire sisters in red and Mina in blue; later, Mina writhes when the vampire sisters are staked, reinforcing the link and also suggesting that vampires bond as humans do.). We seem, then, to be invited to attend not only to the vampire but also to his victims as sources of potential disruption and challenge to prevailing ideologies.

There are also other differences between Stoker's novel and *Count Dracula*, and they too serve to blur the polarities of the book's carefully constructed opposition between victims and vampires. In the first place, the name of the country which Jonathan visits is Bohemia rather

than Transylvania. At first glance, this might seem relatively insignificant: after all, both are in Eastern Europe, and the average BBC viewer might well struggle to point to either on a map, so one vague sense of *mitteleuropisch* foreignness might well seem as good as another. However, the connotations of the two locations are suggestively different. Largely because of *Dracula* itself, Transylvania by the time this adaptation was made had become indelibly branded as synonymous with the sinister and the supernatural, but two years after the first performance of Queen's 'Bohemian Rhapsody', Bohemia suggested above all the popular sense of the adjective bohemian, which is unconventional - often but not exclusively in a sexual way - in ways firmly connected in the social and thus the securely human sphere. Again, then, audience attention seems to be directed away from any exclusive focus on vampirism, this time towards more general questions of sexual behaviour and *mores*.

Still more significant and suggestive is the complete absence of Arthur Holmwood, a key figure in the novel. Instead we have Quincey P. Holmwood, a portmanteau name which clearly announces to the informed viewer that the characters of Arthur Holmwood and Quincey P. Morris have been amalgamated. The consequence of this is that we have no heroic Englishman whose name encodes echoes of myth and chivalry, and no attempt is made to fill this gap: indeed Quincey is too badly wounded to do anything to Dracula (although he does seem to be alive and sitting against a tree at the end), and it is Van Helsing who stakes him. In addition Lucy, thus reduced to two suitors instead of three, must now ask 'Why can't a woman marry two men?' instead of 'Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?' (p. 59); since Dracula has three brides the parallelism between Dracula and Lucy which obtains in the novel is thus undermined, and instead a new parallel is created by the highly suggestive choice of Jack Shepherd to play Renfield. In the novel, Dr Seward says of Renfield 'Jack Sheppard himself couldn't get free from the strait-

waistcoat that keeps him restrained' (p. 102). He means the famous eighteenth-century escapologist of the name, but the coincidence of nomenclature draws attention to the casting of Shepherd, an actor whose involvement in projects such as The Actors' Company and the first production of Bond's *Saved* had given him a distinctive profile as a fine player of troubled, edgy characters, and made him already famous enough to warrant a 'with' billing here. Renfield is notably prominent in *Count Dracula*: in a series of scenes not in the original novel and hence freshly created for the adaptation, we see him speaking to Dracula and later see Renfield attempting to attack Dracula, warning Seward about Mina, and dying uttering a prayer, and once he is dead we see only the undamaged side of his face, inviting us to read him as redeemed. Rather than being a collaborator with Dracula, he is thus presented as a parallel victim to Lucy, something which is accentuated when he sticks his tongue out at Mina as vampire-Lucy did at Quincey. Once again, the polarities and alignments of the original novel are disturbed, and the effect of that disturbance is to invite us to reconsider any assumption that the Crew of Light alone are virtuous and that those who oppose them must automatically be read as at best fallible and at worst incriminated.

In a further important difference from the novel, there is no mention of New Women. There are, though, New Vampires, and a modern audience might well feel inclined to regard them as falling into something of the same category. Stoker's original novel defined the nature and powers of the vampire; this adaptation reconceives them through a series of subtle but significant differences from the original. This is an emphasis underlined when we get a vampire point-of-view shot (in the original novel, Dracula's is one of the few perspectives that is never represented) and by Dracula's speech in defence of vampirism, when he calls the cross 'an instrument of torture and humiliation' and argues that 'We must recruit disciples, even as your leader has done'. Nor does he retreat when Van Helsing says 'Retro me

Sathanas'; he merely remarks suavely, 'It always sounds more convincing in Latin, doesn't it?'. In this adaptation, the antisemitism which has bedevilled earlier receptions of *Dracula* and which some critics have felt to inhere in the original itself has given way to a presentation of Dracula himself as something of a Shylock figure, who only narrowly fails to ask 'Hath not a vampire eyes?'

This, then, is a Dracula who is not necessarily evil but *is* necessarily sexual, and moreover sexual within a particular social context which has no place for him and what he represents. Unlike the Haddon version, this is an adaptation firmly rooted in its Victorian setting, and with attention to that setting comes an unusually nuanced and well observed awareness of what that meant in terms of constraints on behaviour, the quality which is so conspicuously lacking in the Haddon. Although there is no sense of 'the crowded streets of your mighty London' (p. 20) which the Count hopes to visit, and indeed no exterior shots of any populated part of London, this can to a certain extent be attributed to the budgetary concerns besetting the BBC in the seventies, which they typically tackled by restricting the use of crowd and location shots (witness the games and circuses scene in *I, Claudius*, where we see nothing but the occupants of the imperial box and hear their descriptions of what passes supplemented by a few token noises off, or Doctor Who's years on earth with UNIT, officially because the Time Lords had banned him from using the TARDIS but actually to eliminate the need for sets which could do duty for other planets). In *Count Dracula*, the absence of external London scenes is compensated for by a focus on interior ones which draw our attention to the ways in which society is structured and personal relationships are conditioned. In particular, we are constantly reminded of the hierarchical nature of this society by a sustained visual emphasis on the vertical: we look sharply up at Dracula descending a cliff; when we first see Renfield we look sharply down at him in his cell as if we were the fly he seeks, except that

once he has caught the fly the point of view is still briefly maintained; we are told that Cannon committed suicide on the top of a cliff; Jonathan is seen climbing and jumping down to escape; vampire-Lucy is first seen far above Van Helsing and Seward and they have to look up sharply; and we look down from above on the Crew of Light as, seated round a table, they plan the destruction of Dracula. Sustained and repeated, this simple device takes on the status of a motif, and it is one which reminds us of the sharply vertical nature of the class and power structure of this society, and the vertiginous difficulty of movement from one position to another.

Within that hierarchical structure, sex is a problem, in ways for which the idea of vampirism becomes a metaphor. Van Helsing (who is here not presented as himself a strange or troubling figure) asks Lucy ‘Do you think you could be worried about your forthcoming marriage?’. This is a question that could never have been asked in the original novel, for two reasons: first, none of the characters could have any reason to suppose that Lucy feels any such concern, and second, it would be culturally impossible for them to enquire about such a matter even if they did. Making Van Helsing articulate the idea not only raises it as a possibility but also forces us to realise that it is odd that it has been raised, because this is a society in which sex is not only not spoken of but has apparently been banished. Lucy being fed from imagines herself dancing amid imagery of red rose petals, and Mina asks her ‘Did Quin come into your dream?’, which might easily be misheard as ‘quim’, a very old term for the vagina (and the sexual meaning for ‘come’ is recorded by *OED* as early as 1650 so is certainly available). When we hear of bed, though, it is always in other contexts and in association with other things: hot chocolate stopped Lucy sleepwalking as a child, and it is administered now to pacify her and keep her from nocturnal ramblings; Van Helsing dispenses cocoa to the Crew of Light. In both instances, we have sleep not sex (though

Dracula knows a better soporific). This is, it seems, a society with a collective neurosis about sex for which Dracula is the symbol and symptom.

Perhaps, though, he is also the cure, for what this Count Dracula does is precipitate the arrival of modernity. The idea of rapid change is first introduced when we see Harker speeding on a train in black and white footage which looks as though it may well be archival, and the idea that he is rushing not just across Europe but towards the future is accentuated when the three vampire women prove to look like nothing so much as three Bond girls. The sense that our own age offers more possibilities than the Victorian one is sharply accentuated by the self-consciousness of much of the cinematography. Dracula says 'The trouble with mirrors is that they don't reflect quite enough'; this not only signals that the adaptation knows that it is Gothic but also alerts us to the fact that we should pay attention to what the screen reflects. If we do so, we will soon realise that a wide variety of visual and special effects is on display. One example of this is the way that, repeatedly in the opening scenes, only parts of faces are shown: the man who sits next to Harker has the upper half of his face in shadow in the first few shots in which he appears, but he subsequently crosses himself and when next seen is no longer in shadow and no longer coded as sinister; similarly, when Dracula himself first appears as the coachman we see only eyes because a scarf covers the lower half of his face. Another is the use of a classic hand-over-the-edge shot to mark Dracula's arrival at Carfax when the coffin is delivered, and when he sees the blood on Harker's neck we break out of the realm of the mimetic and into that of the movie magic of the special effect, used here on Dracula's eyes and teeth. We also see what we know we cannot see when the mirror not only fails to show Dracula to Jonathan but *does* show him Mina. In all these respects, we are invited not only to attend to the nineteenth-century story we are being told but to notice the distinctively late twentieth-century repertoire of ways used to tell it, and thus to register the

progress has been made in the intervening eighty years; indeed the emphasis on the past helps deliver a sense of the difference of the present.

One of the most powerful and suggestive indications of this idea that a new society is being born comes when we catch a half-glimpse of the Simone Martini *Annunciation* in the crypt of Carfax. This celebrated altarpiece, commissioned for the Duomo of Siena but now one of the major draws of the Uffizi, shows the angel Gabriel arriving (his cloak is still flapping) in front of a rather disconcerted Virgin to bring her the news that she is to be a mother.

Maternity in *Count Dracula* is something of a dog which does not bark in the night-time: we do hear of George Cannon's mother and Jonathan is given a cross for the sake of his mother, but the mother of the baby in the bag is not seen and neither the name of the *Demeter* or of the *Czarina Catherine* is mentioned. Mrs Westenra's will is also not discussed and our sense of her guilt is significantly minimised; she does remove the garlic but the action seems innocent enough in context, and our attention is in any case distracted from it by the fact that she dies immediately afterwards. Instead, the theme of motherhood, generally so potent in Stoker's novels, is here completely displaced onto angel imagery. In general, *Count Dracula* is surprisingly chary of angels: despite the fact that the two locations which it is so proud of using, Whitby Abbey and Highgate, are both cemeteries, no angel effigies are in evidence, even though Whitby Abbey is famous as the place where Caedmon, England's first poet, received an angelic visitation (later, when Caedmon's patroness St Hilda died at the abbey, St Bee saw her soul being carried to heaven by angels). Here though the only winged thing in the abbey grounds is Dracula in his form as a bat, while at Highgate, now famous for its angel statuary, the closest we come is Lucy, whose white robe might make her appear parodically angelic. The crypt of Carfax, however, contains only images of angels, which we are probably safe to read as representing Gabriel because as Peter Lamborn Wilson notes in one

of few modern studies of the topic, ‘When an Angel appears to man, he is Gabriel, or sent by Gabriel’.⁷ The Martini *Annunciation* is particularly significant because not only is our brief glimpse of it the culmination of the various shots of angels, but it is itself distinguished by the evident distaste and reluctance of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who ‘shrinks backwards at the news’.⁸ Despite that, though, there will be a birth, and indeed the painting itself could be seen as heralding a (re)birth of a more metaphorical sort, since it is an early manifestation of the aesthetic and praxis of the Renaissance (as Hartt notes, the picture shows ‘the drama of the moment of the incarnation’ and is ‘the earliest known example in which this incident has chosen as the subject of an entire altarpiece’, so that it can be seen as doubly announcing a birth).⁹ Moreover, the shot of the painting proves to lead directly into Dracula materialising in Mina’s bedroom as white smoke like an Unholy Ghost: his face materialises over a sampler and a silhouette of her mother, and when he subsequently says to her ‘They’re superstitious fools. They’ve been losing for two thousand years’ we cannot but link that date to the birth of Christ, and to read the motif of an annunciation as bleeding into this scene too.

Birth imagery often accrues to post-evolutionary fantasies of monstrosity. For Darwin, the workings of natural selection were underpinned by the phenomenon of monstrosity, the Darwinian definition of a monster being an infant which, because of a mutation, differs from its parents, sometimes in ways which impair or impede it but potentially sometimes in ways which may confer on it an evolutionary advantage. There are a number of provocative exploitations of this idea to be found in fiction. In *Jekyll and Hyde*, the name of Gabriel John Utterson combines the angel of the annunciation, the name of the Baptist who was the forerunner of Jesus, and the idea of ‘uttering the son’ to offer a daring hint that Hyde might signal new possibilities for mankind, albeit unholy and unwelcome ones.

There are even more direct parallels with another text featuring a baby. Out of the place of death and into the big city comes the pale-faced aristocrat. Once there, the aristocrat hides in the darkness, preys on the young and inexperienced, imbibes strange substances, and wreaks havoc in a small and close-knit community until eventually that community bands together to expel them, collectively declare them deviant, and run them through with metal. This is of course a description of the plot of *Dracula*, but it can also function as a description of the plot of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Blanche comes from Belle Reve, where she seen all the rest of the household die: ‘All of those deaths! The long parade to the graveyard! Father, mother! Margaret, that dreadful way! So big with it, it couldn’t be put in a coffin!’¹⁰ until ‘finally all that was left ... was the house itself and about twenty acres of ground, including a graveyard, to which now all but Stella and I have retreated’ (p. 140). Explicitly propelled by desire - ‘They told me to take a streetcar named Desire, and then transfer to one called Cemeteries’ (p. 117) - she arrives in New Orleans, where like Dracula she finds a female character willing to give her entrance; shunning the light, Blanche, like Dracula, conceals her real age. Finally the men band together, with Stella, like Mina, as their more ambivalent accomplice, band together to drive Blanche out of the community, and although this is never explicit, Williams’ original audience would have been in little doubt that the fate which almost certainly awaits her is lobotomy, the punishment inflicted on Williams’s sister Rose for behaviour considered deviant, which involves the piercing of the brain with metal as the heart of the vampire is pierced.

Streetcar openly signals an affiliation with the Gothic when Blanche exclaims of the apartment ‘Only Poe! Only Mr Edgar Allan Poe! - could do it justice’ (p. 121); later, she says ‘I attempt to instil a bunch of bobby-soxers and drug-store Romeos with reverence for Hawthorne and Whitman and Poe!’ (p. 151), and the parallelisms with vampirism in

particular are not accidental may not be accidental. Not only was the original name of the Villa Diodati, where Polidori wrote *The Vampyre*, Belle Rive, but in *Der Vampyr* (dir. Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1932), the hero is named Allan Grey, which is also the name of Blanche's husband ('Allan! Allan! The Grey boy!' [pp. 183-4]); he visits an old man and his two daughters who live in a French château, echoing Blanche and Stella growing up at Belle Reve where another Allan Grey finds them, and in Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, the novella on which *Der Vampyr* is based, we are told that 'A suicide, under certain circumstances, becomes a vampire'.¹¹ At the end of *Streetcar*, a child is born, and although it is Stella who has had the baby (and a boy at that, since it has a blue blanket (p. 225) it is Blanche to whom the iconography of sanctified maternity accrues as she dons Della Robbia blue and hears the cathedral bells ring out as she goes (p. 219). We are thus invited to read the birth as a harbinger of a new era in which future Blanches might be spared demonisation and lobotomy. In both *Jekyll and Hyde* and *Streetcar*, a baby thus becomes an unlikely Messiah, suggesting new possibilities for humans and society in ways which we may or may not find reassuring and welcome.

In *Count Dracula* too I think we see the augury of a birth which will trouble and shake existing certainties, and offer new possibilities for humans. The fact that the Holy Spirit is present as a dove in the Martini *Annunciation* may well seem to offer an uncanny parallel to Dracula's incarnation as a bat, and Van Helsing takes with him to the crypt the Host, which gestures at the end of the Incarnation story in that it is, for a Catholic, the body of Christ. Moreover, the next time we see Mina she is lying in a bed just after we've been told that 'her health is now of paramount importance', which presumably implies pregnancy. Later, white smoke rolls past as the vampire women give up the attack on Van Helsing and Mina almost as if Dracula has called them off again as he did with Harker (because he knows she's

pregnant?). Unlike the book, the adaptation contains no scene in which Mina's pregnancy is made explicit, and it ends with the ostensible finality and closure of Dracula's death, but we can nevertheless be in no doubt that modernity has been born: a new era is about to dawn and sexuality has been released from the coffin in which the Victorians sought to imprison it. *Count Dracula*, then, understands and brings to life the pastness of *Dracula*, but also allows its audience to feel the ways in which the story still has energy in the present.

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Notes

¹ See for instance John Allen Stevenson, 'A Vampire in the Mirror: The Sexuality of *Dracula*', *PMLA* 103.2 (1988), pp. 139-49, p. 141, Philip Holden, 'Castle, Coffin, Stomach: *Dracula* and the Banality of the Occult', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 21.2 (2001), pp. 469-85, p. 476, and my own *Bram Stoker: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 54-65.

² Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 89.

³ A. A. Gill, 'A vampire tale that's far too anaemic', *The Sunday Times*, Culture supplement, 3 November 2013, pp. 16-17, p. 17. There is also an influence from *Buffy* in that vampires burn in direct sunlight, which has no precedent in Stoker.

⁴ See for instance Talia Schaffer, “‘A Wilde Desire Took Me’”: The Homoerotic History of *Dracula*’, *ELH* 61 (1994): 381-425.

⁵ See for instance Stephen Arata, ‘The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization’, *Victorian Studies* 33.4 (summer 1990), pp. 621-45.

⁶ See for instance Thomas Elsaesser, ‘No End to *Nosferatu* (1922)’, in *Weimar Cinema*, edited by Noah Isenberg (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 79-94, p. 82.

⁷ Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Angels* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), p. 58.

⁸ Frederick Hartt, *History of Italian Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture*, revised edition (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), p. 99.

⁹ Hartt, *History of Italian Renaissance Art*, p. 99.

¹⁰ Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire and Other Plays*, edited by E. Martin Browne (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), p. 126.

¹¹ Sheridan Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* (London: Wordsworth, 2008), p. 271.