

The Vampire and the Prostitute: Sympathetic Monstrosity in Florence

Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire*

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Despite numerous efforts to eradicate sex work in the Victorian period, the world's oldest profession continued to thrive, though what did change was how sex work was viewed. The popular view of the prostitute as a fallen woman influenced mid-century perceptions of sex work, but by the end of the nineteenth century, she began to be seen as a physically degenerate body. Essentially, the sex worker went from a woman who could be potentially saved from a life of sin to an atavistic figure that was beyond help. Not only did the sex worker bodily represent the existence of sexual immorality and social deviance, but she also imposed a physical danger with her potential to spread sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The public debate over the existence of sex work and what to do about its contagious threat appears in the vampire fiction of the era. When the spectre of the prostitute refused to die out, the anxiety over the sex worker began to be displaced onto a monstrous body that could more easily be destroyed: the female vampire.

The connection between the Victorian streetwalker and the walking undead is well-established: both are considered to be sexually assertive nocturnal creatures, and the vampire's infectious bite is a metaphorical extension of the sex worker's potentially contagious body. Female vampires from Le Fanu's *Carmilla* to *Dracula*'s vampire brides are insidious threats who must be eradicated, but what are the implications when the vampire recognizes her contagion and destroys herself? Florence Marryat's little-known 1897 novel *The Blood of the Vampire* is one

such example. Harriet Brandt — Marryat’s vampiric, mixed-race outsider — embodies the Victorian desire for the sex worker to remove herself if she cannot be forcibly exiled; sadly, this can only be achieved through Harriet’s self-immolation. Caught somewhere between a sympathetic portrayal and a villainous one, Harriet Brandt is a literary parallel of the complicated relationship late-century Victorians had with sex work, though, unfortunately for Harriet, these complications ultimately deny her agency and futurity.

Previous studies of *The Blood of the Vampire* have focused on the novel’s obvious intersections between race, atavism, and the decline of empire. Giselle Anatol’s book, *Things that Fly in the Night*, argues that the ‘gender, sexual voracity, race, and vampirism’ of Marryat’s heroine are ‘inextricable’ (2015: 110). For Anatol, *Blood* routinely presents African Caribbean women as ‘compulsively promiscuous, frighteningly uncontained by death, men, domestic spaces, or their lands of origin – they are, in almost every way, abject bodies, out of control’ (111). Similarly, Brenda Mann Hammack notes Harriet’s overt racialization in her article, ‘Florence Marryat’s Female Vampire and the Scientizing of Hybridity’. Hammack focuses on Marryat’s preoccupation with contemporary sociomedical theories, so much so that *Blood* reads ‘like a medical case study’ (2008: 866).¹ Hammack argues that this preoccupation with Harriet’s ancestry and the menagerie of animals she is likened to — a process that has a long history with racist literary depictions — links Harriet to a primitive, degenerate body. Like Dracula, Harriet is a racial Other who threatens to invade England, and her sexuality is a significant part of her Occidentalism.² Building upon Anatol’s emphasis on inherited vampirism, Octavia Davis notes in her article, ‘Morbid Mothers’, that Harriet’s sexuality and her implied ability to reproduce have potentially catastrophic consequences for a novel preoccupied with heredity and bloodlines. Harriet is herself a victim of her cursed bloodline yet has the ability to pass on her genetic

vampirism to the next generation, further weakening the gene pool. According to Sarah Willburn, Harriet's ability to sap others' vitality means she is 'constantly surrounded by death itself' and that this association 'clearly presents a non-white body as the opposite of health and vitality' (2008: 442). Terra Walston Joseph goes one step further and argues that Harriet's unchallenged racist characterization reveals the potentially harmful 'post-emancipation conditions in the British West Indies', and 'ultimately offer[s] fictive justifications for British Crown rule' (2018: 189).

Scholars have also noted that Harriet's brazen sexuality aligns her with the socially liberated New Woman of the *fin de siècle*. Considered to be the visible embodiment of late-century feminism and its challenge to established gender norms, the New Woman was a repeated target of criticism and censure.³ Anti-feminist tracts, like Eliza Lynn Linton's 'The Wild Women as Social Insurgents', condemned the New Woman for 'obliterating the finer distinctions of sex' along with 'the finer traits of civilization' (1891: 597). Carol A. Senf's seminal article, "'Dracula': Stoker's response to the New Woman', argues that the New Woman was more comfortable with sexuality than her Victorian predecessors: '[s]he felt free to initiate sexual relationships, to explore alternatives to marriage and motherhood, and to discuss sexual matters such as contraception and venereal disease' (1982: 35). Senf maintains that the educated and distinctly modern Mina is still uncomfortable with the forwardness of the New Woman — earlier hyperbolically exhibited by Stoker in the monstrously sexual, child-eating brides of Dracula — and that Stoker 'seems to ally himself and his heroine with a more traditional kind of woman' (1982: 37). Elaine Showalter highlights in *Sexual Anarchy* that fear of the New Woman was partly her desire not to marry and have children, thereby actively participating in the racial degeneracy of Britain by refusing to become the next generation of mothers.⁴ Building upon

these arguments, Hammack notes in her introduction to Marryat's novel that anti-feminist sentiment appears throughout *Blood*, particularly in Harriet's infanticidal behaviour. Even though Harriet is not biologically related to the child she ends up killing, 'Harriet manages to afflict by mere proximity, her lethality compounded, evidently, by the New Woman's emotional promiscuity' (2009: viii). Yet fear of sexually liberated women was not concentrated in the New Woman at the end of the nineteenth century. Analyzing Harriet Brandt solely as a New Woman tends to oversimplify aspects of her characterization, and particularly overlooks that Harriet's status as a sexualized, atavistic body infected with the disease of vampirism links her firmly with the Victorian sex worker.

The correlation between vampirism and deviant sexuality is well-established in the scholarly field, though previous scholars have focused heavily on the women in Stoker's *Dracula*. For example, Phyllis A. Roth studies the threatening sexuality of Stoker's vampiric women in her article, 'Suddenly Sexual Women', and notes how that threat must be eradicated in order for the Victorian family unit to function.⁵ More recently, Jennifer Swartz-Levine's article, 'Staking Salvation: The Reclamation of the Monstrous Female in *Dracula*', argues that Stoker's portrayal of 'female sexuality' and its connotations of monstrosity and insanity is 'diametrically opposed to femininity' (2016: 346). It is therefore no great stretch to compare the sexually alluring female vampire with the Victorian prostitute, a figure similarly feared and desired. Reading Harriet as such helps to place her more firmly within the succession of sexually explicit female vampires, from Carmilla to Stoker's undead women. Scholars of Victorian sex work owe much to Judith Walkowitz's influential book, *Prostitution in Victorian Society*, and her exploration of the various myths surrounding the world's oldest profession. Walkowitz works to dismantle the often-fictitious renderings of the Victorian sex worker, whereby the prostitute was

both a miserable, doomed ‘embodiment of social injustice’ and a vile, sexually deviant ‘degraded temptress’ (1980: 13). Walkowitz argues that the historical reality of prostitution was far less melodramatic, and that sex workers were instead active participants in shaping their destinies while coping with the extremely limited economic options available to them. Nonetheless, the image of the sexual, infected woman appears in the vampire literature of the Victorian period. Leila S. May argues in her article, ‘Foul Things in the Night’, that the women in Stoker’s novel are veritable streetwalkers by virtue of their highly enticing yet polluted sexuality. Since the prostitute could be said to represent the ‘contamination of the social body’, the infectious parallelism between the vampire and the sex worker ‘demonstrates the intensification of bourgeois dread almost to the point of an uncanny apotheosis’ (1998: 16).

While reading Harriet alternatively as racial Other or as New Woman are fruitful interpretations, analyzing Harriet as a potential embodiment of the sex worker helps to parse out some of the more contradictory aspects in Marryat’s rendering. Harriet is not a genuine sex worker, in that she does not offer herself in a monetary exchange, and neither does she need to. Harriet is a wealthy heiress, and as such is not financially dependent on men. But literal sex work is not strictly necessary in order to read Harriet as a prostitute figure. The Victorian horror of prostitution is hardly focused on the economic aspect of the profession, but rather its encouragement of extramarital sex and its ‘unnatural’ display of female sexuality. Harriet’s overt and unrestrained sexuality is enough to categorize Harriet as a woman outside of Victorian social mores, and her contagion — coupled with the fact that it can be read as both sexual and genetic in nature — serves to strengthen this comparison. Furthermore, Harriet is a character who oscillates between hero and villain in *Blood*, and we can understand Harriet’s complicated characterization when we have a more thorough understanding of the history of sex work in the

Victorian period and of how the sex worker herself was cast in a role that inspired both sympathy and repugnance.

This article will begin by briefly summarizing Marryat's relatively obscure novel and contextualizing Harriet Brandt using the lens of Victorian sex work. I will break down how the public perception of sex work changed from the mid-century onward so that we can comprehend the transition of the sex worker from Fallen Woman to a degenerate body, and how these polarizing traits are evident in Marryat's heroine. Discourse on sex work tended towards two extremes during the Victorian period, namely that the sex worker was either a destitute woman entirely lacking in agency or an active and pernicious seducer. The end of the nineteenth century particularly saw the intensification of the latter sentiment, and the advent of the eugenics movement lent medical weight to the view of the prostitute as sexually deviant or even genetically doomed. Marryat garners sympathy for Harriet by establishing that her vampiric heroine is subject to forces entirely out of her control, yet Marryat also compounds this sympathy with near-constant depictions of Harriet as an animal unable to control her urges. Unfortunately for Harriet, this impulsivity is repeatedly bound up in depictions common to the late-century sex worker, namely that Harriet's sexual curse will result in the reproduction of children who will directly threaten the health of England with their congenital 'illness'. This oscillation between sympathy and repugnance means that Harriet, like the Victorian prostitute, can neither be completely destroyed nor tolerated. That Harriet becomes aware of the nature of her vampirism and bitterly repents her effect on others is also a source of sympathy in the novel. But Harriet's ultimate suicide reveals that there is still no real place for women who remain outside of contemporary sexual mores. Apparently, the only option for the repentant prostitute is death.

Sex Work: Sympathy, Fallenness, and ‘The Great Social Gulf’

Published the same year as *Dracula* in 1897, Florence Marryat’s novel *The Blood of the Vampire* has received comparatively scant literary attention. The novel begins with a group of English tourists in a Belgian hotel – Margaret Pullen, her newborn child, Captain Ralph Pullen and his fiancée, Elinor Leyton. The group meets Harriet Brandt, a beautiful young woman rumoured to be a wealthy English heiress. Travelling with a single, sickly companion named Olga, Harriet is eager to make friends and is drawn to Margaret’s baby daughter. The sensual and assertive Harriet begins to pursue Ralph, and the two begin a romantic flirtation to the shock of the English party. Meanwhile, the Pullen baby is suspiciously deteriorating in health, so the Pullens summon their family friend, Doctor Phillips, for a diagnosis. Doctor Phillips is revealed to have known Harriet’s parents many years ago in the West Indies, and he exposes Harriet as the illegitimate child of a mad scientist and a mixed-race Caribbean woman. Harriet’s grandmother suffered the bite of a vampire bat while pregnant, thus genetically passing on the disease of vampirism to Harriet. Harriet’s vampirism is more metaphoric than literal; she does not suck the blood of her victims like Carmilla or Lucy Westenra, but instead saps the vitality of the people with whom she is in continuous contact. On the death of Margaret’s baby from Harriet’s physical touch, Doctor Phillips sets about extricating Ralph from Harriet’s society — partly he wants to avoid Harriet’s vampirism, but he is in fact mostly motivated by racism — and he eventually persuades the group to get away from Harriet altogether and travel back to England. Harriet, saddened by the loss of her friends but unaware of her genetic vampirism, attaches herself to another party on their way back to England, where she meets and falls in love with Anthony Pennell. As various people around her begin to waste away, Harriet at last suspects that something is horrifyingly wrong with her, and in an attempt to save Anthony she consults Doctor

Phillips about her parentage. But despite the good doctor's advice that she never marry, Harriet goes through with the wedding to the man she loves and thus Anthony dies. Finally convinced of her vampirism, Harriet takes her own life, leaving her fortune to Margaret as a show of gratitude for the older woman's kindness when Harriet was friendless.

To say that the Victorians had a complicated relationship with sex work is perhaps an understatement. On the one hand, contemporary discussions of sex workers tended to view the women as sexually deviant, potentially contagious, and even predatory. On the other hand, there was a persistent Fallen Woman narrative where the sex worker was a fatality of male vice. Catherine Lee notes this contradiction where the prostitute 'swarmed like an animal yet was at the same time a soiled dove; she was a victim of betrayal yet was at the same time predatory; dirty yet ostentatious, degraded yet assertive' (2015: 2). For Nina Attwood, the 'myth of the prostitute's downward progress – a narrative involving disease, destitution and early death – was, so it is claimed, crystallized in the Victorian consciousness' from the mid-century onward (2015: 2). To be fallen is, to a certain extent, to be a victim of circumstances. Fallen Woman narratives often entailed the seduction of a woman of good social standing, only for her to be swiftly abandoned and forced to build a life unmarried and without her virtue. She could be a mistress or a kept woman, though others more actively engaged in the streetwalking aspect of sex work. The exact way in which a fallen woman participated in sex work varied, but a lack of futurity in 'good' society is an oft-repeated conclusion. Amanda Anderson analyzes the rhetoric of fallenness in her book, *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces*, stating that the fallen state nearly always implies an 'attenuated autonomy and fractured identity' (1993: 2). For example, Elizabeth Gaskell's fallen woman in *Mary Barton* is tragically seduced and then forced into prostitution after she has an illegitimate child. She later succumbs to alcoholism, illness, and

eventual death on the streets.⁶ While certainly sympathetic, Gaskell's fictive example varies a little from historical truth. The alternation between sympathy and horror over the plight of sex workers continued as the century progressed, but the one unifying theme for both was the call to regulate sex work, which came to pass with the Contagious Diseases Acts.

The problem of prostitution was brought to the attention of the Victorian public when the government passed the Contagious Diseases Acts (CDAs) in 1864 — and extended the Acts in 1866 and 1869. The Acts tacitly condoned the existence of prostitution in an attempt to control the rampant spread of venereal disease among the standing army. Social investigators in the mid-century like William Acton viewed prostitution as a necessary evil for the military, and argued that sexual infections could be contained by a system of police and medical supervision. For Acton, prostitution 'is a thing to be kept within certain bounds, and subjected to certain restraints and surveillance' (1870: 206). Acton saw the CDAs as a clear message to sex workers that the nation 'will take care that your shameful lives shall no longer work injury to the health of others, and outrage public decency' (1870: 206). Under the CDAs, sex workers, or even women vaguely suspected of prostitution, were subjected to forced inspection and quarantine in lock hospitals, along with medical procedures that were as painful as they were ineffective for curing STIs. Perhaps to add insult to injury, only women were inspected, while the military men they serviced were allowed to remain unmolested. Naturally, STIs continued to spread rapidly throughout the Victorian period.

Unsurprisingly, the CDAs sparked outrage among Victorian women, who cited the Acts as an institutionalized sexual double standard, and the vociferous movement to repeal the CDAs can be considered the birth of modern, mobilized feminism. The CDAs were successfully repealed in 1886 — a mere decade before the arrival of Marryat's novel. Advocates for repeal

like Josephine Butler, who wrote about the campaign in *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade*, staunchly objected that the CDAs punished the sex who are the victims of vice and that the CDAs did nothing ‘to diminish disease, reclaim the fallen, or improve the general morality of the country’ (1896: 10). Calling on the narrative of the Fallen Woman, Butler sought to rehabilitate sex workers back into respectable society by blaming male lust for the existence of prostitution. The campaign for social purity continued after the eventual repeal of the CDAs, but these campaigns did very little to regulate sex work, let alone support the women they sought to rehabilitate. However, the CDAs and their repeal did spark a much larger societal debate on women’s treatment in Victorian Britain. Mona Caird’s influential essay, ‘Marriage’, illustrates the seemingly impossible expectations for women by the end of the century, and Caird notes the development of a stage of strict marriage as concurrent with ‘systematic or legalized prostitution’ (1888: 278). By the *fin de siècle*, there were now two classes of women: ‘those who submitted to the yoke of marriage...and those who remained on the other side of the great social gulf, subject also to stringent laws, and treated also as the property of men (though not of one man)’ (1888: 278). Caird’s equalizing and intrinsically feminist logic still relies on the narrative of the Fallen Woman, in that sex work and even marriage cater to male vice. But rather than reclaiming the fallen, as Butler sought to do, Caird instead points out that the ‘great social gulf’ between respectable married women and sex workers is not in fact a wide one. For Caird, the state of women in the late century deserves some sympathy. This sentiment is evident in *Blood*.

Harriet’s deviant sexuality is readily apparent in her sexualized description and her assertive nature. Her first appearance in *Blood* focuses on her sensual body:

Her figure was tall but slight and lissom. It looked almost boneless as she swayed easily from side to side of her chair [. . .] her nose was straight and small. Not so her mouth,

however, which was large, with lips of a deep blood colour, displaying small white teeth. To crown all, her head was covered with a mass of soft, dull, blue-black hair, which was twisted in careless masses about the nape of her neck, and looked as if it was unaccustomed to comb or hairpin. (1897: 4)

Harriet's 'lissom' or supple body conveys not just sensuality, but also a lack of restraint, particularly in her 'boneless' and unconventional way of moving. Similarly, Harriet's hair, already a symbol of female beauty and virtue, is wild, 'careless', and not used to orderly style. These aspects hint at Harriet's lack of social refinement and uninhibited behaviour, but her mouth specifically links her to other literary vampires with their voluptuous lips.⁷ The 'deep blood colour' of Harriet's mouth immediately establishes her as vampiric; it is significant to note that Harriet's sexuality is what allows her to infect others. While Harriet causes fatigue simply by being near her victims, the novel specifically focuses on Harriet's lips as the source of infection. Margaret Pullen's baby begins to decline only after Harriet 'laid her lips in a long kiss upon its little mouth' (42). The previously virile and active Captain Ralph Pullen also physically wanes after he 'turned his face to Harriet Brandt's, and her full red lips met his own, in a long-drawn kiss, that seemed to sap his vitality' (75). Furthermore, Harriet's sexuality is described euphemistically through her voracious appetite and how she 'devour[s] her food' with 'much avidity and enjoyment' (4). Marryat clearly delineates Harriet's sexuality in terms of an animalistic, and therefore vampiric, appetite, particularly when she hungrily pursues Captain Ralph and watches him 'like a lynx watching its prey' (56). All of these characteristics place Harriet in sharp contrast to the prim Elinor Leyton and the motherly Margaret Pullen, who by comparison are the models for proper middle-class courtship and marriage, respectively. If the Victorian sex worker is essentially a woman who lives and acts outside of Victorian sexual

mores, then Harriet shares a clear affinity. This comparison is further solidified by her pursuit of a military man since the CDAs were first implemented to protect the standing army from venereal disease.

Yet, like the sex worker, Harriet is portrayed with some sympathy. Considering her predatory description, it is perhaps surprising that Marryat is so sympathetic to her. None of the other female vampires in the literary canon — from Carmilla to the numerous voluptuous vampires in *Dracula* — are treated as human once infected.⁸ The most crucial distinction between Harriet and other female vampires is that Harriet's motivations are not malevolent — rather, her victims are killed by accident. Harriet is instead searching for love and acceptance. As a child in Jamaica, she was kept separate from other children, and mostly grew up in a convent that she describes as being 'so cold – so lonely. [. . .] It is what I have longed for – to come out into the world and find someone to be a friend, and to love me, only me, and all for myself' (42). Harriet is an altogether more human monster than the vampires that haunt Stoker's novel, in that she can feel human emotions. Perhaps as a result of her more human-like depiction, Harriet is not a monstrous threat that must be brutally annihilated. She is not staked and beheaded in the manner of Lucy Westenra, *Dracula's* brides, or even Carmilla's bloody end, nor is Harriet ever confronted as a contagious risk to the people around her. The characters in the novel instead avoid Harriet using geographic distance. Even Doctor Phillips, the character most aware of Harriet's threat and therefore most likely to take up the responsibility of destroying her, seems reluctant to hurt her feelings by telling Harriet of her genetic inheritance. In an uncharacteristically compassionate moment, Doctor Phillips assures Harriet that her genetic curse 'is not [her] fault' but the result of 'a natural organism' (195). Like the sex worker, Harriet is the victim of circumstances beyond her control, and Doctor Phillips strongly hints that by

living a life of ‘purity and charity’ Harriet could possibly escape the ‘stain’ of her parental heritage (194). Margaret Pullen agrees that Harriet is faultless for her vampiric malady and admits that for Harriet to spare other people from her curse and live in isolation would be a harsh punishment for the younger woman who ‘seemed to crave so for affection and companionship’ (85). While readers might sympathize with Harriet’s search for love and self-fulfillment, this sympathy is continually challenged by descriptions of her as a primitive animal — descriptions which link Harriet to the theory of sexual degeneracy popularized at the *fin de siècle*.

The *Fin de Siècle* and the Degenerate Prostitute

Unfortunately, public fear of the sex worker only continued to escalate from the mid-century onwards. By the 1890s, the sex worker was a degenerate body that directly threatened the health of the nation. Rather than a fallen woman who could possibly be rehabilitated, the sex worker was now viewed as atavistically subhuman; no longer a victim of a moral failing, but a predestined body that was hopelessly regressive by her heritage. Regulating sex work did little to diminish the spread of STIs, which arguably resulted in increased anxiety over prostitution. According to Mary Spongberg’s *Feminizing Disease*, since a sex worker could engage in sexual contact without any visible signs of illness, the medical profession now sought ‘different ways to deal with the threat of prostitution’ (1997: 13). By the end of the century, ‘prostitutes began to be considered as physically degenerate: the product of poor breeding’ and clearly demarcated by their atavistic appearance (1997: 166). Questioning the humanity of prostitutes was not confined to the *fin de siècle*. Acton disparaged sex workers as ‘tainted blood’ with the ability to ‘spread abroad a loathsome disease’ (1870: 85), but by the end of the Victorian period, these beliefs were assigned medical weight. To be classified as degenerate meant being seen as an unevolved body,

and sex workers were quick to be labelled as such. Cesare Lombroso, considered by some to be the father of modern criminology, originally argued that crime — with prostitution as a subsection of criminality — was the product of evolutionary atavism. Not only did Lombroso view women as ‘nearer to her primitive origin’ than men, but he viewed the sex worker as even more regressive (1895: 146). Heightened sexuality, or at least the perception of it, was considered by Lombroso to be the defining feature of atavistic prostitutes, which ‘turned female born criminals’ into beings ‘preoccupied entirely with the satisfaction of their own desires [. . .] like lustful savages whose sexuality has not been tamed by civilization’ (1895: 185).

In *Blood*, Harriet’s atavism descends from her mother’s dissolute and immoral life. The role of motherhood was under increased scrutiny by the end of the Victorian period. With the eugenics movement steadily gaining traction among the medical community, mothers were paradoxically looked at as both the solution to the low-birth rate and as its source. Anna Davin’s seminal article, ‘Imperialism and Motherhood’, examines how good motherhood was ‘an essential component’ to the ‘racial health and purity’ ideology of the eugenics movement (1978: 12). Not only were ‘good’ mothers genetically desirable progenitors for the next generation of Imperial servants, but they also needed to be skilled in the art of childrearing. Davin notes that eugenicists ‘held strong views on marriage, in particular that it should only be permitted when there was nothing nasty to be passed on’ and counted heredity as responsible for ‘a wide range of ills’ (1978: 19-20). Anatol notes the depiction of Harriet’s biracial mother as part of the novel’s larger intersections between race and late-century atavism, though sexuality is also an inextricable part of this nexus. Harriet’s mother, who is only ever identified as Miss Carey, is the child of a mixed-race union (the mother was a former slave) and she lives openly with Harriet’s father without being married to him. For Anatol, the fact that both vampiric women in the novel

hail from Jamaica establishes the African-Caribbean woman as ‘an individual, racial, and national menace for British subjects’ (2015: 110). Moreover, from a eugenicist standpoint, Miss Carey fails as a mother on both accounts. Genetically, Marryat presents Miss Carey as a disastrous progenitor, since she passes on the disease of vampirism to her daughter, but Miss Carey also fails as a caregiver. Uninterested in Harriet when she was alive (or indeed anything that is not directly related to satisfying her own desires), Miss Carey’s early death at the hands of her own slaves leaves Harriet without any primary caregiver. Harriet’s lack of parental guidance exacerbates her already selfish tendencies — a plot that suggests her vampirism is the product of both genetics and, paradoxically, social circumstances. Hence, it is important to note that Harriet’s mixed-race genetics is not the only source of anxiety in *Blood*. Anatol argues that Harriet’s mother is ‘maligned for her ferocious bloodlust as well as for her carnal nature – she has sex with Harriet’s father for several years out of wedlock’ (2015: 110). It is therefore possible to argue that Harriet inherits not only vampirism from her mother, but also the genetic taint of sex work. This argument is not meant to supersede the analysis of Harriet’s race and its implications within *Blood*; rather, it is meant to be additive. Both within the Victorian period and within Marryat’s novel, the politics of race and empire are inseparable from the national policies of sex work, which are in turn saturated with the same logic of sex and degeneracy.

While Harriet is not a literal sex worker, her mother’s position as a concubine confers a genetic heritage onto Harriet that would have been immediately discernable to Marryat’s contemporaries, especially during the end of the century and the era’s preoccupation with ancestry. Doctor Phillips describes meeting Miss Carey in Jamaica some years prior:

She was not a woman, she was a fiend. [. . .] To my mind she was a revolting creature. A fat, flabby half caste, who hardly ever moved out of her chair but sat eating all day long,

until the power to move had almost left her! I can see her now, with her sensual mouth, her greedy eyes, her low forehead and half-formed brain, and her lust for blood. (1897: 83)

Harriet's mother is clearly racialized, but Phillips' distinctly racist description also uses many of the same attributes ascribed to the degenerate prostitute. Miss Carey is literally stripped of her humanity in Phillips' portrayal; she is a 'fiend' and a 'creature'. Her excessive body is reminiscent of Lombroso's hyperbolized description of sex workers focused on their bodily desires, and Doctor Phillips' attention to her 'low forehead' and 'half-formed brain' reads like a phrenological diagnosis. Sex workers, like women of colour during the period, were subject to the seemingly random process of phrenology, whereby innocuous aspects of physical appearance were believed to directly correlate to a specific moral failing. Furthermore, Harriet's mother's bloodlust — more literal than Harriet's since the mother delights in torturing slaves and tasting their blood 'on the tip of her finger' (83) — links her even more to Lombroso's born criminal. Lombroso describes the sex worker as 'weak in maternal feelings, inclined to dissipation. [. . .] She dominates weaker people, sometimes through suggestion, sometimes through force' (1895: 192). While Harriet's genetic curse may technically be the responsibility of a supernatural vampire bite, Marryat clearly associates Harriet's vampirism with the behaviour of her mother, so much so that the mother's lifestyle is given far more precedence than the vampire bat.⁹ Not only is her mother the genetic source of Harriet's vampirism, but the fact that Harriet's mother was literally a concubine also means that Harriet can be classified as a 'born' prostitute, as she is certainly borne of one.

Despite being altogether more sympathetic than her mother, Harriet cannot escape her heritage, which includes some of her mother's cruel and selfish behaviours. While Harriet does

not become a mistress like her mother, Miss Carey's obvious disregard for social conduct and proper courtship is seen in Harriet's almost relentless pursuit of Ralph Pullen, which Harriet does with full knowledge that he is engaged to another woman, and she even delights in her conquest. Eleanor disdainfully remarks that Harriet is the sort of girl who would 'follow her own interests' regardless of where they lead (1897: 53). What is worse, however, is how Harriet gleefully describes torturing slaves at her plantation in Jamaica as a 'treat' when she was 'a little thing of four years old' (20). To Margaret Pullen's horror, Harriet recalls how '[i]t used to make me laugh to see them wriggle their legs under the whip and cry' (20). Harriet proves incapable, or at least unwilling, of regulating her desires and emotions, and she demonstrates a great capacity for violence. For instance, Harriet flies into a rage at Ralph Pullen's rejection – a response that causes her to regress into her mother's behaviours:

[L]ike her mother, she would have given over Ralph Pullen to the vivisectioning laboratory, if she could. Her dark eyes rolled with passion; her slight hands were clenched upon each other; and her crimson lips quivered with the inability to express all she felt. [. . .] At that moment, she *was* brutal. (134-5)

The novel's description calls attention once more to Harriet's vampiric mouth, but also to how her eyes 'rolled' like a wild animal. Rather than expressing herself in a civilized or even lady-like manner, Harriet instead gives way to the reactions of her 'brutal' body.

Perhaps as an extension of her savagery, Harriet is almost constantly likened to predatory animals by the other characters. She is at times a snake, a jungle cat and a rabid dog. Comparing vampiric women to animals is a common trope in vampire literature: Carmilla is described as an over-sized black feline,¹⁰ whereas the reanimated Lucy snarls alternatively like a cat and a dog.¹¹ Harriet's hypnotic effect on the people around her causes Margaret Pullen to admit that '[t]he

girl seemed to hypnotize her as the snake is said to hypnotize the bird, but it was an unpleasant feeling' (34); to Doctor Phillips Harriet is like 'the tiger cub' that will grow into 'a wild beast' (84). Harriet's animalistic traits are evidence to Doctor Phillips of her atavism. He warns Margaret that

[w]e medical men know the consequences of heredity. [. . .] A woman born in such circumstances – bred of sensuality, cruelty, and heartlessness – cannot in the order of things, be modest, kind, or sympathetic. And she probably carries unknown dangers in her train. (85)

Harriet's atavism is a physical threat to the people around her: she positively devastates the gene pool wherever she goes, and the men who come into physical contact with her drop like flies. Bobby Bates wastes away in sickly languor before finally perishing after getting a kiss from Harriet. Not only does Ralph deteriorate, but Harriet's alluring sexuality also diverts his attention from his socially approved fiancée, further confirming Harriet's threat to domestic life.

Yet another terror within the novel is the possibility that Harriet's search for love will result in her becoming impregnated, thereby continuing the curse of her disease by allowing the 'unknown dangers in her train' to continue to the next generation (85).¹² Harriet's unwitting murder of Margaret Pullen's healthy and decidedly English baby girl can be read as supplanting the physically desired Pullen baby potentially with her own, diseased child. This attention to reproduction and disease parallels the specific attention paid to sex workers, STIs and congenital illnesses during this period. Not only were sex workers considered to be generally infected, but they were also believed to have created those infections organically within their degenerate bodies, or at least to have been born with the disease. Should sex workers reproduce, they were believed to invariably give birth to sickly, degenerate babies, and they also had the ability to

spread STIs through sexual contact and thus facilitate the births of more diseased babies with congenital syphilis. Townsend notes that syphilis ‘threatened Britain’s future through maternal and congenital infections which would produce a debilitated population incapable of defending its home and empire’ (2018: 69). The disease was ever present in the popular fiction of the era, a presence that ‘brought fears of degeneration, dissolution, and disease into the public consciousness’ (2018: 69). Furthermore, Harriet murdering the Pullen baby connects her with the streetwalking Lucy Westenra, who feeds on children as the Bloofer Lady,¹³ or Dracula’s brides who viciously devour a peasant baby.¹⁴ A deteriorating friend even notes Harriet’s affinity for children: ‘[s]he wants to kiss everyone’, says the friend, adding that ‘Sometimes, I tell her I think she would like to eat them’ (1897: 70). These infanticidal behaviours can be read as a hyperbolized extension of the oversexed and ‘weak maternal feelings’ of Lombroso’s prostitutes. Simply put, Harriet is simply too dangerous to be allowed to live even a quiet life; the only viable end for her in the novel is death.

What remains most perplexing about Marryat’s novel is her constant oscillation between sympathy and repugnance for Harriet. *Blood* perhaps begs the question of who is the real vampire, since it is not always Harriet. She is too sympathetic to be annihilated, yet too dangerous to be allowed futurity. As a result, Marryat resolves to have the vampire kill herself, thereby ending the quandary of Harriet’s existence. It is Harriet who decides to end her own life, thus terminating her genetic curse. She leaves a note to Margaret Pullen in her will, stating ‘[m]y parents have made me unfit to live. Let me go to a world where the curse of heredity which they laid upon me may be mercifully wiped out’ (227). Arguably, the death of the vampire is a tragedy in more ways than one, intended to mourn not just the characters who perished from Harriet’s vampirism but also Harriet herself. Rather than risk the safety of others, Harriet makes

the only unselfish choice available to her. This uncharacteristically altruistic action encourages not just readers' sympathy for Harriet but also encourages us to recognize her capacity to change for the greater good, though the lack of futurity in this act firmly undercuts any agency this decision might produce. Harriet's considerable fortune is left to Margaret Pullen, the ideal wife and mother, effectively symbolizing the transfer of both resources and attention away from sexual deviancy and towards preferred domesticity. It would seem that all would now be well for the characters at the conclusion of *Blood*. Yet the titular vampire is not the only parasite. Marryat echoes Mona Caird by showing how there is no woman in *Blood* who feels content or fulfilled in domestic plots: Harriet dies, Elinor Leyton is confined to a loveless engagement to the philandering Ralph, and Margaret Pullen is now childless and essentially abandoned by her travelling husband. It would appear that these women all fall victim to what Caird describes as 'that vampire "Respectability" which [. . .] was to fasten upon and suck the life-blood of all womanhood' (1888: 275). It is reasonable, then, to read *Blood* as a pseudo-feminist novel that implicitly critiques women's lack of options. Still, the fact that Harriet remains unmourned by the other characters reveals that the novel's sympathy for certain, hyper-sexualized women can only extend so far.

Conclusion

Blood concludes on an equivocal note: Harriet commits suicide at the convent, and in a matter of lines we learn that Margaret Pullen has received Harriet's will 'scribbled in a very trembling hand upon a scrap of paper' (1897: 227). We are not given Margaret's reaction to Harriet's death or the reaction of any other character – though Margaret, as the mother of the child Harriet unwittingly murdered, would be the character most likely to have an emotional response to

Harriet's demise. Neither does the novel allow the sage Doctor Phillips, arguably the character with the most authority, to offer any form of eulogy or frame her death as a cautionary tale. Rather, the novel only gives us Harriet's parting words and leaves us to interpret them on our own. It is particularly telling that in its concluding sentences *Blood* does not offer an unwavering outpouring of sympathy for its heroine, nor does the novel allow other characters to celebrate the banishing of the vampiric threat. Similarly, the Victorian sex worker could not be concisely classified as a sympathetic creature or a repugnant one. Hence, Marryat's novel does not present a positive outcome for women who violate Victorian codes of sexual conduct.

Sex work was evidently a complicated subject for the Victorians. The sex worker was a figure that interested medical men, social investigators and feminists. She was subject to invasive legislation and medical inspection, yet neither was able to accomplish the goal of ridding Victorian society of her. Sex work was more often than not a rational economic choice in an environment that did not support women working outside of domestic spaces, yet the sex worker continued to be portrayed as a figure of melodramatic extremes. She was at once a highly sympathetic fallen woman, an object of pity, and a potentially rehabilitated citizen; the sex worker was also seen as degenerate and atavistically subhuman, especially during the end of the nineteenth century. Florence Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* thus proves to be a unique inclusion to the canon of vampire fiction by engaging with such medical and social discourse surrounding the Victorian sex worker. Of course, theories of degeneracy and eugenics are evident in the novel's overt racism, but it is interesting to note that sex work during this period was also subject to a similar type of medical fixation and anxiety. Sexuality, specifically deviant sexuality, is an inextricable part of the novel's intersections between race, atavism, and empire. Reading Harriet as a fictive example of the Victorian sex worker helps us to parse out her

perplexing characterization, and it also places her firmly in relation to the other femme fatale monsters in the vampire fiction canon. The fact that Harriet's characterization oscillates almost constantly between hero and villain, sympathy and aversion, ultimately conveys the contradictory opinions surrounding sex work in the nineteenth century.

Notes

¹ Also of note is Brenda Mann Hammack's (2008) attention to maternal imaginationism, whereby the appearance and physical characteristics of infants were believed to be the result of the mother's thoughts and emotions. A commonly held medical belief that persisted well into the twentieth century, imaginationism has since been thoroughly disproven.

² Hammack alludes to Stephen Arata's argument in his seminal article, 'The Occidental Tourist' (1990), whereby Dracula racializes the people he comes into contact with.

³ For more scholarly discussion on the New Woman and her increasing financial independence, see Deborah Epstein Nord's *Walking the Victorian Streets* (1995).

⁴ See Elaine Showalter's *Sexual Anarchy* (1990), specifically chapter three.

⁵ Also of note in Margaret L. Carter's collection (1988) is Christopher Craft's "'Kiss Me With Those Red Lips": Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', Christopher Bentley's 'The Monster in the Bedroom: Sexual Symbolism in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', and Carol L. Fry 'Fictional Conventions of Sexuality in *Dracula*'.

⁶ See Esther's fall in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), specifically Chapter Ten.

⁷ This highly sexualized word appears several times in Stoker's novel, always concerning vampiric women. See the first use of the word in *Dracula* (1998: 69).

⁸ See Nina Auerbach's *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (1995), specifically chapters one and two.

⁹ Hammack also notes how Marryat sidelines the supernatural aspects of the novel in favour of pseudo-medical theories; see 'The Scientizing of Hybridity' (2008).

¹⁰ See Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (2005:52).

¹¹ See Stoker (1897: 249), though animalistic descriptions of Lucy continue throughout the chapter.

¹² For more on congenital syphilis and the fear of inherited atavism, see Kari Nixon and Lorenzo Servitje's *Syphilis and Subjectivity* (2018), and Mary Spongberg's *Feminizing Venereal Disease* (1997).

¹³ Stoker (1897: 249).

¹⁴ Stoker (1897: 71).

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