

**To Want a Monster: Homoerotic Desire in *Dracula* on
Screen**

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Table of contents

Abstract	1
Introduction	2
Chapter One	
1.1 Queer theory	6
1.2 Adaptation studies	9
1.3 Homoeroticism in Dracula	10
Chapter Two	
2.1 The Modern Vampire	14
2.2 The Adaptation	17
Conclusion	24
Bibliography	28

Abstract

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* has been reimagined countless times since the novel's publication in 1897. The narrative and the iconic vampire which led to the creation of others is regarded by many as erotically charged. Queer readings have shown that *Dracula* is homoerotic in nature due to the many analogies the novel contains, which may or may not have been carried over to its audio-visual interpretations. Its latest adaptation by Netflix and the BBC was made in a time where perception of the vampire and homosexuality are viewed very differently from the Victorian era and even the twentieth century. These factors influence Netflix's *Dracula* (2020) in how homoerotic desire is portrayed, and the adaptation itself shows that the vampire is still erotically charged, yet undergoing a sexual identity crisis.

Key words: Homoeroticism, *Dracula*, adaptations, queer theory, urban Gothic, vampire narrative, identity, disease

Introduction

“This man belongs to me!”¹

Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* remains one of the most popular Gothic horror novels up to this day. It has led to the rise in popularity of the now world-famous vampire, and Stoker’s influence can be seen in hundreds of media interpretations which have been produced over the years that vary from Hollywood cinema to stage productions. The novel centres on the mysterious Count Dracula of Transylvania and all the characters that come together to solve supernatural occurrences. Written in an epistolary form consisting of different characters’ journal entries, the reader slowly becomes aware along with the characters of Dracula and his plans. Homoerotic analyses on *Dracula* have already established several interpretative theories about the narrative’s queer aspects and where those stemmed from.

Before going into further detail about this, it is important to explain the genre of the novel. *Dracula* is a case of ‘urban Gothic’ and the romance genre. Urban Gothic is a later version of the Gothic novel and fantastic fiction and differs from the regular Gothic by adding modern settings and aspects of science.² The urban Gothic and romance fiction both contained binary oppositions within the narrative, such as good versus evil, and the colonising self versus the foreign and colonised other. The novel clearly presents the vampires as evil beings and the ‘other’, whereas the pure and good human beings are there to save everyone from evil. Its setting in London and the mentioning of the phonograph further show how *Dracula* fits within the urban Gothic.

Previous research (Schaffer, Spencer, Howes, Muskovits) has shown that the novel’s subtext is filled with homoerotic desire, and that said desire stems from Victorian social constructs regarding queerness, as well as Stoker’s own experiences during the time the novel was written.

The binary opposition of good versus evil links back to Victorian values regarding homosexuality. This is presented through Lucy Westenra, Dracula’s victim and offspring, in the novel. Spencer argues that Lucy’s slow transformation from a pure woman into a vampire makes her a ritual scapegoat which Van Helsing purges in

¹ Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (London: Scholastic Press UK, 2014), 49.

² Kathleen L. Spencer, “Purity and Danger: *Dracula*, the Urban Gothic, and the Late Victorian Degeneracy Crisis,” *ELH* 59, no. 1 (1992): 200, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2873424?seq=1>.

order to restore her purity in death.³ Purity was clearly something to be strived after during the Victorian era, meaning that anything falling into the pits of darkness was to be abhorred and avoided. In other words, Victorian middle-class society had an inside circle that they wanted to keep pure by excluding those people who stood outside the circle by being against standard norms.⁴ Homosexuality was one of those things. Victorian conceptions of homosexuality described same-sex desire as misplaced feminine desires, meaning that men had something feminine in themselves which tried to overwhelm their masculinity.⁵ Because men had these misplaced feminine desires – those being desires towards men - homosexuality was seen as bisexuality instead. First and foremost, there is the original heterosexual desire which all men possess. The same-sex desire is an add-on, so to say, rather than something different and separate, hence it being called bisexuality. Vampires were neither male nor female, the same way Victorians thought homosexuals to be neither.⁶

Stoker cleverly uses vampirism – which is something otherworldly and monstrous – as a metaphor for homosexuality which was meant to be repressed. The repression of desire is, in turn, expressed in the novel through Jonathan's amnesia.⁷ He had undergone a traumatic experience at Castle Dracula, one where he was being exposed to the desires of the Count and his mistresses. Nothing is mentioned on how he escaped except that he ended up in a monastery where his stories would be kept confidential. He ran from his desires in the first place, and repressed them through memory-loss. Furthermore, homosexuality was considered an illness. One of Dr. Seward's journal entries describes Lucy's transformation into vampirism as a disease: "[Mrs Westenra] should not be present with Lucy or think of her illness more than was absolutely required."⁸ Not believing in vampires, one could argue it is natural to see Lucy's condition as simply getting ill. Knowing the subtext and history on homosexuality and desire, however, Lucy's transformation is clearly a metaphor of a change in sexuality. Other metaphorical parallels can be derived from the subtext as well, for example the blood transfusions all the men do in attempt to save Lucy. These

³ Spencer, 209.

⁴ Spencer, 207.

⁵ Marjorie Howes, "The Mediation of the Feminine: Bisexuality, Homoerotic Desire, and Self-Expression in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 30, no. 1 (1988): 105, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40754849?seq=1>.

⁶ Eszter Muskovits, "The Threat of Otherness in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," *TRANS* 10 (2010): 1, doi: <https://doi.org/10.4000/trans.391>.

⁷ Howes, "The Mediation of the Feminine," 106-107.

⁸ Stoker, *Dracula*, 155.

themes and aspects of the novel will be further explained in the first chapter.

Although Stoker's use of homosexuality in *Dracula* was influenced by Victorian social values, his own experiences have also helped in shaping this narrative. Stoker himself was argued to be queer, and that argument comes from the relationship he had with Oscar Wilde. Not all critics agree Stoker was actually homosexual, but Wilde's trial definitely influenced the shaping of Count Dracula. The paper by Schaffer discusses Wilde's trial for sodomy in 1895 and how he became the public standard for homosexuals. His public persona in the media was regarded as ugly, yet Stoker still desired him despite being a closeted homosexual with anxieties about the matter.⁹ This ties back to the conception of repressing homosexuals and other types of 'others'. Wilde's media image further boosted the negative impression people had of queerness. Not being able to openly express his desires – and even fearing them himself because of societal norms – Stoker turned to fiction in order to process his attraction to Oscar Wilde. As Stoker was arguably a homosexual himself, he naturally expected to see Wilde's ugliness within himself. *Dracula* expresses this through Jonathan who expects to see the Count's reflection in the mirror.¹⁰ Knowing the history of all this, Schaffer concludes that Jonathan and Dracula are mirror images of Stoker and Wilde, respectively.¹¹ Again, the argument comes forth that vampirism is tied to homosexuality, and that the humans try to resist it and fight it. Wilde's so-called monstrous appearance was turned into a literal monster, the same way homoerotic desire was turned into vampirism and all the sins that accompany it.

This previous research proves that *Dracula* indeed contains aspects of queerness and homoeroticism within the novel's subtext. *Dracula* uses vampirism as a metaphor for homosexuality and homoerotic desire. It is an example of the Urban Gothic in that it uses the binary opposition of the good humans fighting against the sinful, foreign vampire who uses desire as a weapon. Stoker's influence for writing this novel came from Victorian social constructs wherein homosexuality was meant to be feared and repressed, as well as his own experiences with Oscar Wilde. Yet we are around a century and a half later, and visions on homosexuality have changed considerably. The whole concept of queer has generally been more accepted across

⁹ Talia Schaffer, "A Wilde Desire Took Me": The Homoerotic History of *Dracula*," *ELH* 61, no. 2. (1994): 388, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2873274?seq=1>.

¹⁰ Schaffer, 388-389.

¹¹ Schaffer, 388-389.

the world with the rise of the LGBTQ community, and most parts of it do not consider homosexuality to be something ‘other’ or devilish anymore. The religious, as well as political and economic developments can attest to this.¹² For example, the report by the Pew Research Center states that those who are more religious tend to be less accepting of homosexuals than those who are not.¹³ In other words, the way we perceive Stoker’s novel is also different from the Victorian era. To a modern reader, the Count becomes the oppressed rather than the oppressor. The human hunters think destroying Dracula is justice, yet condemning him for his homosexuality seems unfair nowadays. Putting his desire for blood aside, he still needs it to survive.

Since the novel was written, its popularity has grown and the legend of the vampire has appeared and been reinterpreted over and over again in various media. This means that *Dracula*, in essence, changed along with history and the changes that occurred in society. With the rise of the film, this iconic character has especially had the chance to really grow and develop. Scholars of this age have already analysed *Dracula* through a postmodern lens, with queer readings among others, as well as keeping its historical context in mind. This is familiar now. It raises the question, however, in what way *Dracula* has been reinterpreted in audio-visual adaptations, and more importantly, how the novel’s clear homoerotic desires have been implemented there. Seeing how homoerotic desire is presented through a modern interpretation in contrast to the original material and what attested to those changes is especially interesting.

Before that, it is first important to create a theoretical framework of queer theories and adaptation studies in order to fully understand the novel and its adaptations, which will be done in the first chapter. The first chapter also provides a more in-depth analysis of homoeroticism in the novel. The second chapter will discuss the modern interpretation of the vampire, and then Netflix’s *Dracula* mini-series (2020). By analysing Netflix’s 2020 adaptation it becomes clear that the series expresses homoerotic desire through Dracula’s sexual identity struggle despite the creators claiming Dracula was not intended to be queer.

¹² Jacob Poushter and Nicholas O. Kent, “The Global Divide on Homosexuality Persists: But increasing acceptance in many countries over past two decades,” *Pew Research Center*, June 25, 2020: 5, https://www.pewresearch.org/global/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/06/PG_2020.06.25_Global-Views-Homosexuality_FINAL.pdf.

¹³ Poushter and Kent, 5.

Chapter 1. Understanding Queerness, Adaptations, and Dracula

The trendsetting Count is regarded as homoerotic, as has been shown in Stoker's source text, as well as the various adaptations that have followed. Queerness and identity have become significant themes in the vampire narrative as a whole, spanning even outside of *Dracula* adaptations and therefore making it an important topic for discussion. Before it becomes possible to delve into *Dracula*, an understanding of queer theory is necessary as sexuality is a major underlying theme in the novel. Adaptation theory is also important to understand when analysing the Netflix adaptation in the following chapter.

1.1 Queer theory

Queer theory is derived from feminist theory, in the sense that they both discuss and defend issues of gender and sexuality.¹⁴ Feminists strive for equality, more specifically women being treated equally to men. The queer community similarly strives for sexual equality. For example, homosexual activists protested in the late 60s against the American Psychiatric Association because they categorized homosexuality as a mental illness.¹⁵ Considering the term 'homosexuality' officially existed since the mid-nineteenth century, the realization that it took a whole century for the gay liberation movement to occur is quite shocking.

The term 'queer' was first used by Teresa de Lauretis in 1991 and, in simple terms, means not being able to fit within a certain category.¹⁶ Because of this, queerness has always been linked to gender and identity. Queer people did not have the same rights and privileges as heterosexual white men (the dominating standard) which is why queer theorists wanted to come up with a new social system of categories and societal roles rather than trying to fix the errors in the already existing system.¹⁷ Societal categories are not straightforwardly fixed; a person is not just a homosexual or a person of colour, but multiple societal categories apply to one individual. The previous category of 'homosexual' was deemed as incorrect because sexuality encompasses more than that, and that is why today we have an expanded LGBTQ community.

¹⁴ William B. Turner, *A genealogy of queer theory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000) <https://hdl-handle-net.ru.idm.oclc.org/2027/heh.30704>, 5.

¹⁵ Turner, 14.

¹⁶ Turner, 5, 8.

¹⁷ Turner, 15.

As mentioned earlier, identity is an important factor for defining queerness. There are two sides to identity: on the one hand, it means being unique to yourself, a one-of-a-kind individual. On the other, that uniqueness is based on basic similarities that are recognizable to other people.¹⁸ For example, someone who identifies themselves as a punk can be recognized by their mode of dress. Still, there is a debate going on about whether homosexuality in particular can be described as an identity or not. Sociologist Mary McIntosh argued that homosexuality was in fact not an identity, but “a social role that permits authority figures to distinguish sharply between acceptable and unacceptable behavior and to prevent the latter by stigmatizing it.”¹⁹ In other words, what is seen as the norm and ‘normal’ in society should be adhered to, and everything that goes against it should be disapproved of or discriminated against. Such is the case for *Dracula* as will become clear later on in this chapter. The heroes of the story consist of good, hardworking and faithful men and women. Mina is the embodiment of the pure ‘angel of the house’ who thinks herself contaminated after having been persuaded by Dracula’s pursuits. Dracula, in contrast, is everything these heroes are not: sinful and fuelled with erotic desire. Dracula is, in a sense, destroyed for being the opposite of the norm, turning this narrative into a story of moral judgement wherein the heroes have all the characteristics of good societal people who fight against the threat imposed upon them.

Homosexuality was regarded very differently at the time of the term’s invention (1869) than it is today. As mentioned before, it was medically diagnosed as a mental illness because men who had erotic desires for other men simply had a so-called misplaced feminine desire towards men, instead.²⁰ As with other phenomena that went against the norm, this desire was feared and meant to be repressed. A *History of Sexuality* by Michel Foucault sheds a different light on the matter, however. Michel Foucault was a French philosopher and historian, and he was very influential for gender theory. Sexuality in general was thought to be silenced and swept under the rug by many scholars, yet Foucault argued that this was really not the case. Rather than being silenced for its taboo nature, within legal, medical and sexological discourses the Victorians made the topic of sex an actual topic for

¹⁸ Turner, 32.

¹⁹ Mary McIntosh, as cited by Turner, 66.

²⁰ Marjorie Howes, “The Mediation of the Feminine: Bisexuality, Homoerotic Desire, and Self-Expression in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 30, no. 1 (1988): 105, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40754849?seq=1>.

discussion.²¹ According to Foucault, the Victorians acknowledged the powers of sexuality.²²

Sexuality was, in fact, widely experimented with. Because sex was such a new and ground-breaking topic of discussion, Victorian society felt a need to research its proper use and also describe the evils that accompanied it when misused.²³ One issue of sexuality came with the double-standard between men and women. The Matrimonial Causes of Act in 1857 required that a man should only be prosecuted for adultery if he had committed other offences, while adultery was enough offence for women.²⁴ Women were supposed to be the ‘angel of the house’, being virtuous, respectable, and pure as well as loyal to their husband.²⁵ Because of this it was believed that the enjoyment of sex was something exclusively for men.²⁶ Furneaux’s example of the film *The Young Victoria* proves the opposite, because Queen Victoria expressed erotic desires towards Albert.

Homosexuality, on the other hand, was a different matter. According to Adut, “The Victorians held homosexuality in horror, and Britain stood out at the turn of the twentieth century as the only country in Western Europe that criminalized all male homosexual acts with draconian penalties.”²⁷ An example of this was, as mentioned in the introduction, Oscar Wilde’s trial for sodomy. His affair with a British aristocrat was made public in 1895, and he was put on trial several times for it. Despite flawed evidence, he was prosecuted and condemned.²⁸

This brief look at queer theory sheds more light on Stoker’s novel and its context, in the sense that the instances of homoeroticism in the text refer back to these notions of Victorian sexuality. The debates about homosexuality in relation to identity are useful for understanding the adaptation, as the show caused much upheaval among viewers regarding Dracula’s sexual identity.

²¹ Holly Furneaux, “Victorian Sexualities,” *Literature Compass* 8, no. 10 (2011): 769, <https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2011.00834.x>.

²² Steven Seidman, “The Power of Desire and the Danger of Pleasure: Victorian Sexuality Reconsidered,” *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 1 (1990): 62, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3787630>.

²³ Seidman, 62.

²⁴ Furneaux, “Victorian Sexualities,” 768.

²⁵ Furneaux, 768.

²⁶ Furneaux, 768.

²⁷ Ari Adut, “A Theory of Scandal: Victorians, Homosexuality, and the Fall of Oscar Wilde,” *American Journal of Sociology* 111, no. 1 (2005): 214, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/428816>.

²⁸ Adut, 214.

1.2 Adaptation studies

The field of adaptation studies is relatively new. Adaptations themselves are by definition based on an original source. The Netflix series *Dracula* is – and that speaks for itself – based on Stoker’s novel of the same name. Adaptations tend to carry negative connotations, because calling something an adaptation immediately connects it to another work.²⁹ This implies that the adaptation is not original or creative as it is based on something else. Although some have disregarded it, fidelity criticism plays a large role in this, and actually proves a counterargument relating to adaptations and creativity. Fidelity is an implied assumption that adapters only reproduce a text.³⁰ However, reproduction does not necessarily mean the work becomes a direct replica of the source. Every adapter has their own vision of the work they are trying to reproduce, and they also have to either expand on or cut from the source material, meaning there is plenty of room for creative thought in how a text becomes visualized.

Here, a division occurs in defining adaptations: on the one hand, it is a product, and, on the other, a process.³¹ As a product it is “an openly acknowledged and extended reworkings of particular other texts.”³² With Netflix’s 2020 *Dracula*, the title already tells the viewer this is a product based on Bram Stoker’s novel of the same name. The opening credits of the episodes even mention ‘based on the novel by Bram Stoker’. As a process, however, it becomes more difficult to define. Hutcheon explains how adapting is a process that involves adapters first interpreting the text and then incorporating their own creativity in order to make the adaptation.³³ That process is evident in the *Dracula* series. Spanning over three episodes of an hour and a half long, it quickly becomes evident a lot of aspects are different from the source material. These will be further explained in the following chapter, but it is important to mention that especially the final episode ‘The Dark Compass’ has basically no direct ties to Stoker’s novel whatsoever anymore. The creators have steered away from the novel’s plotline and have even changed the main characters in order to tell a different story. A story that is interpreted from a source text.

²⁹ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2012) <https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.4324/9780203095010>, 3.

³⁰ Hutcheon, 7.

³¹ Hutcheon, 15-16.

³² Hutcheon, 16.

³³ Hutcheon, 18.

In short, an adaptation consists of three aspects: it is an announced transposition of a particular work (meaning one knows it connects to another work), it is a creative process that (re-)interprets and (re-)creates, and it is a form of intertextuality because viewers perceive it as something they are already familiar with (that being the source).³⁴ The concept of fidelity is, therefore, flawed, as it ignores the creative freedom of adapters. It also assumes an adaptation that is unfaithful to the source makes for a bad adaptation. Although in some cases this may be so, it still restricts adaptations from being appreciated as a work of their own. In order to analyse Netflix's *Dracula* and be able to compare aspects of homoeroticism to those present in the novel, it is also important to keep these theories about fidelity and creativity in mind, as that explains why the series has been created the way it has and why certain alterations have been made.

1.3 Homoeroticism in *Dracula*

To round off the discussion of the background necessary for discussing Netflix's *Dracula*, the homoeroticism of Stoker's novel remains a topic to touch upon. Vampirism was used as a metaphor for homosexuality and sexual desire in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, as has been established in the introduction with evidence provided by Schaffer and Howes. As mentioned in the introduction, Lucy's transformation was described by Dr. Seward's journal as a disease. Dating back to the Victorian period, then, it becomes apparent views on homosexuality have not changed much up to the protests against the APA, where homosexuality was medically diagnosed as an illness. There are multiple instances in the novel where homoeroticism is presented, although most of them are not apparent unless the reader is familiar with Stoker's background. Netflix's *Dracula* especially highlights vampirism as a disease by showing Jonathan's blood-drained body as almost a living corpse, or by using phrases such as 'contamination'.

One of the novel's aspects that draws parallels between vampirism and homosexuality is the blood transfusions Van Helsing, Dr. Seward, Arthur Holmwood and Quincey Morris undergo in order to try and save Lucy. Muskovits notes how blood is, symbolically speaking, interchangeable with semen.³⁵ At a certain point in

³⁴ Hutcheon, 8.

³⁵ Eszter Muskovits, "The Threat of Otherness in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," *TRANS*- 10 (2010): 4, doi: <https://doi.org/10.4000/trans.391>.

Dr. Seward's journal, Renfield exclaims "The blood is the life! The blood is the life!"³⁶ Both vampires and humans need enough blood to survive, but taking into consideration the context of the blood transfusions, one could argue that semen also represents life. Dracula creates offspring – new life – through his blood the same way a human man uses his sperm. Blood and semen, in this case, offer the same function. One interesting detail about this is that Dracula is seemingly the only vampire capable of creating offspring, unlike his female mates: "This then was the Undead home of the King Vampire, to whom so many more were due."³⁷ Van Helsing here explains that every other vampire that comes to existence was turned by the Count. It seems like an insignificant detail, but when tying this to the context of homoeroticism wherein only the man's blood or semen can create life, it becomes more understandable. Renfield therefore proves that blood connects on a sexual level as it links people with each other. Not only are Count Dracula and Mina bound together by exchanging blood, the men who undergo the blood transfusions connect erotically as well by having all their blood mixed into Lucy's system.

Furthermore, the novel expresses repression of sexual desire in quite an abstract manner. It is abstract because it is very implicit, and depends on a theory of sexual repression. Howes explained in her paper that men having a deeply rooted desire towards the same sex underneath the standard desire towards women causes homosexuality to be regarded as bisexuality. Male bisexuality is unnatural and unavoidable, and that feminine part of desire cannot be repressed.³⁸ Knowledge of this causes anxiety among men and makes one want to destroy that desire altogether.³⁹ Destruction becomes literalized in *Dracula*, as Van Helsing and the others actively try to kill Count Dracula and his offspring so they cannot take any more lives. This is an example of physical repression, yet there is also an instance of mental repression in the novel. After having escaped Castle Dracula, Jonathan has expelled all events from his memory so much that he has developed amnesia.⁴⁰ According to Howes, Jonathan's shock upon return was caused by "Harker's encounter with the secret sin that vampirism denotes and that the text cannot utter

³⁶ Stoker, *Dracula*, 181.

³⁷ Stoker, 478.

³⁸ Marjorie Howes, "The Mediation of the Feminine: Bisexuality, Homoerotic Desire, and Self-Expression in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 30, no. 1 (1988): 106, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40754849?seq=1>.

³⁹ Howes, 106.

⁴⁰ Howes, 106.

directly.”⁴¹ Although never mentioned explicitly (because Jonathan did not record it as he wanted to forget the whole matter altogether) the reader can assume that the Count and his Brides have drunk from him. Furthermore, he was unconscious afterwards in which the Count could have done other things to him. The scene itself was erotic in nature, with the Count’s “fair cheeks blazing red with passion.”⁴² Yet because vampirism is homosexuality in disguise, Jonathan completely omits the actual act of bloodsucking out of his records.

Although there is much evidence that supports homosexual repression, another reading by McCrea shows that homoeroticism in the novel is used to figure out what a public, marital relationship would look like to a closeted homosexual. *Dracula* has two spheres: the private and the public.⁴³ The private sphere is where individual desires are expressed, and the public sphere is how people ought to act in the outside world. While some scholars, such as Schaffer and Howes, see the gay closet in *Dracula* as the fear of homoeroticism and anxiety about being homosexual, McCrea assumes that, from a queer standpoint, someone in the gay closet (somebody who loves men) wants to know what loving another from the same sex would look like in the public sphere.⁴⁴

The article draws parallels between the gay closet and the marriage-plot found in, for example, Austen novels. Mina and Lucy exist within the public sphere and write to each other in what looks to be a marriage-plot, where they are both excited about getting married to the men they love.⁴⁵ Jonathan, in moving to Transylvania, shifts from the public sphere of his ordinary accountant job to a strange part of the world that seems ominous. Although ominous and scary, Jonathan is still seduced by Dracula’s mistresses. McCrea argues that the scenes in Transylvania are, in fact, portraying heterosexual marriage where Jonathan takes on the role of the wife, in parallel to the marriage plot readers see in Mina’s first journal entries.⁴⁶ Supporting arguments for this are Jonathan writing at his desk about how he imagines ladies to have sat at the same desk, wherein he explicitly describes the marriage-plot heroine.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Howes, 107.

⁴² Stoker, *Dracula*, 49.

⁴³ Barry McCrea, “Heterosexual Horror: Dracula, the Closet, and the Marriage-Plot,” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 43, no. 2 (2010): 252-253, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40959705>.

⁴⁴ McCrea, 253.

⁴⁵ McCrea, 254.

⁴⁶ McCrea, 255.

⁴⁷ McCrea, 265.

It makes little sense, however, to discuss Jonathan's stay at Dracula's castle as a heterosexual marriage. If that were the case, Stoker could have chosen to send Jonathan off to a female vampire instead, but that would clearly diminish any instances of homoerotic desire. Instances that are essential to the novel, given Stoker's own backstory regarding Oscar Wilde. Even so, McCrea's reading of *Dracula's* gay closet being the place where homosexual men can envision – through Castle Dracula – what their desires would look like if they expressed them publicly is just as feasible a reading as Schaffer and Howes' is about repression of desire. As will be explained further in the next chapter, the second episode 'Blood Vessel' introduces a closeted homosexual who hides his secret relationship with his black servant by being engaged to a woman.

Finally, all of these aspects are very complex below-the-surface readings of homoerotic desire in Stoker's novel, but there is still one direct surface element that proves the presence of (homo)erotic tints the novel contains. That one is, of course, Dracula's infamous line: "This man belongs to me!"⁴⁸ as he tells off his mistresses for trying to attack Jonathan without Dracula's permission. There is no such explicit scene in the Netflix series, but the disease parallel, blood connections, repression, and the gay closet are incorporated one way or another.

Now that there is an understanding of the background that frames the novel, as well as of the homoeroticism in the novel itself, the latest *Dracula* adaptation can be analysed to see just how homoerotic it really is.

⁴⁸ Stoker, *Dracula*, 49.

Chapter 2. Unintentionally Bi: An Identity Struggle in Netflix's *Dracula* (2020)

Fast forward two-hundred years later and *Dracula*'s ambiguous sexuality still leaves a bitter taste in some people's mouth. "He's bi-homicidal, it's not the same thing. He's killing them, not dating them," co-creator Steven Moffat said to *The Times* because audiences criticized Netflix's 2020 adaptation of *Dracula* for the main antagonist being bisexual.⁴⁹ Before biting into this show and analysing how it portrays homoeroticism, the change in vampire media and its audience's reception of it needs to be explained. Afterwards, there will be an overview of the show regarding its fidelity in relation to the novel, followed by an analysis of homoeroticism in each episode. Evidence presented in the episodes will show that *Dracula* (2020) does have its homoerotic moments and characters, and even goes as far as to represent a sexual identity struggle.

2.1 The Modern Vampire

Vampires have remained immensely popular throughout fiction and cinema history, whether that be as a horrific monster or a damned lover. This is evident through all the *Dracula* adaptations, as well as more modern instances of vampire narratives, such as Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) and Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* (2005). Of course, a progression of history is tied to everchanging morals, ideals, and perceptions of things. Values change, as becomes clear by examples such as the legalisation of same-sex marriages in the United States from the 1970s onwards. As a result, today's audience would read Stoker's novel very differently from a Victorian one because of this change. At the time it was written the vampire was meant to evoke horror and repulsion as a threat to British society.⁵⁰ *Dracula* was everything a human was not, or not supposed to be: immortal, damned, and sinful.⁵¹ His contrast to the virtuous heroes made for a morality play which showed how people should act, and how people should not.

Nowadays, however, *Dracula*'s transgressive nature is received very differently. While the vampire was repulsive during the Victorian era, it has now

⁴⁹ David Opie, "Is BBC's *Dracula* gay, or very gay?" *Digital Spy*, last modified January 6, 2020, <https://www.digitalspy.com/tv/a30415965/dracula-bbc-tv-gay-lgbtq-queer-netflix/>.

⁵⁰ Joana Passos, "Postmodern Gothic: Teen Vampires," In *Dracula and the Gothic in Literature, Pop Culture and the Arts*, ed. Isabel Ermida (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 224. doi: https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/9789004308060_012.

⁵¹ Passos, 226.

become an object of desire. On the one hand, this desire comes from vampires' seductiveness. Vampires allow for a possibility of immortality by dying, making vampire fans unconsciously attracted to the imagery of death.⁵² This unconscious attraction is tied to Sigmund Freud's theory on Eros and Thanatos.⁵³ Thanatos is the death drive, which can cause people to act riskily up to the point where they might potentially die.⁵⁴ Its opposite is the life drive, Eros, and, according to Lima, these two are interconnected within vampires. People are attracted to danger and risk, and a vampire contains plenty of risk with a chance of killing his victims. Furthermore, the vampire is a fictional being that cannot harm a person in real life, unlike a criminal, which is why people may find this risk attractive.⁵⁵

The popularity of the vampire also stems from self-reflection. Vampires are capable of projecting anxieties, conflicts, or desires.⁵⁶ Along with the shift of perceptions in vampires came the shift in target audience, which explains the portrayal of contemporary vampires. The main vampire audience today is that of teenagers.⁵⁷ Narratives such as *Twilight* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* prove this. Teenagers are at the start of a journey of self-reflection, which is precisely why the vampire appeals to them so much. They become a group that collectively search for self-discovery and alternative lifestyles.⁵⁸ The vampire is essentially an outcast with an identity struggle of its own, making it relatable to young audiences. This shift in audience perception is portrayed in Netflix's *Dracula* through a literal time skip at the end of the second episode. Mina Murray found Dracula terrifying, yet present-time Lucy Westenra, who has an identity crisis of her own, finds him alluring. She is aware of her beauty, but also knows it is the only reason she receives attention: "Everyone smiles when you're beautiful."⁵⁹ Her tone is disappointing, indicating that people are

⁵² Maria Á. Lima, "Forever Young, Though Forever Changing: Evolution of the Vampire," In *Dracula and the Gothic in Literature, Pop Culture and the Arts*, ed. Isabel Ermida, (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 260, doi: https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/9789004308060_014.

⁵³ Lima, 260.

⁵⁴ Lima, 260.

⁵⁵ Lima, 263.

⁵⁶ Mathias Clasen, "Attention, Predation, Counterintuition: Why Dracula Won't Die," *Style* 46, no. 3-4 (2012): 392, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/style.46.3-4.378>.

⁵⁷ Passos, "Postmodern Gothic: Teen Vampires," 230.

⁵⁸ Passos, 231.

⁵⁹ *Dracula*, episode 3, "The Dark Compass," directed by Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat, featuring Claes Bang and Dolly Wells, aired January 4, 2020, BBC, Netflix. <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80997697?trackId=13752289&tctx=0%2C0%2C786827c0753475f0512d84a91149a4e32f3de003%3A8a94fab3b039bc7d0f7afd65b90162d3a01705f0%2C786827c0753475f0512d84a91149a4e32f3de003%3A8a94fab3b039bc7d0f7afd65b90162d3a01705f0%2Cunknown%2C>.

not genuine towards her and that she has no clear identity outside of her beauty. Because Dracula says he does not love her, not giving her the same attention her friends do, she becomes attracted to him. He is, in turn, an outcast, like herself.

With the shift of the vampire narrative, the vampire itself has also changed considerably. Dracula's transition to a more overtly sexual presence began with the 1950s adaptation starring Christopher Lee. This was due to the concept of the 'new woman' that began to emerge in post second-world war America, in which there was a fear of sexual equality.⁶⁰ Although the Hammer films were British made, they were immensely popular overseas. Women became more assertive and open about their desires, causing Dracula to help express this suppressed desire.⁶¹ His female victims would openly wait for him to arrive and feel pleasure from his bite instead of fearing the monster. Four decades later, Dracula has evolved to such an extent that he had become a tragic, romantic hero. Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) had the first director to give Dracula a motive for his eternal damnation: love.⁶² This allowed audiences to sympathise with him, as Dracula was damned for losing the love of his life. He has become a Byronic hero, aligned with Lord Byron's poetic heroes who place their personal ethics over those of society.⁶³ For fans of the horror genre, this romantic lover vampire came as a disappointment; however, this is what started the audience shift to teenagers and young adults.⁶⁴ Yet Dracula's latest adaptation might serve as a counter reaction to this tragic hero.

This shift in the vampire, in turn, also allowed for Dracula (and other vampires) to become more homoerotic in nature. Especially the last few decades have shown an increase of male homoerotic and homosocial relationships.⁶⁵ One example of this would be the complicated relationship between Louis and Lestat in Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), where at a certain point they create a vampire child together and become gay parents. With the rise of homophobia before the nineteenth century, homosocial desire was expressed more openly.⁶⁶ It is

⁶⁰ Meraj A. Mubarki, "Reorienting Dracula: From Nosferatu to Dracula Untold," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 38, no. 2 (2020): 97, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509208.2020.1764801>.

⁶¹ Mubarki, 97.

⁶² Passos, "Postmodern Gothic: Teen Vampires," 230.

⁶³ Mubarki, "Reorienting Dracula: From Nosferatu to Dracula Untold," 101.

⁶⁴ Passos, "Postmodern Gothic: Teen Vampires," 230.

⁶⁵ Andrew Schopp, "Cruising the Alternatives: Homoeroticism and the Contemporary Vampire," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 30, no. 4 (1997): 235, https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ru.idm.oclc.org/doi/pdfdirect/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1997.3004_231.x.

⁶⁶ Schopp, 236.

important to know that homosocial bonds are not the same as homoeroticism or homosexuality; the former simply means two men interacting with each other in a friendly manner. As homosexuality became more linked to identity, leading to homosexual panic, homosocial desire became more socially accepted.⁶⁷ According to Schopp, Sedgwick has argued that *Dracula* is an example of homosocial bonding (Jonathan and Dracula bond by wanting to have something from each other) instead of a homoerotic one and that it reflected homophobia.⁶⁸ As vampire narratives reflect societal ideologies, so does it reflect views on sexuality. *The Lost Boys* (1987), for example, was made during the AIDS crisis, and taking into consideration that blood is interchangeable with semen, the main character's fear of the vampires alludes to this homophobia.⁶⁹ Whether accepting homosexuality or discarding it, vampire narratives do continue to present it one way or another.⁷⁰

2.2 The Adaptation

These changes in vampires, cinema, and homosexuality all link back to Netflix's *Dracula* (2020), as it is a modern – and the most recent - adaptation. This mini-series is an adaptation, meaning that, in terms of fidelity, it can incorporate elements from the source text in one way or another, depending on the adapter's interpretation of it. Because *Dracula* has been adapted so much over the course of the past hundred years, it is not just based on the source text alone. In fact, new adaptations always look at the previous one.⁷¹ Every director has a different interpretation of the narrative, and since every director comes from a different time period, the narrative and *Dracula* himself evolve along accordingly. Every interpretation of *Dracula* is associated with the actor who plays him, and several elements keep recurring in newer adaptations.⁷² Coppola's adaptation, for example, has a Dracula as an old man with a foreign accent, as he was described in the novel, yet older adaptations (with Bela Lugosi or Christopher Lee) had only one of these things.⁷³

⁶⁷ Schopp, 236.

⁶⁸ Schopp, 236.

⁶⁹ Schopp, 237.

⁷⁰ Schopp, 238.

⁷¹ Mario Vrbanić and Senka Božić-Vrbanić, "Different Adaptations: The Power of the Vampire," *SIC Journal* 1, no. 2 (2011): 9, doi: <https://doi.org/10.15291/sic/2.1.lc.4>.

⁷² Vrbanić, 8.

⁷³ Frances Pheasant-Kelly and Natalie Russell, "Revisionist Vampires: Transcoding, Intertextuality, and Neo-Victorianism in the Film Adaptations of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," In *Neo-Victorian Villains*,

Netflix's *Dracula*, starring Claes Bang as the Count, appears to have taken Coppola's old and foreign form, as well as his shift to a younger Englishmen. In fact, much of the first episode is faithful to the original novel, and looks reminiscent to Coppola's scenes at Castle Dracula. Both castles give a cold and mysterious atmosphere, and both Counts look old and speak with an accent. Jonathan arrives at the castle only to be slowly submitted to being Dracula's prisoner, as he watches Dracula slowly become younger and lose his foreign accent after every feeding he has. Whenever Dracula is away, Jonathan goes out exploring, and he even finds Dracula asleep in his coffin.

It is not until an hour of the episode has passed that things begin to change: Jonathan tries to kill Dracula rather than escape, he becomes a vampire himself and dies in the Budapest convent where he was interrogated by Sister Agatha. From there, Jonathan is no longer the main hero of the story; Sister Agatha is. Episode two follows the ship the *Demeter*, which has more passengers than just the crew present in the novel. Then, the heroine changes again as Agatha dies on the *Demeter*, and Dracula wakes up more than a century later and is faced with Agatha's descendant, Zoe Helsing. It is in the third and final episode that the other main characters – Dr. Seward, Quincey, and Lucy – appear as young adults. In terms of fidelity, then, no, it is not very faithful. The narrative slowly deviates significantly from the source material, yet a lot of characters and situations remain, albeit reimaged. Knowing the bigger picture of how this adaptation differs from previous works and its source, it is now possible to analyse how the show incorporates homoeroticism.

The first episode, 'Rules of the Beast', begins with Jonathan's account of visiting Castle Dracula, although it initially starts with him talking to Sister Agatha during his stay at the convent in Budapest, after his escape. Even before the opening credits begin, Sister Agatha asks Jonathan a rather controversial question: "I'm asking you, mister Harker, if you had sexual intercourse with Count Dracula."⁷⁴

Controversial because of the creators' statement regarding Dracula's sexuality. As mentioned at the start of this chapter, the creators intended Dracula to be *bi-homicidal*

ed. Benjamin Poore, (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 333-334, doi: https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/9789004322257_018.

⁷⁴ *Dracula*, episode 1, "Rules of the Beast" directed by Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat, featuring Claes Bang and Dolly Wells, aired January 4, 2020, BBC, Netflix. <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80997695?trackId=13752289&ctx=0%2C0%2C786827c0753475f0512d84a91149a4e32f3de003%3A8a94fab3b039bc7d0f7afd65b90162d3a01705f0%2C786827c0753475f0512d84a91149a4e32f3de003%3A8a94fab3b039bc7d0f7afd65b90162d3a01705f0%2Cunknown%2C>.

and not bisexual, meaning that he murders both men and women rather than feeling attracted to them. Whether or not Dracula really is bisexual or not is up for interpretation, as the show does maintain the novel's ambiguity regarding homoeroticism. Dracula is not necessarily bisexual, but he is definitely having a sexual identity crisis. Despite that, these episodes still incorporate other homoerotic aspects, some more explicit than others. Some of these aspects are, for example, secret gay couples or the insinuation that Dracula and Jonathan were intimate with each other, however, the remainder of this chapter will further explain these.

“Rules of the Beast” is, for the most part, faithful to the source text, and especially Jonathan’s repression of his experience has been given prominent attention in this adaptation. Sister Agatha said he left out disturbing details in his written account so he would not disturb Mina.⁷⁵ The show goes even further by giving Jonathan amnesia, as he eventually forgets Mina’s face. When Mina reveals herself at the convent, Jonathan has a difficult time recognizing her. This harks back to Howes’s theory on bisexuality through misplaced feminine desires and its repression of it because of anxiety. Similarly to the novel, Jonathan represses his traumatic experience, and the show’s other allusions to Dracula being homoerotic strengthen Jonathan’s repression of homosexuality. When Dracula prepares to feed on Jonathan, he imagines having intercourse with Mina, until her appearance shifts abruptly to the Count. Agatha then tells him “there is no shame in it.”⁷⁶ Furthermore, she mentions sexual intercourse a second time: “You have been contaminated with something. Any contact you had with Count Dracula, sexual or otherwise, is therefore relevant.”⁷⁷

Although never explicitly shown, much like the novel the assumption of homoeroticism between Jonathan and Dracula is very much present. As Sister Agatha implies same-sex intercourse at least three times, the idea that said intercourse actually occurred must be so. Her last statement on the matter also refers back to homosexuality being a disease, as Jonathan’s body was visibly decaying after having been drunk from by Dracula. This metaphor – vampirism and homosexuality as a disease – will be especially prominent in the final episode. It implies that Dracula’s blood is like poison, and that blood still connects people, although not necessarily erotically. Renfield’s famous quote ‘the blood is the life’ has been changed to ‘blood

⁷⁵ *Dracula*, “Rules of the Beast”.

⁷⁶ *Dracula*, “Rules of the Beast”.

⁷⁷ *Dracula*, “Rules of the Beast”.

is lives', on which Sister Agatha also asks confirmation on. Blood no longer creates life itself, but blood connects all lives together. Dracula gains knowledge by drinking blood, for example becoming more fluent in English, which means that he is also particular with his victims. As he searches for them rather than feeding blindly, there could be some form of attraction that influences his search, yet that again does not need to be erotically charged. Still, his relationship with Jonathan, especially when he calls him his 'bride', hints at homoeroticism just as much as the novel did.⁷⁸ Critical viewers can still give Dracula the benefit of the doubt, as it is just the first episode, but there are already too many hints that point at what Dracula's sexual identity is.

The series continues with 'Blood Vessel', when Dracula travels to England on the Demeter. This episode contains the most explicit form of homoerotic desire through Lord Ruthven (of which the name belongs to another fictional vampire from John Polidori's *The Vampyre*, written before Stoker's *Dracula*) and his black 'servant', Adisa. As the episode progresses, it becomes more apparent to viewers that they are secretly an item, and that Lord Ruthven's marriage to Dorabella is merely pretence, as Ruthven himself says "This marriage is a necessary evil."⁷⁹ The show then reveals that Dracula is aware of this relationship, as he has chosen all the passengers aboard. This can be explained by him choosing his victims carefully, as was made clear in the previous episode. It shows that Dracula has indeed an interest in the homoerotic, and that is supported by the way he acts around Lord Ruthven during the episode. He places his hand rather seductively on Ruthven's knee in one scene, and later on when Dracula's identity is exposed to the passengers he says "I was so enjoying the voyage. And the people,"⁸⁰ all while looking at the lord. Ruthven then decides to help Dracula because he was promised immortality, and calls Dracula 'seductive' as well as wonders "what he sees in me."⁸¹ Although short-lived, their relationship is very erotically charged and really counterargues the creators' statements that deny Dracula's queerness.

The secret relationship between Ruthven and Adisa is also an example of

⁷⁸ *Dracula*, "Rules of the Beast".

⁷⁹ *Dracula*, episode 2, "Blood Vessel," directed by Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat, featuring Claes Bang and Dolly Wells, aired January 4, 2020, BBC, Netflix.
<https://www.netflix.com/watch/80997696?trackId=13752289&tctx=0%2C0%2C786827c0753475f0512d84a91149a4e32f3de003%3A8a94fab3b039bc7d0f7afd65b90162d3a01705f0%2C786827c0753475f0512d84a91149a4e32f3de003%3A8a94fab3b039bc7d0f7afd65b90162d3a01705f0%2Cunknown%2C>

⁸⁰ *Dracula*, "Blood Vessel".

⁸¹ *Dracula*, "Blood Vessel".

McCrea's theory on the gay closet and marriage. Ruthven is a closeted homosexual, disguising it by being married to a woman. Dorabella functions as the mediating female, a sort of transmitter that allows Ruthven to be with Adisa. He, as a matter of fact, uses Dorabella to see what life out of the closet could be like, except, society does not allow for such a relationship to be with a man, let alone a person of colour who poses as his servant. As more people on the ship die, at some point including his wife Dorabella, Ruthven drops the façade by expressing his desire towards Dracula. Once he is dead too, Adisa admits their relationship was more than just master and servant: "He wasn't my master."⁸²

Returning once again to Howes's theory on the misplaced feminine desires, this episode also provides a scene similar to the one with Jonathan in the previous episode. One of the crewmates fancies Dorabella and ends up wounded. He has a fever dream where Dorabella is being intimate with him, but then the image morphs into Dracula who proceeds to feed on him. The fact that Dracula manipulates his male victim's mind into imagining a woman while he is committing an erotic act on him points to homosexual panic. The episode also points back to Sedgwick's theory on the *Dracula* narrative being homosocial in nature rather than homoerotic and that it reflects homophobia. This makes Netflix's Dracula an all the more complex character, as he seems to be interested in men – based on his relationships with Jonathan and Ruthven – but still uses the images of women to shield his homoerotic desire while feeding. The show tries to be more progressive regarding homosexuality, but ultimately remains in the conservative notions of Victorian sexuality. Still, this could be a conscious choice, as the first two episodes take place during the Victorian period. The third and final episode makes a big time leap to the present era to which Dracula is exposed. Perhaps his identity struggle is linked to the time period he experiences, the same way homosexuality changed from being repressed and regarded as demonic in the Victorian era to more commonly accepted nowadays.

'The Dark Compass', which is the final episode, has Dracula adapting to modern England, as Sister Agatha destroyed the *Demeter* along with herself and sent Dracula sinking to the bottom of the ocean in his coffin, where he lied dormant for over a century close to the English coast. When he awakes, he is confronted with Agatha's descendant, Zoe Helsing who detains him. Their relationship, as well as that

⁸² *Dracula*, "Blood Vessel".

of Dracula and Lucy Westenra, forms the main focus of this episode, although there is also a rather stereotypical gay character that deserves some attention later.

This is also the episode where the metaphor of vampirism (and consequently homosexuality) as a disease is most prominent. It is revealed that Zoe Helsing has cancer, which is a literal disease. When Dracula tries to drink from her, his body rejects her blood because it is poisonous to him.⁸³ As was established earlier, blood connects people, both in the novel and the adaptation. When Dracula drinks from his victims, they lose their strength and their health decreases, leading to, for example, loss of hair and nails. His blood is poison to humans, and the humans' blood intermingles with his. When he drinks from Agatha, he says, "You'll travel to the new world in my veins,"⁸⁴ meaning that they are connected, even when Agatha dies because her blood is now in his body.

Throughout the three episodes, the word 'contamination' has been used multiple times in relation to Dracula, indicating that he is, in fact, a parasite trying to invade others.⁸⁵ Stoker's novel established that vampirism was a metaphor for homosexuality. Vampirism was also, in turn, described as a disease. This adaptation then visualizes this aspect of homosexuality as a disease, and something that must be destroyed. The show ends with Dracula drinking from Zoe in order to end her suffering, but also to kill himself. The major plot twist at the end of the show is that Dracula fears death. This explains why Dracula fears sunlight and the cross even though they pose no actual threat to him. Him drinking Zoe's infected blood is him accepting death at long last, ultimately destroying his queer identity.

The final episode leans more on the repression and destruction of homosexuality after all, as another example of this is shown at the beginning when Dracula stands in front of a mirror. He says, "I don't see any less in the mirror than you do. I see more,"⁸⁶ as the mirror shows his old, ugly form. This is a clear reference to the ugliness of Oscar Wilde, as Schaffer argued that, in the novel, Jonathan expects to see Dracula's ugly reflection in the mirror.⁸⁷ Even though history and views on

⁸³ Laure Blanchemain Faucon, "Permeable Viewpoints and Parasitic Influence in BBC and Netflix's Dracula," In *Journal of Dracula Studies*, (Pennsylvania: Transylvanian Society of Dracula, 2020), 62, <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/dracula-studies/>.

⁸⁴ *Dracula*, episode 3, "The Dark Compass".

⁸⁵ Faucon, "Permeable Viewpoints and Parasitic Influence in BBC and Netflix's Dracula," 59.

⁸⁶ *Dracula*, "The Dark Compass".

⁸⁷ Talia Schaffer, "A Wilde Desire Took Me": The Homoerotic History of Dracula," *ELH* 61, no. 2. (1994): 388-389, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2873274?seq=1>.

homosexuality have changed, Dracula, being immortal, has not. In a new world filled with an LGBTQ community and people who no longer fear him for what he is, he remains stuck in time, and stuck in the old ways of the Victorians. He tries to adapt, by moving into a luxurious penthouse, using gym equipment and even using a mobile phone. While on his phone, he uses a dating app on which he tries to find his victims. Again, he is shown choosing his victims carefully by swiping left or right. His adapting ultimately fails in the end; he represses his queer identity, opting for death instead, and his poisonous blood leads him to destroying himself.

The show also presents the change in time and audience by introducing a character who has no link to the original narrative whatsoever: Lucy's gay best friend, Zev. Zev comes off as a stereotype with his character, trying to give an example of the present-day gay community. Considering he is not one of Stoker's characters, or related to any of them, his inclusion feels odd and unnecessary. Although he knows Lucy is seeing someone, he has no interaction with Dracula at all. His relationship with Lucy does show, however, how the modern youth lives by, for instance, going to night clubs and drinking. He serves as the normal stereotype of a young adult and accentuates the changed target audience of vampire narratives, while Lucy represents the teens who no longer fear vampires.

To summarize, the show does, in fact, incorporate instances of homoeroticism that draw close to the parallels of the source text, despite steering away from the original narrative. The relationship between Jonathan and Dracula is still mysterious and erotically charged, and vampirism is still a disease. Having Dracula himself as one of the main characters rather than an antagonist that moves to the background after the first few chapters allows for his character development and identity struggle. His interest in Lord Ruthven implies that Dracula is more queer here than he was in Stoker's novel, although he still tries to repress his homoeroticism.

Conclusion

Being an adaptation of many, Netflix's *Dracula* is a partially faithful one in terms of certain plot elements, but, most importantly, homoerotic metaphors that were presented in Stoker's original novel. The novel itself is arguably Stoker's own coping with his sexual identity. Schaffer has explained that this was because of his complex relationship to Oscar Wilde, who was publicly seen as ugly and monstrous by being homosexual, ultimately leading up to his trials for sodomy. As has been explained, homoeroticism was publicly frowned upon in the Victorian era, and it has taken roughly a century for that view to slowly undergo change, for example through the American protests by queer activists against the APA. Nowadays, there is a whole school of queer theory that debates whether or not homosexuality and queerness is an identity, and what it is that defines queerness.

Although sexuality itself was a widely discussed topic, the Victorians saw homosexuality as a sin and something diabolical, and they sought to repress and get rid of it. The article by Adut strengthened this argument by explaining that only in Britain there were strong penalties against male homosexuality in that age.

Only some scholars agree that *Dracula*'s homoerotic narrative was created through Stoker's own struggle with repressing his desire, yet most acknowledge that vampirism was indeed a metaphor for homoerotic desire. Howes's theory of repression, for example, which was expressed through Jonathan undergoing mental trauma, and the destruction of Dracula. An opposite reading of that was McCrea's, where there is a desire to come out of the closet through the marriage-plot, with evidence for that being Jonathan and Dracula acting as a married couple with Jonathan assuming the role of the wife. Another parallel some scholars drew was that the blood transfusions between the male characters stood for homosexual intercourse, as the phrase 'the blood is the life' implies that blood connects people, and that blood could be interchangeable with semen because of this.

All of these theories pointed back to the conclusion that *Dracula* can, in fact, contain homoerotic elements among other themes, and it shows in many adaptations that have followed. The concept of fidelity is still a topic of discussion when it comes to adaptation theory, although many theorists want to steer away from it in order to appreciate the adaptation as a work of its own. Hutcheon's text explained that this is

because fidelity takes away the creative freedom of adapters and causes the adaptation to always remain in the shadows of its source material.

Netflix's *Dracula* has been shown to be much more creative and less faithful than some other adaptations may have been, and that is thanks to the sociological developments of the past decades. As Passos and Lima argued, in the same manner that homosexuality has evolved, the vampire narrative has done so too, as well as cinema in general. The vampire narrative changed the vampire from a monster to a desired figure who is an outcast due to its immortality. Its search for meaning and identity in the world has appealed to adolescents, as they can relate to the situation. Therefore, the target audience also shifted from adult to teen, which has led to many young adult vampire fictions such as *Twilight*. Furthermore, homoeroticism became a much more prominent topic in various vampire narratives due to the increased acceptance in homosocial bonding, despite the fact that many (for example *The Lost Boys*) presented it alongside homophobia.

Many of these developments in vampire fictions, as well as the disregard of fidelity, is evident in the Netflix adaptation. The narrative of the first episode is mostly true to its source material until it deviates significantly from the last thirty minutes onwards. The nudges towards homoerotic desire, which were already present in the novel, are much more explicit here, such as direct questions about whether or not Jonathan had intercourse with Dracula. Many of the allegories, metaphors and other parallels to homoeroticism presented in the novel, which critics have argued in favour of, present themselves in the series.

Firstly, Howes's theory of homosexual repression was visualized directly from the novel. Jonathan left out details in his written account, it was never shown nor mentioned how he escaped the castle, and he realizes that he has forgotten the face of his fiancée. His experience at the castle was so traumatic he mentally repressed it, along with repressing his homoerotic desire.

Secondly, the show provides multiple instances of a mediating female figure. When Dracula feeds on Jonathan, Jonathan imagines he is together with Mina until her face warps into that of Dracula. The same thing happened in the second episode with one of the Demeter's crewmates, who imagined Dorabella. As the theory by Howes explained, men would put a female figure in between them to account for their misplaced feminine desire. Homosexuality was not regarded as existent, meaning that men's desire towards other men came from a female source. The Victorians, then,

assumed homosexuality was actually bisexuality.

Thirdly, blood still connects people, for example when blood intermingles through transfusions or drinking from each other. Dracula gains knowledge from his victims because their blood flows through his veins. This implies that his drinking does not necessarily need to be an erotic act. His blood infects their bodies, but their blood strengthens him, and a part of them remains with him. Dracula and Sister Agatha establish a deep connection this way where, even after her death, her spirit is still with him. This is, of course, not homoerotic, and the show decided to leave out the erotically tinted part where nearly all the men of the story would fuse their blood into Lucy.

Lastly, the show heavily emphasizes Faucon's theory of vampirism and homosexuality being a disease. Sister Agatha literally uses words such as 'contaminate' and 'infect' when referring to Dracula, as his blood drinking decreases his victims' health severely. Their faces sink, and they lose their hair and fingernails. When Dracula drinks from Zoe, he spits it out because she has cancer and her blood is poisonous to him.

Although the show's creators speak against it, *Dracula* really is as homoerotic as possible. Whether Dracula is bisexual or just bi-homicidal does not matter in the argument, because the show draws on too many elements that refer back to the novel written more than a century ago.

As far as the question on how the homoeroticism compares to the novel goes, it still remains in some aspects that were similar to the close reading theories done on the novel. On the one hand, *Dracula* (2020) is more explicit, such as characters asking directly whether there were any instances of male-male intercourse. On the other, it remains close to the source text in the sense that it is left ambiguous by not actually showing said intercourse. Dracula, as the main character, has more plot development which allows for his sexual identity to develop as well. He himself has homoerotic desires but he tries to reject them, therefore not making him bisexual.

Regarding the question as to what aspects influenced the choices made in the adaptation, it is clear from the analysis that both historical and sociological changes have played a role in this. The historical development of queerness and queer theories have allowed for this show to be more explicit in its homoeroticism than the novel could have been, for example by introducing a gay couple. Furthermore, because fidelity has generally been disregarded lately, it became possible for the show to

deviate from the source material. The sociological changes in audience perception have influenced the way Dracula was portrayed in the adaptation and gave him a sexual identity crisis as that appeals to younger audiences.

It is unclear what Dracula's sexual identity is, because he struggles with it himself. As the last scene of the series plays out it becomes clear that Dracula was an outcast – an outcast for being queer. He accepted he was stuck in time and he accepted his defeat, allowing himself and his sexual identity to be destroyed the way it was done in the lifetime he originated from. Knowing he has been facing this struggle makes it more difficult to define whether Dracula is the monster he was written to be in Stoker's novel, or whether he was a Byronic hero like those from previous adaptations. His personality could be the start of a shift back to the fear-inducing Count Dracula, yet his placement as an outcast will most likely remain in future adaptations.

As this is the most recent adaptation up to this point, not much analysis has been done on it. Other theoretical themes could be used in further research, such as how this series incorporates postcolonialism, as that is also a large theme in the original text. Dracula was, outside of being interpreted as a homosexual, seen by postcolonial critics as a foreign 'Other' trying to invade the Western 'Self'. Faucon's article on parasitic invasion already touches on this regarding the 2020 adaptation, but only briefly. Moreover, the adaptation could be analysed from a feminist standpoint, as the female characters are significantly different from Mina and Lucy of the novel. After more than a hundred years, Dracula is still very much homoerotic in nature, and one thing is certain: Dracula, and the vampire, is far from dead.

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