

**Mother Your Monsters**

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### **Mother Your Monsters**

Parents are important. This sounds like an obvious statement: of course parents are important, they shape who you are. However, much of what parents do goes unrecognized, not just the chores they do, or the errands they run, but the time spent raising their children. Reproductive labor, the work that people put into raising children and keeping households, is one of the most underappreciated forms of labor. It has historically been undervalued and underpaid, with women traditionally taking on the task for little to no reward. It is performed in the private domain of the home and includes housework and child rearing. While it is a product of social factors and economic systems, reproductive labor has often been naturalized and understood as a freely chosen “labor of love” (Pupo 29). However, in reality the phenomenon of unpaid women working in the home is a product of power relations and gendered social expectations, where women are “socialized into assuming a role which was socially denigrated, economically marginalized yet culturally romanticized” (Pupo 29). In a capitalist society, this work is “oriented towards the maintenance of life and social bonds rather than the production of commodities” (Adams 397), which diminishes its perceived value. Due both to gendered social roles and capitalist understandings of what is valuable to the economy, the

capacities associated with reproductive labor are devalued and unappreciated.

However, without someone to take on reproductive labor, what happens? Monster stories, specifically *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*, provide a clear representation of the danger of life without reproductive labor and reveal how incredibly important this work really is. *Frankenstein* demonstrates the horror of a person who grows up without a parent to engage in reproductive labor. The creature is not a monster because of his grotesque features, but because Frankenstein shunned him and left him to fend for himself, without someone who was willing to raise him and teach him right from wrong. Similarly, *Dracula* attempts to father a new race of people without engaging in the reproductive labor necessary to guide them, creating a race of monsters. Essentially, these stories suggest that what makes monsters is the lack of reproductive labor that women traditionally undertake, an unappreciated yet indispensable task. These texts have frequently been compared for their gothic themes and settings, however, their focus on men creating life is what most closely connects the texts and reveals cultural themes that still exist today. Both *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* were written in the 1800s, when women were expected to work at home for little to no money. Each depicts a man who wants to create a new race, which will give them power and respect. *Dracula* wants to be the “father or furtherer of a new race” (Stoker 278) while *Frankenstein* believes he shall be owed more gratitude for creating new life than any child ever

owed their father (Shelley 57). However, both refuse to undertake the emotional labor that is required to successfully raise children, and the fact that neither accepts women into their unsuccessful quests to create life reveals the importance of the work that women do in the home. The potential horror of unparented children being monstrous is the core of how these stories emphasize the importance of reproductive labor. Without the emotional labor that parents and especially mothers are expected to undertake, these creatures are reduced to monsters with no hope for redemption. In juxtaposition, these texts also feature women who are framed as the ideal of femininity and motherhood, again illustrating how important these things are to human life. Bram Stoker and Mary Shelley created two very different texts that both highlight the undervalued labor of raising children, and looking at these stories side by side reveals how important reproductive labor and the women who undertake it truly are.

Many scholars have written about *Frankenstein* as a reproductive text and have even discussed Victor's failure to be a father to the being he created. By engaging with other scholars who have examined the text in similar ways and using evidence from the novel, I will set up *Frankenstein* as the framework for how a gothic novel understands reproductive labor. Then, I will demonstrate how *Dracula* allows for the same understanding, despite rarely being analyzed in this way. Other scholars have touched upon the subject of reproduction in *Dracula* but do not reach the conclusion that Stoker is revealing the same message as Mary Shelley on the importance of

reproductive labor and parents. Thomas Stuart discusses how vampirism disrupts potential heteronormative, or reproductive, relationships, but through the lens of Dracula's queerness and his fixation on Jonathan Harker. His analysis of the female vampires' sexuality demonstrates how their eroticism "results not in reproduction but in monstrous consumption and transformation" (220). This lack of reproduction resulting in monstrousness is not, as Stuart claims, a factor of queerness, but rather of the horrifying potential of a woman who will not, or cannot, engage in reproductive labor. Charles Prescott actually does acknowledge the reproductive theme the Mina Harker embodies, but he centers his analysis on how she critiques the New Woman of Victorian England. To him, Mina's juxtaposition with Lucy is meant to demonstrate the threat that these modern women represent to the cultural status quo. Indeed, his final remarks describe how the story which will be passed on to her son is about the "record of her New Woman affinities, her problematic friendship with Lucy, the desirability of a monster, and her overacted propriety," and she must be silent so as not to provoke the men into discovering her failure to live up to their ideal of her (509). In diminishing her final moment as one of passivity, Prescott fails to recognize the way that Mina not only lives up to the maternal ideal held up by Jonathan Harker and Van Helsing but also proves herself to be an active agent in the story and her life. In fact, her maternal instincts are what save the day and defeat Dracula. Prescott and Stuart both fail to recognize how Stoker demonstrates how vital mothers

and reproductive labor are by both highlighting how important women who are willing to engage in reproductive labor are and then highlighting how significantly this can impact individuals and ultimately humanity, in the same way that *Frankenstein* does.

### **Frankenstein's Failure as a Father**

*Frankenstein's* reproductive aspects have been a topic of frequent discussion ever since it was written. Mary Shelley herself referred to the story in reproductive terms, calling it her "hideous progeny" (Shelley 25). Many critics have discussed how her history is reflected in the text, as her mother died during childbirth, and she was "forced to confront the monstrous nature of her own birth" (Conley 248). When she became pregnant with Percy Shelley's illegitimate child, she ran away and had two miscarriages and a child who died soon after birth. The monster reflects this point in her life, being "as nameless as a woman is in patriarchal society, as nameless as unmarried, illegitimately pregnant Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin may have felt herself to be at the time she wrote *Frankenstein*" (Gilbert 241). Throughout her writing, Shelley was focused on the struggles of labor, and the responsibilities of family, and *Frankenstein* can, in many ways, "be considered a 'birth myth,' encompassing Mary's ruminations on birth and death, love and responsibility" (Conley 249). Indeed, the theme of responsibility is as important to birth as creation is. Giving birth, in Mary Shelley's novel, is only part of parenthood; the other part, the duty of caring for one's child, is what truly makes a parent. As Conley puts it in her article

about how technology relates to monstrousness and reproduction, "*Frankenstein*, as well as the context it emerged from, is a story about parenthood—about the care parents must take for their creations, lest they unleash something truly monstrous upon the world" (249). Shelley's own experiences with a dead mother and an absent father are reflected in the significance which she places on caring for your children, a significance which Victor Frankenstein, while clearly aware of, is happy to ignore when it comes to his own creation.

While Frankenstein's obsession with creating life stems in part from his desire for knowledge, it mainly comes from his desire to be worshiped by his creations. While thinking about creating a new species, he imagines that once he is successful, his creation "would bless me as its creator and source: many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I deserve theirs" (Shelley 57). He wants to create new life so that he might receive the gratitude that he felt towards his own parents, without undertaking the reproductive labor which was what truly earned that gratitude. Victor's family is a clear example of successful instances of reproductive labor. His mother and his eventual wife, Elizabeth, represent everything a good woman should be: caring, steadfast, and ready to take on the emotional labor for her entire family. Shelley's female characters are centered in the domestic sphere, expected and willing to carry out the reproductive labor that Victor refuses to engage in. Victor's mother is introduced as a carer,

supporting her ailing father before he dies, Victor himself when he is born (Shelley 41), and then Elizabeth when she catches scarlet fever (Shelley 49). She is represented as “the best of women” (Shelley 49) and passes on her role of caring for the family explicitly to Elizabeth when she dies, telling her that “Elizabeth, my love, you must supply my place to my younger children” (Shelley 49). This passage of maternal duty is a successful one, and Elizabeth takes on that role with grace. After his mother dies, Victor notes that Elizabeth “strove to act the comforter to us all. She looked steadily on life, and assumed its duties with courage and zeal. She devoted herself to those whom she had been taught to call her uncle and cousins” (Shelley 49). Elizabeth quickly steps into the role of nurturer and pseudo mother for the family, including Victor’s father, demonstrating how “cis-women are assumed to be the logical subjects of reproductive labor struggles” (Aizura 192). Her presence as the maternal figure leads to harmony and love within the household, and gratitude from everyone in the family, revealing how gendered Shelley understands this role to be, and how important she recognizes it is.

However, earlier in the novel, the reproductive labor seemed to be spread equally between Victor’s parents. While Victor is growing up, he assigns the duty of his parenting to both his mother and father, who had a “deep consciousness of what they owed towards the being to which they had given life” (Shelley 41). This duty, which is at the core of reproductive labor, is not gendered in this instance: it is a facet of a parent-child



relationship, which always constitutes the need for reproductive labor. Knowing their responsibilities, Victor's parents were loving and nurturing, and Victor "distinctly discerned how peculiarly fortunate my lot was, and gratitude assisted the development of filial love" (Shelley 44). Yet, Victor did not fulfill the duties he owed the monster by caring for him, and so lost that gratitude he had been seeking. When Elizabeth steps into the role, she does so as an adopted child, taking on the duties of a mother because she is a woman and feels the need to earn her place in the Frankenstein family. When Victor's mother falls ill, she asks Elizabeth to take her place as their mother while also urging her to marry Victor (Shelley 49), illustrating that no matter the role a woman has in a family (mother, sibling, or wife), she is always expected to take on the reproductive labor that men require. Thus, Shelley demonstrates that parents, no matter their gender, must always engage in reproductive labor, but it is only women who seem required to do so no matter their relation to who they are caring for. When Victor reflects on his childhood, he says that parents have a duty to their children "to bring up to good, and whose future lot it was in their hands to direct to happiness or misery, according as they fulfilled their duties towards me" (Shelley 41). Clearly, Victor is aware of the importance of caring for and teaching children, but he feels that it does not apply to his own situation. Therefore, when Victor refuses to care for his own creation, despite truly being his father, it leads to violence, pain, and death.

In creating the monster, Victor recognizes that he “was bound towards him, to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being. This was my duty” (Shelley 184). However, the creature’s hideous features make him unwilling to support the creature in the way that parents are meant to. The monster’s grotesque nature, “more hideous than belongs to humanity” (Shelley 74), so overcomes Victor’s senses that he does not recognize him as human, but as something other. This leads him to ignore the creature’s need for guidance and his existence entirely and run back to his family, where he is able to gain a sense of peace in the emotional sanctuary created by his parents and future wife through reproductive labor. Victor continually falls into depressive episodes after learning the truth of the creature he created (Shelley 61, 75, 86, 131), and each time, he is welcomed by his family and nursed back to happiness. His family takes on significant emotional labor for his peace of mind, despite being unaware of why he is upset, and their labor leads him to recover and re-establish himself as the good man he believes himself to be.

The monster, just like Victor, understands the responsibility that Victor should feel towards him, which Victor’s parents felt towards their son. The monster is not even aware at first of what Victor did to him, but as he experiences more of the world, he sees families taking care of each other and realizes he is alone, lamenting, “but where were my friends and relations? No father had watched my infant days, no mother had blessed me with smiles and caresses” (Shelley 110). He becomes aware of this lack

when he lives near a family in the woods for months, who take care of each other, physically and mentally. The father, in particular, draws him in as a figure he had never seen before, and “the silver hair and benevolent countenance of the aged cottager won my reverence” (Shelley 99). His age and benevolence (a standard feature of parents in the novel) are what endear him to the creature who has only thus far seen animals and aggressive humans who react violently to his appearance. The care these family members have for each other moves the creature to live near them for many months, learning how to speak and read English by watching them and naming them his protectors despite never speaking to them (Shelley 110). However, he is unable to truly connect or enter their domestic lives because of his grotesque appearance. When he attempts to speak with the father, who is blind, at first he is welcomed, until the children return and greet him with “horror and consternation” before physically beating him to drive him away (Shelley 121). This rejection from domestic life is what spurs the creature to find his creator. He becomes aware of the debt that parents owe their children through watching this family and therefore also of the lack of fulfillment of this debt on the part of whoever created him. Thus, he seeks Victor out, aware that it is his creator’s fault that society rejects him.

Upon finding Victor in the Alps, the creature asks him, “You, my creator, abhor me; what hope can I gather from your fellow creatures, who owe me nothing?” (Shelley 93). The monster knows that Victor owes him

something, the same way that Victor's parents owed him, but Victor will not do his duty, despite the creature's many requests. After killing Victor's brother and framing the maid, Justine, the monster begs Victor to take him in, and do the duty which they both understand to be necessary for parenthood. He says, "you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us...Do your duty towards me, and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind" (Shelley 92). Here, he attempts to bargain with Victor, first mentioning the duty of parenthood, and then claiming he will not hurt anyone else as long as Victor helps him. Victor is not swayed by this argument at all, insisting that there are no bonds between them, that they are enemies. In this moment, the monster is "definitively rejected by a world of fathers" (Gilbert 243) and has no other parent to seek out. He lays his problems at Victor's feet and blames him for everything that has gone wrong in his life, including the violence he committed, and is rejected again, this time for his actions rather than his appearance.

While Victor may not believe that the monster could be anything but wrong, based upon the horrific physical appearance of its birth (Shelley 60), the monster claims that he is the way he is because of Victor's abandonment. His ugliness is Victor's fault, which barred him from engaging in society. His loneliness is Victor's fault, for creating him and then abandoning him. In his mind, all this means that his violence is Victor's fault as well. Without Victor's support he is "the miserable and the

abandoned... an abortion, to be spurned at, kicked and trampled on” (Shelley 188). His anger at Victor’s rejection leads him to murder Victor’s brother in order to hurt Victor. Then, his plot to frame Justine for the murder is, in his mind, a result of the lack of kindness or willingness from women to engage in reproductive labor, which is itself a consequence of his grotesque features. In essence, he has a face only a mother could love, without a mother to do so, making him murderously angry at all women for not supplying that love. He finds her in a barn after murdering the boy and is overcome with anger at the thought that he “was forever deprived of the delights that such beautiful creatures could bestow; and that she whose resemblance I contemplated would, in regarding me, have changed that air of divine benignity to one expressive of disgust and affright” (Shelley 127). His horrible appearance separates him from society so that he can never be loved, therefore he hates Justine for being beautiful and most likely horrified by her if she ever saw him. Here, “the monster's physical ugliness represents his social illegitimacy, his bastardy, his namelessness” (Gilbert 241), as well as actually facilitating his rejection. In the creature’s mind, Victor’s abandonment of his creature is what makes him a monster, not his appearance.

This rejection of human women is partly what spurs the creature to ask Victor for a female companion, a woman who would not find him monstrous simply because of his image. However, Victor is horrified by the very idea of a female monster because “a female monster- a woman born of

unnatural means, a creature both desirable and horrible- would have been too much of a boundary creature, even within this tale about monstrosity and otherness” (Hawley 221). A female creature would be an inversion of everything Victor understands femininity to be: unnatural, ugly, and yet still with the potential for creating life. One of the biggest fears Victor has about creating the female monster is that she might populate the world with “a race of devils” (Shelley 144). However, he never considers building her without the ability to have children, something that would be very possible as he pieces her together from different bodies. In the end, Victor destroys the female creature before he even considers simply removing her uterus because without the ability to have children, she would be something even more ‘other’ who would “delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness” (Shelley 144). However horrible the male creature is, Victor considers the female one might be ten thousand times as evil because she would be a perversion of femininity. In his mind, he can’t take away the ability to reproduce without making her something unnatural, and he can’t inflict upon the world a woman who might create more beings of such ugliness. Here, removing the confusion of a potentially horrible mother is his only choice. His decision to destroy her instead is what sends the creature into his final murderous rage, resulting in Victor’s death.

Ultimately, Victor’s statement, “I had been the author of unalterable evils” (Shelley 86) is entirely accurate because his rejection and abandonment of a creature to whom he is supposed to have cared for and

his failure to engage in reproductive labor directly leads to the creature's hatred, cruelty, and monstrosity. The reproductive themes in *Frankenstein* are demonstrated through Victor's obsession with creating life, his refusal to engage in reproductive labor, despite his awareness of the fact he should, Elizabeth's easy willingness to take up the maternal role in the Frankenstein family, and the creature's ensuing monstrosity due to the lack of emotional connection with his creator. Using this framework of *Frankenstein* as a reproductive text, I will demonstrate how *Dracula*, another gothic novel, depicts reproductive labor and monstrosity in much the same way.

### **Dracula, The Dreadful Dad**

*Dracula* is rarely interpreted through a reproductive lens. Unlike *Frankenstein*, the theme of creation is far more subtle, dispersed throughout with no obvious moment of birth. However, reproductive labor is still a significant theme throughout, clear through both Dracula's attempts at siring more vampires, and the emotional labor which Mina Harker undergoes for the entire group of vampire hunters. The theme becomes clear through various motifs where unnatural things represent the natural, displaying "type-writers as reproductive machines, bloodsucking as intercourse, zombification as reproduction" (McCrea 254). Dracula's attempts to create a new race ultimately fail because he is unable, or unwilling, to do the emotional labor required of a parent, similar to Victor Frankenstein. Stoker juxtaposes that with Mina's happy willingness to

handle all of the emotional work that the men who are hunting Dracula need, just like Elizabeth is willing to do for Victor. She is presented as the perfect woman and mother because of this, and a large part of the danger of her also turning into a vampire is the fear of her losing that ability to engage emotionally and reproduce naturally. The female vampires from Dracula's castle represent that future: voluptuously beautiful and undead, they are the direct opposite of Mina's caring, motherly nature. This "ruptures reproductive futurity, the basic foundation of the contemporary social structure" (Stuart 219). I argue that *Dracula* highlights the importance of reproductive labor and the women who undertake it through the theme of monstrosity.

Throughout the novel, Dracula's plan revolves around turning others, especially women, into vampires. Van Helsing describes this as his desire to be "the father or furtherer of a new order of beings, whose road must lead through Death, not Life" (Stoker 278). Explicitly stating that Dracula wants to be the father of a new race of beings, similar to Frankenstein's desire, Van Helsing also denotes how their creation will come through death, not life. This indicates how these beings will not be given the same attention that a typical child would be. They are killed in order to become a vampire; their birth is in reverse, and Dracula has no desire to parent them beyond their initial creation. This stems from both the nature of vampires, and from Dracula's apparent inability to love in such a way. When Jonathan Harker stumbles upon the female vampires in Dracula's castle and Dracula comes



to rescue him, the female vampires accuse Dracula of being unable to love. “You yourself never loved; you never love!” (Stoker 48), they tell him, perhaps a bitter reminder that while he may have created them, he does not love them as a parent should. However, Dracula responds by saying, “Yes, I too can love; you yourselves can tell it from the past. Is it not so?” (Stoker, 48). There is no explanation for this later in the book, but it implies that while Dracula used to love these women, at some point he lost the ability or desire to do so. This makes it impossible for him to undergo the emotional labor that is required of a parent and consequently damns the whole of his ‘new race’ to monstrosity in the same way that the creature becomes monstrous without Victor’s parenting.

Dracula’s desire for creating more vampires is also at the core of why he is unable to engage in the duties of a parent. The more vampires he makes, the stronger he becomes; like Victor Frankenstein, he creates life, or Un-Life, in order to strengthen himself. Van Helsing comments that “he ha[s] always the strength in his hand of twenty men; even we four who gave our strength to Miss Lucy it also is all to him” (Stoker 193). Each new vampire lends their strength to Dracula, along with any blood they drink from other people. When the four men give their blood to keep Lucy alive, it transfers that strength to Dracula. Dracula does seem to feel some kinship with the vampires he creates, calling them “flesh of my flesh; blood of my blood; kin of my kin, my bountiful wine-press for a while; and shall be later on my companion and my helper” (Stoker 266). Clearly, they do mean

something to him, but ultimately they are first a “wine-press” as a human, and then only an aide in getting what he truly wants. Interestingly, in his past as a human, Dracula had many children, and, now, as a vampire, he can only live on the earth above their bodies (Stoker 226). Even though, then, he may have been able to truly care for his children, they still serve a purpose to him in death. In a way, the reproductive labor he engaged in for his human family members is what allows him to live as a vampire. Creation is nothing more than a tool to help further his goals, and he does not have to engage in any reproductive labor beyond the initial transformation. This makes his turning of other vampires not an emotionally driven action, but a rational one, akin to Victor’s desire to create life to increase his own reputation.

This is also reflected in the female vampires’ monstrosity, as well as Lucy’s descent into evil. When Jonathan Harker finds female vampires, the first thing he notices is their beauty, calling them “voluptuous” and “fair,” inspiring in him both a “longing” and a “deadly fear” (Stoker 46). This ends with him deciding they are dreadful and horrifying, and not truly women. Comparing them to Mina, he decides “Mina is a woman, and there is nought in common. They are devils of the Pit!” (Stoker 60). This removal of their gender is not accidental; while they may have the bodies of women, they lack something that Harker would consider vital to the female gender: the ability to have and raise children. Their beauty, described as voluptuous, is intimately linked to sex, and the fear they inspire in Jonathan represents the

cultural fear of women's sexuality where "the idealized Mina serves as a stark contrast to the actively sexual vampiric women" (Prescott 490). By removing their gender, he distances human women from that sexuality and qualifies the vampires as Other for wanting sex outside of reproduction. In doing so, he restricts them to devils who have nothing in common with his ideal of femininity, Mina. As vampires, "there is no progress, then, for either of these creatures—no reproduction, nor possibility of evolution, only varying forms of parthenogenesis" (Stuart 221). They can, presumably, still create other vampires, but their ability to naturally reproduce is gone. That they still feel desire only underscores how 'wrong' they are. Their sexuality is a core part of what makes them understood as monsters, specifically because of their inability to reproduce or engage in reproductive labor. They are beautiful imitations of women, without the part that truly matters, the emotional core of caring for others. This mirrors the fear Victor feels about creating a female creature, who he worries will either populate the world with a race of devils or be such an unnatural being he can't fathom creating her (Shelley 144).

The fear of women's sexuality is also evident in Lucy's transformation. Once described as a beautiful, caring woman, when she dies and becomes a vampire, she is reminiscent of an entirely different form of beauty. To Dr. Seward, "the sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness," a "devilish mocker of Lucy's sweet purity" (Stoker 200, 202). At once heartless and wanton, Lucy is as far from

the acceptable form of femininity as possible. She does not care for those she should and is sexualized when sex for her would be purely for pleasure not procreation. She is “an embodiment of dangerous, unbridled femininity, a promiscuous and threatening female” (McCrea 262), with no ability to create life or do the emotional labor that is considered necessary for women in the time period. The process of turning into a vampire falls under the same theme. The scene when Mina is caught drinking Dracula's blood “can be read as one of cunnilingus, more pleasure than procreation” (Stuart 222). Engaging in sex without hope for reproduction would be considered sinful in that time (Prescott 489), and underscores Lucy's fall from true femininity. Nothing, however, does so more than Lucy's attacks on the children in London. Effectively seducing several young children away from their homes, as the “bloofer lady,” Lucy drinks their blood, uncaring of their innocence, and potentially turning them into vampires if she had not been killed (Stoker 203). When she is caught by the men trying to stop her, she carelessly throws “to the ground, callous as a devil, the child that up to now she had clutched strenuously to her breast, growling over it as a dog growls over a bone” (Stoker 200). She seeks out children to use as food, like Dracula used her, clutching them close until they are no longer useful. Without a guide as a vampire, she enacts the same brutal attacks that happened to her before on innocent children, revealing how important reproductive labor is to shaping new life and how the perversion of it leads to cruelty and monstrosity, just as it did with Frankenstein's creature.

### **Mina: The Model of Motherhood**

While Lucy represents the horror of a woman unable to do emotional labor, Mina embodies the perfect woman who happily mothers all the men in the story, just like Elizabeth in *Frankenstein*. Other scholars have discussed how vital Mina is to the story, but they fail to recognize how she demonstrates the value of reproductive labor. From the first moment she is mentioned by Harker, she is depicted as a wonderful, kind, caring woman: the ideal of femininity. Van Helsing describes her as “one of God’s women, fashioned by his own hand to show us men and other women that there is a heaven where we can enter, and that its light can be here on earth. So true, so sweet, so noble, so little an egotist” (Stoker 180). Held up as the perfect woman, she strives and seems to meet the ideal. She is quite literally a schoolmistress, teaching children and shaping the next generation, and despite being the same age, Mina “acts as mentor and teacher to Lucy as well as to her students at her etiquette school” (Prescott 496). She selflessly cares for Lucy, Jonathan, and the other men in the story (who she just met), not just aiding them in capturing Dracula, but taking on emotional labor for all of them. While she is incredibly similar to Elizabeth in *Frankenstein*, she has far more agency, demonstrating how the perfect woman is not just maternal and caring, but also active in getting what she wants. In this instance, the framework of *Frankenstein* as a reproductive text does not cover the importance Stoker places on Mina as both a maternal figure to the men in her life and an intelligent, active woman.

In many instances throughout the novel, the labor she undertakes is not just emotional but can truly be described as reproductive. When Arthur first meets her, he immediately breaks down about losing his fiancée and she comforts him as she would a child.

I felt an infinite pity for him, and opened my arms unthinkingly. With a sob, he laid his head on my shoulder and cried like a wearied child, whilst he shook with emotion. We women have something of the mother in us that makes us rise above smaller matters when the mother is invoked: I felt this big sorrowing man's head resting on me, as though it were that of the baby that someday may lie on my bosom, and I stroked his hair as though he were my own child (Stoker 216).

Naturally falling into the role of mother, for a grown man, she compares his grief to that of a "wearied child" and feels responsible for taking on the burden of his emotions. That she compares him to her own hypothetical future child reveals how immediately she cares about a relative stranger as if he was a family member. She feels pity and is apparently moved to take care of him because she has "something of the mother" in her that exists in all women and is evoked by both children and emotional men. In Stoker's eyes, her shining example should reveal to other woman that this is something that any woman should do for any man because "there is something in woman's nature that makes a man free to break down before her and express his feelings on the tender or emotional side without feeling himself it derogatory to his manhood" (Stoker 215-216). Women are needed

to allow men to feel their emotions without harming their manhood, and so it is the duty of women to engage in emotional and reproductive labor for every man they meet. Mina exemplifies this intentionally, casting herself as “the assistant schoolmistress of etiquette, the devoted helpmate of Jonathan Harker, and the compassionate, maternal shoulder that “manly” men turn to when overcome by emotion. In fact, Mina likes to present herself as Van Helsing describes her” (Prescott 488), as the perfect woman and mother willing to do anything for the people she loves. Mina spends the entire second half of the book caring for the men going after Dracula without complaint.

Even after she has been attacked by Dracula and is in constant mental pain, Mina consistently puts her emotions to the side in order to bolster the men’s state of mind because “no one but a woman can help a man when he is in trouble of the heart” (Stoker 217). Immediately after she is forced to drink Dracula’s blood, she comforts Jonathan when he is upset about what she has gone through, telling him “do not fret, dear. You must be brave and strong, and help me through the horrible task” (Stoker 265). She is the one who needs emotional support, but instead of asking for that, she tells her husband not to worry and asks him to step into his role as the man who will protect her by being brave and strong. The help she asks for is not emotional, but physical, casting herself as the emotional, motherly carer, and Jonathan as the physical, manly protector. When he is distraught over her pain, she looks “at him pityingly, as if he were the injured one” (Stoker

266), unwilling to admit that she is upset as well for fear of hurting him more. Through the next few chapters, Mina continuously refuses to admit her feelings regarding what she has gone through so that she won't upset the men. In Dr Seward's words, Mina "was so good and brave that we all felt that our hearts were strengthened to work and endure for her" (Stoker 269). She was "so pleased with the prospect of anything to do" (Stoker 269) and "was the brightest and most cheerful of us" (Stoker 273), as the group of men attempted to track down Dracula while keeping her completely in the dark about their plans. After they fail, they return to Dr. Seward's house, and Mina immediately forces down her own pain to take care of her husband.

We found Mrs. Harker waiting us, with an appearance of cheerfulness which did honour to her bravery and unselfishness. When she saw our faces, her own became pale as death; for a second or two her eyes were closed as if she were in secret prayer; and then she said cheerfully, 'I can never thank you all enough. Oh my poor darling!' As she spoke, she took her husband's grey head in her hands and kissed it - 'lay your poor head here and rest it. All will yet be well, dear!' (Stoker 283)

She clearly feels distraught over their failure to kill Dracula and save her from her approaching vampirism, but she very quickly hides it, cheerfully comforting her husband. The unselfishness that Seward comments on is at the core of who Mina is and what makes her the perfect woman and mother.



Both Mina's projection as the ideal of femininity and her constant emotional labor reveal how important Stoker believes reproductive labor to be. Mina is what all women should be, and she is someone who constantly engages in reproductive labor for all those around her.

In fact, Mina even manages to care for the being who did such harm to her in the first place. After the first attempt to kill Dracula, the men are in righteous rage, discussing how much they hate and want to kill him. Mina immediately scolds them for looking at it that way, showing pity and compassion for Dracula. As Prescott puts it, "in her role as maternal comforter, she not only consoles Harker and Arthur Holmwood but also feels compassion for Dracula" (Prescott 505). Comparing him to Lucy, she says "that poor soul who has wrought all this misery is the saddest case of all. Just think what will be his joy when he, too, is destroyed in his worser part that his better part may have spiritual immortality. You must be pitiful to him, too, though it may not hold your hands from his destruction" (Stoker 284). She empathizes with his plight, seeing both herself and Lucy in him, despite his treatment of her. She entreats the men to do the same, spreading her morals and values like a mother would to her children. She then weeps when it works and the men agree, listening to her "sweeter counsels" (Stoker 284). Even before this, while reading about how Lucy died, she remarks "one ought to pity anything so hunted as is the Count" (Stoker 215), showing remarkable emotional maturity to feel pity for the thing that killed her friend. This emotional maturity, compassion, and

empathy are vital to her character and to the adoration the others feel for her. Harker remarks "This I know: that if ever there was a woman who was all perfection, that one is my poor wronged darling. I loved her a thousand times more for her sweet pity of last night, a pity that made my own hate of the monster seem despicable" (Stoker 285). A large part of why she is described as the perfect woman is because of her caring nature, which makes the people around her more caring as well. Stoker signifies this empathy as vital to motherhood and women in general, by having the men listen and agree with her values.

It is not a coincidence that the attempt to kill Dracula failed without Mina's aid. After this, she is brought into their plans and becomes the key to Dracula's eventual defeat. By framing Mina's importance as centered around both her domestic skills and emotional capability along with her intelligence and aid in killing Dracula, Stoker reveals not just how important mothers are but also how undervalued. Mina is not allowed to help in the first plan to kill Dracula and does not say anything during the discussion. Later, when they begin to use Mina's link to Dracula to help find him, she flourishes under the responsibility and is vital in finding him. Dr. Seward comments on her intelligence, stating that he knows "she forms conclusions of her own, and from all that has been I can guess how brilliant and how true they must be" (Stoker 295), and Van Helsing refers to their need for "her great brain which is trained like a man's brain, but is of sweet woman" (Stoker 311). This reveals the value Stoker places, not just on

Mina's motherly attributes, but her intelligence and cunning; an intelligence which comes about because she was educated like a man due to her status as a schoolmistress and is directly correlated to teaching. The gendered aspect of her intelligence, which is highly praised, indicates Stoker's approval of women being well educated, like men, in order to better raise children. After Mina successfully discovers Dracula's route home, Van Helsing says, "our dear Madam Mina is once more our teacher. Her eyes have seen where we were blinded" (Stoker 323). In this instance, the term teacher is another way of calling Mina mother, as someone who guides and directs more naive people to better knowledge. This directly relates to a core aspect of reproductive labor which is social reproduction and how to pass on good values (Aizura 188). Therefore, Mina's status as a teacher is vital to understanding her role as the perfect woman and embodiment of motherhood. As well, Mina's attention to detail and tireless work ethic, both common attributes of mothers, is what results in this discovery, and so "in a novel obsessed with the importance of careful note-taking and accurate recording, Mina is the key to the text" (Prescott 491). The men do not have this skill and so fail without her. Here, she is not just teaching children, but full-grown men who still need her motherly and feminine skills to succeed. In this way, Stoker highlights how vital mothers are through his description of Mina's importance in the plot. Her intelligence and feminine attributes are truly the key to saving them from Dracula.

Indeed, the novel ends with Van Helsing saying that Mina and Jonathan's child "will someday know what a brave and gallant woman his mother is. Already he knows her sweetness and loving care. Later on, he will understand how some men so loved her, that they did dare much for her sake" (Stoker 344). The moral of the story is quite literally that everyone understands how incredible Mina is and how she moved men to do good for her sake. That this lesson is meant for their child reveals how Mina's goodness is all meant as an example to her children. Everything about her is meant to make children and raise them correctly. All women should be "good women, whose lives and whose truths may make good lesson for the children that are to be" (Stoker 177). Vampirism, therefore, disrupts everything that women should be. They cannot reproduce, they cannot care for their children, they "cannot die, but must go on age after age adding new victims and multiplying the evils of the world; for all that die from the preying of the Un-Dead become themselves Un-Dead, and prey on their kind" (Stoker 203). In other words, they cannot spread goodness and life as women are expected to do. They can only spread evil and, like a plague, spread vampirism which only increases the evil that they embody. By indicating how monstrous vampirism is and how it is the antithesis of reproductive labor, embodied in Mina, Bram Stoker reveals how important reproductive labor is, as well as the women who undertake it.

### **Conclusion: Comparison and Covering Cultural Shifts**

The similarities between *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* are numerous despite their many differences. The monster in *Frankenstein* is a son, while Dracula is the father. The heroes in *Dracula* save the day and defeat the villain, while Frankenstein dies on his quest for revenge, leaving his body in the creature's hands. The theme of reproduction is overt in *Frankenstein* and much more subtle in *Dracula*. However, on a very basic level, both texts depict a creature which is monstrous because of a lack of reproductive labor. The framework of *Frankenstein* demonstrates a distant father, who does not parent his children, a creature who hurts others because he is not loved, a fear of women who cannot reproduce, and a woman who is represented as the embodiment of domestic life and goodness. In *Dracula*, these motifs are repeated, with Dracula as the distant father, Lucy and the female vampires as the scorned creatures and the terrifying un-reproductive women, and Mina as the perfect woman. Each motif reveals the value of reproductive labor and the women who undertake it, as well as the transparent need of humanity for both. The distant father represents how easy it is for parents to refuse to parent their children. The scorned creation demonstrates the horrifying possibility of someone who is never given the attention they need as a child. The fear of women who cannot reproduce or engage emotionally depicts the value of women who can do such things, which is represented by the woman who is the embodiment of goodness. In this essay, I demonstrated that by including these themes into

the texts, Bram Stoker and Mary Shelley highlight reproductive labor and society's need for the people who will undertake it.

However, *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* were both written in the 1800s in Europe. The gothic settings and monstrous characters are meant to reflect the contemporary understanding of parenthood and mothering, not our modern outlook. The perfect woman having to be a mother is an outdated idea, as well as the fear of women who can't reproduce. Now, women have no requirement to have children, and it is certainly not monstrous for women to be unable. Neither Bram Stoker nor Mary Shelley would have heard of the term 'reproductive labor' or the modern representation of it, but analyzing the texts through this lens reveals that the theme is clearly apparent in their work. It is important to look at these texts as representations of the time period they were written in, but this only makes their valuation of reproductive labor all the more significant. These novels are steeped in the values of their time, and while some potentially regressive beliefs are evident, there are many progressive ideas that need to be examined. Even today, when women have far more agency and control over their lives than they did when Mary Shelley and Bram Stoker were writing, the work they put into the home is ignored. The organization of labor in modern society "not only separates the functions of production and social reproduction, it also subordinates the latter to the demands of the former" (Adams 388). People are forced to prioritize wage earning labor over other forms in order to survive. As a result, they might work full time

with more than one job and still have to come home to spend even more time working as parents, a difficult job even when one is well rested. This is even more prevalent in immigrant families, where mothers may have to work two or three jobs to support their families, while also raising children (Adams 390). These women are overworked, underappreciated, and undercompensated for what should be considered a full-time job.

*Frankenstein* and *Dracula*, however, despite having been written 200 years ago, provide a depiction of reproductive labor that *must* be recognized. They demonstrate how vital it is to society, families, and humanity itself. Without reproductive labor, people become monstrous, and society falls apart. These texts depict reproductive labor's importance and reveal how we as a society must start giving the people who undertake that labor their due respect.

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