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SHE WHO CANNOT BE NAMED: LUCY AS A CHILD MOLESTER. STOKER'S RHETORIC OF TABOO

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Résumé : Comment un texte peut-il nommer l'innommable ? En mentionnant la *voluptueuse luxure* (« voluptuous wantonness ») de Lucy au contact d'un corps d'enfant, le *Dracula* de Stoker transgresse explicitement l'interdit langagier envers l'abus infligé à un enfant par une femme, bien que d'autres procédés linguistiques – notamment l'ambivalence et le paradoxe – détournent le lecteur de cet objet d'interdiction. La rhétorique de Stoker lui permet de faire référence à ce type d'abus tout en maintenant à distance ce tabou par l'usage du paradigme socialement acceptable de la sainte Mère, et par la fragilisation de la vraisemblance au moyen des paradoxes fantastiques inhérents à la figure du vampire. Le recours au paradigme de la maternité pour décrire une Lucy qui n'a jamais enfanté signale que la sexualité féminine se conçoit plus aisément sous l'angle de la procréation. Hors maternité, la sexualité féminine demeure taboue. Si de surcroît cette sexualité implique une activité pathologique tel l'attentat à la pudeur des enfants, elle s'avère alors, *a fortiori*, innommable.

Mots-clés : rhétorique, tabou, femme, abus sexuel, enfant, ambivalence, paradoxe, métaphore, vampire, Madone

“I think strange things which I dare not confess to my own soul.” (24)¹

More than thirty years ago, Phyllis A. Roth (1997 [1977], 412) wrote: “the equation of vampirism with sexuality is well established in the criticism”².

¹ All quotations from *Dracula* refer to the 1997 Norton edition. Pages are indicated with bare numbers in round brackets.

² This equation is still very frequent in today's criticism: see for example (Craft, 1999), (Linneman, 2010), etc.

However, to our knowledge, the passages related to Lucy's *vamping* – strictly understood here as biting and bloodsucking – of toddlers in Stoker's *Dracula* are widely construed as poor mothering, only exceptionally as child molesting³. Indeed, the novel strongly suggests the link between women and mothers, though paradoxically, Lucy has no offspring.

The main scene discussed in this essay ("There was a long spell of silence [...] the words addressed to another", 187-188) takes place after a series of aggressions against children resulting in "so small holes in [their] throats" that Van Helsing intends to prove "were made by Miss Lucy!" (173), (un)dead⁴ at this point in the novel. In other words, Van Helsing is exposing Lucy for what he thinks she actually is: a child predator (henceforth, I shall refer to the passage as *the exposure scene*). As will be shown, the text literally – as opposed to metaphorically – expresses Lucy's erotic contact with the child in her arms, but paradoxically resorts to an imagery contradicting Lucy's predation, namely the "Madonna and Child" art paradigm. It can be hypothesized that this paradigm aims to bypass the taboo of female child molesting, in order to portray Lucy even though her desires and activities remain unspeakable.

Hence the focus of this essay on the rhetoric of taboo. How can language build reference to a subject that in fact cannot be named? According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word "taboo" concomitantly designates "the putting of a person or thing under prohibition", and "a total or partial prohibition of the use of certain words, expressions, topics, *etc.*, esp. in social intercourse". This essay thus concentrates on the study of the linguistic devices used to speak of the unspeakable; to label the unnameable Lucy. The first part is dedicated to the ambivalent textual posture that consists in simultaneously unveiling and veiling Lucy. The second part focuses on the names that the text suggests for Lucy, especially the name of "mother" – an analysis which provides clues about the nature of the unnameable taboo terrors she triggers.

³ Weissman (1977, 402) dedicates one sentence to the question: "The women in the castle are also satisfied with a child when they are denied Jonathan; there is obviously a suggestion that women become child molesters". Minot (2004) studies it further, emphasizing the link between Lucy and the Victorian procuresses: "Lucy's sexual menace to the children may be read both as a threat of sexual abuse and as a threat of sexual recruitment [for others] [...]". Though child molesting is nowadays more commonly called *pedophilia*, Minot's historical perspective shows that the phenomenon must have raised then concerns similar to today's, even if laws and medicine have evolved.

⁴ "Un-Dead" (183) designates the vampire's state of being neither alive nor dead.

How to “call Lucy” (187): ambivalent textual posture

Between spectacular displaying, and downplaying

Dr Seward, the focalizer, presents the exposure scene as a spectacle staged by Dr Van Helsing for an audience consisting of three younger men – Lucy's former suitors: Dr Seward himself, the fiancé Arthur, and Quincey. “All I ask you now is that you come with me, that you look and listen” (184), Van Helsing demands. The older man is indeed the one “point[ing]” (187) to the object of the spectacle, while using “moonlight” and the “concentrated light” of his lantern (187) for a better effect, and restraining his audience's impulse to save the child (187) for the sake of his exposure. He directs the choreography of the piece, arranging for his main protagonist, Lucy, to advance “down the avenue of yews”, and making the young men “obedient to his gesture[s]” (187), ordering them either to keep back or to advance (187). As in any thrilling show, the suspense builds meticulously, progressively replacing the “silence” and “void” (187) with rich sensations. Numerous vision verbs lead to an almost cinematographic close-up. The process starts with the indefinite phrases “a dim white figure”, “something dark”, “a dark-haired woman”, and “a fair-haired child” (187), moves on to the definite “the features of Lucy Westenra” (187), and results in a grotesque⁵ magnification on her “lips”, “chin” (187), and “eyes” (188). The suspense is strengthened by syntactically protracted revelations with structures delaying the occurrences of the names “child” and “Lucy” in “the face [...] was bent down over what we saw to be a fair-haired child” (187), and in “My own heart grew cold as ice, and I could hear the gasp of Arthur, as we recognized the features of Lucy Westenra” (187). The sights of “blood” (187), and then of “fire” (188) trigger a paroxystic explosion. The emotional density to which the suspense has led is conveyed by the strict symmetrical construction of this paroxystic episode, framed between two occurrences of “shudder” (187, 188), and standing out against the repetition of its semantic opposite, “cold” (187, 188).

At that point, one wonders just what spectacular object the exposure scene is unveiling with such elaborate suspense. The text explicitly exposes Lucy's desire as she is in close contact with a child's body, and still “unaware” (188) of the adults around her.

the face [...] was bent down over what we saw to be a fair-haired child. [...] I could hear the gasp of Arthur, as we recognized the features of Lucy Westenra. Lucy Westenra, but

⁵ “Grotesque” is understood as “the ridiculous, bizarre, extravagant, freakish and unnatural; in short, aberrations from the desirable norms of harmony, balance and proportion” (Cuddon 1999, 367).

yet how changed. The sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness. (187)

Indeed, the underlined definite article establishes an anaphoric link between the noun “purity” and Lucy. As a predicative element and a subject complement to “purity”, “voluptuous wantonness” is also related to Lucy, so that it designates the current expression of her features. The term “voluptuous” reflects the focalizer’s perception, but is reinforced by Lucy’s very words when she later addresses her husband with a similar “voluptuous grace”: “My arms are hungry for you” (188). The pathological quality of this female adult’s physical contact to a child is emphasized by the choice of adjective. Sage (1996, 34) proves that “voluptuous” in fact belongs to the codes of nineteenth-century pornography. Furthermore, Lucy’s bodily closeness to the child is strengthened by a color chiasmus miming her embrace: the [pale-dark] combination associated with their figures (“a white figure”; “something dark at its breast” 187) is reversed into a [dark-pale] combination of their hair (“a dark-haired woman”; “a fair-haired child”, 187). The text transgresses the verbal prohibition on Lucy’s pathological desire and forbidden activities involving children, if only with the explicit use of a pornographic adjective.

But a strong rhetorical downplaying tendency runs counter to this textual posture of spectacular displaying. The vamping that Van Helsing holds for the main event of the scene is distanced by the lack of first-hand witnesses to ascertain whether Lucy actually bites the child. Dr. Seward declares that they “could not see the face” (187). Besides, the blood is perceived on Lucy’s mouth and chin (187), but not on the child, that Van Helsing in fact does not consider much injured: “As for this little one, he is not much harm” (189)⁶. In effect, nowhere does the novel provide any first-hand witnesses of Lucy’s suspected biting of toddlers. Even the victims are described as “too young to give any properly intelligible account” (159) of the events. Thus, the readers have only Van Helsing’s word for it that the “pause and [...] sharp little cry” (187) might correspond to Lucy’s blood drinking⁷. Readers are further distanced as they only access the scene through a series of intermediaries, since the extract under study is presented as Mina’s typed transcription of Dr. Seward’s audio diary made the day after the events. In short, the text unveils Lucy’s desire and erotic contact for and with the child but veils her potential biting and blood sucking. Her vamping the child is simultaneously witnessed and reported, but overlooked and concealed.

⁶ This is the original spelling: Van Helsing is not a native English speaker.

⁷ Similarly, the three other succubi’s suspected preying on children is not actually witnessed. When Dracula brings them a “dreadful bag” (44), they disappear before making anything of it, and the content of the bag is only hinted at through the comparison “as of a half smothered child” (44), and not ascertained through perception.

This contradiction between displaying and downplaying could be interpreted as a consequence of the conflicting feelings triggered by vamping, as worded by Jonathan: "There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive" (42). This coexistence of contradictory emotions and attitudes – in short, this ambivalence – is amplified in the exposure scene by the chiaroscuro created by the moon and the lantern against the darkness of the night. According to Freud (1950, 184), "persons who obey the taboo have an ambivalent feeling toward what is affected by the taboo", so that the text can be seen as miming the mixture of fascination and repulsion elicited by Lucy in that it simultaneously obeys and transgresses the prohibition on addressing her taboo practices. Furthermore, the spectacle of Lucy is not restricted to the diegetic audience, as the readers are progressively involved in the text. Through a *mise en abyme*, the readers witness Seward watching not only Lucy, but also Arthur's response to the perception of Lucy. Dr. Seward carefully describes Arthur's movements and vocal manifestations (187, 188). Though Seward is the internal focalizer during the fiancés' tentative reunion in the exposure scene, he is still able to identify with Arthur, since Lucy's "tones [...] rang through the brains even of us who heard the words addressed to another" (188). Similarly, the readers are prepared to identify with the gang of men by the progressively expanding scope of first person pronouns. The pronoun in "we saw a white figure" (187) clearly opposes the three young men to Van Helsing and Lucy, until it includes "even Van Helsing" (187). Thus, the next logical step is for the text to admit the reader into the spectacle. Through their progressive identification with the diegetic audience, the readers are made to experience the ambivalent effects of taboo.

Constructing ambivalent references

The theme of exposure provides a rhetoric opportunity for portraying the taboo object of the spectacle. Just as Van Helsing simultaneously unveils and veils what he perceives as Lucy's true nature, the text refers to Lucy and undermines the process of referring to her at the same time. The referring process is indeed destabilized by the use of contrasting or contradictory words which present Lucy as unnamable as is illustrated in the focalizer's perplexity: "Lucy—I call the thing that was before us Lucy because it bore her shape" (187).

The exposure scene emphasizes the lack of a univocal correspondence between one word and its meaning by contrasting two uses for one word. Through *antanaclasis*, the same word – in the example above, the name "Lucy" – is used twice but each time with a different meaning: *Lucy as we knew her*, as opposed to *reified, monstrous Lucy*. The fact that one word does not have only

one meaning reflects the relationship between body and identity. A part of the body can have two very different qualities, which is illustrated when the “form and color” of “Lucy’s eyes” are opposed to their “unclean” state (188). Lucy herself remarks how difficult it is to make sense of her body with a mirror: “Do you ever try to read your own face? I do, [...], [it] gives you more trouble than you can well fancy” (57). Her body appears as difficult to decipher as her name. A parallel can be established between the undermining of the act of referring to her and the way her body cannot guide observers towards her identity.

Even when a word is not repeated, it is often ambiguous, in that it has more than one possible meaning. Double entendre is the most blatant instance of ambiguity in the extract. It relies on the use of words generic enough to receive either a sexual or a non sexual interpretation, as they belong to at least two different lexical fields, namely pain and/or sexual pleasure, so that the text does not plainly favor one field over the other. The following words thus destabilize the reference to the character of Lucy in that they do not univocally indicate how sexual her behavior actually is. The child’s “sharp cri[es]” (187, 188) and “moaning” (188), Arthur’s “groan” and the narrator’s “Oh, God” (188) are as ambiguous as the protagonists’ other physiological responses, which include “shudder[ing]”, “tremulous[ness]” and “nerve [...] fail[ure]” (187). Arthur almost becomes a “fallen” man (187), even before “hungry” Lucy (188) cries for him to “come” (188).

The text’s emphasis on the lack of unity in the meaning of words echoes the lack of unity in the reference it is constructing⁸. Even before Lucy turned into a vampire, the consistency of her identity was challenged by paradoxes, namely by the “apparently self-contradictory (even absurd) statement[s]” (Cuddon 1999, 634) that she could be either herself or not herself, as Mina here expresses: “Lucy was like her old self again” (94). This explains why some words are made to contradict each other, even when each has their own unambivalent meaning. With antitheses, the meanings of words placed in the same clause or sentence are made to clash. In “The sweetness was turned to adamant, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness” (187), the memory of Lucy’s past “sweetness” and “purity” contrasts with her current “cruelty” and “wantonness”, thence highlighting the intensity of Lucy’s metamorphosis. No wonder then, that Lucy appears by “yew tree[s]”, symbols of transformation. But her inner contradictions climax in the oxymoronic

⁸ Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1871) – a text to which Stoker’s *Dracula* owes much – similarly uses a rhetorical device to challenge consistency and manifest taboo: “In every incarnation over the centuries, Carmilla [a female vampire] must adopt an anagrammatical variation of her original name [such as Millarca, Mircalla], each of which carries its own host of interpretations hinting at the forbidden same-sex desires in the text” (Leal 2007, 37).

“diabolically sweet” (188), that conflates Lucy’s past “sweetness” (187) and the current “hell fire” in her eyes (188), and designates the focalizer’s simultaneous though contradictory responses to her. Indeed, several utterly incompatible words undermine the reference to Lucy and her activities. In keeping with the Gothic⁹ vein of the novel the passage portrays her as a supernatural being whose identity is fraught with paradoxes: she is dead but alive, a human but a thing. Her death, hinted at in the “cerements of the grave” (187), is contradicted by her bodily activities, hence Arthur’s bewilderment at the impossibly contradictory meanings created by the words of Van Helsing: “Un-Dead! Not alive! What do you mean!” (183). Lucy is reified for instance through the syntactical apposition to “the thing” (188) in “Lucy—I call the thing that was before us Lucy”. However, the fact that she speaks testifies to her belonging to at least the *human* category.

In spite of those contradictions and paradoxes, the text insists on constructing the character referred to by the name of “Lucy” as real by abundantly mentioning perception. True to the category of the “fantastic” described by Todorov (1970)¹⁰, Lucy’s supernatural quality clashes with a pre-established rational order in the novel but she is accepted as actually occurring by the characters, in spite of their hesitations. For instance, Harker’s “It was almost impossible to believe that the things which we had seen with our own eyes and heard with our own ears were living truths” (326) corresponds almost word for word with the phrase Todorov sees as expressing the epitome of a character’s attitude facing the fantastic¹¹. The readers however are certainly expected to doubt the existence of supernatural elements. This weakens the process of constructing a reference to the character of Lucy, by undermining the verisimilitude of some of her characteristics. The doubts thus raised could indeed lead readers to discard the possibility that this type of person or behavior can exist outside a Gothic book. The use of the fantastic could lull readers into believing that the character of Lucy cannot be named because her identity is exclusively supernatural, hence impossible – rather than because part of her is verisimilar but is intolerable, hence unspeakable and taboo.

All in all, the abundant contradictions and paradoxes contribute to the text’s ambivalent posture towards its taboo object, and this very ambivalence mimes the feelings caused by taboo. Though the taboo is transgressed through

⁹ *Dracula* contains much of the Gothic material described in Cuddon (1998, 356): “Most Gothic novels are tales of mystery and horror [...]. They contain a strong element of the supernatural and have all or most of the now familiar topography, sites, props, presences and happenings: [...] demonic powers of unspeakably hideous aspect, etc”.

¹⁰ “[L]a littérature fantastique – littérature qui postule l’existence du réel, du naturel, du normal, pour pouvoir ensuite le battre en brèche” (1970, 181).

¹¹ “‘J’en vins presque à croire’ : voilà la formule qui résume l’esprit du fantastique” (1970, 35).

exposure, a relative distance is maintained, notably by insisting on Lucy's lack of consistency. This raises doubts as to what name Lucy most deserves, though in her portrayal, the text strongly suggests that she could be named a "mother".

The paradox of the "Un-dead" *Un-mother*

A "devilish mockery" (190) of the Madonna and Child archetype

Many conflicting references in the passage crystallize as the reversal of the *Madonna and Child* archetype. The rhetoric strongly focuses the readers' attention on motherhood by linking Lucy to the Madonna, for example with the use of "holy" and "grace" (188) and through powerful visual hints. The Marian figure is described by Barral i Altet (2003, 539) as crucial in the Christian iconography, and as experiencing a period of renewal by the end of the 19th century¹². To cite only Solario's (15th-16th centuries) "Madonna and Child" painting, many of the characteristics that the paradigm features can be recognized in the exposure scene¹³. Lucy is first described as a "white figure" (187), whose "startling" apparition in the "the purity of her [...] robe" (187) brings to mind the white widely associated with the Holy Mother, as in Rossetti's *The Annunciation* (1849-50). Lucy's embrace posture, combined with the exchange of bodily fluids, suggests an attitude of breastfeeding reminiscent of the *Nursing Madonna*, a variant of the archetype under scrutiny:

[the figure] held something [...] at its breast
the face [...] was bent down over what we saw to be a fair-haired child
the stream had trickled (187)

Nevertheless, the *Madonna and Child* paradigm obviously undergoes a dramatic reversal in the text, first through the use of negative affixes, such as in "heartless" (187) or "unholy" (188), of epithets, in "languorous, voluptuous grace" (188), in "held something dark at its breast" (188), and in "lawn death-robe" (187). More complex strategies are also used, such as the emphasis on Lucy's metamorphosis towards "voluptuous wantonness" (187) developed above, or such as the following example, which contains only a few perceptible traces of the archetype, while the underlined clause and phrases subvert it: "we could

¹² Concomitantly, according to Larson (1991, 43), the figure of woman as a pure spiritual being is "one of the period's most lasting religious inventions". However, it seems impossible to determine with certainty which sets of Marian beliefs – notably concerning her purity, or the doctrine of her "perpetual virginity" – underlies *Dracula*. As Herbert points out, superstitious and religious matters are "irresolvably contradictory" in this novel (2002, 110).

¹³ Even though Stoker may not have seen precisely the paintings cited in this essay, the art paradigm has held a crucial place for so long that he was necessarily aware of some instances of it.

see that the lips were crimson with fresh blood, and that the stream had trickled over her chin and stained the purity of her lawn death-robe" (187).

On the contrary, later in the novel, Mina is situated closer to the Victorian feminine ideal of Marian purity and abnegation¹⁴.

I felt an infinite pity for him, and opened my arms unthinkingly. With a sob he laid his head on my shoulder and cried like a wearied child, whilst he shook with emotion.

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 a baby that some day may lie on my bosom, and I stroked his hair as though he were my own child (203).

This passage contrasts Mina's attitude to Lucy's, as Mina's evokes the very same embrace posture as Lucy's, but sanctified by the "mother-spirit" precisely lacking in Lucy's "carnal and unspiritual appearance" (190). Later, Van Helsing's praise of Mina, this "pearl among women!" (194), hints at an emblem of the Holy Mother's purity, whose shape and iridescence are subverted in Lucy's degraded "orbs" (188), in the reference to "glass" (188), and to diamond in the etymology of "adamantine" (187).

The core of the opposition between Lucy and the Victorian ideal of womanhood – embodied to some extent by Mina and inspired by the Holy Mother – lies in the contrast between selfishness and unselfishness, the former quality being held as typical of the "New Woman"¹⁵, characterized by "the destructive abandonment of the nurturing role" (Lancaster, 2004). Not only does Lucy take blood instead of giving milk, but she also harms instead of offering "infinite pity" (203) like Mina, who, true to the "Mother of Mercy" ideal, pities even Dracula. Most crucially, instead of giving comfort to children, Lucy steals pleasure from them, since they prove unable to give their consent in their erotic exchange with Lucy. Minot (2004, 210) emphasizes how "the seriousness of the incidents is also obscured [...] by the attempts of 'a correspondent' to render these children picturesque" with a description of their cute games and faces and with the "direct quotation of the children's pronunciation of 'bloofer lady' for 'beautiful lady'". Minot (2004, note 5) signals the mixture of pleasure and fear inscribed in the assonance and alliterations underlined here in beautiful, bloody, Lucy, and the name "bloofer lady" (174) quoted by a child whose desire to play with the Lady is not hindered by the injuries he is said to have sustained from her. The same

¹⁴ Weissman (1977, 397-8) analyses *Dracula* as "a very extreme version of the myth that there are two types of women, devils and angels". According to her, "Mina is the ideal Christian woman": "Mina sounds like the Virgin Mary of Medieval lyrics".

¹⁵ The "New Woman" is "a popular personification among journalists and novelists in the 1890s [...] connotating a woman given to smoking, working and sexual aggression" (86 [Footnote 1]).

ambivalence between pain and gratification emerges in Lucy's simultaneous manifestations of "heartless cruelty"¹⁶ and "voluptuous wantonness" (187) when in contact with a child. Even though the text makes it impossible to decide whether the children experience more physical suffering than enjoyment, it clearly indicates that if they are "too young to give any properly intelligible account of themselves" (159), and if even pure Mina, an adult, cannot resist a vampire (251), then children, being immature, cannot be construed as consenting knowingly and freely to their intercourses with Lucy, so that, pleasure or not, the experience is selfishly stolen from them by Lucy¹⁷.

Lucy's passion, lively, full of "fire" (188), distances her as much from death as her harming children distances her from motherhood. She deserves the name of *Un-mother* as much as the name of *Un-dead*.

Un-mother vs "New Woman"?

However strongly the text suggests that Lucy might be called a mother, even a poor one, the accuracy of the name "mother" can be doubted as regards natural and supernatural reproduction. It is highly improbable that Lucy has any natural biological offspring, given that the text insists on her purity until her death and that she dies unmarried. As to supernatural reproduction, Van Helsing declares that "she have yet no life taken" (180), so that she cannot have generated any vampiric offspring at this point in the novel. Hence the question: why the paradoxical label of "mother" for a woman without children of her own? Investigating that point should contribute to clarifying the nature of the relationship between Lucy and the child she carries.

If Lucy is no mother and lacks the maternal instincts that Mina, for example, displays, then construing Lucy as a mother, even a failed mother, constitutes a metaphorical reading, namely a transfer that relies on resemblance. In the exposure scene, the pair formed by the woman and the child she carries can – through resemblance in gender, age and posture – evoke the pair consisting of a mother carrying her own child¹⁸. This implies a metaphorical transfer from *womanhood* to *motherhood* that overcomes the blatant difference that Lucy – contrary to a biological or vampiric mother – is childless. Focusing

¹⁶ "Lucy's cruelty towards her child-victim" (Linneman, 2010) has more often been emphasized than her desire.

¹⁷ The text's suggestion – in another downplaying strategy – that the toddler rejected in favor of the fiancé might be used as a substitute, or the fact that any vampire victim could constitute yet another symbolic instance of the Victorian topos of lost innocence do not alter the fact that the child is explicitly described as experiencing her contact.

¹⁸ There is a long critical tradition of reading Lucy's vamping as poor motherhood. Boudreau (2009) for instance applies "object relations" theory to the text to study the topic of "failed motherhood".

predominantly on Lucy's mothering qualities, namely the lack thereof, amounts to downplaying those aspects of Lucy that have nothing to do with maternity, whether poor or good. In fact, to access the interpretation of female aspects that are not related to maternity, one needs to go beyond the alternative labels of *mother* vs. *bad mother* or *mother* vs. *not a mother*. This requires accepting that a woman can be described in terms other than whether or not she corresponds to the paradigm of motherhood and that *mother* is not the only available label for a woman. In an attempt to characterize Lucy, the *(poor) mother / not a mother* labels could make it difficult to take into account the fact that Lucy is childless, unless they are taken as metaphors.

The labels *woman* and *mother* imply another resemblance that consolidates their metaphorical link: female sexuality. Hence the name "mother" could be used to refer to Lucy's sexuality in a metaphorical way. But according to biological laws, a mother's sexuality is necessarily at least partly procreative, whereas the sexuality of a woman without offspring is not necessarily procreative. That is why we may wonder whether the name of "mother" might be a means of signaling Lucy's sexuality without pointing at the fact that Lucy's is not exclusively procreation-oriented, a defection from which the "mother" label can screen. Indeed, the aspects of female sexuality that the text rejects are those not dedicated to giving life, but to taking pleasure, namely the parts of sexual activity involving selfish practices, as can be shown with the contrast in *Dracula* between the ideal Victorian Woman, and the "New Woman". The former is unselfish, the latter greedy, as expressed by Mina: "we should have shocked the 'New Woman' with our appetites" (86). Lucy's sexual aggressiveness in the exposure scene testifies to her sexual appetites. Her proactive attitude is best summarized in "her startling prominence" (187) and her aggressiveness dramatically increases from the phrase "her eyes ranged over us" (188). From that point, Lucy reverses the situation: from the object of Van Helsing's spectacle, she becomes the audience and the director of choreography, with her "advance" that causes Arthur to "f[a]ll back", then her demands that he "come to [her]" (188). The expected fear of the traditional helpless frail maid taken unawares by lurking men is replaced by a forwardness stained by the threats her bites pose. On the one hand, the figure of the "New Woman" was reputedly "given to [...] sexual aggression" (86 [Footnote 1]). On the other hand, the "female members of the ruling class were desexualized by Victorian English society" (Hatlen 1980, 95) – in keeping with the ideal of the pure Mother. As a consequence, the text implies that literally, Lucy qualifies better for the label "New Woman" than for the name "mother". Thus, if Lucy's relationship with the child cannot be characterized by biological motherhood, then what is screened by the suggested metaphorical label of "mother" is the

taboo of a non-procreative, selfish sexuality, while it is rather the qualification – for instance in “*poor* mother” – that can indicate the abuse.

In this perspective, it should be emphasized that female pleasure-oriented non-procreative sexuality is mostly presented as aggressive and dangerous in *Dracula*, even when it is not instantiated with children. Even with adults, it is as violently rejected as a taboo. For instance, the depreciative adjectives “voluptuous” (188, 190, 320, *etc.*) and “wanton” (188, 319, *etc.*) are exclusively related to female vampires in the novel, whether they are in the company of adults or children. By contrast, the only male vampire in the novel is not obviously described as seeking pleasure, since Dracula expresses rather “thirst” (251) and a need to “punish” (252). The metaphorical transfer from sex to vampirism – based on resemblances like penetration, exchange of bodily fluids, *etc.* – provides clues to account for the terror of female non-procreative sex. It can be assumed that the vampiring act is all the more taboo as it involves oral practices, which do not result in procreation. Oral sex can be construed as referring metonymically to non-procreative sex. Thus, the “horror” (187) of vampiring might correspond to the fear of non-procreative sex, and the terror is all the more intense when it involves females, as it might divert them from the child-bearing roles the Victorian society almost exclusively assigned to them¹⁹. If Lucy metonymically – and hyperbolically – stands for the developing group of Victorian females who refuse to devote themselves exclusively to maternity, then what is at stake is the regeneration of the entire society, which can account for the Crew of Lights’ feelings that their members are invested with “a greater task” (193). Hence the grotesque hyperbolic leap from failing to give life to actually taking life, and from active, selfish (*i.e.* non-procreative) sexuality to aggression²⁰. A woman’s non-procreative sexuality is presented in the novel as implying such dramatic consequences for the entire society that it simply cannot be openly acknowledged, thus remaining taboo.

Following this hyperbolic path that rejects female non-procreative sexuality to the point of equating it with aggression or murder, there can be only two options for representing a sexual relationship involving (at least) a woman and a child. The ideal version is that she has had procreative sex to mother the child. The only alternative – on account of the horror of female non-procreative sex (with children *and* with adults) – is a hyperbolic transfer to

¹⁹ “The belief that the moral decay of society was being led by the New Woman developed because English society began to realize that these women no longer focused solely on motherhood. Her thoughts had now divided between work, sexuality, and the home life to which she formerly devoted herself completely” (Lancaster, 2004). “[A] hungry woman is represented as a monstrous usurper of masculine function” (Craft 1999, 115).

²⁰ The disclosure scene could even be interpreted as a lesson by Van Helsing on the “horror” (187) of female sexuality not (yet) channeled towards procreation, with the child Lucy discards symbolizing her childhood, and her bleeding lips standing for menstruation, hence for her ability to procreate.

murder. In other words, Lucy's harming children to the point of almost killing them is less terrifying to represent, to conceive, than Lucy's sexually enjoying children, which would account for the need to shield the label of "female child molester" with the label of "mother", even if it be "poor mother" or "infanticidal mother".

The paradigm of the "Mother and child" helps suggest the socially acceptable name of "mother" for Lucy, shielding from the taboo of female non-procreative sex. This solves the paradox of referring to a woman with no offspring through the "Madonna and Child" art paradigm. The metaphor of motherhood creates an ambivalent reference as it brings to mind female sexuality while screening from its non-procreative part. In Lucy's case, naming female child molesting requires breaking not only the taboo of child abuse *but also* the taboo of female non-procreative sexuality, since to acknowledge that a woman can have pathological desires outside reproduction, one first has to acknowledge that a woman can have desires outside reproduction at all. Hence the use of a metaphor for a shield. If female sexuality is only accepted as procreative, then the only visible relationship between a woman and a child is maternity, so that another form of sexuality between woman and child – one exclusively pleasure-oriented for the adult – remains invisible and unspeakable: female child molesting cannot be named. The name of "poor mother" thus can be interpreted as a rhetorical device for both exposing and screening the taboo of the "pathologically sexual woman".

"Vampire": a vortex of "possible impossibilities" (172)

Of course, the name "vampire" constitutes a screen in and of itself, since the figure of the vampire enables the text to achieve the rhetorical feat of making reference to "possible impossibilities". In one single act, vamping collapses the frontiers between killing, generating and consuming²¹. According to Van Helsing, a vampire is a paradox incarnate: "he may be [...] the father and furtherer of a new order of beings, whose road must lead through Death, not Life" (263). The act of vamping implies two crucial paradoxes. A vampire fathers (or mothers) death, as it simultaneously commits murder and gives birth when draining its victim's blood; and a vampire fathers (or mothers) a parent, as its partner in vampiric procreation is simultaneously the offspring resulting from this act of procreation. The paradoxes can be partly solved by the notion that the victims are not killed as individuals, but only their human lives are

²¹ (Stevenson, 1988), who analyses the taboo of incest in *Dracula*, underlines the link between food and sex consuming and points out the incestuous collapse of barriers between sexual partners that are closely related.

destroyed. Thus, no new individuals are generated, only new forms of lives, to wit vampiric lives. The logical impossibilities implied by the fantastic act of vamping can be construed as metaphorically standing for social impossibilities, namely, forbidden, taboo acts. In this perspective, referring to the vampiric act of killing an offspring can be a device for conveying infanticide, and the act of consorting with one's offspring might stand for child abuse. Vamping subverts the socially accepted outcome of one person bodily penetrating another. Instead of leading to the life of a third individual, it creates no new individuals and results in one more death. The label of vampire enables the text to refer to transgressions through its built-in paradoxes, and simultaneously to protect against them by challenging the reality of its transgressions through the supernatural aspect of the metaphors it implies.

Ambivalence is paramount in the text's rhetoric for naming Lucy. Her taboo characteristics provide a thrilling spectacle, but a spectacle whose very object is veiled with horror. The text referring to Lucy has a "dual life" (179), just like her. Indeed, if the taboo is partially transgressed verbally through the explicit mention of Lucy's "voluptuous wantonness" when she is in close contact with a child's body, both the socially valued paradigm of the *Madonna and Child*, and the lack of verisimilitude in labeling Lucy a vampire undermine the reference to her characteristics. Simultaneously however, those very labels guide towards the taboo reference. The paradox of portraying a childless woman as a Madonna indicates that procreation can be read as a metaphor for female sexuality, a convenient metaphor since maternity is its ideal instantiation. Reversing the maternity paradigm enables the text to keep to the mother label while referring to its taboo opposite, namely female non-procreative sexuality, especially the pathological sort. The social impossibility of such sexuality metaphorically emerges in the logical impossibilities implied by the paradoxical figure of the vampire. Thus, the readers are made to experience the ambivalence inherent in taboo: they can either acknowledge the various complex facets of Lucy, or – just like Arthur "*hid[es] his face in his hands*" (188) – fail to face the taboo.

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