

The Victorian period was marked by repression and strict traditional values that prohibited the expression of female sexuality and non-normative relationships. But, with authors being influenced by the time period, literature emerged that sought to challenge societal expectations. Out of that variety of works came the novel *Dracula*, written by Bram Stoker, reflecting the growing anxiety with sexual repression and changing gender roles. Stoker displays anxiety about the changing roles of women, and the implications of sexual repression resonate with the discussion of gender and sex. When critics access the novel *Dracula*, they look at it through a queer lens, but they typically overlook the theme of lesbianism. This analysis will examine how readers can perceive Mina and Lucy's relationship as having lesbian undertones in *Dracula*.

When scholars examine homosexuality in *Dracula*, they generally examine the male gay relationship between Jonathan and the Count, "How dare you touch him, any of you? How dare you cast eyes on him when I had forbidden it? Back, I tell you all! This man belongs to me!" (Chapter 3). *Dracula* acts possessively over Jonathan, telling his vampire brides that Jonathan belongs to him when they try to seduce and go after him. Audiences from the 1897 novel and 1992 film interpret this scene as *Dracula* having romantic feelings for Jonathan. But many scholars fail to acknowledge the homosexual relationship between Mina and Lucy that is implied during the novel *Dracula* through their letters, conversations, and interactions with each other. Samantha Kountz and Isabella Norton are among the few scholars who have explored lesbian themes in the novel *Dracula*, thus supporting my argument in their book *Where There is Love, Why Not?* making significant contributions to the study of queer storytelling. The women narrowing in on the female characters perspectives shifts the narrative into a more feminist lense, "Reframing the emotional and physical suffering of Mina and Lucy as the trials of women in

love highlights the tragedy of the narrative and shifts the emotional core of the study to a love which productive, nourishing and undeniably queer” (Kountz, Samantha, and Isabella Norton 34). Kountz and Norton perform a insightful literary analysis focusing on how the experiences of the female characters can be read through the lens of women’s emotional and relational lives.

Lesbian vampires have been in the media for a long time, challenging traditional norms, starting with *Carmilla*, which was released in 1872, 26 years before *Dracula*. Most scholarly conversations involving lesbian vampires discuss *Carmilla* by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, which is about the vampire Carmilla who seduces and goes after women to drink their blood. “Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s character Carmilla is the prototype of all the lesbian (and regular) vampires that pose such a great danger to the society” (Uygur 6). *Carmilla* laid down the foundation of lesbian vampires in literature and fiction, with people taking inspiration from the novel in their own works. The book also challenges traditional notions of Victorian society by defying expectations, having the main vampire being not only a woman but also a lesbian who was able to express her femininity and sexual desires during a time period when that was not prohibited. Carmilla’s relationship is similar to that of Mina and Lucy’s relationship in *Dracula*, with both stories using vampirism as a device to explore female sexuality. After Carmilla and Lucy turn into vampires they gain the confidence to use their new abilities to escape the patriarchy and take control of their own female agency, allowing them to indulge in their previously suppressed desires.

Readers can read Lucy and Mina’s relationship as having signs of lesbianism through their letters, with the expression of affectionate language and shared experiences. Mina expresses her desire for Lucy, looking forward to spending time with her on their planned vacation to Whitby, being stressed at her job as a schoolmistress, “My dearest Lucy: I am longing to be with

you, and by the sea, where we can talk together freely and build our castles in the air.” (*Dracula* 1897). Mina dreams of running away from her hectic life to somewhere peaceful where she can spend the rest of her days with her beloved Lucy. Kountz and Norton explain Lucy and Mina's relationship as ““referencing to the fantasy as “an intimate world together without interpretation from a patriarchal Victorian society”” (Kountz and Norton 37). Lucy reciprocates Mina's feelings, communicating how badly she craves to be with Mina, “I wish I were with you, dear, sitting by the fire undressing, as we used to sit, and I would try and tell you what I feel” (*Dracula* 1897). Lucy, missing Mina, reminisces on the time they spent as children, where they enjoyed each other's company by the fireplace. Lucy wants to recreate experiences they had as children, seeking to reproduce the sentimental feelings they had when they were young, sitting close together by the fire. Lucy longs to physically be present with Mina so that she can fully express her feelings about her engagement to Arthur Holmwood. This exhibits the close relationship Mina and Lucy have developed over time through their shared past and warmth with each other. This closeness can be studied through the homosocial, homerotic, and homosexual spectrum, three ways individuals can interact with someone from the same gender. Ranging from purely platonic social connections (homosocial) to subtle or overt desire (homerotic), and culminating into sexual or romantic desire (homosexual). Through the novel Lucy and Mina's relationship was leaning more toward the homerotic side of the spectrum.

Readers can perceive the love between the two women in the novel, with Mina repeatedly admiring Lucy's beauty in her diary entries. During their vacation together, Mina comments on Lucy's looks, noting that she appears to be in better spirits since they've been together in Whitby, “Lucy was looking sweetly pretty in her white lawn frock; she has got a beautiful color since she has been here” (*Dracula* 1897). Mina highlights how charming Lucy looks in her

outfit, reflecting on her personal affection for Lucy. Mina's compliments to Lucy display her affection and respect for Lucy's femininity and her ability to represent the ideals of Victorian womanhood. Mina and Lucy's relationship starts to blur the lines between friendship and more than friends with Mina's underlying attraction for Lucy coming out. As Mina and Lucy's trip continues, Lucy begins to become ill, picking up her old habit of sleepwalking. One night, Lucy sleepwalks all the way to the churchyard, where Mina has to go outside and help Lucy snap out of her sleepwalking daze. "Lucy always wakes prettily, and even at such a time, when her body must have been chilled with cold, and her mind somewhat appalled at waking unclad in a churchyard at night, she did not lose her grace." (*Dracula* 1897). Despite the cold and confusion of nighttime, Lucy speedily regains her self-control, contrasting with the potential danger around her. Mina's concern and protectiveness of Lucy while she was asleep affirms the close bond and trust between them. Revealing that their relationship offers much more than just traditional friendship with the two women relying and depending on each other more than anyone else.

The lesbian relationship between Mina and Lucy is portrayed more in the movie *Dracula* from 1992, amplifying the homoerotic theme that is only hinted at in the novel. In the movie, Mina experiences how admired Lucy is by everybody while at a dinner party they both attended; "The truth is that I admire Lucy, and I'm not surprised that men flock around her. I wish I were as pretty and as adored as she " (*Dracula* 1992). Mina expresses her own insecurities, feeling insufficient when comparing herself to Lucy's beauty and popularity. Mina's compliment reflects how her feelings for Lucy are complex, with a sense of longing and a touch of jealousy. Another scene that shows Mina and Lucy's intimate relationship is when they kiss. Mina kisses Lucy to break her out of Dracula's hypnotic spell that she falls under when she sleepwalks to the churchyard. This scene suggests a romantic relationship between the two friends, being a

representation of the subtextual queer coding that is in the film. The film presents Mina and Lucy's relationship with romantic and erotic undertones, which supports audiences and critics viewing their relationship as approaching lesbianism.

In the novel, Mina shows her love and support for Lucy by assuming a maternal or protective role. Mina becomes extremely concerned for Lucy when she falls into her old habit of sleepwalking, which starts to affect her well-being as well: "Lucy walks more than ever, and each night I am awakened by her moving about the room. Fortunately, the weather is so hot that she cannot get cold, but still the anxiety and the perpetually being wakened is beginning to tell on me, and I am getting nervous and wakeful myself" (*Dracula* 1897). Mina describes Lucy's restless behavior during the night as so worrisome that it starts to take a toll on her health as well. Mina, being deeply distressed by Lucy's illness, is willing to do anything to help make sure she gets better, even giving up her own sleep to check on her. This passage promotes the frightening situation and foreshadows Lucy becoming a vampire. The audience notices Mina in a nurturing role, specifically when Mina does her best to help Lucy when she sleepwalks outside one night, but afraid of awakening her, "fasted the shall at her throat with a big safety pin; but I must have been clumsy in my anxiety and pinched or pricked her with it." (*Dracula* 1897). Mina attempts to keep Lucy safe when she is sleeping by fastening her clothes with a safety pin, but being uneasy, accidentally injures Lucy. Mina's desire to protect and tend to her unwell friend during her time of need reflects how she reacts during moments of peril despite having limited knowledge and control. This provides insight into the personal and confidential moments amid *Dracula's* horrors, where characters struggle with their fears while trying to support each other.

Usually, when scholars analyze the two women, they focus on how they challenge gender roles and societal norms in the time period with the idea of the new woman. Jenifer A. Swartz-

Levine, in "Stalking Salvation: The Reclamation of the Monstrous Female in *Dracula*," explores how female characters in *Dracula*, particularly Lucy and Mina, embody societal fears and anxieties of the Victorian era regarding women's sexuality and femininity.

When Stoker sets up female sexuality as diametrically opposed to femininity and does so in terms of insanity and monstrosity, he draws from a heritage that long reveres the idea of the chaste, modest, nonsexual beings as the standard for Englishwoman and devastations from this norm as grotesque (346).

Stoker connects female sexual agency with monstrosity because it violates the norms of Victorian society. Viewers of the novel particularly notice this concept, with Lucy being able to express her independence when she becomes a vampire, "Come to me, Arthur. Leave these others and come to me. My arms are hungry for you. Come, and we can rest together. Come, my husband, come!" (*Dracula* 1897). When Lucy becomes a vampire, she tries to seduce Arthur with her vampire powers to turn him into a vampire so that they can be together forever. Lucy's metamorphosis displays the societal fears and anxiety surrounding female eroticism in the Victorian period. After Lucy's transformation, she can break free from the expectations of heterosexual conformity and male-dominated social structures. This highlights the monstrous representation of women becoming vampires, allows the text to explore non-normative sexualities, and promotes lesbian relationships.

Readers taking a close look at Mina and Jonathan's relationship can interpret it as asexual. While Mina and Lucy's relationship is not sexual, their close bond can be interpreted as Lucy fulfilling needs for Mina that Jonathan is not fulfilling; a dynamic conveyed in Mina's own wedding vows, "I have nothing to give him except myself, my life, and my trust, and with these went my love and duty for all the days of my life" (*Dracula* 1897). Just after Mina and Jonathan

get married, she expresses her love and devotion, displaying that her love and loyalty are unconditional. Mina's declaration highlights that her devotion is not superficial but a lifelong commitment as a wife. Mina conveying her affection for Jonathan this way plays into traditional Victorian roles for a married couple, instead of focusing on sexual desire. While it's evident that Mina demonstrates her love for Jonathan, their relationship lacks a level of intimacy. Lucy provides Mina with her need for intimacy and companionship with their close bond, "She came and snuggled in beside me and told me all about Authur. I told her how anxious I was about Jonathan, and then she tried to comfort me. Well, she succeeded somewhat, for, though sympathy can't alter facts, it can make them more bearable." (*Dracula* 1897). Lucy attempts to comfort Mina when she hears how worried she is about Jonathan wanting to cheer up her best friend. This moment acknowledges the emotional connection and the importance of sympathy in making difficult situations bearable. Lucy fulfills the role of emotional support for Mina while Jonathan is absent, identifying the strength of their female friendship.

In a time period of censorship with strict traditional values, these deep friendships gave women a sense of companionship and emotional support. These relationships provided a space for women to explore their feelings and desires that were often suppressed in heterosexual relationships. Suzanne Raitt and Claire Buck are critics who contributed to the fields of literature and feminist studies with "Friendship and Lesbian Studies," by exploring how the study of female friendships, particularly in historical or lesbian contexts, is complex and multifaceted. They mention studies by Martha Vicinus and Shannon Marcus as "models for all of us who aspire to reconstruct the bewildering of Victorian women's erotic, emotional, and social lives" (Raitt and Buck). This emphasizes their focus on capturing the historical depth and significance

of women's intimate connections. Overall, these lesbian friendships shaped the identities and experiences of women in the Victorian period.

The theme of queerness is discussed in *Dracula*, with Mina's reaction to Lucy's death being devastated by the loss of her female lover, "Oh, what a wealth of sorrow in a few words! Poor Mrs. Westenra! Poor Lucy! Gone, gone, never to return to us! And poor, poor Arthur, to have lost such sweetness out of his life! God help us all to bear our troubles" (*Dracula* 1897). Mina, grieving for the loss of her best friend, expresses deep sorrow and loss, reflecting the intensity of human emotion triggered by Lucy's death. Mina's deep expression of grief displays how intensely Lucy meant to her. Mina's grief deepens after hearing Lucy's death being recited through Dr. John Steward's diary entries being, "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 own tones, the anguish of your heart." (*Dracula* 1897). Mina conveying a profound understanding of Dr. Steward's grief implies that she experienced the same feelings of pain and loss herself. Mina's willingness to share her feelings of sorrow with Steward exhibits her desire to help the vampire hunters defeat the Count to avenge her lesbian lover.

In the end, through *Dracula*, readers can interpret Mina and Lucy's relationship as having lesbian undertones with Stoker using metaphors, confidential female friendship, and coded behaviors to suggest same-sex desire. This reveals both the restrictions of the Victorian era and Stoker's engagement with queer themes through Gothic horror. The book portraying hints of lesbianism provides insight into the historical context with deep female relationships, offering a space where women could express their desires.

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