

**Jonathan Harker, Spicy Chicken,
Communal Meals:
Dishing Out a New Masculinity
in Bram Stoker's *Dracula***

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Bram Stoker introduces Transylvania—and by extension his novel *Dracula*—through the eyes of Jonathan Harker, the quintessential Englishman on a journey to the “East.” This other world entralls Harker, enticing him throughout his way to Count Dracula’s castle to seek new experiences. Perhaps one of the most common experiences any traveler, even today, will relate to is the experience of a new dish—for isn’t it through another culture’s food that we first encounter the “other,” and also where we first begin to understand how that other comes to reside within us as well?

By extending Stephen Arata’s definition of reverse imperialism to the culinary landscape, we can see how the consumption of foreign foods operate on competing levels. In one sense, the colonial subject is literally consuming the object (or country) that he colonizes; on the other, however, he is also literally

taking in the customs and culture of the colonized country. Consumption of foreign food is not done in isolation; it is always done with the colonist's nationalistic sensibilities in mind. Because the colonial subject must first identify himself along the particular lines of his nation, he then necessarily creates an "other" through his own definition of the colonized. Eating, then, becomes a political act that mimics the act of colonization. While Arata does not extend his argument as far as I have gone, I do agree with his contention that examining texts like *Dracula* through a lens that goes beyond historicist readings allows "representation of fears that are more universal than a specific focus on the Victorian background would allow" (qtd. 622). For a novel such as *Dracula* that mines the tension between desire and fear, the experience of eating becomes fraught with new possibilities.

By literally ingesting the "other" through his meals in Transylvania, Harker awakens to a world he must recontextualize, one where his perceived differences from monsters like the vampire aren't so profoundly different after all. As Elaine Martin claims in her article "Food, Literature, Art, And The Demise Of Dualistic Thought": "Food, as a necessary universal practice and the only way of literally ingesting the other, becomes a logical site for challenging dualistic thinking and projecting new inclusive identities" (43). Although vampire tales like *Dracula* obsess over boundaries—be it boundaries between genders, sexuality or countries—in reality the very act of eating itself is a breakdown of that border. For a novel that lingers on

the cannibalistic nature of vampiric feeding, creating a sense of fear but infusing it with sexual desire, it's easy to overlook all the other forms eating takes. However, to fully understand the relationship of eating to conceptions of the colonial framework, we need especially to understand the multi-layered presentation of gender in Stoker's novel.

This essay engages with the discourse of food and eating in relationship to the vampire at the fin de siècle, especially in regards to the role hunger and communal eating plays in *Dracula*. The figure of the vampire at the fin de siècle often serves to represent fears of degeneration, be it in regards to female sexuality or ethnic purity. Because the vampire attacks by breaking the flesh of its victim, it is, as Angelica Michelis put it, a figure that revels in the boundaries of the "leaky/leaking" female body: "The trope of the 'open' or 'leaking/leaky' body imagines individual as well as social bodies as vulnerable to disease and infections and in danger of being invaded by what should stay firmly exterior and foreign to them" (85). For most scholars, vampirism engages with those fears in tandem to the overriding domestic ideology of the "Angel in the House," or the sublimated desire of the "pure, virtuous, non-sexualized female" (Swartz-Levine 345). In spite of these gendered readings, discussions of masculinity independent of the vampire's dangerous masculinity are missing in these analyses.

However, building on the recent work of scholars S. Brooke Cameron and Suyin Olguin, I contend that feeding in the novel goes beyond the fear and desire embedded in the vampire mythos, and

instead serves as a way to construct a new form of masculinity through the melding of those very fears and desires. Food and the activities that surround it do more than just create spaces for interactions with othered individuals that at first glance seem frightening, and eating works in a larger sense than a simple metaphor for the desire for female purity. Instead, I will examine how the role of eating works to construct a new kind of masculinity, one that unites perceived gender differences into a man that is nothing like the dangerous vampire.

In examining masculinity in this form, I hope to continue the psychoanalytic work of Dejan Kuzmanovic, in which he places Harker's "seduction" by Dracula not as simply a threat to Harker's heterosexuality, but a seduction that "is symptomatic of a deeper psychic process in which Harker's ego, in response to external pressures of his impending initiation into business and marriage, allows its own limited, temporary destabilization in order to be re-stabilized in a modified form which can accommodate these external pressures" (412). By reading the varying forms of masculinity through this lens, one that unifies the "other" with the subject of a new masculine identity, Stoker's novel suggests a more positive approach to masculinity and its role within the family structure than previous scholarship has accounted for. Examining masculinity also opens new possibilities in the field of Victorian studies, as it moves the conversation about domestic ideology and the "monstrous female" to concerns about the construction of gender and those individuals who transgressed against the supposedly strict boundaries

it created. Stoker's novel is unique in that it preserves these anxieties while also offering a new template in the form of the vampire hunters' family structure created at the end of the novel. While food is one avenue of exploration into this topic, more work could certainly be done in other areas of material culture.

Chicken Recipes and the New Masculine

It's curious that Stoker included a reference to paprika chicken in the opening pages of *Dracula*. While the inclusion of mundane details like meals and recipes makes sense for the epistolary form that the novel takes, the language around the meal itself seems to gesture towards a foreshadowing of the similarities in nature of Count Dracula and Harker to follow: "I had for dinner, or rather supper, a chicken done up some way with red pepper, which was very good but thirsty. (*Mem.*, get recipe for Mina)" (31). Both the choice of "done up" and "thirsty" seem out of place; the language could indicate either Harker or the chicken's state of being. Done up seems to imply a sort of mask, a chicken that has been fashioned specifically for its color. After all, hungarian paprika, as implied by the waiter's calling it "paprika hendl," would lead the dish a bright red color, similar, in fact, to blood.

The thirstiness described next by Harker is unclear—it would seem he's implying his own thirst after eating the dish, but also that the chicken itself is thirsty in some way. There's a certain positive judgement passed on the meal (that memo to get the recipe for Mina says so), but there's also an

uncomfortableness in what it does to his body. Because Harker's introduction to the area is immediately tied to its cuisine, his literal ingestion and enjoyment of it foreshadows his later encounter with the vampirettes in Dracula's castle. He is both enjoying the chicken and driven to drink by it; he is both happy to be in this interesting place but also frightened by how the journey could change him. He is, ultimately, confronting the other through his own body.

It's also important to note that the combination of the spice with the chicken itself mimics the very act of butchering that led to the meal. While consuming animal flesh is an accepted form of eating meat, it still requires a violent act to render the animal fit for consumption. A short description, which is necessarily included in full, of what that violent scene looks like conveys the brutality of the meal:

[Y]ou will hear signs of a revolution in the basse cur; the cocks and hens are in alarm; one or two of the largest, and probably oldest member of their unfortunate little community, are seized their necks wrung, and while yet fluttering, immersed in boiling Water. Their coats and skins come off at once; a few unmentionable preparatory operations are rapidly despatched--probably under the traveler's immediate observation--the wretches are cut into pieces, thrown into a pot, with water, butter, flour, cream, and an inordinate quantity of red pepper, or paprika, and, very shortly after, a number of bits of

fowl are seen swimming in a dish of hot greasy gravy, quite delightful to think of. (qtd. in Newton)

This combination of spice and chicken seems deliberately placed to shadow Harker's own development as an eventual companion and hostage of the vampire himself. By ingesting a meal that resembles the vampire's own feasting, Stoker places Harker deliberately in a space where the reader both emphasizes and unquestionably follows Harker through his journey and his development into the vampire hunter. In doing so, the idea of the monster is internalized in a way that will destabilize the vampire as "other." Harker and the other vampire hunters fear Dracula not just because he is scary, but because he forces them to recognize their own desire, which in turn allows them to recognize their own inherent "otherness."

Harker's meal of paprika hendl leads to "queer dreams" that plague him throughout the night, leading him to blame it on "the paprika, for I had to drink up all the water in my carafe, and was still thirsty" (32-33). The fact that this thirst is not quenched, and that Harker readily blames the paprika for it, is in keeping with how spices like paprika were viewed during Stoker's time. In *The diseases of the nervous system : a text-book for physicians and students* published in 1893, paprika is blamed for illnesses such as epilepsy, due to its potential effects on the (female, in this case) nervous system. Harker sees the effects of the ingestion of the food as a serious potential cause for the disturbance in his dreams, yet he does not seem put off by the spice by

the morning. Indeed, he has “for breakfast more paprika, and a sort of porridge of maize flour which they said was ‘mamaliga,’ and eggplant stuffed with forcemeat, a very excellent dish, which they call ‘impletata.’ (*Mem.*, get recipe for this also.)” (33). His desire for the meal outweighs his fear of its effects, something that will become especially important later on when he encounters the vampirettes at Dracula’s castle. He has already been exposed as someone who struggles with his own desire and perhaps is driven more by lust than he would readily admit.

The final meal he records before reaching Dracula’s castle continues the juxtaposition of pain and pleasure. Harker writes: “I dined on what they called ‘robber steak’—bits of bacon, onion, and beef, seasoned with red pepper, and strung on sticks and roasted over the fire, in the simple style of the London cat’s meat. The wine was Golden Mediasch, which produces a queer sting on the tongue, which his, however, not disagreeable” (36). Again Harker mentions red pepper—presumably hungarian paprika—and a wine that is both stinging yet agreeable. While the meal itself does not elicit nearly as much obvious enjoyment (there’s no recipe collecting memo for this), it also more explicitly exposes the animalistic nature of meat-eating, with the spit-fire recalling more primitive cooking methods. Although Harker seems less pleased about this meal, he does not go out of his way to condemn it, instead seeing it as more of a class issue than a moral one as cat’s meat implies horse flesh, typically a cheap cut reserved for the poor (Davidson 150).

Harker's confrontation with his own primitive nature by ingesting the robber's meat nearly breaks him, leading to that "brain fever" at the end of the first section of the novel. However, before he escapes from the castle, he has two more encounters with the culinary—one with his host, Count Dracula, and the other with the vampiresses. The first is remarkable because it sets up the importance of eating together versus not eating together, a trope that will be significant later in the text as the group of vampire hunters work together to defeat Dracula in London. The latter incident is perhaps more significant in that it exposes Harker to his own duality, and it is that encounter that nearly breaks him.

Harker's initial unawareness of his dual nature allows Count Dracula to control him. Harker still seems rather rational and unemotional, although the language around his meals continue to decry a more passionate being hidden within. As Harker recounts: "The Count himself came forward and took off the cover of a dish, and I fell at once on an excellent roast chicken" (48). Besides the flourish of the Count's maneuver, which clearly seems to impress Harker to some extent, the use of the phrase "fell at once" indicates a growing acceptance or permissive attitude to the animalistic side. Harker no longer writes whether the meal was good or satisfying, but simply talks of consuming it in a way that divorces the food from its domestic underpinnings. He devours the chicken's flesh in the same way that vampires are characterized as falling upon their victims' necks.

This meal is followed by a long passage in which Harker describes Count Dracula's physique, paying special attention to his physical attributes. Although Harker does not find him especially attractive, there is something so alluring about him—"his face was a strong - a very strong - aquiline [. . .]"—that Harker finds himself thinking "strange things" he cannot even "confess to my own soul" (48-49). These remarks follow from Dracula comforting Harker when his dogs howl outside, with Dracula remarking, "Ah, sir, you dwellers in the city cannot enter into the feelings of the hunter" (49). Tying together both Harker's unnamed fear and Dracula's references to hunting, we see Harker beginning to doubt his own masculinity even as he grows to be more like the hunter himself.

While Dracula is clearly the feared colonizing "other" in the text, there is a relationship between hunting, masculinity, and consumption, and it is one that questions traditional definitions of masculinity in an attempt to recontextualize how the concept of the other is confronted in a patriarchal society. Although Harker's confrontation does lead to the brain fever, it also eventually leads to his stronger, more equal relationship with Mina. Dracula's claim that the city boy cannot confront his own animalistic nature is bogus; confronting it opens Harker up to a new definition of masculinity and family that eventually triumphs over the lone wolf hunter embodied by Dracula himself. While it may at first appear that food does not play an obvious role, the oddity around Dracula's refusal to dine with Harker indicates an otherness that goes beyond their

simple national differences. It is a difference in how they use their masculinity.

Dracula only uses feeding as a means to control or satisfy his own desires, especially when it comes as a threat to his status as a dominant figure. When the woman whose baby he presumably stole to feed the vampirettes appears at the castle, he unleashes his wolves, who consume her and “[stream] away *singly*, licking their lips [italics mine]” (78). Much like Dracula himself later in the novel, feeding here is a means to an end, not an experience that is shared, marvelled at, or discussed. It’s simply a way to dispose of an unwanted woman, and the wolves follow their meal by wandering away singly.

This leads to why the confrontation scene with the vampirettes becomes important for both men, but especially in conjunction with Dracula’s own situation as a dominant male at the castle. Harker must acknowledge his own passion to begin to understand the dual nature of his existence, and it is revealed directly in his attraction and repulsion to the vampirettes: “There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips” (69). The emphasis on the mouth here, while overtly sexual, also brings back other mouth-related activities, like eating. Stoker ties Harker’s sexuality to the mouth, both through his eating and indirectly through the emphasis on mouths of the other characters.

As the women come closer to feeding on Harker, he sits mesmerized, “[. . .] as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal” (69). He feels “languorous ecstasy” as he waits for her to feast upon him, yet in acknowledging his feelings he is also melding his dual natures together (70). He is no longer just a man who is trying to justify his own passions; instead he is a man who is openly allowing both states, the fear of and the desire for the vampirette, to exist simultaneously. In doing so, he can grow as an individual in a way Dracula cannot because Dracula’s identity is always limited by his desire for blood. Harker’s consumption of the other has actually led to an awakening of his own internal duality, and that acceptance will help him create a new family structure when he joins the vampire hunters, one that allows for all forms of masculinity to exist.

For comparison, I want to turn to the depiction of the infamous zoophagous patient Renfield as a character whose juxtaposition with the other men of the novel highlights a perverse form of masculine denial.

Renfield’s Perverse Masculinity

David Del Principe expounds on the relationship between meat eating and flesh eating in his essay “(M)eating *Dracula*: Food and Death in Stoker’s Novel.” One of the most critical comparisons he makes draws a comparison between the consumption of animals and the consumption of humans—although disturbing at first glance, Renfield’s eating of a pigeon is not so different from

Harker's eating paprika chicken. Both are types of birds, after all. In this way, the importance of the meal itself takes shape in the construction of the individual. The reader should feel uncomfortable, even disgusted, by Renfield's diet. However, no such judgement is passed on Harker. Why?

One of the major distinctions I would draw between these two characters lies in the performance of eating going on *around* them. This is a concept I borrow from Roland Barthes' "Towards a Psychosociology of Food Consumption," but it is one that helps unpack the taboo nature of Renfield's diet. He is presented to us as an individual, one that is remarkably similar in attitude and obsession as Dracula. He asks for meat and asks for it raw, yet his desire to consume is never shared with any other individual. While he yearns for Dracula to visit him, he in fact eats alone in his bedroom in the hospital. Even the men Seward has stand guard do not engage with Renfield while he is eating, instead interacting with him before or after he is done.

The nature of his diet is not particularly shocking, even by today's standards. Cultures around the world eat bugs, birds, even small animals for protein, and they have for millennia. But Renfield justifies his eating choices not by necessity, but as extension of his own life. He wants to consume life to lengthen his own life, and his relationship to the things he eats mimic Dracula's own relationship to his victims. There is a certain selfish fascination, a great egoism, in privileging one's own desires above another's existence. As Seward later says of Renfield: "He is more like wild beast than a man"

(137). Seward cannot conceive of a man who eats only out of desire, yet it is the very nature of the being he most wishes to destroy. Thus, Seward's interactions with Renfield foster a connection between Dracula and Seward himself. Renfield is a step on the spectrum towards Dracula, but by no means is he a being wholly apart from man or monster.

Although Renfield is similar in his "perverse" eating as Dracula, he does draw a line between what he perceives as permissible: "I want no souls. Life is all I want" (308). This, coupled with his inability to discuss "drinking" in any form, separates him from Dracula. He is closer to human than monster and can serve as a barometer for Seward precisely because he can still garner some sympathy from the doctor.

Seward's fascination with Renfield mimics Harker's vacillation between fascination and repugnance at Dracula's castle. When Renfield breaks into his office and slashes his wrist, Seward's reaction belies his real feelings: "As the attendants rushed in, and we turned our attention to him, his employment positively sickened me. He was lying on his belly on the floor licking up, like a dog, the blood which had fallen from my wounded wrist" (177-178). Before this incident most of Seward's descriptions of Renfield rely on his fascination with the patient; here we see the doctor giving away part of his interior feelings. No longer the impartial doctor, Seward is "sickened" by Renfield's actions. The previous ignorance of his actual state of feeling towards Renfield denied Seward the ability to

reconcile his outward demeanor with his own inward feelings of rejection after Lucy turns down his proposal. Now, however, he begins to recognize that Renfield's madness stems from a similar form of fear of death. Renfield wants to prolong his life and desires to eat animals out of fear and a desire for control over life, just in the same way that Seward's anxieties and frustrations stem from his own denial about his sexual desires.

Although the source of Renfield's insanity is left open by the novel, one could posit that similar constructions of selfhood, such as those that Seward or Harker place upon themselves, could lead to such a fissure in a man's mind. Perhaps Renfield's character is less of an odd plot device and instead functions more as the missing link the men need to see in order to better understand Dracula as a man himself. Renfield is less of an "other" than Dracula, for he is an Englishman who at one time "had the honour of seconding [Arthur's] father at the Windham" (283). Because Renfield still bears the recognizable trappings of the gentleman, his perversion of masculinity is less abhorrent to the men and therefore more readily studied by them.

Breaking Bread and Staking Vampires— Together

Integral to crafting a new sort of masculinity—and, by extension, a new kind of family—stems from the vampire hunters' recognition of each other as members of the same group. They do this in a myriad of ways, including sharing blood, sharing diaries and secrets, and by

eating together. The importance of coming together around a table to eat together cannot be overlooked, especially in a novel that is so heavily invested in what it thinks about feasting. The vampire hunting gang triumphs over Dracula precisely because they are willing to work together, to form bonds and alliances with others. They use food to bolster each other's spirits and to keep each other emotionally well, if not always physically. Unlike Dracula, they do not see eating as a form of control. They join together in the ways that families do, finding solace and comfort over food as they work together to defeat the monster. As Lucy puts it in a letter to Mina: "We have told all our secrets to each other since we were *children*; we have slept together and eaten together, and laughed and cried together" (88). Although Lucy is eventually lost to vampirism, the spirit she evokes continues on as the vampire hunters work together to avenge her death.

Many of the characters first interact over a meal or service of some sort. Perhaps the most significant is the meeting between Mina and Dr. Seward. At a loss, both want to solve the puzzle of Lucy's death, albeit neither has the full story. Immediately upon meeting however, Dr. Seward is already inviting Mina to his table, and therefore into his life: "Come, there is dinner. We must keep one another strong for what is before us; we have a cruel and dreadful task. When you have eaten you shall learn the rest, and I shall answer any questions you ask—if there be anything which you do not understand, though it was apparent to us who were present" (261). Seward is not shy in his discussions

with Mina; that frankness is a crucial component to ultimately catching Dracula. Seward immediately positions Mina as an equal to himself, and that confidence allows Mina to open up about Harker's own history, as well as her own.

Mina continues this tradition herself when introduced to Van Helsing: "Read it over whilst I order lunch; and then you can ask me questions whilst we eat" (221). Harker then takes the cue, later meeting Van Helsing over breakfast and proclaiming, "[He] is the man to unmask him and hunt him out" (225). Breakfasts work as stations of information throughout the novel, as well as places where knowledge is exchanged and turned into action.

Food does not just bond Mina to the rest of the men; it also, importantly, ties the men to each other. After being rejected by Lucy, Quincey invites both Seward and Arthur to "mingle our weeps over the wine cup" (94). As the men continue to meet and eat together, they grow more emotional, as seen in such descriptions as when Van Helsing nearly "break[s] down and ha[s] hysterics" (381), or when Seward describes Arthur as looking "desperately sad and broken; even his stalwart manhood seemed to have shrunk somewhat under the strain of his much-tried emotions" (205). The men find a safe outlet for their emotional outpourings in each other, and this safe space allows a bond that is familial-like to develop. It is also one where they do not need to obsess over the feminization of emotions, and therefore do not feel threatened by perceived gendered attributes.

The importance of these meals to developing the family structure cannot be overstated. The number of instances where breakfast or tea is mentioned alone are numerous. By one estimate, “[a] quick keyword search of Stoker’s novel shows us that ‘breakfast’ comes up twenty-eight times” (Cameron 70). These meals aren’t just for authenticity, however. They also chart an important plot change as Mina begins to transform into a vampire herself. It is only after she is excluded from the breakfasts and dinners, and by extension the group as a whole, that Dracula begins to get the upper-hand. Once the men recognize that Mina is just as integral a member of the group as any other member, their misogynistic attempts at protection end.

Besides serving as a place for the characters to exchange knowledge and updates, eating together also literally fuels their hunt for Dracula. The novel’s attention to the mundane realities, like eating, create an aura of authenticity that contributes to its lasting power. Eating even creates seemingly unlikely scenarios, such as the fast upwardly mobile rise of Harker to partnership status after dining with Mr. Hawkins, a kind old family friend (Stoker 190).

In contrast, we only see one instance of Dracula’s dining table in London, and it does not serve as a source of comfort or inspiration. In contrast to the gang’s table, Dracula’s does not exude any sense of comfort or stability. Instead it is a repository of papers, keys, and a basin of bloody water (340). This description simply highlights the perversion of Dracula’s eating—not only does he

feast on humans, but he does so alone, late at night, and clearly not at a table. This emphasis on the table may seem trifling, but for a time period obsessed with social propriety, the lack of a usable table reinforces Dracula's otherness.

The need to eat also forces parallels between the hunters and Dracula. As Harker writes about one breakfast, "for Dr. Van Helsing and Dr. Seward are agreed that if we do not eat we cannot work our best" (329). Eating fuels their work, just as it allows the gang to gather as a group in support of their need to hunt. Dracula's eating is a perversion of this same idea, as his feasting on human blood is a necessity for his continued existence. His drinking, though, does not humanize him in the same way that, say, Van Helsing's regular desire for a cup of tea does. Although both men use drinking liquid as a form of regrouping, be it in body or mind, Dracula's eating is always performed alone.

The hunters recognize that othering is the main issue at stake in the novel—if they exclude Mina, they suffer. If they fail to understand Dracula's own desires, they suffer. And if they ignore the duality of their own natures, they risk losing their masculinity. Therefore, by fashioning a new sort of family, one that seemingly allows each man to contribute to the creation of the new baby Quincey at the end of the novel, Stoker is positing a way forward out of the mire of clear-cut, defined gender roles: "Already [baby Quincey] knows her [Mina's] sweetness and loving care; later on he will understand how *some men so loved her*, that they did dare much for her sake [*italics mine*]" (419). So Lucy

was not wrong—there is a way for a girl to have multiple husbands. However, it takes men refashioning their masculine ideal for that to happen. The baby Quincey is a step towards that new world.

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