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# TECHNOLOGIES AND THE DIVERSIFICATION OF SEXUALITIES IN BRAM STOKER'S *DRACULA*

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Technologies and the Diversification of Sexualities in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is a novel manifestly charged with sexual imagery. The punctures Dracula leaves on his victim's neck and his invasion on England signify sexual penetration, especially his targets being middle-class English women. Specifically, the novel narrativizes perverse sexualities: Dracula, despite his male sexual identity, assumes a female role of giving birth to new vampires by copulating not through the female sexual organ but through the punctures on their necks. This story about an East European abject being's perverse sexuality is recorded by cutting-edge technologies of the nineteenth-century: stenograph, phonograph, and typewriter. The novel is a synthetic work of stenographic, phonographic and typewritten records. These technologies, however, are not merely fancy, cutting-edge elements utilized by the author to draw readers' attention. Rather, they constitute the perverse sexualities count Dracula and some of his English adversaries exemplify in the novel. In this essay, I will attempt to show how the qualities of the three technologies triggered the diversification of sexuality in Victorian England.

Martin Heidegger, in his essay, "The Question Concerning Technology," usurps the traditional definition of technology as means to an end. Rather, defining the essence of technology as instrumentality, which is the essence of *Dasein*, he argues that technology is *the* fundamental factor that defines *Dasein*. (12) Marshall McLuhan, in the same vein with Heidegger's assertion, maintains that our subjectivity is determined by media/technologies. (20) If we accept the propositions by the German philosopher and the Canadian media theorists, the nineteenth-century of Western civilization is a remarkable period for its being an age of technological innovation. The major technologies having constituted the modern culture, such as photography, typewriter, phonograph, cinematograph, and so on, were invented in the century. Bearing in mind McLuhan's assertion that the medium is the message, it is fascinating to imagine how these new media transformed the culture of the nineteenth-century western hemisphere.

Discussing the nineteenth-century explosion of technologies, Walter Benjamin argues that

they undermine the authenticity and accordingly the privilege of a work. (22) In other words, the world is democratized through the mechanical reproductions of authentic artworks of the past. Friedrich A. Kittler connects the democratizing force of the nineteenth-century technologies of reproducibility further to desexualization. Discussing the effects of the typewriter as an example, Kittler argues that “[typescript] amounts to the desexualization of writing, sacrificing its metaphysics and turning it into word processing.” (187)

*Dracula* is a collage of the records produced by these technologies of reproducibility: stenographic and phonographic records transformed into typescripts by the heroine, Mina Harker. Jonathan Harker, while detained in Dracula’s castle, leaves shorthand writings about the count, his castle, and the morbid events happening around him there. Due to their illegibility, his records avoid the count’s watchful eyes and survive, typewritten later by Mina. Thus survived, the information Jonathan Harker’s stenographs contain plays a significant role near the end of the novel when the English expedition team chases after and exterminates the monster. In addition to Harker’s stenographic records, Dr. John Seward’s phonographic diaries are significant in the story. Dr. Seward’s diaries preserve intact the information about most of the happenings related to Lucy Westenra, Renfield the lunatic, and Mina Harker, most of which is essential in understanding Dracula’s habits and the vampiric transitions of the two female characters. These two different types of mechanical reproductions are typewritten by Mina Harker. Her typewriter reconstructs Harker and Seward’s dispersed records into a set of information. Indeed, without Mina’s typescripts, the English are helpless in tracking down and finally killing Dracula.

These mechanical reproductions separate the author from his text. Stenograph enables rapid recording of information. The stenographer’s job is not to make a work of art but to jot down as much information as possible. In this process, he produces a large quantity of information over which he has no control. The author being detached from his text, his stenograph merely becomes a pack of signifiers freed from the rein of the author’s signified. Phonograph records sound

immediately. This immediacy of phonographic reproduction completely separates the recorded sound from its producer. Recording even the elements not caught by the symbolic, phonographic records demolish the structure constructed by the connection between the signifier and the signified.

Typewriter's capacity to produce multiple copies at a time, at a much faster pace than handwriting, also contributes to a writer's losing the sense of authority over his writing.

By detaching the signified from the signifier and disseminating a large number of meaningless signifiers, the three technologies dissolve one's symbolic authority, the super-ego. The dissolution of the super-ego is closely intertwined with the formation of one's sexuality. According to Sigmund Freud's explanation of sexuality, the solidity of one's super-ego, which is formulated through the proper Oedipal phase, determines one's sexual orientation. Freud explicates that a female infant, unlike her male counterpart, does not have to surmount the Oedipal phase before the threat of castration by her father, tend to be less governed by the super-ego. (427) Accordingly, she comes to establish an ambivalent sexual orientation that may turn out to be either heterosexual or homosexual. (424-428) I am not trying to endorse Freud's more or less sexist argument here. Rather, I would like to emphasize the correlation between one's sexuality and the solidity of one's super-ego, which, in my opinion, may diverge into various paths regardless of biological sexual differences and is prone to weaken by phenomenological causes later in one's life. Considering Michel Foucault's observation of the proliferation of various sexual discourses in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe (37-38), the dissolution of one's super-ego and of the social norm, and the diversification of sexuality in the Victorian era, which are not essentially wrong at all by the way, seem closely intertwined, the first having fostered the social atmosphere where various, even perverse at times, discourses about sexuality could multiply in their number.

As discussed above, the three reproductive and disseminative technologies deconstruct the sign system constituted by the binding of the signified and the signifier, which in turn obscures the boundary between the normal and the abnormal sexualities. *Dracula* is a symptomatic text inscribed

by this techno-sexual transition. The three technologies, stenograph, phonograph, and the typewriter, respectively emasculate or feminize three characters of the novel: Jonathan Harker, Dr. John Seward, and Mina Harker. Stenograph emasculates Jonathan Harker. Jonathan Harker's stenograph about the happenings in the castle Dracula is mere rambling gibber uttered by a man petrified by mysterious and sinister Count Dracula. Most of his stenographic records are about how much he misses his fiancée, Mina, and how dreadful the count and the castle is. Even though he once shows a manly determination to kill the count while he is in sleep during the day, the temporary masculinity is substituted by extreme fear of facing the horrific face of the sleeping undead. (Stoker 51) The situation here is scary, but he certainly has another opportunity to attack the count since the latter is more or less immobile. His inability to kill Dracula at the crucial moment, then, proves his emasculated indeterminacy.

Dr. John Seward is another male character with emasculated sexuality. His medical investigation on the zoophagous Renfield is highly discursive rather than concentrated. His indulgence in phonographic recording distracts his attention and keeps him from collecting crucial information about Dracula when he has enough clues from the conduct of the zoophagy. (Stoker 209-210) Seward himself here not only admits his incapacity of data processing but also is interested more in Renfield's case itself rather than discovering the count through him. (Stoker 68; 101)

Mina Harker is the most fervent recorder in this novel. She is a fervent user of stenograph and typewriter, enjoying producing a significant number of documents, which are later used to trace Dracula but denigrated at the end of the novel into mere pieces of meaningless paper. (Stoker 351) Certainly, she pieces together and organizes the typescript versions of Jonathan Harker's stenograph and Dr. Seward's phonograph, but she fails in playing the decisive role in tracing the count, spending most of her time in simply reproducing texts.

In contrast with these feminine characters, Abraham Van Helsing, a representative masculine character, constantly tries to move forward towards the communal goal, which is the extermination

of Dracula. By contrast with Harker and Seward, who is more interested in recording their experiences than in finding out and killing the count, thus ending this narrative, it is always Van Helsing who makes their exorcist project advance. He is the man of linearity, progression, and masculinity.

The correlation between technology and sexuality appears to be more plausible when Jonathan Harker's sexuality alters. At the very end of the novel, he seems to be an entirely changed person, denouncing Mina's typescripts, among which his stenographic records are significant contribution:

I took the papers from the safe where they have been ever since our return 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 typewriting, except the later note-books of Mina and Seward and myself, did we wish, to accept these as proofs of so wild a story. (Stoker 351)

Harker says this, disturbed by the typescripts, the remnants of his former emasculated habit of stenographic recording. After his wife, Mina, is vamped by the count, he turns into a man of masculinity. Dracula does not make him fall into stupor anymore (262), and, furthermore, he even shows unhesitant bravery to kill the count with his merciless, 'phallic' Kukri knife, as Mina testifies: "But, on the instant, came the sweep and flash of Jonathan's great knife. I shrieked as I saw it shear through the throat." (Stoker 350) Now that he is a man of masculinity, he is understandably embarrassed in reencountering the proof of his feminine past.

Technological reproducibility and sexuality are, as examined and argued above, closely related. The characters' indulgence in the feminine technologies is the manifestation of their femininity. The technologies of reproducibility started to emerge in the Victorian social sphere and even, as Harker's stenograph vindicates, infiltrated into the public sphere that had been dominated by males. The male sphere, ironically, could not but accept the new but feminine technologies due to

their functional efficiency. This unavoidable encounter with the feminine technologies, I argue, slowly assimilated the male users. After all, the adoption of the feminine technologies during the Victorian era was one of the most decisive factors that induced the diversification of sexuality.

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