

Van Helsing, a model of vigorous masculine endeavor, storms Dracula's pile and encounters these same sleeping female vampires, he records the same languorous effects of their "voluptuous beauty." In his idiomatic English, he describes them producing the desire for immobility in a man, a desire for

delay, til the mere beauty and fascination of the wanton Un-Dead have hypnotize [*sic*] him . . . and the voluptuous mouth present to a kiss—and man is weak . . . I was moved to a yearning for delay which seemed to paralyse my faculties and to clog my very soul. (393)

At this point Van Helsing describes a "strange oppression" beginning to "overcome" him: "Certain it was that I was lapsing into sleep, the open-eyed sleep of one who yields to a sweet fascination" (393). The waking dream/nightmare of fascinated immobility at the advance of the beautiful vampire threatens to overwhelm Van Helsing, the upright scientist, too. The figure of the vampire renders the male characters of the novel prone to all sorts of queer sinkings; to faints, coyly termed "falls"; to hysterics;⁴ and, most profoundly, to the desire for a yielding, erotic immobility. Vampirism makes *men* subject to the kind of languorous immobility that had become symbolically associated with *feminine* forms of pathology by the end of the 18th century.⁵ We might read *Dracula*, then, as a kind of erotophobia. It suggests the dangers of the vampiric overwhelming of its male subjects, while revelling in describing the temptation towards "delay." Morton describes erotophobia as "the fear of and fascination with a feminized state" (*Ecology Without Nature* 137). The possibility of passive (feminized) masculine states here is a source of terror, which nevertheless betrays erotic fascination. Dracula threatens *all* of his victims with the desire to be immobile, to be subject to "a languorous ecstasy" which might seem dangerously close to desiring a "feminized state"; the queerest of dreams.

Animals Off Display

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This series of photographs is an attempt to explore the impossible spaces of the contemporary zoological garden from a queer ecological perspective. I intentionally focus on the artificiality and finitude of the zoo landscape rather than on nonhuman animal bodies that are already overrepresented in the zoological reimagining of natural habitats. The zoo with its taxidermic taxonomy captures nonhuman animals within the species boundaries, turning them into things on display. Wary of the limits of representation I focus on what usually remains in the background, or functions as an obstacle for "wildlife photography," on the very edges of the voyeuristic imagemaking practice so present in the zoo nowadays. In this sense I see the zoo as a paradigmatic example of a Foucauldian heterotopia—a real place that stands outside of its space, and creates an illusion of a world in miniature captured in a timeless void.¹ There is no fire in a two-dimensional forest; there is no key to the door in the painted jungle. The photographs were taken in various zoological gardens around the world (Hungary, Poland, Singapore, Malaysia, Canada) as part of a large project, "Queer(ing) Naturecultures: The Study of Zoo Animals."

1. Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16 (Spring 1986), 22-27.

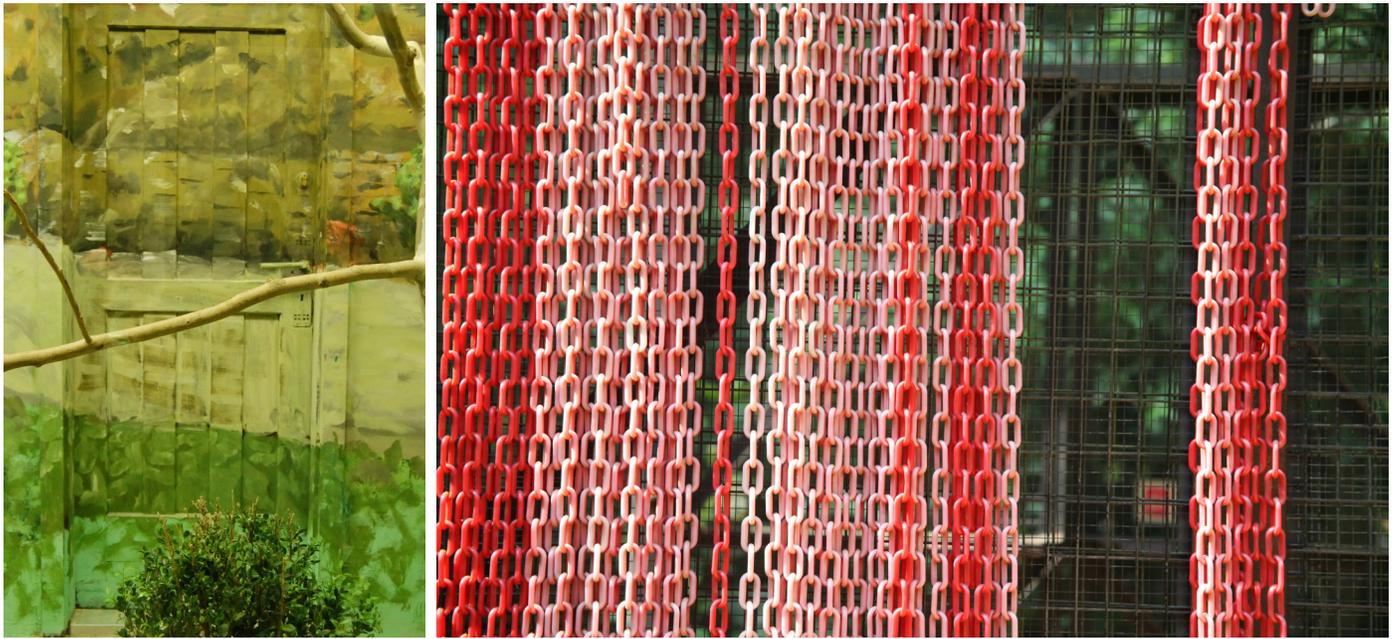


THE TORONTO ZOO. Marianna Szczygielska.

One of the key threats and pleasures of vampire narratives, then, is the imagined effect of the vampire on the agency and desires of his victim. None in a vampire narrative is safely allowed to remain themselves. This is most dramatically manifested as the telepathic influence the vampire is able to exert on his victims through the drinking of blood. But, in *Dracula*, there is also a parallel mesh of influence and interrelation between the ostensibly non-vam-

piric characters. I use the term "mesh" here to posit a parallel to Morton's idea of life-forms constituting an ecological "mesh":

a nontotalizable, open-ended concatenation of interrelations that blur and confound boundaries at practically any level: between species, between the living and the nonliving, between organism and environ-



ZOO IN BUDAPEST, HUNGARY/FŐVÁROSI ÁLLAT- ÉS NÖVÉNYKERT (L) AND MALACCA ZOO, MALAYSIA/ZOO MELACA (R).
Marianna Szczygielska.

ment. Visualizing the mesh is difficult: it defies our imaginative capacities and transcends iconography. (“Queer Ecology” 275–6)

Vampire fiction might be read as one (alarmist and eroticizing) attempt to iconize ecological mesh, a proleptic literature of ecological awareness. The vampire and his victims in *Dracula* form a new and bloody mesh. Blood transfusions between other characters in the novel provide a parallel circulation of blood-exchange, which similarly reconstitutes all the narrative’s main characters as enmeshed entities. Lucy Westerna, a beautiful young woman who is nightly drained of her blood by Dracula, is given transfusions in an attempt to save her from anemia. Arthur, Lucy’s betrothed, has donated his blood for this purpose, and feels that, even though her premature death prevents an actual marriage ceremony, the mingling of blood has made Lucy “his wife in the sight of god” (Stoker 185). At this suggestion, Van Helsing’s face grows “white and purple by turns” (185). The Professor’s intermittent floridity and blanching here reveals his dis-ease at this blood-tie version of marriage. All the strong young men in the nov-

el (who have also mostly been in love with Lucy) have donated their blood to her, unbeknown to Arthur. This blood promiscuity means that all the men are now married to the polyandrous Lucy, and also, by blood-mingling extension, to each other, to the Count, to Mina, and to Jonathon Harker.

The bloodletting that has made even the most virile among them feel “faint” has also bound them all together in an erotic mass-transfusion. This is the kind of pan-erotic connection that the vampire critic Christopher Frayling refers to as “haemosexuality” (xx), working from Maurice Richardson’s earlier influential psychoanalytic description of the cast of *Dracula* constituting one big incestuous family: a “kind of . . . necrophilius, oral-anal-sadistic all-in wrestling match” (387). In Richardson’s account, the “morbid dread” of the vampire stands in, following Freud’s dictum, “for repressed sexual desire” and the desire suggested here is for a multilateral, immobile sexual overwhelming in undifferentiated haemosexuality. A queer new version of the incestuous human family is produced here: a mesh of conjoined characters, living and undead.

Blood Relations and Erotic Contagion

The dis-ease with which Van Helsing, the medical professional, encounters this erotic mingling of blood is partly a realization of proliferating sexual connections, but it is also intimately connected with the vampire’s connection to disease. There have long been anthropological accounts of vampires that link their supposed appearances to altered physical states and to contagion. Christopher Frayling tells us that when vampire epidemics were reported across eastern and central Europe between 1672 and 1772, the Age of Reason and Enlightenment thinking adduced medical explanations that might correspond with contemporaneous scientific thinking. Some suggested food poisonings might be responsible for the belief in vampires, or that communities were embroiled in collective nightmares following opium use. It has also been suggested that plague was being re-imagined as vampirism:

The symptoms of the victim—pallor, listlessness, fever, nightmare—were thought to be those of the plague. The transmission of the ‘vampire’s curse’ from predator to victim, who then became predator in

turn, was a graphic way of explaining the rapid spread of plague germs. (Frayling 25)

The possibility of vampirism as an account of rabies has also been considered, and Frayling suggests that most recent folklorist analyses of the vampire outbreaks of 1731–2 have concluded that the “manifestations” represent, at least in part, “attempts by preliterate communities to make sense of what we would today call ‘contagion’” (26).⁶ Ernest Jones, in *On the Nightmare*, makes the same point about the close correlation between the visitation of the Black Death and reports of vampirism in the Middle Ages, telling us that “even as late as 1855 the terrible cholera epidemic in the Dantsic revived such a widespread belief in the dead returning as vampires to claim the living that, according to medical opinion, the fears of the people greatly increased the mortality from the disease” (413). It is interesting that Jones mentions cholera here, given the accounts of the horrific epidemics in Ireland that Bram Stoker’s mother, Charlotte, wrote for him. In these she describes to Stoker the disease’s “bitter strange kiss” and the fact that many were buried alive, “stultified from opium” (Stoker 412). The double meaning of pathology can be felt to resonate here, as both the apprehension of disease and *the pleasurable feeling* of succumbing that might bleed out from its strange, bitter kiss.⁷

To further explore the ramifications of erotic contagion in the context of dark ecology, I turn now to a slightly earlier queer vampire tale. It is perhaps no coincidence that this tale was also written by an Irish writer, one who had lived through the cholera outbreaks as well as the horrific starvation and cannibalism of the Great Famine (1845–1852). Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* was originally published in 1872 as part of his popular *In a Glass Darkly* collection, which ostensibly presented the posthumous papers of an occult detective. This particular case is narrated by its central character, Laura, who recounts the visit she and her father received in their “lonely” forest mansion in Styria⁸



MALACCA ZOO, MALAYSIA/ZOO MELACA. Marianna Szczygielska.

from a beautiful, refined young woman who is unexpectedly placed in their care. The two young women, Laura and Carmilla, seem to remember one another instantly. Carmilla claims to share a traumatic “dream” that Laura also had as a young child, in which a beautiful woman caressed her: she “lay down beside me on the bed, and drew me towards her, smiling; I felt immediately delightfully soothed, and fell asleep again. I was wakened by a sensation as if two needles ran into my breast very deep at the same moment, and I cried loudly” (90).

The two girls begin to share a reciprocal trance-like attraction: “I wonder whether you feel as strangely drawn towards me as I do to you?” Carmilla asks Laura. “Now the truth is, I felt rather unaccountably towards the beautiful stranger,” Laura tells us. “I did feel, as she said, ‘drawn towards her,’ but there was also something of repulsion. In this ambiguous feeling, however, the sense of attraction immensely prevailed. She interested me and won me, she was so beautiful and indescribably *engaging*” (101, emphasis in original). Laura exhibits the mesmerized fascination common to the vampire experience, and this sense of captivated immobility is deepened and inflected through the repeated use of the term “languor.”

Carmilla’s “bodily langour” is often remarked upon, and becomes part of her attractiveness to Laura: “Her beauty was, I think, enhanced by that graceful langour that was peculiar to her” (123). Carmilla exhibits the nineteenth-century vogue for looking consumptive, as described by Susan Sontag. “Romantic agony,” Sontag tells us, is trammelled during this period into a glamorization of debilitation, whereby specific kinds of morbidity are transformed into the desirable state of langour (30).

When Carmilla’s attentions to Laura become particularly ardent, she briefly wonders, in a Shakespearean turn of mind, if Carmilla might be a man dressed as a woman, come to woo her. But, she decides, this is implausible: “I could boast of no little attentions such as masculine gallantry delights to offer . . . there was always a langour about her, quite incompatible with a masculine system in a state of health” (105). Carmilla’s attractiveness is bound up with her langour and the exquisite feminine illness it connotes. The possibility of this langour being infectious is the basis for reciprocal erotic attraction here. Laura describes Carmilla’s embraces becoming “foolish,” that is over-intimate, and wishes to extricate herself from them: “but my energies seemed to fail me. Her murmured words sounded



OLD ZOO IN POZNAŃ, POLAND/STARE ZOO W POZNANIU. Marianna Szczygielska.

like a lullaby in my ear, and soothed my resistance into a trance” (104).

The dangerousness of this seductive langour is made manifest as young girls in the surrounding area begin to die. The young women report seeing a ghost, or a figure that seizes them by the throat, and then the process of their decline is described as “sinking” (106, 109). Laura’s father thinks they are in the midst of an epidemic fever, and both girls wear charms as an “antidote against the malaria” (118). However, it becomes clear that Laura has now contracted this “illness.” Every morning she feels an increased “lassitude and languor”; she believes that she is darkly transforming: “I feel myself a changed girl.” Her apprehension of this sickness is also an apprehension of her failure of volition:

[A]n idea that I was slowly sinking took gentle, and, somehow, not unwelcome possession of me . . . Without knowing it, I was now in a pretty advanced state of the *strangest illness* under which mortal ever suffered. There was an unaccountable fascination in its earlier symptoms that more than reconciled me to the incapacitating effect of that stage of the malady. (118)

The erotic immobility of the vampire/contagion victim is further attested to in Laura’s nightly dreams, where strange sensations visit her, in particular the “peculiar cold thrill which we feel in bathing, when we move against the current of a river” succeeded by the feeling that “warm lips kissed me, and longer and more lovingly as they reached my neck and throat . . . a sense of strangulation, supervened, and turned into a dreadful convulsion, in which my sense left me, and I became unconscious” (118, 119). Sexual ecstasy and horror in the midst of disease/predation climax here into a swoon. But, Laura refuses medical help for her dreadful/ecstatic complaint, she tells us, because of the “narcotic” influence that is acting upon her (119).

Carmilla is the contagion. She admits that she has herself “suffered from this very illness” (109). Discussing the spread of the “fever” with Laura’s father, she tells him that the “disease that invades the country is *natural*. *Nature*. All things spring from Nature—don’t they? All things in the heaven, in the earth, and under the earth, act and live as Nature ordains? I think so” (109). Vampirism, contagion, and the spread of queer desires *are* Nature in Carmilla’s account. Further, she pursues an erotic intimacy with Laura which seems to share much in common with Morton’s conception of

ecological intimacy: “a polymorphously perverse belonging (and longing) that doesn’t fit in a straight box—an intimacy well described by queer theory when it argues that sexuality is never a case of a norm versus its pathological variants” (“Queer Ecology” 278).

Carmilla’s philosophy of the natural involves a version of the erotic that is at once a disintegrative and deadly fusion of the lovers *and* their transformation into other organic forms: “[Y]ou shall die,” she murmurs to Laura, who is immobilized in her embrace, “die, sweetly die—into [my life] . . . you, in your turn, will draw near to others, and learn the rapture of that cruelty, which yet is love” (103). Then she kisses her. This recalls Ernest Jones’s account of vampirism as the continued relation between the living and the dead, a reunion which might transform individuals into conjoined organisms. For Jones, vampiric conjoining is the correspondent of the desire for lovers to die together expressed in Wagner’s *Libeostod* in *Tristan and Isolde*: “our being we might blend/ in love without an end” (qtd. in Jones 405). The transformative connections stressed in *Carmilla* also remind me of the many other ways in which shared blood is imagined to mesh individuals into strange new amalgams: the childhood rituals of cutting fingers and rubbing blood on blood to produce playground “blood brothers”; folk-magical beliefs that secreting menstrual blood in a man’s food might bind the beloved to the bleeding woman; or the continued belief in menstrual synchronicity.⁹

Later, Carmilla extols to Laura the virtues of the opportunity “to die as lovers may—to die together, so that they may live together. Girls are caterpillars while they live in the world, to be finally butterflies when the summer comes; but in the meantime there are grubs and larva, don’t you see—each with their peculiar propensities, necessities, and structure” (110). This vision of the erotic as the propensity towards merger and organic metamorphosis is followed by a description of the vampire as an “amphibious existence” (147). The vampire is both at once: it is symbiotically doubled rather than single; it is an ev-

er-changing “existence” rather than a solitary life form. In Le Fanu’s imagining of the vampire as queer amphibian, as the contagious metamorphosis that is nature, we can discern the beginnings of the dark understanding that has been recently expounded by Morton as dark ecology. In Morton’s deconstructive re-estimation of nature, those “unnatural” terms against which it might seem to stand, for instance “queer” or “disease,”¹⁰ might instead be drawn into its purview. We might, then, hear the vampire Carmilla’s plaintive question echo through Morton’s work: “disease . . . is *natural*. *Nature*. All things spring from Nature—don’t they?” (109)

The ideas of “hosting” and “hospitality” might be helpful here as ways to further explore the notion of queer vampiric/ecological/deconstructive symbiosis. The risk of contagion in *Carmilla* is simultaneously achieved through the idea of the body as the host of disease (of fever, of “malaria,” of “the strangest illness”), and of the home as hosting the self-replicating vampire. Hosting and hospitality have long played an important part in vampire mythology,¹¹ with vampires often needing to be *invited* across the threshold into a victim’s home. In the case of *Carmilla*, the vampire is handed over into the care of various aristocratic homes and she thanks each host heartily for their “hospitality,” later being described by them as a “perfidious and beautiful guest” (114, 145). The uneasy proximity between hospitality and predation has been explored in J. Hillis Miller’s incendiary deconstruction of the terms “parasite” and “host.” Hillis Miller (1977) tells us that “parasite” originally had a positive meaning, referring to “a fellow guest, someone sharing the food with you, there with you beside [*para*] the grain” (442). As the meaning of the term “parasite” modulates towards predation, “The host and the somewhat sinister or subversive parasite are fellow guests beside the food, sharing it. On the other hand, the host is himself the food, his substance consumed without recompense, as when one says, ‘He is eating me out of house and home’” (Hillis Miller 442). This sense also echoes

through the use of “host” to refer to the Eucharist bread: the host as sacrifice, or symbolic victim. But if the host is both the eater and the eaten, he also contains in himself “the double antithetical relation of host and guest, guest in the bifold sense of friendly presence and alien invader,” because host and ghost share the same etymological root:

ghos-ti, stranger, guest, host, properly; someone with whom one has reciprocal duties of hospitality . . . A host is a guest, and a guest is a host. A host is a host. The relation of . . . host and parasite in the original sense of “fellow guest,” is inclosed [*sic*] within the word “host” itself. A host in the sense of a guest, moreover, is both a friendly visitor in the house and at the same time an alien presence. (442–3)

Working through these terms as an example of deconstruction, Hillis Miller suggests that there is always already an alien guest in the home of the *text*: each reading of a poem contains “its enemy within itself, is itself both host and parasite” (447). Deconstruction is, then, bound up with the strange logic of the welcomed parasite; “Deconstruction,”

Derrida famously remarked, “is just visiting” (“Time is Out of Joint” 29). The idea of deconstruction as the welcome alien is perhaps even more pronounced in Derrida’s idea of “autoimmunity” (*Rogues* 45). The term “autoimmunity” is best known to us through autoimmune diseases such as Multiple Sclerosis and AIDS, wherein the body treats its own material as alien, producing an immune response against its own cells and tissues. As Michael Naas explains, in Derrida’s thinking, the autoimmune “entails an attack not simply on the self through some kind of self-destructive behaviour, but an attack on those things that protect and defend the self, leaving it open, vulnerable, hospitable to outside forces” (162). This is at once “a threat and an opportunity”:

The threat or danger is that in compromising the self . . . [it] may allow within it something that will eventually destroy it, a virus, a would-be assassin, a terrorist cell. But the opportunity consists in the fact that by compromising the *autos* in this way, by opening the self to what is other than and outside it, beyond its borders, it has the chance of welcoming something that may help it go



THE SINGAPORE ZOO/TAMAN HAIWAN SINGAPURA. Marianna Szczygielska.