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“Mirrors Can Give Us Space to Imagine...” Representations of Gender and Sexuality in BBC’s Dracula (2020)

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“MIRRORS CAN GIVE US SPACE TO IMAGINE...”

REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN BBC’S *DRACULA* (2020)

by

Riana Sharice Slyter

A Thesis Submitted in
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August 2021

ABSTRACT

“MIRRORS CAN GIVE US SPACE TO IMAGINE...” REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER & SEXUALITY IN BBC’S *DRACULA* (2020)

by

Riana Sharice Slyter

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2021
Under the Supervision of Professor Elana Levine

What follows discusses how BBC’s *Dracula* uses character representations, scripted dialogue, and narrative to challenge and perpetuate the dominant ideologies of our society. *Dracula* exposes the tensions in the growing cultural acceptance of, but also increased resistance to, the fluidity of gender and sexuality in contemporary western culture. I contextualize representations of women and queer characters in *Dracula* with the broader issues of gender and sexuality in our current socio-political environment. Queer horror looks at *Dracula* as a text that arouses cultural anxieties concerning sexuality, while also attempting to illustrate fear within queer communities and subcultures. In many ways, the current *Dracula* parallels the queer historical readings of this text, but often, instead of embracing queerness, the ancillary LGBTQ+ representations in *Dracula* (2020) are regressive. These problematic representations, coupled with the co-creator, Steven Moffat, refusing to see the queer tendencies in *Dracula*, imposes a resistance to the queer horror narrative. In addition to examining the representations of sexuality I also analyze the portrayals of gender and race featured in the mini-series.

My thesis investigates the sexist and racist representations of women in *Dracula*, asking whether the genderswap of Agatha Van Helsing can be considered feminist from the mere embodiment of a traditionally male role. I analyze queer and feminist theories in relationship to *Dracula* and contemporary horror television. *Dracula*’s character representations straddle the

binaries of masculine/feminine, gay/straight, life/death, and attractive/repulsive, thereby arousing cultural anxieties concerning gender and sexuality. *Dracula* resists the canonical queer readings of the text and fails to address the concerns of women in the show, mirroring society's continued fears of nonnormative identities. This project is a critique of one example from the growing horror television landscape and its focus on bringing marginalized stories to the center of the narrative. *Dracula* illustrates that even when the representations of characters revert to heteronormative displays, queerness always resides in the vampire metaphor, and in the horror genre more broadly. Holding a mirror up to *Dracula* provides opportunities to interrogate our biases and prejudices and begin to reveal the truths about ourselves and our societies.

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Chapter One

Introduction: Vamps, Vampires, & Count Dracula

As the legend has it, Dracula cannot see his reflection because he reflects the culture around him. The reflection in the mirror shifts and evolves given the views and values of society at any given time. Dracula has been a part of various cultures for the last 124 years, accruing over 300 film and television adaptations, hardly reappearing and reflecting in the same way twice. He has become one of the most iconic characters in popular culture, expanding beyond the walls of Transylvania into transmedia variations like television shows, movies, plays, books, and video games. These reverberations speak to each generation, renewing their curiosities for vampire mythology. Bram Stoker's original 1897 Gothic novel sparked the archetypal vampire that has inspired countless other vampire stories, from Anne Rice's *Interview with a Vampire* (1976) to Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* (2005-2008). British Broadcasting Corporation's *Dracula* (BBC, 2020) is the latest edition, joining the long history of vampire folklore, intertwining details from Bram Stoker's novel with modern updates like the ability to see his reflection.¹ What keeps him from peering in the mirror, however, is fear. Dracula says, "Mirrors can give us space to imagine or worse, show us the truth."² Holding a mirror up to *Dracula* provides opportunities to interrogate our biases and prejudices and begin to reveal the truths about ourselves and our societies.

Dracula is a horror television miniseries from Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat, the same writers and producers of *Sherlock* (BBC, 2010- present). Moffat also produced select seasons of

¹ *Dracula* is produced by Hartwood Films; the BBC is the original distributor of the show. It aired on BBC on January 1 through the 3, 2020, and then it was released on Netflix in the US on January 4, 2020. Netflix is the international distributor of the series.

² Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss, writers, *Dracula*, Season 1, episode 2, "Blood Vessel," Directed by Damon Thomas, featuring Claes Bang, and Dolly Wells, Aired January 2, 2020, in broadcast syndication. BBC, 2020, Netflix.

Doctor Who (BBC, 2005-present). The three-part miniseries follows Dracula's adventures from 1897 to 2020. Gatiss and Moffat reference previous Dracula incarnations by incorporating scenic shots of Orava Castle (*Nosferatu*, 1922), refashioning Bela Lugosi's costume and red amulet (*Dracula*, 1931), and resembling Gary Oldman's aged Dracula makeup (*Bram Stoker's Dracula*, 1992), just to name a few moments of homage. On the surface, it seems like the creators have faithfully represented Dracula's vast history. However, they neglect to accept and acknowledge the most important theme the canonical text offers – fluid representations of gender and sexuality.

One of the main reasons *Dracula* is such a prolific and revisited story is because the narrative is saturated with sex.³ The very act of vampirism, which is biting or penetrating the flesh and exchanging bodily fluids between people, is highly erotic. Vampires thrive during nightfall, following their desire for humans and luring victims into spaces of seclusion. Dracula is as attractive and intimate as he is mysterious and dangerous. The not-so-subtle link between eroticism and vampirism is not a coincidence. It stems from Bram Stoker's own sexual anxieties around his closeted "homosexuality," as many scholars like Richard Dyer, Talia Shaffer, and Richard Primuth have noted.⁴ Audiences have been continually fascinated by Dracula as a sensual figure who awakens the sexuality inside ancillary characters like Agatha Van Helsing (a genderswap of the original's Abraham Van Helsing), Jonathan Harker, Mina Murray, and Lucy Westenra. Each variation of *Dracula* finds ways to address society's anxieties revolving around gender and sexuality, and the most current iteration is no different.

³ Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, *The Vampire Film: Undead Cinema*. (London: Wallflower, 2012), 2.; Weinstock lists seven principles or themes within the vampire cinema with the first being about sex.

⁴ Richard Dyer, "Children of the Night: Vampirism as Homosexuality, Homosexuality as Vampirism," in *Sweet Dreams: Sexuality, Gender, and Popular Fiction*, edited by Susannah Radstone (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988): 58.; Richard Primuth, "Vampires Are Us," *The Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide* (March-April 2014). <https://glreview.org/article/vampires-are-us/>; Talia Schaffer, "A Wilde Desire Took Me: The Homoerotic History of Dracula," *English Literary History* 61, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 381.

For this project, I focus on the ways that *Dracula* exposes the tensions in the growing cultural acceptance of, but also increased resistance to, the fluidity of gender and sexuality in contemporary western culture. Throughout my thesis, I examine how *Dracula* uses character representations, scripted dialogue, and narrative to challenge and perpetuate the dominant ideologies of our society. Historically, *Dracula* has been presented with a gay or bisexual identity. In the original text, *Dracula*'s relationship moves from homosocial to homoerotic with Jonathan Harker when *Dracula* declares, "This man belongs to me!"⁵ *Dracula*'s queer sexuality reveals the chafing and strain within and between the concepts of self and other, monsters and humans, suggesting how the institutional structures of homophobia stem from the fears of the "monstrous other." The "other" has been seen as a symbolic representation of social anxieties and fears, usually around nonnormative identities.

The horror genre has been extensively analyzed for both its symbolic and implicit gay representations, in other words, horror that is queer.⁶ However, my analysis focuses on queer horror, which "projects contemporary anxieties within gay male subcultures onto its characters and into its narratives, building upon the figurative role of gay monstrosity."⁷ Queer horror looks at *Dracula* as a text that arouses cultural anxieties concerning sexuality, while also attempting to illustrate fear within queer communities and subcultures. In many ways, the current *Dracula* parallels the queer historical readings of this text, but often, instead of embracing queerness, the

⁵ *Dracula, 1897* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 43.

⁶ Horror and "homosexuality" have been extensively traced from scholars like Robin Wood, *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan... and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).; Jack Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).; Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993).; Richard Dyer, "It's in his Kiss!: Vampirism as Homosexuality, Homosexuality as Vampirism," in *The Culture of Queers*, 70-89. (New York; London: Routledge, 2002).; Harry M. Benshoff, *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film*, Manchester (New York: Manchester University Press, 1997).

⁷ Darren Elliot-Smith, *Queer Horror Film and Television: Sexuality and Masculinity at the Margins* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 21.

ancillary LGBTQ+ representations in *Dracula* (2020) are regressive. These problematic representations, coupled with the co-creator, Steven Moffat, refusing to see the queer tendencies in *Dracula*, imposes a resistance to the queer horror narrative. How does the show feature topics of queerness and potentially find ways of extending the metaphor of the queer Count? How might the progressive homoerotic depictions become exploitative tactics through queerbaiting? What might the characters' representations offer to the ideas of sexual freedom, shame, and desire for LGBTQ+ experiences?

In addition to examining the representations of sexuality I also analyze the portrayals of gender and race featured in the mini-series. How does modern horror television like *Dracula* reproduce dominant ideologies of gender and sexuality through adapting classic Gothic stories? My thesis investigates the sexist and racist representations of women in *Dracula*, asking whether the genderswap of Agatha Van Helsing can be considered feminist from the mere embodiment of a traditionally male role. What does it mean if Agatha Van Helsing is positioned as a woman in a leading role while being surrounded by underdeveloped and stereotypical representations of Black women like Lucy Westenra? How does *Dracula* reflect and sustain conservative social views of gender and race? I analyze queer and feminist theories in relationship to *Dracula* and contemporary horror television. I position *Dracula* in conversation with the growing body of queer horror television, including programs like *American Horror Story* (FX, 2011- present), *Hannibal* (NBC, 2013-2015), *The Haunting of Hill House & Bly Manor* (Netflix, 2018-2020), *Ratched* (Netflix, 2020), and *Lovecraft Country* (HBO, 2020). These texts intertwine many marginalized and nonnormative identities into popular horror narratives. *Dracula's* character representations straddle the binaries of masculine/feminine, gay/straight, life/death, and attractive/repulsive, thereby arousing cultural anxieties concerning gender and sexuality. The

show is erotic, sexual, and disturbing as the nonnormative identities represented become catalysts for transforming characters and audiences alike. In this thesis, I examine how queer horror television may function as a political tool oriented toward social transformation through reflecting and distorting societal perceptions. *Dracula* resists the canonical queer readings of the text and fails to address the concerns of women in the show, mirroring society's continued fears of nonnormative identities.

Literature Review

The following sections aim to encompass many of the historical conversations centering *Dracula*, theoretical understandings of queerness and horror, and horror television more broadly. At first, I trace the many fluid readings of gender and sexuality in vampire folklore and the original *Dracula* novel. The second subsection examines the academic conversations that trace the connection between queerness and horror, specifically focusing on their similar queer orientations. Then the final section highlights a few scholars who have mapped the transnational growth of horror television and its increased popularity in recent years in the United States and the United Kingdom. Overall, it examines the contemporary landscape of horror television scholarship, academic contributions about the creator, Steven Moffat, and the BBC as a network more generally.

Vampire Folklore & Dracula

Bram Stoker's original novel, and the adaptations that follow, emphasize the sexual fears of the monster in connection with female sexuality. *Dracula* is perhaps the most overtly sexual of the horror movie monsters. Sexual difference is seen in both the history of *Dracula* and in historical vampire folklore. Even the term "vamp" is the abbreviated word for vampire, and it was a term often used in the silent film era, referring to a woman who used her sex appeal to

exploit men.⁸ Within the broader category of vampire history, there is an intertwining narrative of sexual difference seen more visibly with lesbian and gay vampire films like *The Fearless Vampire Killers* (1967), *The Vampire Lovers* (1971), *The Hunger* (1983), and *Interview with the Vampire* (1994). In contrast to the explicit display of gay relationships in previous films, a lot of Dracula's sexual and gender deviancies are more implicit. In this section, I track the sexuality and gender narratives that have been historically associated with *Dracula*.

“As a figure of popular myth in Western culture, Dracula is the product of Victorian sexual repressiveness; over ninety years later, we are still trying to exorcise him,” Robin Wood writes.⁹ Now over a hundred years later, we are still viewing *Dracula* from the standpoint of deviating from social expectations of gender and sexuality. Jack Halberstam explains that Gothic monsters are frightening because they transform a monster like Dracula, “into a beast who is all body and no soul.”¹⁰ The Gothic tradition is deeply embedded into the society that produced it. Therefore, it becomes important to “map out a relation between the monstrous sexuality of the foreigner and foreign sexuality of the monster because sexuality... is itself a beast created in the nineteenth-century literature.”¹¹ These sexual deviancies can be read through a homoerotic connection of the vampirism displayed in the Gothic.

Talia Schaffer sees *Dracula* as a “queer Gothic,” connecting the story of Count Dracula as a direct reaction to Stoker's fears and anxieties surrounding his sexuality. These fears were sparked by Oscar Wilde's trial and conviction for illegal “homosexual” behavior in the mid-

⁸ Barry Keith Grant, *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, 2nd ed. (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2015), 2.

⁹ Robin Wood, “Burying the Undead: The Use and Obsolescence of Count Dracula,” In *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, edited by Barry Keith Grant, 2nd ed. (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2015), 389.

¹⁰ Jack Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*, 1.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 6-7.

1890s.¹² The tensions between gay and straight, as well as masculine and feminine, were being redefined around the same time that *Dracula* was written. Sos Eltis argues that the Victorian period that birthed *Dracula* had “unprecedented anxiety and uncertainty about the social roles, sexual nature, and natural spheres of activity of men and women.”¹³ Inevitably, these tensions led to the change of property and marriage laws giving “wives a legal status independent of their husbands, enabling them to own and inherit wealth.”¹⁴ The fluidity of gender and sexuality that Stoker imposes with the effeminate Dracula and sexually vampiric women, “enact a fin de siècle cultural panic, but they are defeated by a fluid and surprisingly modern combination of masculine and feminine qualities.”¹⁵ The gender and sexual inversions in the book are meant to pose a deeper commentary on the shifting of ideals at the turn of the century.

Reading *Dracula* as a “queer gothic” also brings a lot of the queerness written in the book to the surface. The image of the vampire is one of decadence, which historically is a euphemism for an effeminate “homosexual” man.¹⁶ *Dracula* is a man of decadence metaphorically treading in-between the binaries of feminine/masculine, which codes him as queer. Beyond the metaphor, the connection of vampires and queerness permeates into our culture as it can show, “how people have thought and felt about homosexual women and men – how others have thought and felt about us, and how we have thought and felt about ourselves.”¹⁷ *Dracula* can be seen as a kind of queer transformation as he is elegant and seductive and preys on the bodies of both men and women, “but also on the very *being* of his victims, transforming them into creatures as sexual[ly]

¹² Schaffer, “A Wilde Desire Took Me: The Homoerotic History of Dracula,” 381.

¹³ Sos Eltis, “Corruption of the Blood and Degeneration of the Race: Dracula and Policing the Borders of Gender.” In *Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism: Bram Stoker’s Dracula*, ed. John Paul Riquelme, (Boston; New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2015), 565.

¹⁴ Ibid, 567.

¹⁵ The *fin de siècle* is a term that references the period of Gothic literature at the end of the 19th century. Ibid, 580.

¹⁶ Richard Dyer, “It’s in his Kiss!: Vampirism as Homosexuality, Homosexuality as Vampirism,” in *The Culture of Queers*, 74.

¹⁷ Ibid, 73.

monstrous as himself.”¹⁸ Harry Benshoff understands this contagion of sexual deviancy as a mirroring of culture’s invention of the homosexual as, “the vampires’ victims not only indulge in vampiric sex but now become a new and distinct type of individual/monster themselves.”¹⁹ There is a virality to sex imposing a rippling effect that transforms the vampire’s victims into monsters as well.

The monster can also be seen as a mirror or double for the woman in horror. She is a victim, an object, or “other” in her genital differences. In Freudian psychoanalysis, she is the castrated male. Linda Williams links the vampire/monster to the woman: the woman gazes at the monster or the “freak’s own spectacular appearance” and “this look momentarily shifts the iconic center of the spectacle away from the woman to the monster.”²⁰ The female gaze in horror is punished, reifying the masochistic fantasy of the “male gaze.”²¹ The monster’s power is held in his sexual difference from a “normal” man, placing both the monster and the woman as “biological freak(s)” in contrast to him.²² Williams continues to illustrate how the vampire film furthers the “power-in-difference” notion by equating the “vampiric act of sucking blood, sapping the life fluid of a victim so that the victim, in turn, becomes a vampire, similar to the female role of milking the sperm of the male during intercourse.”²³ This equates the woman and the vampire, furthering the point that they are both “potent threats to a vulnerable male power.”²⁴

¹⁸ Harry Benshoff, “The Monster and the Homosexual,” in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, edited by Grant, Barry Keith, 2nd ed. (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2015), 235.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Linda Williams, “When the Woman Looks” In *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, edited by Grant, Barry Keith, 2nd ed. (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2015), 20.

²¹ The “male gaze” is a term coined by Laura Mulvey in her seminal piece, “The Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.”

²² Ibid, 22.

²³ Ibid, 25.

²⁴ Ibid.

The connection of the woman and the monster as a threat to normativity unlocks the potential for women characters in *Dracula* to perform their gender and sexuality.

The women within Stoker's novel, e.g., Mina Murray and Lucy Westenra, are positioned as sexual predators. Nina Auerbach explains how Stoker positions women as monogamous and heterosexual. Lucy is an example of "unleashed female energy in a fear-mongering way."²⁵ Her sexual deviance goes on to spawn other women as promiscuous and unorthodox as she. Lucy and Mina transform within the *Dracula* novel, changing into different monsters, "Lucy is transformed into a ravenous animal, Mina into a clairvoyant."²⁶ Their powers and ravenous sexual appetites are threatening. Their embrace of the libidinal monster makes them ironically more alive than we are as a culture, because they act on their desires. Slavoj Žižek extends this notion saying, "The paradox of the vampires is that, precisely as 'living dead,' they are *far more alive* than us."²⁷ The cultural reoccurrence of the vampire is due to our continual fascination with them and the embrace of their sexuality.

The monstrosity of Dracula, Mina, and Lucy is seen through deviating from the norm, representing forbidden homoerotic desire and expanding conventional gender relations. Forbidden desire is a theme that runs through the narrative as Dracula represents the fluidity of both gender and sexuality. *Dracula's* metaphorical examples of gender and sexuality continue to be explored and valorized in a society fighting off the nonnormative monsters. Renée Fox examines how *Dracula's* queer production enables female intimacy, saying, "Dracula may have the power to reproduce himself, but women have the potential to bring each other back to life."²⁸

²⁵ Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 80.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

²⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 221.

²⁸ Renee Fox, "Building Castles in the Air: Female Intimacy and Generative Queerness in *Dracula*," in *Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism: Bram Stoker's Dracula*, edited by John Paul Riquelme (Boston; New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2015), 590.

She explains the term queer as deviating from the norm, like a woman's life not resulting "in marriage and reproduction between one man and one woman."²⁹ Stoker's positive display of female intimacy invites a queer view of the female vampire that has been neglected in queer readings of masculinity. Mina embodies the "New Woman" as she is intelligent and independent, which is threatening to the gender norms at the time. She diverges further from societal norms by becoming a vampire, and then lesbian. Her "potential vampirism is most threatening in *Dracula* [because she] is... financially and martially independent, and from 'New Woman' to lesbian is but a step in the ideology of the day, leading to the vampiric lesbianism."³⁰ Vampire stories are always about sex and communicate the cultural thoughts about sex and sexuality depending on the time and place they are recreated.³¹ This shows us that vampire stories are always queer, meaning "they reveal in dangerous and exciting ways the extent to which both manliness and womanliness are always masquerades, inevitably flawed performance of cultural expectations."³² The vampire teaches us the contra-straight perversions of the sexual monster which can be seen in *Dracula* (2020).³³

Queerness & Horror

This section strives to outline and build upon the theoretical connections between horror and queerness. Scholars have attempted to theoretically define and understand horror from disciplines like philosophy, film theory, and psychoanalysis.³⁴ In *The Pleasures of Horror*, Matt

²⁹ Ibid, 593.

³⁰Richard Dyer, "It's in his Kiss!: Vampirism as Homosexuality, Homosexuality as Vampirism," in *The Culture of Queers* 74-75.

³¹ Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, *The Vampire Film: Undead Cinema* (London: Wallflower, 2012), 6.

³² Ibid, 8.

³³ Ibid, 23.

³⁴ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1975).; Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan... And Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).; Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," In *Totem and Taboo* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1990).; Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).; Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London; New York: Routledge, 2007).

Hills outlines the difficulty in defining the genre and understanding the audience's attraction to horror. He provides a carefully detailed account of the vast history, presenting limitations of the theories that attempt to explain how and why audiences take pleasure in the horror genre. He says, "*the horror genre is not where it is*; it exists, intertextually, rhetorically and as a 'principle of contamination' outside its major and explicitly labeled generic traditions/sites/texts."³⁵ In other words, the pleasures of horror cannot be understood through the text but asserted through the cultural exchanges surrounding them. The difficulty of defining horror is often because it lingers in the realm of the in-between, not fully something that theory can identify, and not something that can be defined through affective approaches. Horror is then not something that can be easily categorized logically or emotionally but is experienced through varying sites of interplay. Since there is not an agreed-upon universal definition of horror, it requires a more subjective approach.

Hill's interpretation of horror is paralleled in Judith Butler's account of subjectivity. She says, "In a theoretical vein, we can, following a general Foucaultian line, simply state that the subject is produced through norms or by discourse more generally."³⁶ She continues to explain that these "norms" form us, that is to say, produce "us" in such a way that "we" can deploy such terms as "us" and "we" in intelligible and meaningful ways. Horror is in a way directly breaking these norms by displaying nonnormative subjects. As many scholars have observed, horror embodies the entanglement of subjectivity, queerness, and the abject within the monster. Halberstam writes, "Monsters are meaning machines. They can represent gender, race, nationality, class, and sexuality in one body."³⁷ The monsters are queer as they are embodying

³⁵ Matt Hills, *The Pleasures of Horror Cinema* (London; New York: Continuum, 2005), 6.

³⁶ Judith Butler, *Senses of the Subject* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 5.

³⁷ Jack Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*, 21.

whatever contrasts with the dominant culture. Queer and queerness are flexible terms that resist “normal.” Benschhoff paints the long history of the “monster queer” in horror films asserting that horror, “continues to be the ongoing monsterization of homosexuality within mainstream US culture.”³⁸

Benschhoff’s historical tracing of queerness within horror is continued into the present day by Darren Elliot-Smith. Picking up queer horror history from where Benschhoff left off, he maps queerness and horror by focusing on the pleasures offered to the gay male spectator. He says gay men are operating in “an oscillation between a strong sense of celebration or pride taken in foregrounding one’s sexual difference but also [masking] a deep shame that is demanded both by hetero-and homo-normativity.”³⁹ Queer horror reveals that the identification of sexual difference is both pleasurable and shameful, specifically commenting on gay and lesbian subcultures.

While non-normative sexuality may be portrayed as monstrous in some horror, scholars have also expressed that the horror genre may encourage a queer positioning for audiences. As Alexander Doty explains:

The central conventions of horror and melodrama actually encourage queer positioning as they exploit the spectacle of heterosexual romance, straight domesticity, and traditional gender roles gone awry. In a sense, then, *everyone’s* pleasure in these genres is ‘perverse,’ is queer, as much of it takes place within the space of the contra-heterosexual and the contra-straight.⁴⁰

³⁸ Harry Benschhoff, *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film*, Manchester (New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 274.

³⁹ Darren Elliot-Smith, *Queer Horror Film and Television: Sexuality and Masculinity at the Margins* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 21.

⁴⁰ Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 15.

Claire King perceives, “queer as outside of and in opposition to normative structures, [thus] it should perhaps come as no surprise that horror—an often disturbing genre—might be considered a queer genre.”⁴¹ She continues to speculate that queer horror “scholarship understands horror’s monsters not as loathed or rejected but as key figures of desire and identification that encourage spectators to read queerly.”⁴² This queer positionality can help trigger empathetic and repugnant viewpoints for queer horror narratives. Kent Brintnall suggests a way to understand the queerness in horror, on one hand, as potentially harmful, but “on the other hand, there may be ways in which narratives linking queer desire, monstrosity, disruption and death can be read as energizing and furthering the political and cultural struggles of queer people.”⁴³ I lean more toward viewing *Dracula* as engaging the struggles of queer characters, providing valuable queer representations through characters and narratives. *Dracula* challenges structures on multiple levels, including the characters, narratives, and genre identification, providing complex and sometimes contradictory readings of heteronormativity.

My research is meant to further the connection between queerness and horror. I am not positing a new way of engaging with the texts, but instead finding ways to reveal the instability of categorical structures. I would like to use the term "orientations" to describe horror and queerness in their positionality toward *Dracula*. Sara Ahmed offers the term “queer orientations” as a way of interrogating how certain bodies and objects connect or disconnect from one another. Her book, *Queer Phenomenology*, investigates how "bodies are gendered, sexualized, and raced by how they extend into space...What is offered, in other words, is a model of how bodies

⁴¹ Claire Sisco King, “Un-Queering Horror: Hellbent and the Policing of the “Gay Slasher,” *Western Journal of Communication* 74, no. 3 (May-June 2010): 250.

⁴² *Ibid*, 251.

⁴³ Kent Brintnall, “Re-Building Sodom and Gomorrah: The Monstrosity of Queer Desire in the Horror Film,” *Culture and Religion* 5, no. 2 (2004): 155.

become oriented by how they take up time and space."⁴⁴ What is intriguing about the term orientation is in direct contrast to how horror and queerness make audiences feel, that is, *disoriented* in the way they both blur the norms of society. In other words, it is only in being disoriented that we might be able to approach and make visible how we are oriented. For the scope of my thesis, I do not want to prescribe a definition, but I would like to offer a way to view horror and queerness and their intersections beyond the text. These texts provide moments of disorientation for the audience toward horrific objects, encouraging a constant moving, pushing, and shifting of alternative positions. Through the maneuvering of these moments and our orientations in the world, there is the possibility that "we might find joy and excitement in the horror."⁴⁵ Queerness operates within horror narratives but also more viscerally by manifesting fears within audiences as a constant shifting and reorientating of the objects presented on-screen and our relationship to them.

Horror forms a cultural commentary of our society, bringing to light our prejudices and providing radical ways of reformulating ourselves and our ideas. Horror can push audiences to blur stringent categories that we think inherently or naturally exist, i.e., sex either being male or female and a person as either being good or bad. Specifically, vampires in Stoker's *Dracula* move and change as they are in a constant state of "disintegration and renewal," forcing a reconceptualization of space and time, by orientating the body through different and competing conceptions of time and space that are outside of hegemonic ideologies.⁴⁶ Stories of the vampire reflect the dread, desire, and anxiety of the modern world, "perpetually in the throes of massive

⁴⁴ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 5.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁶ Stacey Abbott, *Celluloid Vampires: Life After Death in the Modern World* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 5.

change.”⁴⁷ It is uncomfortable and disorienting to see people embody paradoxes of being both male and female or good and evil. Horror deals with human struggle and trauma, reorienting the audience to empathize with the characters. Natalie Wilson envisions horror as attracting willful subjects towards the monstrous. She says, “When one is a willing subject, they go along with the general will. In doing so, they bolster existing systems of power. When one is a willful subject, they resist the very same systems.”⁴⁸ She goes on to say that a willful monstrosity seeks “to valorize a monstrosity that resists assimilation, exploitation and annihilation.”⁴⁹ These horror texts provide a “progressive” political view of society, which is prevalent in contemporary horror narratives, as horror’s existence rests in the constant chaffing of these power relations.

Dracula plays with the intersections of both horror and queerness. At first, horror and queerness may seem like unlikely bedfellows, but upon further examination, they are no strangers to challenging dominant ideologies and hegemonic norms. *Dracula* blurs, queers, and pushes boundaries through the characters, narratives, and incorporation of horror, challenging societal structures. Horror, like queerness, is where paradoxes are embodied. It becomes a space to explore tensions between *seemingly* static binaries like reality/delusion, life/death, monster/human, good/evil, etc. Horror can be uncomfortable to watch because it delves into the liminal space between categories, not fully one thing and not fully another, i.e., the vampiric Count being good/evil and human/monster. *Dracula* is saturated in queerness and horror, even in the current iteration, offering many rich layers of analysis on the destabilization of heteronormative and hegemonic structures and ideologies.

Horror Television

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Natalie Wilson, *Willful Monstrosity: Gender and Race in 21st Century Horror* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2020), 19.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Although the contributions of Clover, Creed, Williams, and Wood all paved the way for horror to be viewed as a high art form, their work was focused on the horror *film*. As the genre continues to be elusive and changing, so does the “ever-growing critical conversation, focusing... on horror’s now near omnipresence on the small screen.”⁵⁰ Horror scholarship has increased in conjunction with the popularity of horror films and television. With the recent boom in horror television becoming more graphic in the depictions of gore and violence, there has been a desire to understand the collective fascination with dark and evil narratives. The scholarship on horror television has been more prominent in recent years as the diversity of cable and streaming platforms have allowed for more horror content, producing a couple of streaming services that exclusively focus on horror, Shudder and Screambox. Horror series have flooded cable channels and streaming services, including programs such as *True Blood* (HBO, 2008-2014), *Teen Wolf* (MTV, 2011-2017), *Hemlock Grove* (Netflix, 2013-2015), *Hannibal* (NBC, 2013-2015), *In the Flesh* (BBC, 2013-2014), *Penny Dreadful* (Showtime, 2014-2016), *Supernatural* (WB and CW, 2005-2020), *American Horror Story* (FX, 2011- present), *The Walking Dead* (AMC, 2010-present), *The Haunting of Hill House* and *The Haunting of Bly Manor* (Netflix, 2018-2020), *Riverdale* (CW, 2017- present), *Ratched* (Netflix, 2020), *Lovecraft Country* (HBO, 2020), and much more. The growing accessibility of shows has led to an “obsessively loyal fan following, demonstrating enthusiasm for horror programming and horror themes unprecedented in the modern television era.”⁵¹

Helen Wheatley, the author of *Gothic Television*, is one of the few scholars who closely navigates transnational horror television from both the US and UK, from the 1950s to the 1990s.

⁵⁰ Belau and Jackson, *Horror Television in the Age of Consumption: Binging on Fear*, 1.

⁵¹ Linda Belau and Kimberly Jackson, *Horror Television in the Age of Consumption: Binging on Fear* (New York; London: Routledge, 2017), 1.

To understand Gothic television as it appears on UK and US television is to begin to see a “specific relationship between the Gothic as a genre concerned with domestic spaces and narratives and television as an inherently domestic medium.”⁵² She points to the Gothic as a way to focus on the home, importantly pinpointing the “homes and families which are haunted, tortured, or troubled in some way.”⁵³ Gothic television is popular in both the United States and the United Kingdom. British horror, once known for the Hammer Films era (the mid-1950s to the 1970s), has also moved to the small screen with shows like *Afterlife* (ITV, 2005-2006), *The Fades* (BBC, 2011-2012), *Being Human* (BBC, 2008-2013), and *Psychoville* (BBC, 2009-2011). There are UK and US co-produced shows like *Penny Dreadful* (Sky/Showtime, 2014-2016) and *Dracula* (Sky/NBC, 2013-2014), both touching on the Gothic stories of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that have had a resurgence in recent years. Wheatley contends, “Gothic television is a particularly striking example of a genre of television programming which asks *to be looked at* which demands concentration and attention from viewers (both domestic and scholarly), through its emotional intensity, its complex plotting, and its highly dense and detailed mise-en-scène.”⁵⁴ The increased production of horror and Gothic television in the US and the UK has been attributed to the “evolution of the horror genre, the nature of the television, and the culture of the twenty-first century.”⁵⁵

Stacey Abbott and Lorna Jowett have traced horror television in *TV Horror: Investigating the Dark Side of the Small Screen*, claiming horror fits well with television because television is still seen as an object of horror.⁵⁶ What they mean is that television has been seen historically as

⁵² Helen Wheatley, *Gothic Television*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006, 2-3.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 21.

⁵⁵ Linda Belau and Kimberly Jackson, *Horror Television in the Age of Consumption: Binging on Fear*, 1.

⁵⁶ Lorna Jowett and Stacey Abbott, *TV Horror: Investigating the Dark Side of the Small Screen* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013), xiv.

a fearful object because its ubiquity taints the sanctity of the home. The co-authors locate the Golden Age of television content from the 1950s to the current horror television explosion of the last decade. Abbott and Jowett show the fluidity of the genre, arguing that it “demonstrates a merging of horror with other genres, an embrace of genre fusions that suggest ‘loosening up’ of generic tropes and conventions marking a shift away from fixed genre forms.”⁵⁷ Additionally, due to the “hybrid nature of television, the genre also crosses into most other genres from children’s programming to comedy to procedural police dramas to reality TV.”⁵⁸ The success of the horror genre is in part due to its inherent hybridity, pushing scholars and audiences to rethink what horror is within a “television context.”⁵⁹

The serialization of horror television is foundational to the establishment of the genre. The line between horror television and Gothic television is fluid and goes beyond the ability to depict violence and gore on screen. Lisa Schmidt identifies that the serialized Gothic novels parallel television’s seriality, seamlessly shifting the medium of Gothic from the page to the screen.⁶⁰ The Gothic is then the “home of horror” because horror suits the formatting. She argues that although the film also provides melodrama, “television’s intensified deployment of seriality gives it the capacity to achieve the *affects* of melodrama on a more intense scale.”⁶¹ At the heart of a horror story is a strong narrative that is melodramatic that can be fully actualized through a long-form serial arc. The nature of the Gothic creates promising stories that are fundamentally designed for the televisual medium.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 18.

⁵⁸ Ibid, xiii.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Lisa Schmidt, “Television: Horror’s ‘Original’ Home,” *Horror Studies*, 4, no. 2 (2013): 159.

⁶¹ Ibid, 160.

The latest series in Gothic television, *Dracula*, has Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat as co-creators, both of whom have dabbled in dark narratives previously. Gatiss directed *The Tractate Middoth* (BBC, 2013) and Moffat worked on *Doctor Who* (2005-2017) which explored darker narratives, raising questions on morality and committing genocide against the Doctor's enemy in the 2005 reboot.⁶² Moffat has been the focus of much academic scholarship analyzing the problematic representations of minority populations.⁶³ This can be seen through the deployment of queerbaiting tactics in the BBC show *Sherlock*, via the hinted at romance between Sherlock and Watson.⁶⁴ Additionally, *Dr. Who* has been scrutinized for the gender, racial, and sexual politics displayed on the screen due to the creator's heteronormative views. The seasons Moffat has been involved with have focused on white male subjectivity.⁶⁵ The gender and sexual politics featured in the shows created by Moffat's *Doctor Who* are what Dee Amy-Chinn suggest as a "double entanglement" where they both "[promote] an agenda of liberalization with regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations" and "a neo-conservative agenda in relation to gender, sexuality and family life."⁶⁶ This "double entanglement" is why there are so many polar audience interpretations of Moffat's shows as both "misogynist" and "feminist."⁶⁷

⁶² Sherryl Vint, "Visualizing the British Boom: British Science Fiction Film and Television." *CR: The New Centennial Review* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 157.

⁶³ Lindy Orthia, *Doctor Who and Race* (Bristol, United Kingdom: Intellect Books, 2013).; Lorna Jowett, *Dancing with the Doctor: Dimensions of Gender in the Doctor Who Universe* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2017).

⁶⁴ Louisa Ellen Stein, and Kristina Busse, *Sherlock and Transmedia Fandom: Essays on the BBC Series* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012).; Diana W. Anselmo, "Gender and Queer Fan Labor on Tumblr: The Case of BBC's *Sherlock*," *Feminist Media Histories*, 4, no. 1 (January 2018): 84–114.; Amandelin A. Valentine, "Toward a Broader Recognition of the Queer in the BBC's *Sherlock*." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 22. (2016).; Nichole Flynn, "'Strong Female Characters': An Analytical Look at Representation in Moffat-Era *Doctor Who*," *Journal of Undergraduate Research*, (Fall 2015): 64-74.

⁶⁵ Matt Hills, "How is Popular Television 'Political?': From the Texts of Seven Moffat's *Doctor Who* to Brand/Fan Politics," *Journal of Popular Television*, 6, no. 2 (2018): 177.

⁶⁶ Dee Amy-Chinn, (2014), "Amy's boys, River's man: Generation, gender and sexuality in the Moffat Whoniverse," in Andrew O'Day, ed., *Doctor Who – The Eleventh Hour: A Critical Celebration of the Matt Smith and Steven Moffat Era*, (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014), pp. 70–86.

⁶⁷ Elizabeth Sandifer, "Steven Moffat is a Feminist and You are Wrong if You Disagree," (Eruditorium Press, 2014), <http://www.eruditorumpress.com/blog/steven-moffat-is-a-feminist-and-you-are-wrong-if-you-disagree/>; Helen Lewis, "Does Steven Moffat Have a Problem with Women?" (NewStatesmen, 2012), <https://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/helen-lewis-hasteley/2012/01/moffat-sherlock-women>.

Dracula is not only connected to Moffat but also the BBC. In a recent publication, Tom Mills' *The BBC: Myth of a Public Service* interrogates the BBC's political interests and agendas. Although it is one of the most trusted sources for media in the world he argues, "The BBC is neither independent nor impartial ... its structure and culture have been profoundly shaped by the interest of powerful groups in British society; and . . . this, in turn, has shaped what we see, hear and read on the BBC."⁶⁸ He continues to elaborate on the political positioning of the BBC as many would regard it to be "left-wing," but it has "tended to be regarded as conservative" by others.⁶⁹ However, the political bias "is not based on political partisanship, but rather in an orientation towards those networks for power and their shared interests."⁷⁰ This tension between the political leanings of television in connection to gender and sexuality can be exemplified in Moffat's latest collaboration with the BBC, *Dracula*. My project positions itself within the realm of transnational contemporary horror television, but also within Gothic literature, television, and film that has led to the latest edition of *Dracula*. The history of Moffat's and the BBC's political agendas can be seen in the representations of gender and sexuality within *Sherlock*, *Dr. Who*, and *Dracula*. This interpretation of *Dracula* can extend the conversation on gender and sexuality relating to the horror genre and a canonically queer and women-focused text like Stoker's *Dracula*.

Theory and Methods

I view *Dracula* as a polysemic text holding both conservative and progressive views of gender and sexuality. I link the creator Moffat to his previous work in *Dr. Who* and *Sherlock*, and how the text continues to produce the same kind of polar audience reactions, with *Dracula* being

⁶⁸ Tom Mills, *The BBC: Myth of Public Service*, (London and New York: Verso, 2020), 1.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 106.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 139.

labeled either “misogynist” or “feminist.” I uncover the industrial intentions for the BBC and Moffat, as the network and creator, to better understand the context of the choices that were made on-screen. My thesis examines the politics of popular television through off-screen and on-screen conversations and depictions and how they might influence one another. I follow the path laid by Judith Fathallah’s interrogation of British masculinity seen in *Sherlock* through the “queer disruptions” in the performance of masculinity with *Dracula*.⁷¹ She also has written *Fanfiction and the Author: How Fanfic Changes Popular Cultural Texts*, where she analyzes how fanfic alters discursive formations of canonical media and how it frequently depends on the empowered white man who also is the author.⁷² My thesis further destabilizes the power of the producer and author, Moffat, and his intended meaning of the text, amplifying the discursive meanings of *Dracula* for marginalized populations.

My textual analysis focuses on *Dracula*, Jonathan Harker, Agatha Van Helsing, Mina Murray, and Lucy Westenra through a feminist lens. I focus on *Dracula*’s narrative and how it carries and shapes dominant ideologies about gender and sexuality, while also showing moments of destabilization. I concentrate on the character representations within the following three episodes that comprise the BBC miniseries: “*Dracula: The Rules of the Beast*,” “*Blood Vessel*,” and “*The Dark Compass*.” I am particularly interested in the ways the characters display dominant cultural expectations of gender and sexuality and moments where they may be read as queer or as diverting from societal norms. I am looking at how the queer narrative of *Dracula* still shines through even though this iteration offers an overwhelmingly strong heteronormative

⁷¹ Judith Fathallah, “Moriarty’s Ghost: Or the Queer Disruption of the BBC’s *Sherlock*,” *Television and New Media* 16, no. 5 (2014): 490-500.

⁷² Judith Fathallah, *Fanfiction and the Author: How Fanfic Changes Popular Cultural Texts* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2017).

agenda. Additionally, I analyze the representations of women and how they conform or deviate from gender norms and stereotypical depictions.

I also incorporate articles from trade publications like the *Times* (London), *Variety*, and *The Hollywood Reporter* to better contextualize *Dracula* within a broader view of the changes within the BBC network during and after the #MeToo movement. In particular, I look at the way the BBC implemented the 50:50 Project to increase the representation of women on and off-screen. I discover how social turmoil and off-screen politics may have led to the way *Dracula* was produced and the choices that were made, like the genderswap of Van Helsing. Additionally, some paratextual objects are analyzed, like interview coverage with the producers and writers of the series, Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat, and other promotional materials such as video promotions, Comic-Con interviews, and behind-the-scenes clips for more contextual evidence. Through these materials, I uncover the intentions and expectations of the *Dracula* creators in connection to the other science-fiction and mystery shows Gatiss and Moffat have produced, like BBC's *Sherlock* and *Doctor Who*. I contextualize representations of women and queer characters in *Dracula* with the broader issues of gender and sexuality in our current socio-political environment.

Chapter Descriptions

Chapter two is a textual and industrial analysis of *Dracula* that focuses on Dracula and Jonathan Harker's relationship. I investigate the first episode and second episode of the mini-series to trace its queer connotations. I further explore the queerness of the series from ancillary queer characters like Adisa and Lord Ruthven in connection to the bisexual history of *Dracula*. I reveal the ways Dracula can be seen as queer in this edition from the many new twists implemented by the producers, although they might say Dracula does not have a sexuality at all.

By investigating the thoughts of the main showrunner, Steven Moffat, and how his comments clash with Dracula's story presented on the screen, I illuminate the continued tension around queer acceptance in television today. I argue that although there is a resistance to queerness from the production side, *Dracula* can be read as a "coming out story," where Dracula accepts his own identity at the conclusion of the series and looks to have society accept it as well. Dracula then becomes a character who communicates broader ideas of desire, ultimately exposing the tensions of identity in our current sociopolitical climate. This allows us to reflect on those tensions through the character and the narrative arc. *Dracula* is a divisive series which is both exploitative in the queerbaiting used, and progressive in its display of homoeroticism.

Chapter three is a textual and industry analysis focusing on the stereotypical representations of the women in *Dracula*. Agatha Van Helsing's gender swap affords more opportunities for representations of women, shifting the audience's perceptions of which bodies can portray certain fictional and historical roles. However, her transcendence is held back by the other women in the show, Lucy and Mina, revealing the inauthentic and stereotypical representations of women in *Dracula*. More representation of women is important, but there must be characters of substance. It matters how *all* women are represented. Analyzing how Lucy and Mina are characterized in the show starts to poke holes in even the strongest adaptations of women like Agatha. It may at first seem like the show is making positive changes in representation, but I argue that this gender swap is misleading, superficial, and inauthentic. The representations of women are similar to queerbaiting, in the way they lure audiences in with the promise of strong representations, but then the representations slip back into regressive stereotypes. I coin the term genderbaiting as a way of illustrating a similar representational tactic for depictions of heterosexual, cis-gender women to that of queer characters. Overall, the female

representations in *Dracula* are stereotypical, reflecting and sustaining socially endorsed views of gender and race.

The fourth and final chapter reiterates how representation and identity in *Dracula* can have multiple meanings and how, at times, the meanings are paradoxical. The conclusion summarizes the main arguments made in the preceding chapters, pointing to prominent implications of the analysis. I then focus on the limitations of the work and the directions that might be possible to continue the work in future research.

Chapter Two

Drac is Back as Progressive or Exploitative?: Representations of Sexuality in BBC's

Dracula

Dracula (2020) resurrects the Count, but with a few unique twists to the vampire story. The series is an amalgamation of previous *Dracula* adaptations with a few differences that reveal and extend the underlining queer narrative. Although Dracula is the title character, he is in extraordinarily little of the original novel and continues to lurk in the shadows with little development in each adaptation. However, Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss' *Dracula* becomes the main protagonist or anti-hero of the story. He is a central character who lacks the conventional heroic attributes, i.e., Dracula kills people instead of saving them. Blood also becomes a key plot device for the storyline, as it provides not only nourishment but also the skills of the victims to Dracula. The blood imagery is everywhere, particularly in the title sequence, and in this version "Blood is lives," which means there are stories, traits, and skills that are literally being transported in the blood acquired by Dracula. Another interesting twist is that Dracula can make death a pleasurable experience for his victims. These updates in the series were meant to provide something new and different to the *Dracula* narrative. I argue that these twists further emphasize the queer storyline of *Dracula*, and although one of the co-producers, Steven Moffat, denounces the queer readings of *his* Dracula, the show still provides moments of identification and visibility for LGBTQ+ audiences.

Dracula is an immortal character, but he is never crystallized. Instead, he is changing, morphing, and transforming with each new interpretation, reflecting the cultural anxieties of the time. Dracula, and vampires more broadly, become manifestations of monstrous "others," particularly marginalized identities in various societies. Vampires cannot be placed in one

category or another: they are not alive or dead, human or animal, masculine or feminine, gay or straight. On one level, *Dracula* is queer because he is a vampire, but on another, *Dracula*'s queerness comes from his portrayal as a combination of non-normative identities that are "othered" through race, sexuality, nationality, etc. He then is a character who can produce fear in dominant, hegemonic audiences while simultaneously providing connection and identification for audiences on the margins.

Dracula has been long researched as a part of horror that is queer, as it portrays implicit or symbolic queerness that is not always recognized by audiences under the sway of dominant ideologies. *Dracula* (2020) can be considered as a part of New Queer Horror as it reads the anxieties and fears from within the queer community back onto itself. Darren Elliott-Smith and John Edgar Browning determine that over the past two decades horror films and television shows have found success through the implicit or explicit depictions of queerness. Elliott-Smith and Browning look at a trend known as New Queer Horror which is, "...horror that is crafted by directors/producers who identify as lesbian, gay, bi, queer, transgender, non-binary, asexual, intersex; or work that features homoerotic, or explicitly gay, narratives with 'out' LGBTQ+ characters."⁷³ New Queer Horror projects contemporary anxieties felt within LGBTQ+ subcultures onto the characters and narratives, building on the symbolic role of the queer monster as it becomes more explicit and unambiguous.⁷⁴ New Queer Horror highlights the limits of the metaphorical existence of queerness while turning the focus of fear upon its own communities and subcultures. *Dracula* can be read as a part of the New Queer Horror trend as Moffat's co-producer, Mark Gatiss, is openly gay. Additionally, the updated twists in this series

⁷³ John Edgar Browning and Darren Elliott-Smith, eds, *New Queer Horror: Film and Television*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, January 15, 2021, Kindle, chap. 1.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

explore anxieties and fears within the LGBTQ+ community while also depicting explicit gay characters and implicit homoerotic content.

Historically, the depictions of queer characters were merely suggestions or hints at the possibility of a queer relationship, without ever saying it for certain. Alexander Doty explains that these implicit moments of “mass culture queerness” have lived in the “shadowy realm of connotation,” becoming a metaphorical closet that, “allows straight culture to use queerness for pleasure and profit in mass culture without admitting to it.”⁷⁵ As previously stated, over the last twenty years there has been a rise in queer content that is more explicit. New Queer Horror is pushing the queer metaphors out of the closet, aiming to lure in LGBTQ+ audiences because their inclusion is lucrative. Now that there is a larger quantity of “out” characters it is important to distinguish between the depictions. More importantly, at what point is the portrayal of queerness a sign of progress or one of exploitation? *Dracula* (2020) rests in the middle of this tension as the show provides moments of identification which are read as progressive, bringing the fears and anxieties within the queer community outward. But it might also be read as exploitative, as the co-creator Moffat is hesitant to embrace *Dracula* as queer and writes shallow representations of peripheral queer characters.

Dracula delivers evidence of implicit queerness through both homoeroticism and queerbaiting. Moffat’s history of past queerbaiting tactics persist in *Dracula*. Judith Fathallah defines queerbaiting as:

[A harmful] television strategy by which writers and networks attempt to gain the attention of queer viewers via hints, jokes, gestures, and symbolism suggesting a queer relationship between two characters and then emphatically denying and laughing off the

⁷⁵ Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, xi.

possibility. Denial and mockery reinstate a heteronormative narrative that poses no danger of offending mainstream viewers at the expense of queer eyes.⁷⁶

Queerbaiting is a double-edged sword as it can be used to elevate difference through representations of marginalized bodies on screen, but those representations are superficial depictions of queerness, which are damaging for queer audiences. Homoeroticism solely focuses on desire depicted through the sexual attraction between two people of the same sex, leaving the possibility of queerness as an open-ended question. Queerbaiting is suggesting the possibility of a queer relationship and then stripping it away, reasserting heteronormativity. In this chapter, I first investigate the ways the co-showrunner, Moffat, and his history of queerbaiting continues to problematize the impact *Dracula* could have in New Queer Horror. Then I outline the ways *Dracula* as a character and *Dracula* as a series are queer and progressively incorporate desire. Ultimately, *Dracula* is a queer series and can provide transgressive ideas of sexuality while illuminating anxieties felt within the LGBTQ+ community, regardless of the creator's intentions. *Dracula* is then both a sign of progress and of exploitation, offering a text dripping with sexual fluidity.

Queerbaiting & the Creator

“Is BBC’s *Dracula* gay, or very gay?” David Opie asked, writing for *The Digital Spy*, a British-based entertainment, television, and film website.⁷⁷ It is one of numerous articles supporting the gay and bisexual readings of BBC’s *Dracula*.⁷⁸ The series has many gay

⁷⁶ Judith Fathallah, “Moriarty’s Ghost: Or the Queer Disruption of the BBC’s ‘Sherlock,’” *Television and New Media* 16, no. 5 (2015): 491.

⁷⁷ David Opie, “*Dracula* Is Queer and Always Has Been, but the BBC Series Refuses to Accept That,” *Digital Spy* (Digital Spy, January 7, 2020), <https://www.digitalspy.com/tv/a30415965/dracula-bbc-tv-gay-lgbtq-queer-netflix/>.

⁷⁸ Daniel Megarry et al., “Viewers Defend *Dracula* Being 'Bisexual' in Terrifying New BBC Series,” *Gay Times*, January 2, 2020, <https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/culture/viewers-defend-dracula-being-bisexual-in-terrifying-new-bbc-series/>; Josh Milton, Patrick Kelleher, and Ed Nightingale, “BBC’s New *Dracula* Is 'Bi-Homicidal' Not Bisexual. Yes, Really,” *PinkNews*, December 28, 2019, <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2019/12/28/bbcs-new-dracula-is-bi->

moments, from the direct and indirect innuendos in the dialogue to the characters and narrative arc. Within the first five minutes of episode one, “The Rules of the Beast,” Jonathan Harker is directly asked if he had sexual intercourse with Count Dracula.⁷⁹ Harker is stunned by the question and does not respond. After an awkward pause, the scene humorously cuts away to the title sequence. Although the show may directly engage or hint at Dracula’s fluid sexuality, the producers resist any gay or bisexual readings of the series. Moffat is known for his controversial comments when considering queer readings in his past shows, such as *Sherlock* (BBC, 2010-present). Despite his resistance to the queer reading of his *Dracula*, the queer themes and concepts are irrevocably embedded in the narrative, as well as in the more general seductive vampiric metaphor.

There are some explicit LGBTQ+ relationships and representations featured in the series. However, the few “out” gay characters either have unsatisfying storylines or are murdered. Queerbaiting is apparent in the series when the creators of television shows or films hint at same-sex romances and other LGBTQ+ representations but never state them explicitly or, when they do, the depictions are shallow. This is misleading for LGBTQ+ audiences because they are led to believe their identities will be showcased and enunciated but, unfortunately, they are never actualized. These satisfying storylines and character actualizations can come in several different ways, from more screen time and development of their story or clear depictions of them in love or being loved.

homicidal-not-bisexual-yes-really/.; Adam Miller, “So What If Dracula Is Gay?,” *Metro* (Metro.co.uk, January 2, 2020), <https://metro.co.uk/2020/01/02/calling-dracula-gay-vampire-totally-misses-point-11991772/>.

⁷⁹ Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss writers, *Dracula*, Season 1, Episode 1, “The Rules of the Beast,” directed by Jonny Campbell, featuring Claes Bang, Dolly Wells, and John Heffernan, Aired January 1, 2020, in broadcast syndication, BBC, 2020, Netflix.

The queerbaiting is compounded by comments from Steven Moffat that denounce the queer readings of *his* Dracula altogether, despite the countless moments of queerness portrayed. In fact, Moffat suggests that Dracula does not even have a sexuality at all, which echoes similar comments he has made while producing and writing *Sherlock*. The queer content on *Dracula* may be a sign of progress, but simultaneously the exposure of queer identity, when flippantly illustrated, becomes exploitative. In this section, I problematize the queerbaiting used in the show, which is further supported by Moffat's comments, through the explicit gay relationship between Lord Ruthven and Adisa. I tease out the many ways that the relationship treads the line of exploitation but also visibility, demonstrating how the show dabbles between queerbaiting and homoeroticism. I conclude that the creators and the show might not always embrace the queer readings of *Dracula* or depict the few "out" characters with much consideration, but that the series can still be a part of the New Queer Horror, providing visibility and identification for LGBTQ+ audiences.

Explicit Queer Representations

Dracula predominantly depicts implicit queerness, although there is an example of an explicitly gay couple in the series. I am defining explicit queerness as the open expression of either verbal or physical romantic interactions between gay characters. Those two characters are Lord Ruthven and Adisa, featured in the second episode, "Blood Vessel." Lord Ruthven is one of many social elites that are trapped on the Demeter ship with Dracula. He is also newly married to Dorabella as a cover for his sexuality. When he is around other people, he makes a point to talk about having intercourse with his wife. It becomes clear these many statements indicate that he is overcompensating for something. He says he "wore her out" and she was tired, which is why he

is spending time with Adisa, “his man,” or paid servant.⁸⁰ But the reason he is spending time with Adisa is because they have a secret romantic relationship. Lord Ruthven and Adisa are the only gay couple depicted in the series, and the intensity of their relationship is only exposed *after* Lord Ruthven dies, meaning there is little development or explication of the couple together.

After Dracula kills Lord Ruthven, he then comes for his partner, Adisa. Everyone assumes that Adisa is Lord Ruthven’s servant because he is Black and is always next to Lord Ruthven, but he is much more. In a passionate rage, after Dracula kills Lord Ruthven, Adisa says, pointing to Dracula, “This man killed Tom, Lord Ruthven. He took the love of my life, and I will not play his games.” This statement is where the implicit tension of their secret romance becomes explicit, as Adisa explains that Ruthven is the “love of my life.” This is never explored in the story, but rather is thrown in after Lord Ruthven’s death. Dracula responds with, “Yes... Do as you’re told. Do as they tell you, as you always do, ‘cause that’s what you’re good at, ‘cause you’re a servant. Hmm. However stupid your masters were, however beautiful, you’re destined to remain in the shadows. A guilty secret.” Dracula can recognize the desires and fears of the people most susceptible to his seduction, using Lord Ruthven’s selfishness and Adisa’s pride against them. He maneuvers himself within this love triangle between Lord Ruthven and Adisa, killing them both and providing a predictable and regressive ending for this gay couple.

Just as Dracula is manipulative in the way he lures victims with the promise of sex, the showrunners are manipulative in luring LGBTQ+ viewers with the promise of satisfactory representation. The explicit gay relationship between these two men is never explored while they are both alive. The seriousness of their relationship is only revealed after death. Although this

⁸⁰ Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss, writers, *Dracula*, Season 1, episode 2, “Blood Vessel,” Directed by Damon Thomas, featuring Claes Bang, and Dolly Wells, Aired January 2, 2020, in broadcast syndication, BBC, 2020, Netflix.

relationship is explicitly gay, it is represented as frivolous and unsubstantiated within the text. It was meant to draw in LGBTQ+ audiences but not to satisfy them.

Implicit Queer Representations

The explicit gay storyline is contrasted with a more typical instance of queerbaiting, which is portrayed through the implicit moments of homoeroticism. Queerbaiting is depicted in the show through the use of sexual tension between two same-sex characters, which is then denied or excused, citing another reason for their apparent romantic connection. This denial and mockery reinstate dominant ideology and cultural norms, which will not offend mainstream viewers and instead exploits queer audiences. The exploitation is taking advantage of these audiences by luring them into a show merely for profits, without delivering the promise of a robust narrative surrounding LGBTQ+ characters. The most obvious queerbaiting in this text is depicted through Dracula encountering the star-crossed lovers, Adisa and Lord Ruthven.

Dracula becomes increasingly involved in the love triangle of Lord Ruthven, his wife Dorabella, and Adisa. Lord Ruthven's excessive flaunting of having sex with his new wife cued Dracula into the possibility that Lord Ruthven was hiding something. Dracula asks why he is not spending time with his wife, and Ruthven says that there is too much of a good thing. Dracula makes his move and leans over, squeezing Lord Ruthven's thigh, saying, "Too much is exactly enough," providing a subtle hint that Dracula might want him, too. Dracula's seduction throughout the episode is shown through the passing glances and looks of passion between him and Lord Ruthven, who is becoming increasingly infatuated with Dracula. He opens up to another passenger about his interest in Dracula saying, "He's a very persuasive man, the Count. One might almost say seductive." He goes on to emphasize their partnership. He mentions they are "partners" multiple times as Dracula fixes the lower buttons of Lord Ruthven's coat jacket

and looks at his waistline, insinuating that they have a business partnership, which becomes a euphemism for gay relations or desires.

The homoeroticism depicted in the scene quickly turns out to be an example of queerbaiting because Lord Ruthven and Dracula's relationship is not about their romantic partnership but a business partnership. This is revealed when Lord Ruthven quickly turns evil, trying to impress his new business partner by threatening and killing some of the other passengers aboard the *Demeter*. Lord Ruthven's goal is to become a vampire and have eternal life. He believes Dracula will give him eternal life because they are "partners." Dracula then discloses the real reason they are business "partners": so that Dracula can take his money when he dies. Lord Ruthven dies as Dracula caresses his face, whispering, "Partner... Thank you for everything... Try and stay calm. You're doing very well." The sexual tension, although manipulative, is palpable in the relationship between Dracula and Lord Ruthven. The manipulation broadens Dracula's monstrosity as he uses his sexual appeal to lure his victims.

All of these moments of implicit queerness throughout the text reveal that these ancillary characters are merely a means to an end, and not an end in themselves. In other words, the homoeroticism portrayed is not always meant for sex or a romantic relationship, but for the purposes of money or eternal life. The homoeroticism is portrayed through the lingering glances, Dracula squeezing Lord Ruthven's thigh, and playing with the lower buttons on his waist coat. It is clear there is an infatuation between the two characters. However, these moments of homoeroticism will not amount to anything. These more implicit scenes function as queer bait when the sexual interactions between Dracula and other queer characters are dismissed. They require a different end, other than a relationship or sex; they are for a business transaction. Dracula does not want Lord Ruthven sexually; instead, he only wants his money. Conversely,

Lord Ruthven does not want Dracula sexually, either. He wants to be a vampire for the eternal life. But the sexual tension between them is still palpable. The promise of sex is used as hints, jokes, gestures, and symbolism, suggesting a queer relationship between two characters, but one that is never actualized. The toying or flirting with unmet desires is intended to suggest the possibility of something more and then denying or excusing the sexual tension for another reason. This denial and mockery reinstates a heteronormative narrative that poses no danger of offending mainstream viewers and exploits queer audiences.

The History of the Showrunner

The queerbaiting is validated by co-showrunner Steven Moffat's comments. In December 2019, leading up to the release of *Dracula* (2020), co-creators Moffat and Gatiss and actor Claes Bang were interviewed by *The Times* about the upcoming series. It was in this interview that Moffat divulged his intentions for Dracula's sexuality, which quickly circulated around the Internet. Moffat is quoted, saying, "I mean we've had a lot of stuff about Dracula being bisexual. He's not. He's not actually sexual. He's bi-homicidal if he's anything. He just kills people. He might lure them in with the promise of sex, but then he drinks their blood and tosses aside their desiccated corpses. He's really not in the dating game."⁸¹ There are some interesting points to interrogate from his response. Moffat acknowledges "a lot of stuff about Dracula," referring to the many canonical texts that portray a gay or bisexual interpretation of the iconic vampire. Moffat is aware of the existence of these texts but wants to directly position *his* Dracula in contrast to those readings. He wants to create a Dracula that is not bisexual, and that is "not actually sexual" at all, which suggests that Dracula is asexual, or without sexuality altogether.

⁸¹ Andrew Billen, "Dracula Returns: Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat on Their New BBC Series," Times2 | The Times (The Times, December 28, 2019), <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/interview-dracula-returns-mark-gatiss-and-steven-moffat-on-their-new-bbc-tv-series-n996gxkrj>.

Asexuality is still considered queer because it is a non-heterosexual identity and is even represented in the LGBTQIAPK+ acronym.⁸² In a way, Moffat is redefining Dracula's sexuality and placing him within the realm of asexuality. Ultimately, Moffat's comments show Dracula was not meant to be queer, but he nevertheless provided a number of places and reasons for this reading to be valid. Dracula might be asexual to Moffat, but to other audience members, the show is saturated with implicit and explicit queerness, which provides moments of identification while simultaneously leaving them unsatisfied.

Moffat's comments on Dracula parallel the very same comments he made on another iconic character he co-produced, Sherlock Holmes. *Sherlock* fanfiction predominantly grew on Tumblr as fans of the series wrote stories about a romance between Sherlock Holmes and John Watson, a slash fiction community known as Johnlock.⁸³ When asked how Moffat handled Sherlock's sexuality in the show, he remarked, "There's no indication in the original stories that [Holmes] was asexual or gay. He actually says he declines the attention of women because he doesn't want the distraction. What does that tell you about him? Straightforward deduction. He wouldn't be living with a man if he thought men were interesting."⁸⁴ Moffat goes as far as discounting the asexual reading of Sherlock altogether. He says that if Sherlock were "asexual, there would be no tension in that, no fun in that – it's someone who abstains who's interesting. There's no guarantee that he'll stay that way in the end."⁸⁵

⁸² I want to make a distinction between the word queer is the "Q" in LGBTQIAPK+ and the way the term is used in academia. Queer is also an umbrella term pertaining to the spectrum of non-normative sexual and gender identities and politics featured in the acronym, this is where Moffat's understanding of Dracula's sexuality resides. At the same time, the term queer used within queer theory, is an opposition to the binarized system of "norms" produced, which Dracula continues to represent. In both instances, Dracula is queer through his non-normative sexuality and is opposition to normativity.

⁸³ Diana W. Anselmo, "Gender and Queer Fan Labor on Tumblr: The Case of BBC's *Sherlock*," *Feminist Media Histories*, 4, no. 1 (January 2018): 85.

⁸⁴ Stuart Jeffries, Interview with Steven Moffat, "There Is a Clue Everybody's Missed," *Guardian*, January 20, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2012/jan/20/steven-moffat-sherlock-doctor-who>.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Despite such denials, *Sherlock* can be read as queer regardless of the intentions of the author or producer of the story. The text transcends the plans of the author, producer, or creator. Although their thoughts or contributions can be a part of the conversation, they do not dictate meaning. Roland Barthes' essay, "Death of the Author," extrapolates on the author's intentions and how they do not determine the creation's meaning. He says, "The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing re-inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin [author] but in its destination [reader]."⁸⁶ The author, in this case Moffat, cannot dictate in advance what the meaning(s) of a text will or should eventually or inevitably be, and it is rather through discourse and negotiation with a reader that meaning is produced. However, as a mini-series, instead of a continuing series like *Sherlock*, *Dracula* does not provide as many opportunities for overt, transformative storytelling between the text, audience, and creator. The short series cannot respond to the audience's fanfic creations, which are one way that audiences visibly negotiate meanings of texts. As Fathallah writes, "Fanfic begins to create new knowledge in fictional spaces, utilizing the gaps and possibilities of canon and reality to reveal basic assumptions and possibilities they exclude."⁸⁷ Fanfic is an example of how meaning can be negotiated between creators, audiences, and texts, however, the mini-series form does not allow the same conversation the long-form series provides.

Amandelin Valentine mentions that scholarship on *Sherlock* has mostly focused on, "The ways [queer] readings conflict or intersect with how the show and its producers understand [Sherlock]."⁸⁸ Valentine motions for a broader understanding of queerness in the show outside

⁸⁶ Roland Barthes and Stephen Heath, "The Death of the Author," Essay, in *Image-Music-Text*, London: Fontana Press, 1977, 148.

⁸⁷ Fathallah, *Fanfiction and the Author: How Fanfic Changes Popular Cultural Texts*, 200.

⁸⁸ Amandelin A. Valentine, "Toward a Broader Recognition of the Queer in the BBC's *Sherlock*," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 22. (2016).

the essentialist ideas seen within the gay domestic relationship of Johnlock. Valentine believes that outside the affirmation of Sherlock's sexuality from the creator, we can see his sexuality as "entirely illegible," but it is through this indecipherability that he becomes "a site of profound recognition for its queer audience."⁸⁹ Sherlock could be gay, asexual, heterosexual, or queer but what matters is that he "is a point of identification (or disidentification) for viewers to whom his inability or unwillingness to find a place within the hegemonic, heteronormative paradigm of 'traditional values' is a point of rare representation in popular culture."⁹⁰ We can see something similar in the case of *Dracula*. Regardless of the creators' intentions for Dracula's sexuality, we can read him as queer, and he can still be a site of recognition and identification for queer audiences.

Although Moffat rejects the readings of both Sherlock and Dracula as queer, he nevertheless utilizes queerbaiting in an attempt to appeal to a wider, perhaps more diverse, audience. BBC's *Sherlock* has been under scrutiny from scholars for these precise queerbaiting tactics. The representation is there to some degree but remains problematic through the implicit and explicit queerness in *Dracula*. Future LGBTQ+ representations will need to do more than use queerbaiting and stereotypes to satiate the audience's thirst. Instead, they will need adequate time and development. Queerbaiting is a double-edge sword in the way it is both a sign of exploitation, but also of progress. As we see more explicit and implicit queerness depicted on-screen with New Queer Horror content, there is a continued importance to critique and scrutinize these representations. Coinciding with the resurgence of Gothic characters like Dracula, over the last decade there have been many New Queer Horror television shows that have received mainstream acceptance, such as *American Horror Story* (FX, 2011 - present), *Hannibal* (NBC,

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

2013 - 2015), and *The Haunting of Hill House* (Netflix, 2018). These texts intertwine many marginalized and non-normative identities into popular horror narratives. Despite the queerbaiting and Moffat's comments, BBC's *Dracula* still fits into the larger work of New Queer Horror as it features stories of queerness, particularly from the Count himself.

Dracula: The Queer Count

Moffat has caused some controversy with his justifications for Dracula's sexuality and the queerbaiting used in the show, but *Dracula* still has valuable contributions to New Queer Horror and provides recognition and identification for marginalized groups. In this version, Dracula becomes the main protagonist, and the narrative circulates around understanding the Count's desires, interests, and patterns of behavior. The audience is then positioned more directly toward Dracula and his many transformations in the series. The queer monster is not the "other" but one of us; we are situated in relation to Dracula as the protagonist. In this section, I trace the ways Dracula's queerness may be more apparent in this latest installment. *Dracula's* queerness can be seen in multiple ways, but especially in the aspects of the story that were updated or changed. The story has been changed in four major ways: 1) Dracula is the main protagonist, 2) Dracula drinks blood to gain skills and knowledge, 3) Dracula can make death pleasurable for his victims, and 4) Dracula can shapeshift into animals but also people. I argue that although there is a resistance to queerness from the production side, *Dracula* can be read as a queer story because the narrative and characterization of Dracula supports the anxieties and fears that are shared in the queer experience.

Dracula: A Coming Out Story

Dracula is the main protagonist of the series and his decisions propel the story forward, culminating in the final scene where he comes to terms with his identity. The other characters are

positioned as plot devices to allow Dracula to better understand himself. Dracula might be the main character, but he is still as evil and villainous as ever. Steven Moffat indicates, “The radical difference is... we are used to the idea that the moral center for the show is the main character, this is not the case in Dracula.”⁹¹ The morality of the show rests in the reactions of the ancillary characters like Agatha Van Helsing, Jonathan Harker, and Lucy Westenra. The horror they experience at the fangs of Dracula reveals his evil side. The story is positioned in a way for the audience to better understand Dracula and his differences, both moral and immoral. As he learns to accept who, or what, he is, then the audience better understands him, too. In a way, the overarching narrative is symbolic of a coming out story, which reveals how Dracula’s fears prevent him from living authentically.⁹² Coming out is a metaphor used to describe when someone is, first, aware that their sex, gender, or sexuality does not align with the heterosexual cisgender “norm,” and second, openly shares or confesses this to their family, and or a normative community more generally. Dracula’s resistance to embracing his identity as a vampire echoes the fears of the queer community when coming out about their sexuality or gender identity, fearing the inevitable negative social repercussions.

Vampires metaphorically depict queer lifestyles and that is why many non-normative groups identify with the vampire. Richard Dyer notes there are specific pleasures that are offered to gay readers, particularly with vampire narratives. He believes that the vampire is a euphemism for “homosexuality,” saying:

⁹¹ MCM Comic Con, “BBC Dracula | Claes Bang, Mark Gatiss, Steven Moffat, Sue Vertue | MCM Comic Con,” 2019, YouTube 43:09, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFRU3Lf9tZ0>, 33:00 to 33:12.

⁹² When I use words like “authentic,” “free,” “liberated,” “openly,” “acceptance,” etc., I am referring to their colloquial use within the gay rights and gay liberation movement. Queer theory might critique the use of these terms because the freedom to choose is still within a realm of particular possibilities, and that choice is never truly “free” because freedom is a condition of power. However, for my thesis, I am looking at these terms in the way audiences connected with the LGBTQ+ community may recognize the rhetoric when embracing their sex, sexuality, and gender, ultimately living their “truth” like Dracula.

Much of the suspense of life lived in the closet is precisely, ‘will they find out?’ An obvious way to read a vampire story is self-oppressively, in the sense of siding with the narrator (whether s/he is the main character or not) and investing energy in the hope that s/he will be saved from the knowledge of vampirism (homosexuality). Maybe that is how queers have often read it ... The structure whereby we the reader know more than the protagonist (heightened in first-person narration) is delicious, and turns what is perilous in a closeted queer life (knowing something dreadful about oneself that they don’t) into something flattering, for it makes one superior. Another enjoyable way of positioning oneself in this text-reader relation is in thrilling to the extraordinary power credited to the vampire, transcendent powers of seduction, they can have anyone they want it seems. Most queers experienced exactly the opposite, certainly outside of the gay scene . . . Even though the vampire is invariably killed off at the end, how splendid to know what a threat our secret is to them!⁹³

The vampire must hide its desires to walk effortlessly in the world in the same way that people in the queer community exist. Their desires are secrets of a closeted queer life, suppressed or not discussed openly because of the continued social stigma.

The coming out story can be viewed through the metaphor of the vampire and the additional implicit symbolism in the show. Dracula’s internal struggles are brought to the surface through his relationship with Agatha Van Helsing, who astutely interrogates his beliefs and ideas about himself. Dracula seeks recognition from Agatha and remarks, “After 400 years it’s nice to be understood.” She is the one that raises the contradictions in his life and how he is not entirely truthful about his existence. She questions why he fears the cross while simultaneously boasting

⁹³ Richard Dyer, “It’s in his Kiss!: Vampirism as Homosexuality, Homosexuality as Vampirism,” in *The Culture of Queers*, 79.

of his love for science, which revels in so-called “facts.” He responds that the cross is, “Not a symbol of virtue and kindness. It’s a mark of horror and oppression. Your idiot Church has terrorized the peasant population for centuries, and I have been imbibing the blood of those same persons for so long, I have absorbed their fear of the cross. My God. I can’t wait to eat some atheists.” Dracula tries to find logic in his repulsion of the cross and blames it on his ability to absorb the fears and habits of the people he devours. However, Agatha knows that this is not true because it does not answer the other questions, like why must Dracula be invited into a home, and why is he afraid of sunlight? As Agatha Van Helsing aptly concludes, all these questions are reduced to one question: what does Dracula fear the most? Whatever that fear is, it prevents Dracula from existing without restraints.

In the final scene of the series, Van Helsing is nearing death due to cancer, and in her dying moments, she uncovers what Dracula fears the most. She says that these “rules of the beast” that he lives by are not curses; they are “merely habits that become fetishes that become legends, that even you [Dracula] believe[s].”⁹⁴ She continues to pry at what he is terrified of the most—death. After hundreds of years of living in the shadows, Dracula does not possess the courage it takes to die, and he is ashamed. After watching many of his fellow warriors, his family members, and ancestors die, he isolated himself. Agatha says, “You will live forever, in shame” because he is unable to face, let alone accept, death. His thoughts led to habits that led to his beliefs about himself, creating stringent rules to prevent his death. For example, he believes he is unwelcome because he is reviled by people everywhere, and therefore needs an invitation into

⁹⁴ Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss writers, *Dracula*, Season 1, Episode 3, “The Dark Compass,” Directed by Paul McGuigan, featuring Claes Bang and Dolly Wells. Aired January 3, 2020, in broadcast syndication, BBC, 2020. Netflix.

any abode. He is policing his life, creating regulatory norms, which prevent him from dying, but also prevent him from authentically living.

It is through Agatha's astute observation that Dracula willingly faces and accepts death, killing himself by ingesting her toxic, cancerous blood. The scene ends with Dracula stepping out of the dark shadows and into the light, accepting that he lived his life inauthentically because he is ashamed of his vampiric identity. He finally confronts his own fears and shame, and courageously faces his demise. It is in this truth that he can be liberated. He is repulsed by the cross because it shows the courage that he does not possess, living fearlessly no matter the outcome. Dracula's largest fear of living freely, without restrictions and rules, could result in his death. This limited his exposure to others and kept him closeted. Similarly, LGBTQ+ community members also face the same kind of dread and shame when coming out. Their lives are literally at stake in many instances. The overall premise of the story thereby captures the anxieties around LGBTQ+ coming out narratives. Coming out can be a liberating experience but also one that encompasses fear and anxiety because of the possibility of rejection and death. These fears prevent people from the LGBTQ+ community from coming out.

The feelings of shame, exclusion, and fear are learned within a specific society that produces and reproduces heteronormative ideologies. Dracula hiding in the shadows, needing to be invited into spaces, avoiding the cross and sunlight, are all learned fears preventing him from accepting himself. The story speaks to LGBTQ+ communities' closeted feelings of shame and exclusion. To further the idea of this coming out narrative, the show offers a sense of liberation, allowing Dracula to realize his conditioned and learned behavior that has ultimately generated fear and shame. Dracula's coming out is a process whereby he becomes aware of his conditioning and how it has led him to a life of solitude. In the final shift of the story, Dracula no

longer fears the rules that he adamantly lived by. Viewed as a coming out story, *Dracula* provides a radical queer reorientation toward a world unrestricted. *Dracula* fits within the New Queer Horror trend as Dracula's metaphorical coming out story reflects the internal fears and anxieties felt within the LGBTQ+ community and depicts those fears outwardly. The series is set on attempting to understand Dracula and therefore emphasizes the queer readings inscribed in this story.

Blood: Sustenance, Skills, and Sexuality

In this series, blood is the vehicle by which skills, talents, and stories are transferred from Dracula's victims. He also is visibly nourished, as he turns from an old and frail man to an attractive and seductive younger man. With the new knowledge he possesses he can acclimate to different eras, and with every new victim he devours he picks up their mannerisms, bodily habits, and orientations, which helps him move across cultural boundaries and social classes. Blood allows him to move between different people, languages, skills, and talents. This flexibility and fluidity add an additional layer of queerness to his character.

The first episode, "The Rules of the Beast," begins with an ancient and frail Dracula. He is first encountered as a decrepit and decaying old man who then slowly transforms into his beautiful younger self by draining Jonathan Harker of his blood. As Harker withers away and becomes increasingly disheveled in appearance, Dracula becomes stronger and more refined. Not only is Dracula more nourished by the blood, but he also gains Harker's skills, e.g., the ability to speak English. The transformation Dracula undergoes gives him power physically but also gives him a skill set that helps him journey outside Transylvania. This younger, more attractive version of himself, as well as his newfound ability to speak English clearly, helps him attract victims that will elevate his status.

Throughout the series, Dracula chooses his victims carefully to acquire their abilities. In the second episode, “Blood Vessel,” aboard the Demeter ship, Dracula secretly persuades many wealthy and powerful people to travel aboard so that he can feed. In one instance, Dracula kills a man so he can speak German to win over the Duchess on the ship. The man, however, had a stutter, and therefore Dracula acquires the stutter when speaking in German. Dracula must be selective with who he eats because if he is not, he could have “the social skills of a Russian sailor.” The important point is this: these skills (and many others) are learned patterns of behaviors and bodily comportments, and hence, they are not natural or essential characteristics of a person. He carries these stories and talents in his blood just as his victims did in their own. If Dracula can ingest the fears, habits, and skills of the people he consumes, why could he also not ingest their sexual orientations?

Judith Butler says sex is an “ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize ‘sex’ and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms.”⁹⁵ Conventionally, sexuality is understood as something essential or biologically natural to human beings, emanating from one’s sex; sexuality is then something we inherently possess. However, as Butler illustrates, queer theory challenges this essentialist ideal, and suggests that sexuality is a cultural artifact, not biological. Sexuality is something that must be learned, even if that learning is unconscious. Through learning, our bodies are directed toward certain objects and desires, and it is through this performance that we reproduce this learned behavior. This process is reinstated in such a way that it eventually appears natural or biological, when in fact it is artificial or at least non-biological. Queer theory critiques this inherent view of sexuality, and

⁹⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex,’* New York: Routledge, 1993: 2.

sees it as produced through certain forms of power and specific ideologies, which shows, at least in part, that sexuality is a set of contingent learned behaviors and desires, not something essential or natural about us as human beings. Under this reading, Dracula could acquire sexuality through blood, and because he is open to consuming men and women, gay and straight, his sexuality could morph in a similar way as picking up new languages, speech patterns, fears, or desires.

The Vampire's Kiss: A Pleasurable Death

Dracula goes beyond the labels of gay or bisexual, as there is a fantastical element to his character given his vampirism, rendering him queer. Additionally, Dracula has another novel ability in this series, wherein he can make death pleasurable for his victims. On multiple occasions, the men and women that the Count feeds on are unaware that they are dying because they experience visceral sexual visions with the people they desire most. Dracula twists their intimate fantasies as they perish in paradise.

These intimate dreams turn into nightmares as the scene shifts from a romantic encounter to the reality, showing Dracula actively killing them. In one scene, there is a dreamlike sequence that shows Mina on top of Jonathan in bed, and suddenly her blonde hair shifts to white as Dracula's fanged smile brings Jonathan back to reality. He does not remember the Count entering his room that night and slowly draining him of blood. The only image he has is of Mina. This scene is a horrifying moment that shows how deceiving and believable Dracula's ability to produce the victim's most intimate desires. Dracula provides a different kind of pleasure to his victims, perhaps a paradoxical one, either unwillingly or willingly.

Jonathan Harker may not have consented to this intimate dreamscape between himself and Mina Murray, his fiancé, but Lucy Westenra does. Lucy willingly gives Dracula her blood, which will be further investigated in chapter three. As Dracula slowly drains the life from her,

she knows and accepts her inevitable death, because she simply cannot resist the kiss of the vampire. Dracula can mentally transport Lucy to the places of her dreams, and she uses him to escape. She does not mind that she will die as long as she still receives these small doses of pleasure, because “the kiss of the vampire is an opiate.” When Dracula asks Lucy where she wants to go this time, she says, “Put me where no one can see me. Where I don’t have to smile.” In this iteration of *Dracula*, death is not always painful for his victims. Instead, the Count can make death satisfying, moving the victims beyond the corporeal limitations of pain and into romantic fantasies of pleasure or moments of escape. Dracula is queer not only because of his sexuality, but because of his unusual vampiric appetite that produces paradoxically pleasurable fantasies for his victims as he drains their lives.

Physical Transformations

In previous film and television adaptations, Dracula can physically transform into a bat, a wolf, and a large dog, but in *Dracula* (2020) he is also able to morph into other people. His physical ability to transform into other bodies can also be read as queer, as he moves beyond the limitations of the body. This shapeshifting into animals and people is depicted as a gruesome and grotesque process, or as an abjection penetrating the boundaries of self and other. Dracula’s sexuality is viewed through both visible and invisible transformations in the series. There are no borders that separate Dracula from the other characters. He infiltrates them through their blood, mind, and body. He does not respect the categories or rules but defies them. As Julia Kristeva contends, abjection is, “not lack of cleanliness or health... but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the

composite.”⁹⁶ Similarly, Dracula is an abject figure that rejects all rules and borders. He maneuvers in between them, becoming ambiguous.

In one instance, Dracula transforms into a wolf to travel to a nunnery from which Harker, one of his brides, escaped. A naked Dracula bursts from the wolf’s body, lingering with the fluids of the beast. The obscenity of his transformation is heightened by the “gaggle” of nuns who are witnessing his “devilry.” Later, he disguises himself by wearing the skin of Jonathan Harker and fooling Harker’s fiancé, Mina Murray, into thinking he is the real Jonathan. The Jonathan look-a-like says, “I couldn’t stop him, Mina, I let him inside. He’s inside... He’s inside,” which is a double entendre in the way it is referring to inviting Dracula inside the convent but also warning Mina that Dracula is physically inside him. The answer to the question of whether Harker had sexual intercourse with Dracula is revealed through this double meaning. In the final moment of the episode, Dracula rips Harker’s skin from his face and reveals that he is not the “Johnny blue-eyes” that Mina adores. This physical invasion uncovers that Dracula is everywhere, that he penetrates the very curtain of self and other.

Dracula’s insatiable desire for human blood increases throughout the series, augmented by no longer needing to hide in the fur of a beast or be masked by the skin of another. Dracula moves between the boundaries of self and other. Robert Phillips explores how the transgender body, especially when viewed in transition, becomes a disruption of the systemic order by refusing to adhere to the categories of sex and gender. The abject is then used to disturb socially constructed gender categories. There is a sense of fear and horror produced at the sight of the ambiguous body, which lends itself well to Julia Kristeva’s idea of abjection.⁹⁷ Dracula’s ability

⁹⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay of Abjection* (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 4.

⁹⁷ Phillips, “Abjection,” 20.

to take on different bodies and permeate the boundaries between self and other makes it difficult to distinguish him from another. He exhibits a liminal space where he experiences a “crisis of meaning in which transformation is possible — the difference between internal and external becomes unclear, and in the process, conditional identity is stripped away to reveal a queer object.”⁹⁸ Dracula can blend the transformations of human and monster and internal and external in a way that makes him queer. His physical transformations throughout the series emphasize his queerness as a palpable force that saturates the narrative.

There are many layers of implicit queerness in *Dracula*: his elusive figure is demonstrated by the coming out metaphor, the draining of blood, his ability to make death pleasurable, and his transitioning between bodies. The text has numerous instances of implicit or explicit queerness. The newest edition provides specific updates to the story that extend the queer narrative. Dracula as the protagonist positions the audience in a way that is sympathetic to his non-normative behaviors. Because the audience is encouraged to focus on trying to understand the queer monster, the series can be read as a metaphorical coming out story. Blood is used as a way of transporting skills, speech patterns, and bodily components to Dracula, allowing him to infiltrate and seamlessly maneuver different social classes and cultures. He gives his victims a pleasurable death and transforms into both animals and other people. In all of these cases, Dracula is a visceral force that transcends his very being and invades the bodies, minds, and souls of his victims. He replicates the behaviors of others and wears their skins so that he can perform “humanness.” In doing so he fleetingly evades his own monstrosity as he temporarily becomes someone else. Dracula is a vampire that lurks in the shadows ingesting the blood, habits, and beliefs of the people he devours, preventing him from courageously living as himself.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

His fluidity within a structured society, in terms of sexuality and his emotional and physical transformations, are moments of identification for the LGBTQ+ community, as they are often marginalized bodies, required to hide certain parts of their being for fear of rejection and death.

Conclusion

Dracula was produced by Moffat, who might not readily admit that Dracula's sexuality is fluid, but there are many moments of implicit queerness in the text. The overarching narrative of *Dracula* can be read as a coming out story, where Dracula accepts his identity and reorients his entire being. Dracula then becomes a character who communicates broader ideas of desire and human nature, ultimately exposing the tensions of identity in our current sociopolitical climate. This allows us to reflect on those tensions through the character and the narrative arc. When Claes Bang, the actor portraying Dracula, was asked to describe *his* Dracula, he said, "This is not *my* Dracula. If anything, this is *our* Dracula."⁹⁹ *Dracula* becomes a product of the people, where meaning is negotiated between the showrunner, spectator, and the text, turning out to be as fluid as Dracula himself. The text can have multiple interpretations, meaning the story goes beyond the intentions of the author or any creator who adapts the story.

Dracula has been, and continues to be, a series that arouses cultural anxieties concerning queerness. Dracula's non-normative identity straddles the binaries of masculine/feminine, gay/straight, and life/death. It is impossible to understand Dracula through the use of strict binaries. He is a character who at the very least shows where these boundaries fall apart. His actions would be unintelligible without the blurring of those categories, and in their very blurring risks illegibility. He shows how categorical structures fail and do not account for everything. He is erotic, sexual, and disturbing, becoming a catalyst for transforming characters and audiences

⁹⁹ MCM Comic Con, "BBC Dracula."

alike. *Dracula* may have aspects that veer away from the original text, but it still carries many moments of connection for queer audiences. Both the monster and “the homosexual” are permanent residents of “shadowy spaces: at worst caves, castles, and closets, and at best a marginalized and oppressed position within the cultural hegemony.”¹⁰⁰ There is a potential for horror to open spaces for genuine difference and cultural critique, but at the same time, it can be appropriated and only provide superficial understandings of non-normative stories. *Dracula's* representations of gender and sexuality exemplify the epistemological formations of both queerness and horror. Comparing the two reveals the shifting of cultural norms and discourses surrounding identity in the present moment.

What makes *Dracula* interesting is that the queerbaiting tactics seem to be backfiring as more conservative audiences are recognizing explicit and implicit depictions of queerness. Queerbaiting is a way to attract and target multiple audiences, but it is not operating in the way it was meant to. As Julia Himberg explains, queerbaiting is about, “Targeting multiple audience demographics where you’re not offending a conservative audience and you’re signaling to an LGBTQ[+] audience that you want them as well.”¹⁰¹ An article from *Metro* mentions that the queerness in *Dracula* was so poignant that conservative viewers almost went as far as canceling their subscription to the BBC. One viewer tweeted, “I was watching to see if *Dracula* was in a wheelchair, or Black but oh no, the BBC made him gay. The character who goes after seducing women with his eyes is now after men. For gods sake how pathetic of PC bbc (sic).”¹⁰² Another audience member said, “The #BBC has made #Dracula gay... I have no words, when or more

¹⁰⁰ Harry Benshoff, “The Monster and the Homosexual,” in *The Monster Theory Reader*, Edited by Weinstock, Jeffrey Andrew (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 230.

¹⁰¹ Holly Honderich, “Queerbaiting - Exploitation or a Sign of Progress?” *BBC News*, BBC, April 8, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-47820447>.

¹⁰² Miller, “So What If *Dracula* Is Gay?,” *Metro* (Metro.co.uk, January 2, 2020), <https://metro.co.uk/2020/01/02/calling-dracula-gay-vampire-totally-misses-point-11991772/>.

worryingly where will it all end?”¹⁰³ The implicit and explicit queerness depicted in the series is no longer satisfying for some conservative mainstream audience members. Audiences might read *Dracula* as a sign of progress or regression. Either way, these reactions show that audiences once satisfied by queerbaiting are no longer.

As horror and queerness lie in counterhegemonic spaces, they can also be popularized and appropriated to fit the values of heteronormativity. The queerbaiting used in the show draws in marginalized members of society as well as attempting to appeal to the mainstream public. No longer is queerbaiting beneath the surface of the show. Instead, it bubbles up as a vexing problem, as not all audience desires can be satisfied. One side might deem the depictions of queerness as just another sign of the downfall of society while the other interprets it as a sign of progress. In previous versions of *Dracula*, the gay subtext has slipped beneath the radar of the mainstream public; it was only apparent to the gay and lesbian community.¹⁰⁴ Over time, as there has been an increase in explicitly queer storylines in New Queer Horror, substantial LGBTQ+ representations are also desired. Queerbaiting becomes a double-edged sword in the way it can be used to draw certain audiences in while also pushing away others, but this tactic ultimately reveals the hostility and rejection the queer community has always faced and continues to face. In this way, queerbaiting is both a sign of progress and exploitation. *Dracula* reveals the internal and external struggles of queer people and although they are at times problematic, they still can provide points of recognition for the LGBTQ+ community.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Benshoff, “The Monster and the Homosexual,” 230.

Chapter Three

Revamp of the Vampire Slayer: Representations of Gender in BBC's *Dracula*

The three-part miniseries of *Dracula* (2020) updates the classical vampire narrative with contemporary twists, most notably the genderswap of the main character Abraham Van Helsing to Agatha Van Helsing. Sister Agatha Van Helsing is introduced as a witty, faithless, and dynamic nun at the St. Mary's Convent, Budapest. Her candid humor and characterization are symptomatic of the writing from showrunners Moffat and Gatiss. The first episode features Van Helsing as a promising representation of a woman in a leading role, but her storyline and characterization quickly nosedive, veering toward a story solely concerned with Dracula and his desires. The showrunners hold the executive power on what makes the final cut and can still be held responsible for any praiseworthy or blameworthy aspects of the show. Moffat, more particularly, has been known as a controversial creator, not only for his comments on sexuality, but also through his problematic depictions of women. His past representations have been so inadequate that fans have coined them as "Moffat Women."¹⁰⁵ These "Moffat Women" are defined by their lack of agency, their character arcs revolving around men, and how they act as simple plot devices without much substance. *Dracula* showcases the same flat character representations and depicts stereotypical women throughout the series.

In this chapter, I aim to better understand what signifies feminist representations of women in television. Scholarly research on representations of women in relation to feminism call for more than just the breaking of television stereotypes like the "damsel in distress." It demands an adequate degree of character agency while addressing television's historical sexism and

¹⁰⁵ Lizzie Mahoney, "Impossible Girls: Women in Doctor Who," *Varsity*, December 10, 2020, <https://www.varsity.co.uk/features/6007>.

racism.¹⁰⁶ More diversity and authenticity in representations of minority characters are needed on-screen, but also with the creators behind-the-scenes of the show. Feminism battles patriarchy, which is a social system promoting, “male privilege by being *male dominated, male identified, and male centered.*”¹⁰⁷ This means men hold more positions of power than women, masculinity and manhood are valued and associated with what is “normal,” and men are the focus of cultural spaces. The patriarchy is deeply engrained in our culture and can be exposed through television and film. Allan Johnson says:

If you want a story about heroism, moral courage, spiritual transformation, endurance, or any of the struggles that give human life its deepest meaning, men and masculinity are usually the terms in which you must see it. Men’s experience is what patriarchal culture uses to represent human experience, even when it is women who most often live it.¹⁰⁸

Johnson provides an example of the film *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993), where the story centers around a single father raising children when women more often live that reality or “human experience.” Male centered stories are ubiquitous in our media and culture and are often used as the universal perspective. *Dracula* featuring a woman as Van Helsing provides an opportunity to explore more of her struggles, better representing her experience as a woman and elevating the experiences of other women in the process. Unfortunately, her character falls flat and her story is never fully actualized. I aim to challenge the male-dominated spaces of horror television in order to advocate for authentic stories starring women.

¹⁰⁶ Feminism and agency read together almost become paradoxical because feminism exists because of oppression. If we are living in a system of oppression, it would prevent women from gaining true agency. There are deep philosophical roots with the term agency. However, I am using it in correspondence to women’s possibility of becoming free agents against oppressive systems like the patriarchy.

¹⁰⁷ Allan G. Johnson, *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2014), 5.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 10.

This chapter begins with an industry analysis of *Dracula's* showrunners and the BBC network, and then turns to a textual analysis of key characters including Sister Agatha Van Helsing and Zoe Van Helsing (the great-great niece of Agatha), Mina Murray, and Lucy Westenra. My analysis dives into the sexist and racist representations of women in *Dracula*, asking whether the genderswap of Agatha Van Helsing can be considered feminist from the simple embodiment of a role traditionally held by a man. What does it mean if Van Helsing is positioned as a “strong” character while being surrounded by underdeveloped and stereotypical representations of women like Mina Murray and Lucy Westenra? What might the character Lucy offer in regard to feminist ideas of sexual freedom, consent, and desire? More representations of women in television are important, but *how* women are represented becomes just as, if not more, crucial to analyze. The examination of the industry and the text will expose the weaknesses in even the seemingly strongest depictions of women.

In many ways, this chapter parallels the shortcomings in queer representations featured in chapter two, introducing the potential for character depth and development starring LGBTQ+ characters, but then denying those aspirations. Similar to queerbaiting, in this chapter I present the term genderbaiting, which focuses on heterosexual, cis-gender, white women and women of color in lead roles, providing a platform to develop their narratives. When such representations are carefully considered, however, it becomes clear that the characters lack agency, that their stories are superficial, and that they are centered around men. The genderswap of the leading character Van Helsing offers a way to earn the attention of women viewers, but the narrative does not challenge the sexism or racism in our culture. Instead, it reinstates a patriarchal narrative. Although at first *Dracula* is making encouraging changes in representation, I argue that the genderswap is misleading and superficial, exposing the stereotypical representations of

women throughout the show, and ultimately reflecting and sustaining conservative social views of gender and race.

Genderswap Controversy

In the age of remakes, one way to increase the diversity of character representations is through genderswaps.¹⁰⁹ The genderswap label has been used by both scholars and fans to describe stories where the character's gender identity and/or biological sex are different from the canonical iterations.¹¹⁰ Fans were notably excited to see the genderswap of Dracula's rival, not Abraham, but Agatha Van Helsing. She is positioned as a strong character, conquering Dracula with her research, knowledge, and wit, similar to how Abraham Van Helsing outsmarted Dracula in earlier iterations of the story. Her cleverness and pithy, feminist one-liners made her an instant favorite. A woman as a vampire slayer is not particularly remarkable in the scope of television history. Buffy Summers, in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (WB/UPN, 1997-2003), is one example that immediately comes to mind. The role of Van Helsing has been portrayed as a woman before, in *Van Helsing* (Syfy, 2016 - present). Thus, the current Van Helsing iteration as a woman vampire slayer is not necessarily new for audiences. However, the genderswap does highlight the political tensions and controversies surrounding the BBC and Steven Moffat.

In recent years, there has been an increase in representations of women in leading roles within film and television. In 2019, the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film at San Diego State University reported that 40% of the highest-grossing movies that year featured white women in leading roles, but the numbers are not as promising for intersectional

¹⁰⁹ Raquel Kokkoros, "Welcome To The Age of Remakes: Has Hollywood's Remake Cup Runneth Over, Drowning Audiences In A Flood? Live-Action Aladdin? Charlie's Angels? Little Women? - Hollywood Insider," *Hollywood Insider - News Entertainment & Culture*, December 27, 2019, <https://www.hollywoodinsider.com/age-remakes-hollywood/>.

¹¹⁰ The term can be problematic in the way it compresses gender expectations as attached to biological sex; Ann McClellan, "Redefining Genderswap Fan Fiction: A Sherlock Case Study," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 17, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2014.0553>.

representations of minority women.¹¹¹ Comparably, women in lead roles escalated in television with streaming, broadcast networks, and cable channels.¹¹² Although the numbers are increasing, there is still a staggering disparity in women performing and producing media while also being compensated equally. In 2017, the UK took dramatic steps to pass legislation toward dissipating the gender pay gap after the rise of the #MeToo movement and the release of the gender pay inequities within the BBC.¹¹³ In the last three years, the BBC has tried to balance on-screen and behind-the-scenes gender discrimination to better reflect and represent the public and their interests. This has led to the BBC creating the 50:50 Project, an initiative to represent women and men equally in their programming and content creation. As of March 2020, “78% of the programs that had been involved in 50:50 [Project] for two years or more gender-balanced their shows’ contributors.”¹¹⁴

Additionally, the BBC has been notorious for genderswapping characters like Diaq in *Robin Hood* (BBC, 2006-2009), Angela Burr in *The Night Manager* (BBC, 2016), and most controversially, Jodie Whittaker as the first woman doctor in *Dr. Who* (BBC, 2017- present). The genderswap of *Dr. Who* materialized after Moffat left the production in 2017, which coincidentally corresponded with the rise of the #MeToo movement and the BBC’s gender inequality scandal that same year. When Moffat stepped down, he was asked why he never genderswapped the Doctor during his time as showrunner, and he answered:

¹¹¹ Paul Glynn, “Record Number of Female Film Leads, US Study Suggests,” *BBC News* (BBC, January 9, 2020), <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-51046200>.

¹¹² Elaine Low, “Streaming Shows Featured More Women Protagonists in 2019-2020 TV Season: Study,” *Variety* (Variety, September 10, 2020), <https://variety.com/2020/tv/news/streaming-shows-women-protagonists-2019-2020-tv-season-1234765290/>.

¹¹³ Mark Sweney, “BBC Reaches Equal Pay Deal with Former China Editor Carrie Gracie,” *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, June 29, 2018), <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2018/jun/29/bbc-reach-equal-pay-deal-with-former-china-editor-carrie-gracie>.

¹¹⁴ Avivah Wittenberg-Cox, “How The BBC Gender Balanced... Everything, Everywhere, Fast,” *Forbes* (Forbes Magazine, July 10, 2020), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/avivahwittenbergcox/2020/07/10/how-the-bbc-gender-balanced-everything-everywhere-fast/?sh=52699a581ed9>.

We could have replaced Matt Smith with a woman, given that his Doctor was more sexless and less of a lad, but then I got obsessed with seeing Peter [Capaldi] in the Tardis... This isn't a show exclusively for progressive liberals; this is also for people who voted for Brexit. That's not me politically at all – but we have to keep everyone on board.¹¹⁵

Moffat's comment about Matt Smith's Doctor being "sexless," is another instance of him inscribing asexuality to the men he writes in lead roles, i.e., Sherlock and Dracula. He also emasculates Smith's Doctor, reasoning that this would have been the best opportunity to have a woman seamlessly transition into the role because Smith is "less of a lad," anyway. What this shows is that Moffat had the power and opportunity to make the Doctor a woman but decided not to because somehow Capaldi was more appealing in a Tardis than a woman. Even more revealingly, Moffat said the decision was made because he also did not want to upset conservatives who watched the show. He felt pressure to appeal to the masses and attempt to not ostracize certain audience members. Moffat is correct about the BBC appealing to conservative audiences, as this historically has been the case.

Tom Mills traces the ideals of public service broadcasting in relation to the BBC. As a political and cultural institution, the BBC provides information to British citizens and the entire world, becoming one of the world's most important media institutions, but also, the most misunderstood:

[BBC] is maligned by commentators in the national press for its left-wing bias, but in fact its journalism has overwhelmingly reflected the ideas and interests of elite groups, and marginalised alternative and oppositional perspectives. It is lauded by liberal academics

¹¹⁵ Ana Dumaraog, "Steven Moffat Defends Not Casting a Female Doctor Who," *ScreenRant*, December 5, 2017, <https://screenrant.com/doctor-who-steven-moffat-female-casting-defends/>.

and journalists for its much-vaunted independence and its fostering of democratic public life, but in fact it is part of a cluster of powerful and largely unaccountable institutions which dominate British society.¹¹⁶

Mills argues that although the BBC is meant to reflect the people as a public service, the content produced largely appeals to the conservative elite. Moffat “wanting to keep everyone on board” underscores the tensions of liberal and conservative viewership and illuminates the difficulty in producing content for a continually divisive world. For example, the mere switch of a role traditionally played by a man can cause outrage around the question of political correctness.¹¹⁷ Overall, the genderswap has become a politically charged decision that seems to some to be forced, unbelievable, or even worse – liberal.

In contrast to the conception of the *Dr. Who* genderswap, Van Helsing’s switch was an organic or unforced process, which seemed to be more agreeable to Moffat. He said:

We came up with the idea of an atheist nun, we just called her 'Atheist Nun,' the nun who didn't really believe in anything and made lots of jokes, and that character immediately leapt to the top of the script. You just thought, 'my god, that's great...' And very, very quickly, we thought, 'that's Van Helsing, isn't it, we don't need anyone else, we just need the nun. Then you just think, 'nuns are more or less dressed in the superhero outfit for fighting vampires, aren't they? Why didn't Bram think of that one?!'¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Mills, *The BBC: Myth of Public Service*, 1.

¹¹⁷ In fact, there was a huge backlash to the genderswap of the Doctor. Many fans said it ruined the show. They were upset that the Doctor was not a man, because he is supposed to be a man. They said there was no real need for the genderswap, and it was because of the BBC’s need to be politically correct; Mick Joest, “Why Do So Many People Dislike Doctor Who’s Female Doctor?,” *Cinema Blend* (Cinema Blend, July 14, 2020), <https://www.cinemablend.com/television/2549935/why-do-so-many-people-dislike-doctor-whos-female-doctor>; Thomas Bacon, “Why Doctor Who Has Completely Divided Fans This Season,” *Screen Rant* (ScreenRant, November 27, 2018), <https://screenrant.com/doctor-who-fan-divide-season-11/>.

¹¹⁸ Samuel Spencer, “Why a Key ‘Dracula’ Character Was Gender-Swapped in the Netflix Version,” *Newsweek* (Newsweek, January 4, 2020), <https://www.newsweek.com/dracula-netflix-agatha-van-helsing-gender-swapped-woman-female-dolly-wells-1479866>.

Moffat and the creative team's stroke of genius making the "Atheist Nun" develop into Van Helsing provided an interesting twist to the story and encouraged the visibility of women that the BBC was seeking for the 50:50 Project. The genderswap might have become more natural or necessary "because these days we want more from our heroines than for them to offer up their necks for penetration."¹¹⁹ As much as Moffat thinks otherwise, however, Van Helsing's genderswap is not different than the genderswap in *Dr. Who*. After all, nearly all the canonical texts of both characters historically have been played by men. The only difference is Moffat's attitude toward the switch and how he thought it would be perceived. To him, it would be better if the switch were his idea and decided organically without political pressure.

Outside of the genderswap, Moffat has been under scrutiny for his recurring sexist portrayals of women on BBC's *Sherlock* and *Dr. Who*. In 2013, Moffat took a stand against the accusations with a now-deleted Twitter account and tweet that said, "I am sexist. Women are cleverer, nicer, kinder, and better at stuff. Don't let on or they'll keep us in fields. FIELDS!!!"¹²⁰ Moffat's tweet was meant to compliment women, but instead furthers the stereotyping and explains a lot of the issues with his representations. The tweet is an excellent example of the historical reassertion that gendered difference stems from biology. In this view, biological differences correlate to psychological differences, which dichotomize the domain of possible experiences and actions between the sexes. In contrast, as previously explored in chapter two, Butler asserts that sex and sexuality are constructed and learned over time, and that these differences are products of learned behaviors.¹²¹ Moffat's views on gendered difference and on women generally fail to understand what audiences are asking for. They do not want portrayals

¹¹⁹ Andrew Billen, "Dracula Returns: Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat on their New BBC Series," *The Times*, December 27, 2019.

¹²⁰ Mahoney, "Women in Doctor Who."

¹²¹ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 2.

of women to be better than, or less than, men. They want dimensional characters that have the opportunity to develop their interests and flaws, connecting to audiences' authentic experiences.

Caetlin Benson-Allott says to achieve strong women-led representations, shows need to:

Demand respect for their characters by figuring defeat, failure, and desperation as stages women must pass through to challenge patriarchal cultures. They prominently repudiate the idealized feminist heroines of yore; but in order to reflect the diversity of women's experience, they also need to address feminism and television's historical bias toward white women and their stories.¹²²

The way to give adequate shape and development to a character is through proper screen time dedicated to their story arc, allowing for a deeper exploration of their trials, while also addressing the historical prejudices toward certain stories. For example, it would be more interesting to know Agatha Van Helsing's story, rather than know her only in relation to Dracula. After the *Buffy* era, it was clear that vampire slayers were far more interesting than vampires, particularly women vampire slayers navigating their femininity.¹²³ *Dracula* exists in the "post-*Buffy*, post-*Twilight*, post-*True Blood*" realm, meaning that the show adopts certain features of these vampire incarnations, but could also further the development of women-led roles and expand upon their representations.¹²⁴

However, in opposition to *Buffy*, *Twilight*, and *True Blood*, the show insinuates that Dracula is the hero, and the focus shifts away from the heroine. Moffat confirmed this purposeful shift when he said, "We thought we could try... to make Dracula the main character... if you

¹²² Caetlin Benson-Allott, "No Such Thing Not Yet: Questioning Television's Female Gaze," *Film Quarterly* 71, no. 02 (2017): 65.

¹²³ Elana Levine, "Buffy and the 'New Girl Order': Defining Feminism and Femininity," in *Undead TV: Essays on Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, ed. Elana Levine and Lisa Parks (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 169.

¹²⁴ Billen, "New BBC Series."

look at the book, he's not in it that much. He's in the first few chapters and then he is in the background."¹²⁵ The showrunners wanted to put the spotlight on Dracula this time around, making him the protagonist. As outlined in chapter two, the attention focused on Dracula as the protagonist amplifies his queerness, but the development of other marginalized characters in the narrative, like women and ancillary LGBTQ+ characters, is lost in the process. Although the representations of women in leading roles are growing within the BBC, many of these women's voices, direction, and narratives are still controlled by men. Moffat continues to hold power by speaking for underrepresented populations, moving his writings and interpretations of minorities out from behind the scenes and translating these problematic depictions on-screen.

The Humorous Nun & The Wise Woman: Van Helsing

The women featured in *Dracula* all gravitate toward Agatha Van Helsing and Zoe Van Helsing, Agatha's great-great niece, who encounters Dracula 123 years later. Bram Stoker's original novel included Sister Agatha in a small role, but in this version her role is inflated, becoming Dracula's worthy adversary as Van Helsing. In the first two episodes of the miniseries, Sister Agatha is introduced as an atheistic nun who has a vast knowledge of vampire folklore. The series begins in the year 1897 and at the end of the second episode the show jumps to the year 2020. At first, Agatha tackles Dracula directly, but then, the show moves to the present and Zoe Van Helsing takes on the obsession with the undead vampire. Her life's work is predicated on the scientific investigation and capture of Dracula. As a descendant of the late Agatha Van Helsing, Zoe not only has inherited her identical physical features (they are played by the same actor, Dolly Wells), but also the same desire to understand him. At first, Agatha and Zoe Van Helsing become the perfect antitheses to Dracula, with ample amounts of screen time and

¹²⁵ Mark Gatiss, Steven Moffat, and Claes Bang, "Dracula, How Dracula Was Brought Back from the Dead," *BBC One* (BBC, January 3, 2020), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p07zgmex>.

potential for character growth. However, as the topical layers are stripped away, they are not much different from any of Moffat's other problematic representations of women. Agatha and Zoe are still "Moffat Women" even if they are at first presented with dimension. Because their existence and story arcs revolve around a man, they have minimal agency, and are plot devices that lead to Dracula's demise.

At first, Sister Agatha is introduced as a character who is conflicted, knowledgeable, and ambitious. The story begins with Agatha's interrogation of Jonathan Harker, a man who went to the convent after a nonconsensual rendezvous with Count Dracula. She was called to study him because of her interest in witchcraft and the occult. Harker says that he fled Dracula's castle to the convent because he knew he would be protected by the overabundance of crucifixes and by living in a house of God. Agatha responds:

A house of God, is it? [laughing]... Two years ago, a church in this town collapsed. The roof fell on the congregation, killed everyone as they prayed, including the children. The priest was the only survivor. Priests are like that. He said to me afterwards that even in moments like these, he was able to maintain his faith. I told him he should have *maintained* his roof. Look to your own protection, Mr. Harker. God doesn't care.¹²⁶

She proceeds with the interrogation, asking bluntly, "Your life may depend on your complete honesty... I am asking, Mr. Harker, if you had sexual intercourse with Count Dracula?" The audience begins to see the tensions within Agatha's identity: she is outwardly faithful, dressed in nun attire and adorned with a crucifix, yet internally she is questioning her faith and the existence of God. She is positioned as a woman who has taken vows of abstinence but wants a

¹²⁶ Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss writers, *Dracula*, Season 1, Episode 1, "The Rules of the Beast," Directed by Jonny Campbell, featuring Claes Bang, Dolly Wells, and John Heffernan, Aired January 1, 2020, in broadcast syndication, BBC, 2020, Netflix.

full account of the sexual relations Harker had with Dracula. Harker never answers Agatha's question; instead, he sits stunned by the nun's candor. He is unsettled by her unladylike behavior, using blunt humor and faithlessness to navigate dark topics. Agatha is intriguing because she is defying expectations of being a lady and a nun. Her character at first is given interests, flaws, depth, and agency, everything needed to consider her a strong lead. However, as the story goes on, the representation flattens. Similar to queerbaiting, genderbaiting hints at or teases at the possibility for authentic and developed representation, but ultimately reverts back to a narrative in which her story is never actualized.

The tensions in Agatha's identity are divulged mid-way through the first episode. Agatha purposely slashes her hand to taunt Dracula on the outside walls of the nunnery. Flicking her blood at him, he responds with animalistic behaviors, becoming like a rabid dog. Part of the vampire folklore is correct: Dracula's disdain for the cross keeps him outside the walls and he needs an invitation to enter any abode. When Dracula asks her who she is, Agatha responds, "Your every nightmare at once. An educated woman in a crucifix." At this pinnacle moment of the show, Agatha throws out this feminist one-liner to seal Dracula's interest in her. After, Dracula ingests some of her blood (that she flung in his direction), and he begins to learn more about her. Through her blood, he discovers her full name is Agatha Van Helsing, and now the mystery comes together. All the questions of who she is and her interest in Dracula are revealed in the climactic moment as the audience realizes she is not a normal nun. She is Van Helsing, the canonical foe and destroyer of Dracula. Physically, Agatha is outmatched by Dracula and knows the only way to conquer the devil is to outsmart him. Their constant pursuit, near captures, and repeated escapes become a complicated chess match between the two rivals throughout the first

and second episode. Agatha is meant to be the antithesis of Dracula, and her purpose is wrapped up with his. Her story from this moment forward revolves around him.

Agatha and Dracula's antagonistic relationship proceeds to carry the show forward. Through the second episode, aboard the ship, the Demeter, Dracula slowly drains Agatha of her life, consuming her blood and knowledge. The ship sinks with Agatha and Dracula aboard. One-hundred and twenty-three years later, Dracula awakes at the bottom of the ocean and resurfaces on an English beach, surprised to encounter Agatha's descendant with an uncanny resemblance, Zoe Van Helsing. In Dracula and Zoe's first encounter, it is clear that she inherited more than just the likeness of Agatha, but her witty personality as well:

Zoe Van Helsing: I'm not Sister Agatha. I'm Dr. Helsing, and I am the woman in charge of this foundation.

Dracula: In charge of it?

Zoe Van Helsing: Oh of course. I suppose women's rights are something you slept through.

Dracula: Women's what? Did you say rights?

Zoe Van Helsing: You'll get the hang of it.

Dracula: No, no, no. Please try and explain. I missed an entire century. What are rights?

Nobody has rights, Zoe. Man, Woman, or Monster. No one, nowhere. It's just a lunatic fantasy.

Zoe Van Helsing: Or civilization, as we like to call it...

Their first encounter shows that Zoe is just as quick as Agatha and contains a lot of her intensity. Additionally, Zoe inherits the obsession with Dracula, seeking to answer the questions that Agatha initiated: Why can't Dracula enter a home without an invitation? Why can't he stand in

the sunlight? And why does he fear the sight of the cross? Like Agatha, Zoe's entire life revolves around Dracula. She works as a researcher at the Jonathan Harker Foundation, where part of the medical research is dedicated to discovering the whereabouts of Count Dracula. Agatha and Zoe blend by the end of the series through Dracula's blood, becoming indiscernible from one another. The sapiosexual bond between Agatha/Zoe and Dracula is fully actualized in the final scene, where Dracula willingly kills Agatha/Zoe, and through drinking her cancerous blood voluntarily kills himself. Agatha/Zoe finally unveils the mystery of Dracula: he fears death more than anything, and they die together in a tragic love scene. Dracula dies by choice, through ingesting Agatha/Zoe's cancerous blood, which is poison to him. Ultimately, Agatha and Zoe cannot break free from Dracula and are not seen as anything outside of their relationship with him. With minimal agency, their characters act as the fatal plot device that brings Dracula down, but only when he chooses to end his life.

The intricate outline of the story connects Agatha, Zoe, and Dracula to reveal the complexity in the narrative and their entanglement with each other. On the surface, Agatha and Zoe are initially read as strong representations of women. Agatha and Zoe have punchy feminist sayings; they are funny, witty, and clever, but underneath those qualities, the heart of the story is not interested in them. Agatha is asked why she knows so much about Dracula, and deflects these acquisitions time and time again, responding with, "We can discuss my imperfectly suppressed fascination with everything dark and evil another time." This is one of many moments when Agatha and Zoe are asked for further information about themselves and deflect the questions because the story is not about them. They are a plot point, without agency. Van Helsing becomes an example of genderbaiting because she is a woman in a lead role whose story is never developed. Ultimately, genderbaiting lures audience viewership because a woman is cast

in a central role or a lead role historically played by a man. However, her representation is superficial. The story is not concerned about her and her development as a complex character. The superficiality of genderbaiting reifies patriarchal norms as it does not produce multi-dimensional representations of women, and instead focuses on male-centered narratives.

Dolly Wells, the actor who portrays both Sister Agatha and Zoe Van Helsing, quickly became a fan favorite the first night of the show airing, with the anticipation that her character would develop further.¹²⁷ As the show went on, it was clear her character was reverting to being yet another “Moffat Woman.” The tensions of her faith, humor, and wit provide a more complex and advanced version of the “Moffat Women” than have been seen in previous works. On the other hand, Agatha and Zoe’s versions of “Moffat Women” are more insidious, as they are placed in a façade of what appear to be strong leading women. Over time, the genderbaiting becomes apparent, as it is revealed that their very purpose and existence are to be antitheses, lovers, and worthy foes of Dracula, nothing more. After closer inspection, Agatha and Zoe do not have a purpose outside of Dracula and embody the stereotypes of the humorous nun and the wise, tragic woman. Consequently, the genderbaiting presents seemingly strong leading women who eventually fall flat.

Light & Dark Feminine: Mina & Lucy

Mina and Lucy are both widely loved characters from Bram Stoker’s original novel. In *Dracula* (2020), they receive little development and screen time. There is not much to analyze when it comes to Mina Murray in *Dracula* (2020). Her character exists as the lover and dutiful fiancé to Jonathan Harker. The actor who plays Mina, Morfydd Clark, was asked about her character, and described her as someone who is, “very much in love with her fiancé, Jonathan

¹²⁷ Deirdre Molumby, “Sister Agatha Is the Official Favourite on BBC's 'Dracula',” *Entertainment.ie*, January 2020, <https://entertainment.ie/tv/tv-news/sister-agatha-is-the-official-favourite-on-bbc-dracula-435770/>.

Harker, and will do anything to make sure he is safe.”¹²⁸ Clark’s comments on Mina are spot on, as she is only in the first episode and spends most of her camera time crying, screaming, and running away in fear *for* or in fear *of* her fiancé. Mina is relegated to a small and minor role that does not account for the depth of her original character. However, Lucy is given the entirety of the last episode to explore her story. She is the only Black woman featured in the show, besides her mother, and is introduced as a vain social media influencer. The episode revolves around themes of vanity, consent, and beauty through Lucy’s depiction. Her character is hedonistic and focuses on pleasure and desire, becoming a perfect bride for Dracula, as he is the epitome of self-indulgence and narcissism. However, her hedonistic behaviors are met with a tragic and problematic ending through the racialization and sexualization of her body, becoming yet another example of genderbaiting. Lucy is an example of how *Dracula* fails to explore the intersections of sexism and racism embodied in her character. The show does not address the diversity of women’s experiences or the historical bias “toward white women and their stories.”¹²⁹ Instead, it continues the stereotypical representations of a Black woman through Lucy’s hypersexuality and villainy.

Women of color have often been represented through stereotyped depictions, if they are represented at all, in television. The representations of Black women often fall under stereotypes, such as the Jezebel, Sapphire, and the Strong Black woman.¹³⁰ These depictions are in stark contrast to “sexually conservative norms of mainstream femininity,” as the Sapphire has a “verbally and physically aggressive nature” and the Jezebel is known for her, “sexually

¹²⁸ Mark Gatiss, Steven Moffat, and Claes Bang, “Dracula, How Dracula Was Brought Back from the Dead.”

¹²⁹ Benson-Allott, “No Such Thing Not Yet: Questioning Television’s Female Gaze,” 65.

¹³⁰ Morgan C. Jerald, L. Monique Ward, Lolita Moss, Khia Thomas, and Kyla D. Fletcher, “Subordinates, Sex Objects, or Sapphires? Investigating Contributions of Media Use to Black Students’ Femininity Ideologies and Stereotypes About Black Women,” *Journal of Black Psychology* 43, no. 6 (September 2017): 610. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798416665967>.

aggressive nature.”¹³¹ The representations of Black women are in direct contrast to the socially endorsed views of femininity and beauty represented in Mina as fair-skinned, blonde-haired, and blue-eyed. Alternatively, Lucy is depicted as darker in complexion and in her behaviors, she is represented as promiscuous, unfaithful, and sexually wild, fulfilling the stereotype of the Jezebel. Patricia Hill Collins has mapped the historical stereotypes continuing to oppress Black people in media, suggesting, “Western social thought associates Blackness with an imagined uncivilized, wild sexuality and uses this association as one lynchpin of racial difference.”¹³² Indeed, Black women’s bodies are often represented as, “sites of wild, unrestrained sexuality that could be tamed but never completely subdued.”¹³³ These kinds of stereotypical representations of Black women are repeated in *Dracula*. The examples from the scenes that follow illustrate the stereotypical representation of yet another “Moffat Woman,” but one potentially more problematic, given that it is connected to the oppressive history of the treatment of Black bodies by white society.

Dracula is transported to the present day 2020, where he meets Lucy Westenra and they spark a romance deprived of love, but full of pleasure. Dracula is entranced by Lucy’s beauty, not unlike the many suitors who pursue her. He first witnesses Lucy at a night club, in sparkly clothing, moving her body freely to the music. The shots focus on her chest, hips, and face as she continues to move like no one is watching. He is drawn to her beauty and sexualized body, but even more drawn to her apathetic personality, where nothing scares her, not even death.

Eventually, Dracula steals her away, and says, “You know, in a very, very long life, I don’t think

¹³¹ Ibid, 611.

¹³² Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 27.

¹³³ Ibid, 56.

I've ever met anyone quite like you. You really don't care, do you?"¹³⁴ And she shakes her head in response. Lucy is depicted as vain, because the single thing she cares most about is her beauty. Her carelessness breaks the hearts of others who adore her like Dr. John Seward, or Jack, a junior doctor working at the Jonathan Harker foundation with his mentor Zoe Van Helsing. Jack quit his position at the foundation to pursue Lucy, only to find that she was never seriously interested in him.

Jack is broken-hearted by Lucy's rejection, which he discovers when she kisses another man in front of him. Lucy quickly becomes engaged to this other man, Quincey, purely for his money. Throughout her engagement she pursues an affair with Dracula, which is also trivial and flighty. Neither of her relationships with Dracula or Quincey are for love, only pleasure and money. Lucy also declines the love of Jack, although she uses him for sex on a few occasions. Lucy is marked as careless, unfaithful, and villainous through her heartless romantic endeavors, ultimately hurting Jack, the man who loves her. Lucy's friend, Zev, confronts her about her behavior:

Zev: You're terrible... I am talking about Jack.

Lucy: What about Jack?

Zev: Now, don't tell me you haven't seen the look on his face?

Lucy: It's not like I've never shagged him. What is he complaining about?

Zev: I think he might be in love with you.

Lucy: Don't be daft. It was like three times. Four, depending on what you count.

Zev: You'll get a reputation.

Lucy: What? [laughing] Thank you, Queen Victoria.

Zev: Well, you know what I mean.

¹³⁴ Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss writers, *Dracula*, Season 1, Episode 3, "The Dark Compass," Directed by Paul McGuigan, featuring Claes Bang and Dolly Wells. Aired January 3, 2020, in broadcast syndication, BBC, 2020. Netflix.

Lucy: I do. It's called slut-shaming.

Zev: Yeah, it takes one to know one.

Lucy: Why shouldn't I have fun? Jesus, I'm only 22. It's not like I am going to marry anyone...

Lucy believes that she gave Jack what he wanted; a few sexual encounters should have been enough in her eyes to satisfy him. Zev reveals that Jack's emotions run much deeper, indicating that he is in love with her. It is clear that Lucy just wants to have fun and not take anyone or anything too seriously. However, what she says and what she does are entirely different. In the next scene, minutes after this conversation transpires, she becomes engaged to Quincey. Lucy goes from pursuing only superficial relationships to becoming incredibly serious about committing herself to Quincey, disregarding Jack's emotions. The interaction between Lucy and Zev also uncovers the negative view associated with her behavior. The direct accusation about Lucy being slut-shamed is met with laughter but, underneath the surface, calling out slut-shaming does not eradicate the way the show is negatively commenting on her promiscuity. Zev also identifies himself as a "slut" and laughs harmlessly at Lucy's unfaithful behavior. The scene fails to reclaim the word "slut" to empower women and instead uses it as a warning. Lucy is portrayed as villainous in her carelessness toward the people who love her the most, i.e., Jack. She is difficult to connect with because she does not have empathy for other people and is self-absorbed. Her actions have consequences and end up hurting decent individuals. Lucy is then positioned as the villain, just like Dracula; without any redeeming characteristics, she becomes flat and one dimensional.

Lucy embraces her sexuality throughout the story, but she is punished instead of celebrated. Lucy's promiscuity is only depicted as liberating for a short amount of time, as the freeing illustration of sexuality is quickly retracted when the story explores ideas around sex and

consent, resulting in Lucy's death. Dracula and Lucy meet again during a late-night *rendezvous* in a graveyard. He acclimates to the technology of the present era in using the dating app, Tinder, which he calls a "food delivery service." Lucy finds Dracula swiping through Tinder for another meal and responds with feigned disappointment. He retorts, "Hungry... Need to feed on someone, Lucy. You don't always give your consent." She then asks why her consent matters to him, to which he replies, "It doesn't, but it's delicious. I am a gourmet, not a glutton." The idea of consent is attractive to Dracula. For hundreds of years, he took what he wanted, men, women, and children, draining them all equally. But now consent is a sexy and desired addition or garnish. Dracula's taste evolved once he realized how delicious consensual draining is. Unfortunately, the sexiness attributed to consent is only that, a delicacy, not a necessity, as Dracula continues to drink from other people without their permission. In this third episode, he portrays a heterosexist man, which contrasts with the previous episodes discussed in the last chapter, where his sexuality is more fluid. As the story goes on, his appetite becomes heightened and uncontrolled when he finds someone he can possess as his bride, like Lucy.

Dracula has a monstrous desire for consent, but this need for consent unravels once Lucy unknowingly agrees to be his bride forever and becomes a vampire. The show is unclear at explaining how much Lucy knows about the vampire transition. It seems that she is aware that opening her veins to Dracula would in fact lead to her death, and she accepts death willingly. Dracula also warns her to not let her family cremate her when she dies, although he does not indicate why that would be a problem. It is obvious that she does not consent to becoming the property of Dracula nor does she fully understand the pain of the vampiric transition. When Lucy dies at the fangs of Dracula, she is in an undead paralysis as her body morphs painfully into that of a vampire. On the inside she is screaming during her funeral, trying to tell her loved ones that

she is alive, at least partially. Her emotional pain is then felt physically when her body is moved into the cremation chamber and burned. When she comes out of the crematorium and goes directly to see Dracula, she is blackened and charred, rendering her even further removed from white standards and beauty norms. From her perspective, her mirrored reflection shows her original beauty, and she says, “Everyone smiles when you are beautiful.” Until you are not. She is at first open and satisfied with Dracula slowly draining the life from her. But then, as she turns, she realizes this is not what she wanted. If vampirism is a metaphor for sex, as Dyer indicates, then Lucy’s nonconsensual vampiric transformation can be seen as a metaphor for rape.¹³⁵ The lack of communication between Dracula and Lucy allowing her to understand what she is consenting to ends up emotionally and physically destroying her. However, instead of a sympathetic connection to Lucy the story presents her as getting what she deserves.

In one of the final scenes of the show Jack and Zoe go to see Dracula, then they are all joined by Lucy after she has been burned. Jack sees Lucy for the first time after she has been incinerated and she asks, “Why are you just standing there, Jack? Kiss me. Kiss me, Jack. Kiss me.” Jack starts stepping away with tears welling in his eyes as he responds, “Lucy, no.” Lucy does not understand why Jack is not completely entranced by her like he used to be. She says, “Come on, Jack. Kiss me like you used to.” She aggressively grabs his neck and tries to pull him toward her. He then pushes her away, and she taunts him back, saying, “What’s wrong, Jack? You can’t look at me now? The boy who looks at me all day, every day, can’t you look now? What’s the matter, Jack?” When Jack rejects her, she becomes hostile and taunting towards him. Jack’s pleas and backing away saying he did not want to kiss her was not enough. Lucy physically becomes a monster through the abjection of her body and her harshness toward Jack.

¹³⁵ Richard Dyer, “It’s in his Kiss!: Vampirism as Homosexuality, Homosexuality as Vampirism,” in *The Culture of Queers*, 74.

If Lucy's actions were villainous and selfish before, after her vampiric transformation she becomes a more sexually aggressive and cruel monster. In some respect, the show is amplifying Dracula's viciousness through Lucy's anguish, but instead of sympathizing with her character she is degraded because her sexuality is demonized.

After Jack's repulsed reaction, Lucy takes a selfie to uncover what she really looks like, a burnt and charred corpse. She subsequently breaks down sobbing from what she sees, as she is disgusted too. This is not what Dracula promised; she did not consent to this kind of transformation. Lucy's racialization and sexualization is furthered as she transforms into a blackened and naked corpse, enslaved to Dracula. Dracula attempts to console her after she sees the picture of her burned body, but he deflects the blame. He says she is the finest bride yet because she was the only one in all his 500 years that willingly allowed him to drink from her veins. He goes on to say, "You knew what was happening, and you embraced it. You accepted it. Now you can live forever." Lucy is uncontrollably sobbing and shaking her head; no, this is not what she wanted. She did not consent to this life, to this body and all its symbolic associations. He turned her into a monster, but it is because she wanted it. The conversation about consent here becomes problematic, as the blame for her decimated body falls on her, not the man that changed her, because she supposedly, or perhaps was supposed to "know what was happening." The audience can recognize the cruel treatment of Lucy, but simultaneously feel unsympathetic towards her. Dracula's proceeding comments are reminiscent of the rhetoric used in rape culture, where the woman "embraced it" or "wanted it," and it is her fault for being in a certain place, or for dressing or acting in a certain way. The idea of consent is perverted as Lucy's autonomy and agency are violated.

The story becomes more disappointing when investigated through Lucy as a Black woman since, historically, Black women have not met white standards of beauty, and instead are rendered in mainstream media culture as hypersexualized figures, indeed, as not even human at times. *Dracula* is a cautionary tale for women who are beautiful, promiscuous, and unfaithful, as the program suggests that those characteristics and behaviors will lead to death. *Dracula* briefly speaks to consent, rape, and gendered power dynamics through the metaphorical eroticism of the vampire. Lucy is another example of genderbaiting as she begins her journey as a sexually liberated woman who is then punished for her freedom, taking away her beauty, the ownership of her body, and her life. Her sexual promiscuity is punished and villainized. This results in a stereotypical depiction of a Black woman by portraying a violation of her body.

Lucy did not know what she was signing up for when becoming Dracula's bride. Dracula uses the term "bride" as property, as ownership over another individual, not unlike the way it has been traditionally used in many cultures. He possesses and controls his brides, similarly (and almost indistinguishably) to them becoming his slaves. bell hooks writes extensively about the Black woman slave experience. She says:

The brutal treatment of enslaved black women by white men exposed the depths of male hatred of woman and woman's body. Such treatment was a direct consequence of misogynist attitudes toward women that prevailed in colonial American society... a message to all women that unless they remained within passive, subordinate roles they would be punished, even put to death.¹³⁶

The terminology of "bride" becomes increasingly problematic when used in connection with Lucy, a Black woman who becomes owned property or enslaved to Dracula. Lucy's original

¹³⁶ bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman Black Women and Feminism* (London and Winchester, MA: Pluto Press, 1990), 29-30.

passivity and apathy toward death is rewarded with eternal life and the promise of being with Dracula forever. However, her “forever” is trapped in a body that both she and society are repulsed by and she is stuck with a man who owns her.

In the end, Lucy is killed mercifully after being burned alive by the only man who loved her, Jack. Because of his love for her, Jack puts Lucy out of her misery as she is begging for her death. Jack’s emotions have been played with by Lucy, but he is compelled to do what he believes is right, to free her from the constraints of her body and enslavement by Dracula. Lucy’s downfall is her sexuality and her wickedness when rejecting men. bell hooks emphasizes that, “Since woman was designated as the originator of sexual sin, black women were naturally seen as the embodiment of female evil and sexual lust. They were labeled jezebels and sexual temptresses and accused of leading white men away from spiritual purity into sin.”¹³⁷ The 2020 *Dracula* casts a more demonizing lens on Lucy than the original text, as she is further sexualized and racialized in the ways hooks describes. Her deviance, carelessness, and shameless sexual behavior suggest that she deserves a horrific ending, one that leads to her demise.

Dracula rests on the desire to destroy “she who threatens by being desirable.”¹³⁸ Phyllis Roth has explored the undercurrent of hostility toward the sexuality of women in the original Bram Stoker text, and there are many parallels between her analysis and the representations of Mina and Lucy in *Dracula* (2020). Roth posits Lucy as darker in comparison to Mina, in her appearance, hair, and morals. She goes on to say, “Not only is Lucy the more sexualized figure, she is the more rejecting figure. This section of the book ends with her destruction, not by Dracula but by whom she was to marry.”¹³⁹ Historically, Bram Stoker’s novel positions Lucy as

¹³⁷ hooks, *Ain't I a Woman Black Women and Feminism*, 33.

¹³⁸ Phyllis A. Roth, “Suddenly Sexual Women in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*,” *Literature and Psychology* 27, no. 3 (1977): 123.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*: 130.

sexually free. Nina Auerbach writes about how the women in Stoker's novel and proceeding film adaptations are often predators. Lucy is an example of "unleashed female energy in a fear-mongering way."¹⁴⁰ The newest adaptation of *Lucy* seems to continue with the previous themes of portraying her with an "unleashed" energy through her sexual deviancy. However, what is different in *Dracula* (2020) is that this interpretation of Lucy reproduces regressive stereotypes of Black women as aggressive and hypersexual. Lucy as a Black woman was cast in a historically white role, and the creators did not change the story to accommodate her entry. This is the BBC's attempt at "equality" by putting a woman of color on screen in a leading role, but the failure to address her identity as Black produces rather discriminatory implications. The hypersexualized depictions must be read intersectionally, that is, as both sexist and racist, making the representation of Lucy particularly insidious when coupled with her lack of depth and agency.

Conclusion

Dracula exemplifies that equality is not simply reached through more representation. The BBC's initiative with the 50:50 Project to incorporate more women throughout the organization is honorable in some regards, but just having more white women and Black women in lead roles is not equivalent to better representation. The reoccurring stereotypes surrounding gender and sexuality also reveal the political positioning of the showrunners, particularly Moffat. His comments and writing reveal the ways that sexist and racist stereotypes are still considered and circulated. In other words, they are still the norms by and through which meaning is inscribed on bodies and reproduced through media. These representations of identity become sites of "production, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not

¹⁴⁰ Nina Auerbach, "Dracula: A Vampire of Our Own. In *Our Vampires, Ourselves*," University of Chicago Press, 1995: 80.

outside, representation.”¹⁴¹ Gender and sexuality are negotiated parts of identity, as they “undergo constant trans-formation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject of the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power.”¹⁴² This means that there can be a multitude of meanings produced and they are always being changed and negotiated over time. There is never an essentialized or singular truth within the representations that needs to be uncovered. For *Dracula*, the representational meanings are intersected by previous historical representations of women, the current cultural understandings of consent and dating, the power structures within the BBC as an organization, and Moffat as the showrunner. These all coincide to offer shallow, underdeveloped portrayals of women, and, specifically in this show, Black women. I am in no way advocating for “perfect” representations of women, as I am not sure what that would mean, and certainly not sure if it is to be desired. But one thing we might be able to say is that a strong representation of a leading woman would include adequate time to develop her character and would actively try to problematize traditional stereotypes. *Dracula* (2020) ultimately fails on these terms.

Sexuality and race must be read as intersections of identity, not isolated categories, as they are simultaneously points of identification for audiences. hooks connects sexism and racism and highlights the problem with eradicating their interconnected impact on reality. She says, “The struggle to end racism and the struggle to end sexism [is because they are] naturally intertwined, that to make them separate was to deny the basic truth of our existence, that race and sex are both immutable facets of human identity.”¹⁴³ The problem with perpetuating these stereotypes without recognizing their historical harm is that they will continue to be repeated.

¹⁴¹ Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation,” *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 36 (1989): pp. 68.

¹⁴² Ibid, 70.

¹⁴³ hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, 13.

Additionally, the negative stereotypes fulfill a specific social function as, “it is through stereotype that the ruling majority rationalizes its maltreatment of people it has designated as inferior.”¹⁴⁴ These images become cultural mirrors of how we see ourselves, and how we see others; the images and representations communicate thoughts, concepts, feelings, or ideas, perhaps even an entire symbolic economy of a heterosexist and racist ideology.

Dracula’s desires and fears are explored at length in this adaptation, placing him at the center of the narrative. People who are unfamiliar with the original *Dracula* might argue that the story should revolve around Dracula. After all, he is the title character of the series. However, when the writers decided to inflate Dracula’s role, they diminished the other characters’ stories. From Agatha’s and Zoe’s obsessiveness in trying to understand Dracula to Lucy’s incessant snapping of selfies, these superficial characterizations lack depth and empathy toward these women. So, when their characters meet their demise from Dracula, their deaths are not felt, but rather invoke a response of indifference for audiences. It appears that these women deserved their fate because Agatha should not have provoked Dracula and Lucy should not have been vain and promiscuous. These are regressive horror tropes reminiscent of the slasher genre, where women who deviated from what was socially acceptable, i.e., by using drugs, having pre-marital sex, etc., would thereby “deserve” for the killer to end them. *Dracula* suggests that the leading women in the show should have been regulating the way they engaged in the world, as their deviant behaviors have the consequence of death. Furthermore, the lack of an empathetic development of their stories and the perpetuation of these stereotypes dehumanizes the women, marking them as other.

¹⁴⁴ Elizabeth Hadley Freydberg, “Sapphires, Spitfires, Sluts, and Superbitches: Aframericans and Latinas in Contemporary American Film,” in *Black Women in America*, ed. Kim Marie Vaz (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 222.

Dracula has been revamped, providing a hopeful possibility for future depictions of women, as the show did begin to move away from the “Moffat Women” of the past. However, the women’s endings need to be rewritten in a compelling way, instead of regressing to ineffectual stereotypes. The show is an example of genderbaiting, as it started depicting strong women like Agatha, Zoe, and Lucy until their stories reverted back to stereotypical, hollowed out portrayals. Agatha’s and Zoe’s genderswap into lead roles as Van Helsing was stifled by the characters’ lack of agency and the fact that their narratives revolve around a man. Lucy’s sexual transgressions and vanity lead her to be turned and burned, becoming Dracula’s final bride. In both cases, the characters embody and reproduce the heterosexism and racism still permeating contemporary society. These characters are paradigmatic examples of the cliché representation of women characters throughout *Dracula*. The show is filled with stereotypical representations speaking to the kinds of tensions we are experiencing in our current society in terms of shame, consent, and the devaluation of Black womanhood. Agatha and Zoe Van Helsing embody the stereotypes of the humorous nun and the wise, tragic woman. Mina is the hysterical and unrequited maiden and Lucy is the jezebel, tease, and the tragic “slut.” What all these stereotypes have in common is they are penned by the same showrunner, ensuring that the same “Moffat Women” thrive on.

Chapter Four

Conclusion: Mirroring the Cultural Anxieties & Fears of the Present Era

Dracula reflects and distorts the anxieties and fears of our culture, but also our hopes and desires. The text continues to be horrific because it sparks questions regarding the fluidity of gender and sexuality, providing both fear and anxiety for some audiences and identification and catharsis for others. Even more alluringly, *Dracula* never has one fixed meaning, but is constantly morphing and changing given the concerns of the time period and culture in which it manifests. Vampires, like Dracula, are malleable monsters that can embody our culture's fears of the "other," whether in terms of racism, sexism, homophobia, or xenophobia. Cultural anxieties revolving around who is considered "other" are all explored in the current iteration of *Dracula*, but in my thesis, I have concentrated on the representations of gender, sexuality, and race. At times, *Dracula* challenges cultural hegemony, as in Dracula's queerness, and at other times it reifies the existence of oppressive gender roles, as in the representations of women like Mina, Lucy, Zoe, and Agatha Van Helsing. *Dracula* also exposes prejudices toward minority populations through the proliferation of stereotypes. The series reveals that darkness lies deeper than people. It dwells in the ideas and images that shape our society, suppressing the exploration of ourselves and each other.

Chapters two and three have focused on the representations of LGBTQ+ characters and women in *Dracula*, emphasizing the cultural regulatory systems in the show that render the images intelligible. There are moments where *Dracula* presents sexuality and gender as fluid, for example, through the metaphorical queerness of Dracula's sexuality, as well as through casting a woman in a leading role historically held by a man, Van Helsing. I also address systemic sexism, racism, and homophobia in connection to the BBC and the *Dracula* (2020) producer, Steven

Moffat, which may be preventing the show from truly harnessing the fluidity exemplified in the original novel. *Dracula* provides moments of recognition and identification for some viewers, while also failing to go beyond previous stereotypes for minority characters, and moreover, at times appearing as if it is doing nothing more than reinstating them. In part, these issues stem from the writer and producer Moffat, as he has a history of presenting marginalized populations problematically, and much of the same critiques hold true of *Dracula*. The difference in comparison to his previous works is that each of the *Dracula* characters begin with complexity and promise before falling flat, eventually regressing into mere stereotypes. These oscillating representations create a whiplash effect, becoming examples of queerbaiting and/or genderbaiting by luring audiences in with the promise of developed representation until it is stripped away. For example, in the first two episodes, *Dracula* presents himself with fluid sexuality, but in the third and final episode, *Dracula* becomes the embodiment of heterosexism by ignoring consent. Indeed, there are ways to read *Dracula* as sexist or feminist, homophobic or homoerotic, exploitative or progressive. The show at times presents limiting views of gender and sexuality, creating problematic representations that diminish the characters' growth in the narrative.

Dracula has a multitude of meanings and often the meanings are contradictory. One of the paradoxes in *Dracula* is that the writers of the show decree that *Dracula* is not sexual (i.e., does not have a sexuality), but then intentionally incorporate homoerotic depictions in his narrative. Or they explain that a character like Mina, “is smart, determined, and a fighter,” although she is portrayed in the opposite way.¹⁴⁵ Prior to the release of *Dracula* (2020), Moffat was asked what kind of representation could be expected for minority characters in the mini-

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

series. He responded, “Dracula is happy to kill anyone, what kind of representation do you want in a show with a man that eats people? [laughing] You know? I am not sure what you expect.”¹⁴⁶ Moffat’s comments brush off the importance and power that representations can have for minority audiences. It also seems he is unaware of the kind of power he holds in making certain people and stories visible. Furthermore, the characters do not attempt to acknowledge sexism and racism, and the producers fail to portray the complexity in the identities depicted.

Dracula does, however, begin to reveal the complexities of power and politics in contemporary horror television. Horror is a genre that often attempts to subvert the expectations of the audience, featuring marginalized populations at the center of the narrative. Although horror operates within counterhegemonic spaces, it can, as *Dracula* shows, become appropriated to fit the values of conservative audiences. *Dracula* was released within the first few days of 2020, and it is indicative of the massive changes that followed that year, where polarizing political tensions grew throughout 2020 due to both Covid-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement. At the very least, *Dracula* begins to reveal the complexities of power and politics in contemporary society, showing that horror can be subversive, but it can also be popularized and adopted to fit the values of the network and showrunner.

Limitations & Future Research

The thesis is focused on revealing the nuanced issues with the representation of women and LGBTQ+ individuals in this series. I wanted to emphasize that just providing more representations of minority characters on screen is not always (if ever) a sufficient solution to the issue. The most obvious limitation for my project is the time and space I had to write it. Because of these constraints, I decided to focus on one text, *Dracula* (2020). There are also many

¹⁴⁶ MCM Comic Con, “BBC Dracula,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFRU3Lf9tZ0>.

television shows on the BBC that could have been added to the research in order to show the complexities and innerworkings of the 50:50 Project across the network. This research could determine whether the representations may have changed since there has been a growing number of women employed on and off screen within the BBC. There are women showrunners within the BBC, like Sally Wrainwright, who wrote *Gentleman Jack* (BBC, 2019), Emerald Fennell, showrunner of *Killing Eve* (BBC, 2019), and *Back to Life* (BBC, 2019), written by Daisy Haggard and Laura Solon. All of these women and their representations of women characters could become a juxtaposition to the musings of Moffat and the characters he creates.

My research was also limited to one series written by Moffat. More research could have been done on his previous representations of women and LGBTQ+ characters in *Dr. Who* and *Sherlock*, uncovering how his previous shows might have contributed to the BBC's growth in diversity initiatives. Analyzing all the of previous depictions of "Moffat Women" could help investigate a larger understanding of genderbaiting used by Moffat and his stereotyping of women, leading to the depictions of Van Helsing and Lucy Westenra. Additionally, if I had more time, I would better trace the original Bram Stoker text and its impact on BBC's *Dracula*, providing an in-depth analysis of the representations of gender and sexuality and their continued influence. Instead, I briefly mentioned the original text, and its possible influence on the current series, rather than focusing on the intricacies. However, I decided to focus on *Dracula* (2020) throughout the thesis and use the original text only as a point of comparison. Along with the original text, integrating all the previous adaptations of *Dracula* could provide more crucial parallels in the resurrection of this current edition, and continue to explain the immortality and potency of Dracula as a character and icon. A study like that might encompass either just the

British adaptations of the original or all works of *Dracula*, which would be over 300 television shows and film texts.

A deeper historical tracing of *Dracula* and the many representations of women and monsters might be another way to progress in the future. One might particularly seek to understand how each adaptation influenced this current iteration. The development of representations of the women, and the presence of LGBTQ+ metaphors could provide interesting insights to the progression of queerbaiting and/or genderbaiting over time and across adaptations. More specifically, diving into how and when different versions might be considered queerbaiting versus homoerotic would be a worthwhile inquiry. Likewise, the incorporation of the term genderbaiting and its use outside of *Dracula* could prove beneficial in other projects steered by Moffat, the BBC, or the horror genre more broadly. Exploring the different ways queerbaiting and genderbaiting develop as we shift to a time that is featuring more stories of historically oppressed populations could provide more critiques of superficial depictions, and the continued prevalence and subtle transformations of hegemonic norms.

The 50:50 Project is in its early stages, tracking the growth of representations of women on-screen and within production. So, it is possible that the project could be a starting point to trace the impact of new voices and perspectives on the BBC's characters and narratives for years to come. More time between the release of the show and the research could help determine whether *Dracula* can be seen as a part of, or separate from, the 50:50 initiative. In contrast to the minimal research on BBC's *Dracula*, there is an abundant amount of scholarly research on *Dracula* more broadly, making it incredibly difficult to synthesize all the ideas, as they vary in meaning and can be contradictory. The metaphor of the vampire requires strict rules, but at the same time, the rules can and must be broken. There are an infinite number of ways people have

read the vampire in connection to their respective cultures, and there is always more to say, and more voices needed to interpret these stories. However, the malleability and broadness of the vampire also makes it exceptionally difficult to use with any certainty and consistency. Although I focused on gender and sexuality, this text could be researched through other facets of identity, like nationality, socioeconomic status, age, religion, etc.

I was also limited in the terminology used, particularly in reference to queer and queerness. The term queer is powerful in its broadness but presents a challenge when attempting to use it with any specificity. Although this thesis is meant to reveal the inner workings of power and cultural discourses on identity, applying theoretical conceptions of queerness can sometimes contrast the rhetoric used in LGBTQ+ social movements. Part of this thesis is concerned with understanding how audiences might identify or disengage with the representations on screen. However, the way audiences experience identification might not be in alignment with the theoretical developments of feminism and queer theory. What is culturally viewed as progress could still be, and often is, problematic through the lens of queer theory. Queer theory can enunciate the permeability of categorical structures as they are not always clear, but there is not a way to separate the term queer in connection to identity politics from its colloquial use. Queerness contrasts with identity politics because identity politics reinforces the categorizations within heterosexual and heterosexist “norms.” This is important especially as my second chapter discusses the coming out narrative as an assumption of a “transformative identity” when it is up against a heteronormative system. But it is only transformative to a certain point. It is not changing the system but rather reifies heteronormativity. Queerness can be used as a broad idea in connection to fluid gender and sexuality, but the term queer is also used as a way of revealing the ambiguity of categorical boundaries of sex, sexuality, and gender.

My cross-cultural understandings of gender, sexuality, and race in the United Kingdom are also limited, given that I was born and raised, and still reside, in the United States. Someone who has a better cross-cultural understanding of British politics in relation to identity may have a different reading of the show, especially in terms of its historical portrayals and representations of minority characters. Much of the jokes, humor, and conversation in *Dracula* is also British-centered. I could understand much of the dialogue in the show, however, there were a few phrases I needed to research, or jokes that did not resonate with me as they may have for British audiences. Additionally, I have an affinity for the horror genre and vampire folklore, which some might consider a limitation in the way it skews my readings of a text. I can readily understand tropes, jump scares, and how the text might subvert an audience's expectations. My familiarity with genre aesthetics and tropes means that horror does not always trigger for me the same kind of emotional impact the show may bring to others. My thesis did not engage as much with audience analysis, so my perspective of the text, especially with my complex understandings of the genre, could only assume how it might have impacted more casual viewers.

For further research, I think a deeper audience analysis would be useful in investigating the polarizing views of Moffat, his previous works, and the BBC. The audience analysis would provide additional meanings and interpretations of *Dracula* and its cultural proliferation. *Dracula* poses contrasting readings that could be seen as progressive by some, but as conservative by others. The audience's interpretations will change depending on their political alignment. Within my thesis, I referenced a few tweets that illustrate how the show provides contradictory and polarizing viewpoints. However, a much more thorough analysis would be needed to provide a more robust cache of evidence. It would be interesting to track the audience's understanding, attitudes, and beliefs toward *Dracula* and Moffat's other television

series, contrasting fan and anti-fan interpretations. Particularly interesting would be to focus on populations that identify as a part of the LGBTQ+ community and then contrast those readings with people who align more closely with dominant cultural norms.

What is at Stake?

The documentary *In Search of Dracula with Mark Gatiss* features one of the showrunners of *Dracula* investigating the history of the vampire legend. Throughout all the interviews and research that went into the documentary, Gatiss concludes that *Dracula's* broad and various meanings can be anything you want them to be. He says, over “120 years after the Count first landed on our shores, it’s clear his hold over us is as strong as ever... The key lies in the Count’s multiplicity of faces, worked on by a whole raft of talented people since 1897... By becoming mythic he is open to endless reinvention.”¹⁴⁷ The multiplicity of meanings in the original novel and the hundreds of adaptations to follow are reinvented in *Dracula (2020)* as it continues to provide paradoxical interpretations. *Dracula* is a polysemic text creating possibilities for a continued critique of horror television as it centers its stories around minority characters.

The growth of horror television is not a coincidence. It can be attributed to the evolving genre and its hybridity as it continues to infiltrate different spaces, critiquing our culture. Horror television and Gothic television expand the metaphor of the vampire as it correlates to times of massive change, pinpointing and depicting the dread, desire, and anxiety of the modern world. Even texts like *Dracula*, developed in the Victorian period, can be adapted to critique our twenty-first century culture. The fluidity of *Dracula* as a text is due to horror’s hybridity as it fuses with other genres, shifting away from fixed categorization. The success of horror is due to

¹⁴⁷ *In Search of Dracula with Mark Gatiss*, directed by Nathan Landeg, UK: British Broadcasting Corporation, 2020.

its ability to subvert categories and expectations, pushing audiences to reorient their ideas of themselves and others. This project is a critique of one example from the growing horror television landscape and its focus on bringing marginalized stories to the center of the narrative. More and more horror texts seem to be advancing stories of women and queer characters.

Historically, horror monsters were positioned as the “other,” embodying characteristics of oppressed populations. For example, *Nosferatu* (1922) has been critiqued for the vampire resembling stereotypical caricatures of Jewish people. It seems that stories of the “other” have become more central as minority characters are now the protagonists, meaning they are the characters the audience connects to. Ultimately, this positioning has the possibility of creating a more empathetic plot toward historically oppressed populations. The expansion of horror television into shows like *American Horror Story* (FX, 2011- present), *Hannibal* (NBC, 2013-2015), *The Haunting of Hill House & Bly Manor* (Netflix, 2018-2020), *Ratched* (Netflix, 2020), and *Lovecraft Country* (HBO, 2020) depicts horror themes while featuring representations of women and LGBTQ+ characters in leading roles. *Dracula* fits into the growing number of horror narratives that are focusing on the fears experienced by these subcultures, projecting their anxieties outward. The difference in the case of *Dracula* is that although the series places minority characters in the lead, those characters are not written with the same intention or development as have been other minoritized characters in the new horror television. At first, it may seem that *Dracula* is making strides in representations, but its depictions are still superficial.

Dracula reveals the connection between horror and queerness as they both reside in the counterhegemonic domain and provides space for those who do not connect with the dominant “norms.” In some ways, *Dracula* illustrates that even when the representations of characters revert to heteronormative displays, queerness always resides in the vampire metaphor, and in the

horror genre more broadly. At this point, it is hard to see how the representations in *Dracula* may impact future works in vampire media. As this avenue of research progresses, I anticipate much more deliberation on and interrogation of these narratives and characterizations. At points, *Dracula* (2020) is regressive in its stereotypes of women and LGBTQ+ individuals, as it employs both genderbaiting and queerbaiting. However, it still provides moments of recognition for non-normative audiences through the vampire metaphor. *Dracula* provides the possibility of exploring multiple truths, and in those truths, mirrors our own prejudices and biases.

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