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# Winner of the 2005 Rober T. Wilson Award for Schorlarly Writing

## Technology in *Dracula*:

Or, "Jonathan, quit playing with your damn camera and please save me!"

Timothy Scott Johnson '07

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*In what follows we shall be questioning concerning technology. Questioning builds a way. [...] The way is one of thinking. All ways of thinking, more or less perceptibly, lead through language in a manner that is extraordinary (Heidegger 311).*

The Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851 represented the summit of all that was and was to be the British colonial, technological, scientific, and imperial empires. The monument wrought of iron and glass was as much about displaying the superiority of Great Britain and its colonies as it was about displaying the inferiority of soon-to-be imperial states of the obviously more advanced and "civilized," growing European nations. George Stocking notes that "the Crystal Palace does in retrospect seem to have marked the opening of the mid-Victorian 'age of equipoise'- a temporary balance between the powerful and sometimes conflicting forces remolding British society" (4). Furthermore, the exhibition may be seen now, as it was then by Thomas Hardy, as a sort of "precipice in Time" (as quoted in Stocking 1), a snapshot of all that was British and all that defined "otherness" in relation to Britain. With exhibits devoted to the industrial products and technology from all over the world, the Palace provided a walk-through tour of the Anglo-centric universe. However, the Crystal Palace Exhibition and the period of confident growth and stability to follow afterwards did not last forever – many different and often hard-to-place factors eventually turned the "age of equipoise" in Britain into the familiar *fin de siècle*, Late Victorian, Britain riddled with fear, anxiety and uncertainty. No longer did the neatly represented and quantifiable representations illustrated by the Crystal Palace seem persuasive.

With Britain blinded from the foreign object of its anguish, conglomerate, fictional monsters in Late Victorian Gothic fiction appeared as placeholders for all of Britain's fears and anxieties. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is one such precipitate formed out of these times of uncertainty. Such anxieties often explored through criticism on *Dracula* are sexual, as exemplified through discourses on the New Women, heredity, rape, and love; social and political, with emphasis on fears caused by Imperialism and even anti-Semitic overtones (Halberstam); and medical and scientific, with talk of the exchange of blood and other bodily fluids and the ability of Western science to deal with the apparently irrational in the world. At the heart of Late Victorian anxiety is the growing inability to classify the us-and-them-based world into the same categories so conveniently created in the Crystal Palace. When one out of a series of possible routes is chosen, from that point onward, the rest are often automatically excluded. Therefore, in order to avoid repeating the Victorians' troubles, it should be noted that any attempt at neatly framing *Dracula* or any other piece of Gothic literature, one genre that defies boundaries, comprehensively within one system alone is doomed to failure.

One aspect of *Dracula* that is too often excluded is the emphasis Stoker placed on technology. As Garnet summarizes *Dracula*, "The greatest of nineteenth-century imperial powers is itself to be imperialized, by the undead powers of feudal Europe, against which all of its scientific knowledge and technological strength may prove to be unavailing" (37). However,

the distinction between assigning technology with the good and the less technological or untechnological in the novel cannot be so easily made. Carol Senf correctly remarks that "It is tempting to say that Dracula and the other vampires are Gothic while their opponents are scientific/technological (and the simplification does work to an extent), but Stoker's rendering of the conflict is much more complex and interesting and therefore worthy of our attention" (*Science*, 18). However, Senf goes on to also describe that the novel is about "the conflict between people who believe that the world is systematic and subject to both reason and human control and individuals whose very existence embodies mystery and the total lack of human control over a powerful and overwhelming universe" (19). This simplification, like the one Senf reveals discusses with technology, is also too simplistic. Dracula is anything but irrational; Van Helsing remarks that Dracula "had a mighty brain, a learning beyond compare" (300). Likewise, Renfield – the supposedly truly insane character – is often described as just as much a scientist as Dr. Seward, both characters who constantly take methodical notes and records on their experiments.

Often, when the technology in *Dracula* is discussed, it is done so through overtly Marxist lenses which, while often shedding light on many aspects of the heliophobic text, commit the crime of perpetuating a kind of vampirism of their own. According to Halberstam, "Attempts to consume Dracula and vampirism within one interpretive model inevitably produce vampirism. They reproduce, in other words, the very model they claim to have discovered" (334). In addition, Marxist traditions never seem to address technology on its own grounds within the novel. Instead, they work best as means of addressing the economic and political dimensions in *Dracula*. Rather than applying a ready-made and over generalized model to a discourse on technology in *Dracula*, it seems that approaching the technology in the novel on the grounds of technological discourse itself would be the most productive and rewarding approach.

The discourse on technology given in German philosopher Martin Heidegger's essay "The Question Concerning Technology" provides a more tenable avenue into exploring the meaning and implications of technology in *Dracula* than previous models and approaches have done thus far. Heidegger's analysis of technology and method of questioning technology's ontological aspects provides a rich account of the tensions and importance placed on technology in the novel. Particularly, it shows the relationship between the Victorian desire to classify and order the universe about them as exemplified by moments such as the Crystal Palace Exhibition and the limits and boundaries that come with such an ideology. As a rule, the Gothic monster defies all boundaries – it will not be classified, and all such attempts to do so will end in failure. Cohen notes that "This refusal to participate in the classificatory 'order of things' is true of monsters generally: they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions" (6). The modern technology in *Dracula*, its emphasis throughout the novel and apparent inability to dispatch with the vampire, represents the Victorian desire to be driven by static categories and the dangers associated with such a deterministic force as well as technology's ability to transcend it and technology's own determinist qualities.

An active reader cannot but help notice the emphasis placed on technology in *Dracula*, especially in the novel's beginning. Jonathan Harker's journal begins with a note explaining that it is being "*Kept in shorthand*" (Stoker 26), a newly revised form of note taking fashioned after the practice of the ancient Greeks that Harker exclaims "is nineteenth century up-to-date with a vengeance" (60). Throughout Harker's journey to the Count's castle, he references his trips to the library of the British Museum, the usefulness of his "polyglot dictionary" (31), and his disappointment that "there are no maps of this country as yet to compare with our own Ordnance Survey maps" (27). When Harker arrives at the castle, he is

amused at the Count's own library and desire to learn all of the advantages of Britain's modernity, including directories, almanacs, and train station schedules, and is more than ready to show the Count pictures of the Carfax estate taken with Harker's new Kodak camera (44-48).

All of Harker's modernist British technology is placed in stark contrast against the rural, pre-industrial background of Eastern Europe. Senf goes as far as to claim that Harker "is highly critical of those who do not share his enthusiasm for all things modern" (*Science*, 17-18). To be sure, Harker's distaste for the figures he encounters when in Transylvania is not hidden. When Harker sees the "Cszeks and Slovaks, all in picturesque attire," he seems quickly disappointed when he notices "that goitre was painfully prevalent" and sullies his preconceived romanticized notions (33).

The other good characters are strongly identified with modern technologies as well. Mina is closely tied to the composition of the text of the novel itself. Also, like Jonathan, Mina can read and write in shorthand, and she prides herself on her newfound abilities with a typewriter (Stoker 76). Even when the good characters are pursuing Dracula back to Transylvania, Mina remarks in her journal how grateful she is to the inventor of the "Traveller's typewriter" (344).

Lord Godalming, Dr. Seward, Quincey Morris, and Dr. Van Helsing all use combinations of telegrams, cable wires, and written letters to communicate quickly and easily with one another. Instead of writing by hand or typewriting, Dr. Seward has a special affinity for his phonograph with which he records personal memoranda and notes on his patients. While on the train in pursuit of Dracula, Seward is not so privileged as Mina and regrets having to write a diary: "How I miss my phonograph! To write diary with a pen is irksome to me; but Van Helsing says I must" (330). Other prominent technologies are the tools Van Helsing uses to give Lucy a blood transfusion, the trains, quick communication devices and steam-powered boats used to track down the Count, and Quincey's guns from America.

On the other side of the coin, the evil characters in the novel are generally associated with either a lack of technology, or out-of-date technologies; however, this generalization does not necessarily fit with careful readings of the novel. For example, all of Dracula's messages to other characters appear to be hand written or sent telepathically. Also, Senf comments that Dracula seems to prefer older means of transportation such as "horses and sailing ships" (*Between*, 91). Yet, Harker notices from Dracula's library that Dracula is willing and ready to learn about all of modern Britain's conveniences. The fact that Dracula is not affected by the modern technology people attempt to use on him is only evidence to his being above such technologies. Garnett asserts that "The technological means used to pursue and entrap Dracula (telegrams, trains, a power-boat, rifles) are impotent to destroy him; for his destruction, arcane, unscientific knowledge of and belief in the metaphysical realm are indispensable" (46-47). Instead of the modern technological marvels of the time, the good characters are forced to use knives, religious artifacts, and wooden stakes.

Many critics (Day, Halberstam) categorize the good characters' infatuation with the material goods of industrial Britain, as well as this phenomenon's wider pattern throughout America and Europe, in terms of Marx's processes of "alienation" and "Fetishism of commodities." In *Capital*, Marx writes that

In [the religious] world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the product of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities. (*Capital*, 321)

The amazing new inventions the characters rely upon from day-to-day would seem to take on a spiritual quality, endowed with an aura of magic about them; the greater the number of commodities, the more estranged or alienated from oneself a person becomes. However, this

interpretation seems to fall short when called to deal with the fact that the commodities so apparently fetishized have no effect against other mystical entities such as Dracula.

When addressing British workers in 1864, Marx discusses "British industry, which, vampire like, could but live by sucking blood, and children's blood, too" (*Inaugural*, 517). Even if the failure of the modern technology is allegorical for one of Dracula's attributes, i.e., his supernatural powers and their hindrance to the good characters, the connection seems tenuous. After all, technological advances in communication and travel are two areas in which the good characters are able to gain an advantage over Dracula.

When briefly discussing the technologies in *Dracula*, Carol Senf defines technology, "somewhat arbitrarily" and "broadly," "as practical or applied science" (*Between*, 89). This is of course supposed to be placed in opposition to the "pure science" in the novel. This definition of technology does indeed seem all too "arbitrary" for the purposes of this discussion. First, this definition of technology represents it only as some means to an end. In reality, a proper sense of technology should also count its corollary effects as well — those not necessarily designed in the end it is originally intended to serve. As Heidegger discusses technology, technology's essence "is by no means technological" and it lies in the effects it has on the world and human beings, specifically, the way in which technology "enframes" the world (Heidegger 311). The definition given by Senf is therefore what Heidegger would classify as a "merely anthropological" definition — one that only discusses what technology itself appears to humans to be without discussing the essence that lay in the background. Also, for Heidegger, the question of technology "may not be rounded out by being referred back to some metaphysical or religious explanation that undergirds it" (326). The religious language (Fetishisms) and metaphysical language (alienation) invoked by the Marxist critique will not get to the heart of technology's effects in the novel. Instead, it only creates a misplaced metaphor useful only to support Marxist views.

The technology in *Dracula* should therefore be seen and interpreted in terms of its essence: that is, a way in which the world is framed both for and by the characters, through the use of technology. The instruments used by both the good and the evil forces in the novel are ways in which characters' decisions are enframed and determined. The fact that the enframing seems like a two-way street might appear contradictory since it would seem that either humans are the masters of technology, or technology is the master of humans. However, Heidegger makes the case that humans are only masters of technology only inasmuch as technology allows itself to be directed. Heidegger writes, "Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it" (311). Although options are seemingly fixed within a person's technological frame and there is never the option of escaping technology, human beings are always and already under technology's enframing, there is at every crossroads the ability to influence the direction of future frames: "Since man drives technology forward, he takes part in ordering as a way of revealing. But the unconcealment itself, within which ordering unfolds, is never a human handiwork, any more than is the realm man traverses every time he as a subject relates to an object" (324). The process of framing is therefore, the process by which the characters in *Dracula* attempt to influence the structure of their own lives both purposely and implicitly. The degree to which any of the characters is free or not depends only on the effectiveness of the frames they choose in revealing the nature of the world about them: "Freedom is that which conceals in a way that opens to light, in whose clearing shimmers the veil that hides the essential occurrence of all truth and lets the veil appear at what veils. Freedom is the realm of destining that at any given time starts a revealing on its way" (330).

The supreme desire for such characters as Mina, Jonathan, Lord Godalming, Quincey, and Dr. Seward to see the world only in terms of the ways their British modernity reveals itself limits the amount of understanding they can have. Jonathan's notions of the people in Eastern Europe are enframed by what his travel guides and trips to the British Museum tell him how the people should be. It does not seem like too much of a stretch to say that Quincey is described

in terms of his adventurous American technology and the frame that it evokes. Senf writes that Quincey "has traveled all over the world and is known mostly for his familiarity with weapons and horses. Above all, he seems to be a type of American Adventurer" (*Between*, 11). Thus, it is not surprising to see scenes in which Quincey first reacts with his rifle (Stoker 320). Similarly, when Dr. Seward tries to diagnose Lucy, he does so through the frame that Late Victorian science provides for him — Seward never seems to consider any causes for Lucy's condition not sanctioned by modern Victorian medicine.

While providing the basis by which the characters in the novel conduct their own day-to-day lives, the frames of modern British technology provide one of the biggest dangers for the good characters. Heidegger writes, "Placed between these possibilities [of approaching truth through enframing or being led astray from truth through framing], man is endangered by destining. The destining of revealing is as such, in every one of its modes, and therefore necessarily, *danger*" (331). The frames that allow the good characters to function are those that also blind them when confronted with difference. As Harker remarks in Dracula's castle, "the old centuries had, and have, powers of their own which mere modernity cannot kill" (Stoker 60). Dr. Seward is unable to truly help Lucy because the cause of her condition lies outside the bounds of what his technological frames will allow. Senf asserts that "Indeed, because Seward is the most scientific and rational of all the characters, it takes him the longest to accept the presence of what is Gothic and mysterious" (*Science*, 21). When provided with a system of neat categories that adhere to Seward's notions of science and technology, Seward functions just fine. However, the moment one of the rules of his technological frame is broken, Seward is rendered helpless. Van Helsing, on the other hand, is able to treat Lucy at least to a degree; one might wonder whether or not the Dutch doctor could have saved Lucy's life had he arrived on the scene any sooner. Unlike Seward, Van Helsing is equally ready to reach for garlic and communion hosts, as he is to reach for his blood transfusion kit. Van Helsing's technological frame is not limited by in the same ways that Seward's frame limits. Instead, Van Helsing's frame is more open to those things Gothic.

Dracula might also be seen within the limits of his own technological frame. Halberstam remarks that "Dracula is indeed no simply a monster, but a technology of monstrosity" (334). It is not necessarily the lack of technology that makes Dracula so monstrous, but rather the type of technology he uses and his attempts as a monster to incorporate modern British technology into his repertoire. Although, the Count tries to amalgamate modern British technology into his life, if for no other reason than the fact that he has "been so long master that I would be master still — or at least that none other should be master of me" (Stoker 45), Dracula nonetheless does not seem to be able to get comfortable with the advantages of modernity. The moment Dracula realizes his enterprises in England have been thoroughly jeopardized he flees back to the less technological Transylvania in a regular cargo ship while his pursuers travel much faster on trains and steam-propelled boats.

In the end, however, the technological frames that hindered the good characters are somehow transcended, or at least re-directed in order to accommodate the fact of the Gothic monster, Dracula — that which defied the boundaries and neat categorization offered by the frame of Britain's modern technology. One interpretation could be that Van Helsing's influence helped the good characters incorporate less modern (or, conversely, more primitive) technologies such as stakes, crucifixes, communion hosts, and garlic into their modern technological frame and this is what allows to forces of good to triumph in the end. Heidegger's essay, however, provides a possible alternative or supplement to this reading.

As a means for escaping and shaping the frames that technology places on us, Heidegger suggests that artistic technology plays an important role. Heidegger refers to ancient Greek, when "There was a time when the bringing-forth of the true into the beautiful was called *technē*. The *poiēsis* of the fine arts was also called *technē*" (339). Artistic expression is a technology in itself that can help to positively enframe the world. Quoting the nineteenth century poet, Hölderlin,

Heidegger states that "But where the danger is, grows / The saving power also . . ." (340). This saving power rests on the corollary statement that "...poetically man dwells on this earth" (340). The technology of artistic expression is the key to enframing the world in a way that leads one to the truth, versus the dangers of being led away from the truth.

At the outset of *Dracula*, the reader is confronted with the confession that what follows is a contrivance of those who have experienced the story. The arranger of the various journal entries (supposedly Jonathan), correspondences and other documents states that "All needless matters have been eliminated, so that a history almost at variance with the possibilities of later-day belief may stand forth as a simple fact" (Stoker 26). Then, at the end of the story, the arranger comments that "there is hardly one authentic document; nothing but a mass of type-writing [...] We could hardly ask any one, even did we wish to, to accept these words as proofs of so wild a story" (369). The account of the story given can be seen as much a work of fiction as the novel itself.

Many of the individual instances of writing in the story corroborate this possibility well. The technology of writing is one aspect that helps the good characters figure out the presence of Dracula among them when Mina compiles and transcribes Jonathan's journals from the castle. When in Dracula's castle, Jonathan even attaches the preservation of his own sanity to the ability to keep a journal account of what transpires and "keep to facts, bare facts" (54). Senf comments that "Not only is writing expressive in *Dracula*, it is a means of suppressing consciousness" (*Between*, 88). With Harker's focus on purely factual entries, he limits the apparently irrational thoughts and ideas concerning his troubling situation.

Also, the means by which the characters write their own accounts seem to differ according to the method they use. Likewise, when traveling by train, Dr. Van Helsing makes Dr. Seward keep a written diary in lieu of his phonograph dictation (Stoker 330) and Mina notes that she would "have felt quite astray doing the work if I had to write with a pen" instead of her "Traveller's typewriter" (344). The technological framing of the characters also coincides with the literary framing of their own personal stories. Halberstam goes as far as to say that "The technology of the monster's monstrosity, indeed, is intricately connected to the novel's mode of production" (335). The apparent incoherence and fragmented nature of the story adds to Dracula's power over the characters. However, the point when each of the fragmented accounts is brought together coincides with the start of Dracula's downfall.

In much the same way that the Crystal Palace brought the new global world, the British Empire upon which "the sun never set," under one handy metaphor that categorized according to principles of us and them, civilized and primitive, advanced and barbaric, the modern technology in *Dracula* represents the way in which the Late Victorian world was enframed. However, in *Dracula*, we are approached with the notion that not only do the neat systems of classification appear to not always be enough when dealing with the world, but also perhaps they are a contributing factor to the very monsters that terrorize our world. The answer that *Dracula* seems to offer to this problem lies not in abandoning technology, but rather redefining technology and working through its frames in ways that can account for the apparently unaccountable.

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