Re: Dracula Bonus Episode 2— Victorian Class and Gender

HANNAH

Hello everyone. My name is Hannah Wright, my pronouns are she/her, and I am one of the executive producers and directors of *Regarding Dracula*. This is a bonus episode that I am very excited to show to you, but before we begin, I wanted to give you a warning that it does contain frank discussion of sex and sexuality (although nothing explicit), as well as spoilers. If you're enjoying *Dracula* for the first time and would rather not be spoiled, then you might want to wait until after you've listened to episode 84 or September 29th to listen to this bonus episode. Thank you so much. Here we go!

HANNAH

Welcome, listeners, to another bonus episode of *Regarding Dracula* where we are talking about the context and culture surrounding the book *Dracula* in the Victorian era. We want to say thank you to our Seed & Spark contributors who helped us basically get to this point where we could do this series of extra episodes. We are so very grateful for the opportunity. I am very excited to be joined today by a Victorianist and writer of one of my favorite podcasts, *Victoriocity*. Would you please introduce yourself?

JEN

Hi! Thank you, that was so lovely! I am Dr. Jen Sugden, and I am an *erstwhile* Victorianist — (*laughs)* I did a PhD in London on the history of the Victorian novel, really, and I looked at changes in the criminal jury trial during the 19th century and how that influenced the development of novel narratives—

HANNAH

Ooh!

JEN

—and in particular, like detective and mystery narratives?

HANNAH

Fantastic.

JEN

So that was my speciality, but I also teach and— so I teach a lot of Victorian fiction, so I've taught *Dracula* quite a lot, and have a healthy interest in the Gothic and Dracula, any kind of sensational text of the 19th century.

HANNAH

And this is exactly why we're so glad you're here!

JEN

So I'm *delighted*! I'm delighted to be here!

HANNAH

Wonderful! Well okay, let's start with what the Victorian era *is.* Now, when we define 'Victorian times,' we're talking about a period of time that goes from, like the 1820s/1830s all the way up to World War I. That's nearly a century! Why do we consider it just one cultural moment, is it because of Queen Victoria?

JEN

Yeah, so I thought about this. So for *me*, if we're defining, like, what is the Victorian era itself, I'd say it spans her reign, which is 1937-1901. But there's so much interesting stuff going on that critics and theorists are kind of interested in, that it's interesting to kind of look just before and just after that— what we've ended up with is sort of a period to study that just ekes out either side of a little bit. It seems to kind of be eking longer and longer and longer — so as you say, we might talk about the "long 19th century," scholars often talk about, and that can run anywhere from the late 18th century right the way through, as you say, to World War I. And I was thinking about this question, about why we tend to treat

it as one cultural moment, because the world in 1830 is completely different to how it is in 1890 or 1900. I mean part of it might be to do with the fact that Victoria's reign *was* so long, particularly the time that she was on the throne. And she's so iconic and emblematic of the period — that might be part of it, I think you might be onto something there. But also I think that, during that time, *so* much changed — it's a period of just rapid social, technological, scientific advancement — in a way that we'd never really seen before, you know, in large part thanks to the industrial revolution.

HANNAH

Right.

JEN

But you're getting changes, *huge* changes in people's way of thinking and experiencing their lived realities — so we get trains in the 1840s, 1838's the invention of the telegraph — it changes people's conception of time and space! Darwin's writing *Origin of the Species*, I think that was around 1859, 1860; we've got new theories in psychology; the legal system changes — we've got loads of reform acts. So I think, whilst a lot changes and you get a very different world at the beginning and the end of the period, because change is happening all the time, I'm wondering if that's why we tend to think of it as one cultural moment — as this moment in time when things just radically shift and change.

HANNAH

Interesting.

JEN

But that would be *my* thought on it.

HANNAH

Well that's interesting because now when we think of Victorian times we think of them as very like, I don't know, rigid? Regimented? You know, people having to

follow one thing at a time, but characterizing it as a time of change — that adds a whole bunch of possibility to this vibe that I'm picking up from Victorian times.

JEN

I think it is! So much is changing. I'm wondering why the thought of— *(laughs)* popular culture today is partly to blame for our view of the Victorian period as a time that is quite rigid and set. It's not really like that. I mean, society isn't— not everybody's the same, I suppose, and we have this idea of the Victorians as sort of very prim and proper — very prudish, almost — and I think a lot of that also will come from the dominant discourse at the time, which tends to be, like, middle class in particular. In the 1850s you get the abolition of the taxes on knowledge — so, duty that was paid on newspapers, and on paper itself—

HANNAH

Hm!

JEN

—they were abolished. So that means that it becomes much cheaper to print newspapers, pamphlets, magazines, journals — and there's a huge rise in literacy as well, and it becomes cheaper to buy these things, so more people are reading, so there's a greater kind of proliferation of knowledge out there. But of course the people who are writing it are writing very much from their own class sensibilities and ideology, whether they're aware of it or not. And so I'm wondering whether a lot of the writings that we have left behind, because of that, might, themselves give a little bit of this impression of quite a rigid, set social system or ideas. But, as an example, you have in the Victorian period what we call "coster culture." So costermongers are like street hawkers, street sellers, and you could get anything like eels, fruit and veg, pies, ice cream even, whatever. For example, Eliza Doolittle in Pygmalion/*My Fair Lady* — she's a costermonger, she's a flower seller.

HANNAH

Ah.

JEN

Costermongers had a, what we call "coster culture," which was completely different to, of the social culture at the time. So like, women and men just didn't marry? And if we think about the Victorian period, you might think, 'oh anybody, if they were in a relationship, if they had children, it would be very frowned upon if they weren't married," and that's the kind of expectation that we have, but it was not the norm within costermonger culture, for example. So it's easy to kind of think about the Victorian period as everybody in these rigid and set patterns and social structures in a way that isn't quite fully true when you take into account the broad range of different cultures and peoples that lived in England at the time. But that isn't to say that there isn't a dominant cultural discourse of rigidity and set patterns and social acceptability, which tends to be, I think, a very middle class worldview, and that's because they really become the dominant class of the day, sort of in terms of like, political power and numbers. I mean, the biggest numbers are in the working classes, but of course they don't have a voice in the same way that the middle classes did, for a number of reasons, some of which we'll touch on, obviously.

HANNAH

I would love to actually talk more about the different social classes. Because I don't know if— this is not true of all of our listeners, but for me it's hard to imagine social classes based on anything besides how much money you have? And I don't know if that's necessarily reflective of what social classes were like in Victorian era, or if money became, like, *the* thing that determined them? Can you talk a little bit about social classes during Victorian times and how that might be different from today?

JEN

Yeah, so I'm doing very broad strokes, and it's obviously quite a complex area, but what I say is *broadly* speaking before the 19th century, traditional kind of social structure of England was sort of based in agriculture and land ownership. So interest tended to be based on land and game. So what you'd have is a sort of a landed social hierarchy that is almost like a feudal social structure; it's not feudalism, but it has this kind of feudal social structure, where—

HANNAH

It's a carryover from that.

JEN

Yeah, yeah. So, what you've got at the top is you've got your nobility, so your earls and your dukes, various noble ranks, and obviously they're going to have money. And then you have the landed gentry — also who have money — who are a social class of landowners, they might own a country estate, they live off the interest of the land. So, for example, rental income from tenant farmers would probably be one of the biggest incomes that they'd have. And then below that obviously you've got the middle classes and the working classes, but England was, really before the 19th century, very agriculture-based. What it engendered is a sort of— or critics think it engendered— is this sort of interdependent hierarchy where you get sort of patronage and responsibility downwards and deference upwards. And the landed gentry in particular, who would very often have very close relatives themselves in the nobility, were very socially and politically powerful. By the 19th century, that traditional agricultural basis and land ownership creating that social system, was starting to come under threat and fall away a little bit. And that's because of things like urbanization, industrialization, geographical migration to concentrated urban centers, new money from industry, trade, and finance, much of which was made possible by the industrial revolution. All of those things started to challenge the traditional landed society. And the increased opportunities for those outside of the gentry to make money and have money, and have influence and power through investment in mills and factories and capital — that allowed people to place themselves, financially at least, on the same level as the gentry. And so what you get in the 19th century, really, is this kind of rise of and consolidation of the middle classes. And there's a critic called Robin Gilmour who calls it "the emergence and consolidation of the middle classes."

HANNAH

Interesting.

JEN

And they become very powerful, very influential. And what's really interesting in terms of— you were talking about class being linked to money. And it always has been, I suppose, in a sense, but maybe nowadays it is more to do with wealth, whereas I think in the past, whilst the landed gentry and the nobility would be quite wealthy, there's also something in there as well about — and I don't know if this is kind of peculiarly English as well — there's something about birth and rank and title and status that goes beyond money. And in the Victorian period, when the middle classes started to become more powerful, more wealthy, that idea comes under challenge as well. So people from within that class system — from the middle classes — could potentially be as wealthy as people in the landed gentry. So what you're getting then is a shift, from, like, previously this kind of social structure that fostered the idea, at least, even if in reality it didn't exist, this idea of responsibility and patronage downwards and deference upwards. It's replaced then by this system that's based on economic interest — and you start to wander into like, Marxism and stuff now — so the bonds between men become economic — or between people. "Between men," I mean there I'm talking kind of Victorian— *(both laugh)* Victorian language, they would say men! But yeah, between people becomes economic. Yeah, and so the middle classes become very economically and politically increasingly powerful. The— I think it was the 1832 Reform Act? — which dealt with voting, gave more men the vote — it gives lots more middle class men the vote, so of course they become more politically powerful in that way as well.

HANNAH

Right.

JEN

And so we start to see the waning influence of the gentry and the nobility but obviously that takes a very long time to sort of, to really kind of fade away. Yeah, so these kind of new economic relationships based on merchandise and money emerge, and with it, the middle classes.

HANNAH

I was going to ask about class mobility. So it seems like there was — obviously nobody's entering gentry or nobility, but a lot of people moving up to, like, at least the same level of power?

JEN

I think so, but it's interesting because— social mobility is an interesting question because it *was* possible in the 19th century, and where it happens, I think, the most, or the most we see it, is we get a fluidity of class boundary between the landed gentry and the upper middle classes. Because what happens is, when you get this shift of social structure that's moving towards this kind of being more about economic ties, and you're moving to a society which is powered by like, industry and capital — capitalism and that kind of thing — rather than sort of an agriculture-based society, what happens is people in the landed gentry are becoming very land-rich but cash-poor, and all the money is tied up in the land.

HANNAH

Right.

JEN

But what that means is they start to form alliances with very wealthy families from the upper middle classes. And it works quite nicely because for a landed family, the money is all tied up in the land, so the eldest son *usually* — it's always portrayed like this in fiction, I think, but it's not necessarily always true because in truth clever lawyers could get around it, but there was a statute in 1215 I think called statute De donis *[transcriber's note: it's actually 1285]*, which basically creates a rule of primogeniture, which means that the land and the estate would pass to the firstborn son *usually*. It's stated in the gift who it will pass to, but it's normally to the first male issue. And that's a way of people not breaking up estates. But like, the original owner doesn't want somebody years down the line to start breaking up the land and selling it off, they want to kind of keep it together. So

what that means is, actually if you're the firstborn son you might inherit this estate but you might be quite cash-poor.
But families also have second sons and third sons and women, daughters. So it's like, well what happens to them if I haven't got a lot of money to leave them? This is Jane Austen. This is like every Jane Austen novel, right? It's Marianne and Elinor, it's the Bennet daughters — they're all worried about, 'well, what are we going to do when father dies because, you know, the estate's going to pass to some cousin because he didn't have any sons,' or what have you. So yeah, so you get the— the estate kind of passes to that first male issue, so what happens to the other children? Or what happens to the baronet that inherits the land but doesn't have any money? Well, what happens is you start to get them being married into wealthy families that are perhaps maybe new money.

HANNAH

Uh-huh.

JEN

And of course the upper middle classes like that because they have loads of money — you know, the wealthy industrialist might have loads of money but he doesn't have a title, but what if his daughter could marry an earl? *(Hannah laughs.)* Oh, but surely then that tells us that she's absolutely made it, right? So you get lots of social mobility that way. And lower down it is possible, we tend to hear about it or see it less, and I was thinking about this earlier today and I wonder whether that's partly to do with the middle classes themselves. And Dickens is a really good example of this, so here's our lower middle class. And when I look at middle class writers, I often find in their novels — in the Victorian period — there's this desire to sort of say, 'look, here we are, we're the middle classes, we're the moral ones, we're the good ones, we're not like the degenerate, lazy aristocrats,'

HANNAH

Or the greedy new money, for that matter.

JEN

(laughs)

But we're— we work hard and we deserve what we've got and we've got a good moral system. And we're just as good as them! And in that sense, class doesn't matter. But at the same time, what they want to do is they want to define themselves against the working class. They want to say, 'well yeah, but we're not that.' Even if you might have social problem novels that are trying to, on the face of it, deal quite sensitively, for example, with class issues and class divides and saying, 'we're all the same person!' But if you actually kind of dig into it, the novelist themself is probably not aware, but as an example off the top of my head, it might be something like, if we're talking about unionizing and workers' rights, the novel might have a message of, like, 'oh, can't we all come together as fellow men by just talking nicely about it?' rather than like, you know, 'industrial action's not great!' But of course, because that protects the middle class interest, right? And not the working class interest. Even though it might be presented— the working class might be presented sympathetically or empathetically in other ways.

And the reason I mention Dickens, in terms of this social mobility is because *Great Expectations* is a great novel for this. It's such a *weird* novel in terms of social mobility. Because on the one hand, it's all *about* social mobility — it's about a blacksmith's boy, working class, gets given this legacy, he doesn't know who it's from, and he gets sent to the city to become a gentleman. And the question is, can he? And the novel deals with 'can he become a gentleman? Is Pip capable of doing it?' And it grapples a lot with the question that I think was an anxiety for the middle classes which was — what a gentleman used to mean was somebody who had been *born* to it, so like rank and status, right? You're *born* as a baronet; you're born as an earl, whatever, you know, you're going to inherit that; *that* makes you a gentleman. It's not really about your character. But the middle classes didn't have that, and there's sort of a sense in which someone like Dickens wants to believe actually being a gentleman is *more* than rank and status — it's not actually really about that; it's about who you are as a person and your morals and your attitude and how you behave. His way of showing that is the person who *has* been born a gentleman, Bentley Drummle, is a bully and vicious, domestically violent, and just a really nasty, nasty character. And when Pip tries

to emulate what he thinks a gentleman is, which is that older vision of what a gentleman was, he himself becomes not a particularly nice person. And the novel seems to suggest that somebody like Joe Gargery, who's the blacksmith — he's Pip's father-like figure but he's married to his sister — he embodies all the characteristics, I think, Dickens wants us to believe a gentleman is; he's kind, he's thoughtful — all that kind of thing. But you never get the sense that he really is one?

HANNAH

Ah.

JEN

—from Dickens? And I think there's this weird sort of tension you get in that novel between Dickens *desperately* as that lower middle class person originally, wanting to say, 'I'm better than, or you know, as good as, and the same as the landed gentry and the aristocrats, if not better! But also I'm not working class.' And a really interesting thing to look at his autobiographical fragment — he never finished writing it, but he wrote about his childhood and about how he had to work in the blacking factory because his dad got put into debtors' prison. He was drawn from a lower middle class background, but of course he ended up working with people — including a boy called Bob Fagin, who was very very nice to him actually, and then he does an appalling representation of Fagin in, uh—

HANNAH

(laughs)

I was going to say!

JEN

—in *Oliver Twist*. It was *so* antisemitic that he himself— Dickens himself, later, edited it to make it less antisemitic—

HANNAH

Good *grief!*

JEN

—because he recognized himself that it was so bad.

HANNAH

Oh man.

JEN

But when he talks about his time in the blacking factory, he talks about how his soul has sunk down, and just how appalled he is at having to come into contact with these other boys that are not really from the same class as him. So, there's something really troubling about that, and I think you see that in his representation of Pip, because Pip is a working class boy. And if you compare that with his other first-person narrative, which is *David Copperfield*, who *is* a middle class boy, David makes mistakes in the same way that Pip does, but David Copperfield is afforded his happy ending in a way that Pip kind of isn't. So I think there's something really interesting when we look at middle class writers about how they view class, and it's sort of like they almost want to feel like the boundaries don't exist for them but they do for other people; it's interesting.

HANNAH

Interesting.

JEN

I'm talking in broad strokes; there's always going to be exceptions, obviously, to everything I say. To link it to *Dracula*, though, I was thinking about this — because you've got *Count* Dracula, obviously aristocracy, obviously a villain — I think that they talk about, like 300 years of wealth that he has. He's very sniffy as well, isn't he, about his bones eventually lying with the commoners *(Hannah laughs)*, there's something like that— even though he won't die, but there is something like that, it's like he—

HANNAH

Yeah, he does talk a lot — and with a lot of scorn — about the peasantry that nevertheless he needs to, like, move his unconscious body across Europe.

JEN

He's a bad egg. And there's definitely class stuff at play in there. And Arthur is the other sort of gentry figure, but for me he seems to become sort of assimilated into the middle class work ethic, and particularly it's interesting that Van Helsing makes him stake Lucy. And I think there's a class thing going on there as well, it's sort of almost bringing him into those middle class values and ideals, and he's sort of enacting it out on Lucy's body.

HANNAH

There's even a moment where, after his father dies, Van Helsing addresses him as Lord Godalming and he's like, 'no, please, not yet.'

JEN

Yeah.

HANNAH

'My father *just* died, I don't want to be called Lord yet.'

JEN

Yes, exactly. So he— so I think there's almost an assimilation into middle class and middle class ideas and ideals, so he's fine. But Dracula, who's this sort of typical aristocrat is *very* bad, and depicted as a *contagion* almost, this sort of disease. And I was thinking, it's quite interesting that Jonathan Harker, who is of course the epitome of the middle class hero — you know, he's like, the lawyer and he goes across — he becomes quite deferential, when he's first in the castle, to Dracula, and he ends up, when he comes out of it, very much, like, a weak character, Mina has to look after him — and I think there's something metaphorical probably going on there as well about that sort of old system of— with the aristocrats with all the power.

HANNAH

Almost like Dracula's taking his dignity, even as he's, like, feeding on him, or letting the vampyresses feed on him, whatever the text actually—

JEN

Yeah.

HANNAH

—implies. It implies a lot of things.

JEN

(laughs)

It does, it does, it does. And a lot that I think Bram Stoker probably didn't realize.

HANNAH

I actually kind of want to move into, as we're talking about *Dracula*, and as we're talking about, I don't know, the way especially the women in *Dracula* are treated. I'd love to move into gender. Like Victorian ideals about gender. But also, before we do that, we should define some terms. So when we're talking about gender, and especially, like, gender roles, what are we talking about?

JEN

So, when I'm talking about in a Victorian context, I'm going to be talking about it in terms of the "dominant ideas" of the time, which isn't to say everybody thought in this way, but generally the dominant discourse tends to treat gender as binary and also essential — so it's like an essentialist approach to it. So there's something that, you know, is about women that "makes them" women and men that "makes them" men, and there's kind of no crossover.

HANNAH

Right.

JEN

You know, which isn't what *I* believe, but at the time the dominant discourse would've treated, yeah, male and female as very separate and having quite distinct characteristics. And so that's how I'm going to be talking about it here because we're talking about the common terms.

HANNAH

Cool! So, let's talk about gender. I think about, you know, in the same way that I think about class in Victorian times as being pretty set and rigid, gender roles even moreso. And to that end, I think of it like Victorian ideals carrying over being some of our cultural problems' roots. Were gender roles in Victorian times really like that? Were they very separate and regimented like that?

JEN

Broadly speaking, yes. It's hard to talk about, like, the *entirety* of society in that way. So, for example, for the upper classes and the middle classes, to— and particularly the upper middle classes — if you were a woman and you worked, there was a huge stigma attached to that. Like, it was not kind of socially acceptable. But obviously working class women worked and were expected to work. So again, it might be a bit class-dependent or social group-dependent, but *broadly* speaking, yes I think gender roles were quite defined — tend to be quite rigid like that. And again, it's partly— like, a lot of the dominant discourse at the time about gender is produced by the middle classes, and they tend to treat gender in this way. Obviously ideas existed before, like Jane Austen and even before that — like, Jane Austen is dealing with the gentry and its fringes, but you get a lot of like— you can see a lot of gender roles at play in then, and that carries over into the 19th century. In the Victorian period what you get is this sort of — I don't know whether to call it a theory, but this idea, let's say — called the separation of the spheres. So you've got, like, the domestic sphere, which is the woman's realm; and the world of work, which is for the man. And the woman stays at home and she's in the domestic sphere and she looks after the house and it becomes a little haven for the man who has to go out into the sinful world *(Hannah giggles)* to kind of come back into and relax and rest.

(sarcastically)

Because the woman musn't be tainted by the outside world, but of course men — as we know! — are, they're more hardy creatures than us poor women and, you know, they can cope with the sins of the outside world, but women musn't be tainted.

And so you get this idea and separation of the domestic sphere is the realm of the woman — women are wives and are mothers, and men are, well they're for the world of work and they look after the family. So that was genuinely a real thing — and *obviously* people are challenging it — and men too, as well. But generally this is the dominant cultural discourse about gender at the time. And there's a poem I always think of, which is Coventry Patmore's "Angel in the House."

HANNAH

Ooh!

JEN

Which I think was written about 1860. It was incredibly popular. And it was basically, a guy writes about his incredibly loyal, chaste, perfect wife who looks like an angel, and then there's this horrible section where he's sort of— I think he chastises her or he's just being super grumpy because he's had a bad day at work? And then she sort of looks adoringly at him as though, like, she's to blame, and she doesn't reproach him for being for like, for him being so awful to her that— that that makes him feel bad about how he's treated her. It's just horrific. I mean, it's so bad. But it becomes a very popular trope in the 19th century novel. Dickens loves it.

HANNAH

We definitely see that in Dracula too.

JEN

Yes, exactly — with Mina and Lucy. Also with Queen Victoria as well; she's an interesting woman.

HANNAH

Yeah, I was going to say — the leader of the empire at this time is a woman, so how does that track for people?

JEN

She was somebody who trod the line quite well of being a monarch but also sort of presenting this image of like, that traditional gender role as a mother and a wife, and there's a really famous painting — I think it's called just like "The Royal Family" and it was painted in 1846 — and you probably know the one I mean. It's Albert and Victoria — she's slightly in the background — sat on chairs, with their children surrounding them, but they're weirdly dressed in sort of formal attire that marked them as, like— marked her as the Queen and him as the Prince Consort, but their children are sort of playing around them, and it both depicts, 'look this is the royal family, but it *is* a family.'

HANNAH

Ahh.

JEN

And there's something presented that's important in that, and it highlights that Queen Victoria, she *is* a mother as well — she *is* looking after her family. And although it was meant to be a private portrait, and I think eventually they hung it in Osborne House, originally when it was exhibited (I think somewhere like at St. James's Palace) a hundred-thousand people went to see it, and then it was mass produced as an engraving in 1850 for popular circulation as well. So she is also projecting this idea of the family, and it's almost like she's sort of the exception, but women *really* should be at home.

But she had very interesting views, as well because at the same time, she loved Albert, like, passionately. And in many ways had very incredibly conservative ideas about what women should do and what they should be. I mean, obviously she herself is a victim of patriarchal structures that have been imposed on her, but interestingly, in her diaries which are, like, *super* candid, she kind of hated giving birth — she had lots of kids — she hated breastfeeding. She said it made her feel like a cow. *(Hannah laughs)* So she had very mixed views about it in some

ways as well, but I think publically, she sort of, again, portrays this traditional image. And then yeah, you were mentioning Lucy and Mina.

HANNAH

Yeah.

JEN

What are your thoughts on that?

HANNAH

I think that over and over again, Lucy and Mina are described as sweet, as kindhearted — Lucy and Mina, obviously are different people (and actually surprisingly different people for Victorian novel writing about women?) — but both of them are described as being compassionate and giving and understanding, and both of them express a will to take care of their fiancés in a way that is reflective of that separation of the spheres. You know, Mina learns shorthand and learns to use a typewriter specifically so she can be a legal assistant to Jonathan. And Lucy — she's not, I don't think she's portrayed by the novel as being as clever, even though I would argue that's— I don't know. I have opinions about Lucy. Don't worry about it.

JEN

No, I'm interested now!

HANNAH

This is in contrast to the vampires, or the women who become vampires who are— you know, they're described as having "cruel mouths" and "laughing wantonly" and having their sexuality emphasized — not that Bram Stoker says anything but the word "voluptuous" when he's describing someone sexually, but um—

[Both laugh.]

JEN

I was just going to say — so much voluptuousness in this novel!

HANNAH

Oh my gosh, over and over again; it's ridiculous! Um, but, the number of times I have heard Jonny Sims or Ben Galpin say the word "voluptuous" is maybe too many times for anyone to say the word—

JEN

If you'd do me a supercut of that please.

HANNAH

(laughs uproariously)

We'll talk!

JEN

Just mainly so I can text it to Ben.

[Both laugh, taking a moment to catch their breaths.]

HANNAH

Yeah. I'll get Stephen on that right away. All this to say, does this contrast between the way women are described pre-vampire and the way vampire women are described — is that tapping into something in Victorian gender roles or anxiety about gender?

JEN

Yeah, absolutely. I think it's tapping into a male anxiety about powerful women. I think it's tapping into a male anxiety about female sexuality — which, I mean they were so obsessed with, and the medical discourse — I've got a book on it actually, somewhere — where, just medical men just being utterly terrified about the idea that women *have* sexuality or might *like* to orgasm or whatev— *(Hannah laughs)* I mean, it just, they're sort of horrified by this idea. Yeah, so I think there

is an anxiety about it, and it's linked — I mean, the sexuality thing has *got* to be linked to the idea of, like, female *empowerment* and independence and that kind of thing. So I think you're right, I think it's a hundred percent tapping into this male anxiety about gender, about women, about independent women, women's sexuality. Lucy, you're right, she sort of embodies this Angel in the House, in particular with her beautiful blonde hair and this image of like, her when she dies initially, I think, and then when she's killed again as the vampire, it sort of goes back; she's got the beautiful golden curls, and Van Helsing creepily brushes it at one point— *(Hannah laughs)* So, she's that innocent figure, and she's infantilized a lot, and I think the Angel in the House figure in novels does get infantilized. Van Helsing does it a *lot* to her. What's really interesting about her, though, is there are moments early on, before she even begins her transformation, where she says things that are a little bit like, 'ooh, that's not very, that's not very stereotypical!' She says something, half-jokingly, that is about like, 'why can't I have three husbands?'

HANNAH

Yup, that's the one!

JEN

And that suggests an excessive desire, I think. And I sometimes read Lucy, or think about Lucy as her transformation into a vampire is almost like Bram Stoker playing out what, like, the end— like, what he as a male writer imagines the end of that is, a woman having a desire like that and being willing to voice it. Like, is the natural conclusion that she ends up, basically, as this sort of aberrant creature that is an inverse of a mother? So she feeds on the children as the bloofer lady rather then children feeding on her? So it's sort of saying if we're to let that idea, these ideas, get out of hand, *this* is the extreme that it could go to, and it must, *must* be stamped out and roles must be reinforced rigidly in order to kind of prevent that because *look* what could happen. And obviously it's all played out in metaphor, but, you know, is that what he's getting at? Is that his anxiety? I think you can see that, I mean the *violence* of the scene where she is staked—

HANNAH

Blood spurting everywhere—

JEN

Yeah, there's an amazing article, I think it's by Carol Senf—

[Jen flips through pages.]

JEN *(con't)*

—I've got it here, if anybody wants to look it up, it's called "*Dracula* and Women," Carol Senf, and you can get it in The Cambridge Companion to *Dracula*. She looks at *Dracula*, she calls it almost like "a punitive patriarchy containing the wayward desire of middle class women." And she's just really good work on the bit with Lucy, and she sees it as— Lucy's almost presented as a medical case, which doctors would do at the time, you know, like, 'oh look, this woman has excessive desires or is outside the norm. There must be a problem with her, so we're othering her, and it's a problem to be fixed," and that fixing, in the novel, is through the staking. But in this hugely violent, sexually violent way, I mean the phallic stake being *driven* by Arthur *into* the body of Lucy, she writhes around — I think Senf says it — it almost reads like an orgasm. But then she comes back to how she was originally, that kind of pure and chaste "Lucy," having the darkness kind of expunged from within her. So yeah, I think Lucy in particular is a real— deals with those anxieties. But Mina too, and you— I mean it was interesting, you pointed out, you know, she learns shorthand and that kind of thing, but you're quite right, as you pointed out — it's to become kind of a legal assistant to Jonathan! And, I think it's Mina — it's either Mina or Lucy — *jokingly* invokes the idea of the New Woman—

HANNAH

Yes.

JEN

—in the 19th century.

HANNAH

I think they both do, actually.

JEN

Yeah like, 'oh, we would even make them blush with our appetites!' and sort of half joking about them. But I mean, *Dracula*'s in 1897, I think, correct me if I'm wrong—

HANNAH

Yes.

JEN

In 1894, an essay comes out by a woman called Sarah Grand, called "The New Aspect of the New Woman Question," and I'm not a hundred percent sure on this, but I think that's her coining the term "the New Woman," which is basically like, you know, women who want to be independent, particularly financially independent, forge their own path, they want to work, they want to be their own people! They don't want to be strained and contained by the patriarchy. And in some ways, Mina's coded like that, in the fact that she learns shorthand, she's very very competent, she 'works' in inverted commas, but there's always the sense of wanting to contain her. When we first read about her, Jonathan's constantly going, 'uh, note to self: get the recipe for Mina!' You just like paprika Jonathan, just slap it on everything!

HANNAH

(laughs)

Or he might be allergic, given how much water he had to drink when he tasted it.

JEN

Also true, also true! But you're really astute to pick up the fact that her work is *always* in the service of men, and is this why it's acceptable to Bram Stoker? Because right at the end, we get that really traditional and conservative familial tableau at the end, and she's got the family now at the end.

HANNAH

Yes.

JEN

Yeah, with the New Woman— it was *such* a challenge and there was *such* a critical backlash against it. It's really hard to define what it is because whatever reading you do, it depends on the writer at the time. You know, she's depicted as being like, too manish or not manish enough or like, *too* sexual or not sexual enough, or like, wanting to kill men or liking men too much— there's no kind of, like cohesive depiction of her, but there's lots of writing about the New Woman, and clearly there's a huge anxiety about her, and some of my favorite things to look at are the Punch cartoons of her, and there's like, three favorite ones, I think— you can look them up on the internet, if you type in basically "punch cartoons the new woman" these will come up. One is, I think, called, "WHAT IT WILL SOON COME TO," and it's a woman who's *very* tall towering over this tiny little man, and if you look at the way they're depicted, it's that (and of course this isn't *my* view) the woman has been given what at the time would be considered traditional "masculine" characteristics — broad shoulders, tall, muscular, angular face — whereas the man has been given what might be considered at the time to be typical "feminine" traits — of course, just sort of awful system and… I won't get on my soapbox about how gender is constructed and I hate it *(Hannah laughs)*, but um… But it is and I hate it! But you get, like, a playing on that, so the tiny little man — he's called *Mister Smithereen* as well, as though he's been pummeled down — and she says, "Would you like me to carry your bag?" — the woman is saying to the man. And the title of it is "WHAT IT WILL SOON COME TO."

HANNAH

Mm.

JEN

And another one I like is — again, they've done this — it's two sisters; they're wearing neckties — even though they're wearing skirts, they're wearing neckties — and again, they're very angular, very muscular in their depiction, they take up a lot of the frame; and in the background sort of — with his hand on his hip, and looking sort of effete by Victorian standards — is their brother, and they say "Oh, tea is going to come soon. Won't you join us?" And he says something like, "Oh no, I'm going to have my tea downstairs with the servants. I can't do without female company nowadays." And that's called "THE NEW WOMAN," I think, just called The New Woman.

And a third one is something like, "The Literary… Woman of the New School," oh no, "PASSIONATE FEMALE LITERARY TYPES OF THE NEW SCHOOL," meaning New Women. There's a typical kind of, what we might expect as a depiction of a Victorian lady, looking up to a teacher-type called Mrs.*[sic]* Quilpson, saying "Oh I wonder you never married," and the woman replies, "What? I marry and be a man's plaything? No thank you!" But the joke is, the depiction of her, she's, again, drawn very masculinely — she's got a beard, that kind of thing. So you know, like, *horrible* misogyny going on in that, but again, it's playing into those anxieties about The New Woman and this new sort of independence and power that women demanded or wanted and were gaining and the fear of that. And I think Mina, in many ways, we can read her as a New Woman even though she sort of mocks them a little bit herself.

But at the end, Bram Stoker's saying 'Yes that's all very well and good, and I don't necessarily have a problem with women working, but as long as it's in the service of men,' and that reminds me of John Ruskin, the cultural and literary critic, did a series of lectures called *Sesame and Lilies*, and in one of the lectures called "Of Queen's Gardens," he talks about education of women. And he says 'Yes yes, we must educate women, that's important! Of course we must educate them! All knowledge should be given to them in order for them to be able to understand and *even* aid the work of men.'

HANNAH

(Sarcastic)

Oh, good. Thanks, John!

JEN

Yeah! So, I get that vibe a little bit from *Dracula* and Bram Stoker's representation of Mina, for me. Of course, there's multiple ways to read novels, and um, you know, we could say she represents a challenge to patriarchal order, and even though it's sort of "resolved" in the end and she is kind of brought backwards in that patriarchal control, there has been this moment where we've shown— Bram Stoker's shown positively what women could achieve; that might be sort of a Brechtian, sort of carnivalesque reading, like that *moment* of independence exists and then it'll start people thinking about it, and maybe that's a good thing, so. There's lots of different ways that we can read it, I think.

HANNAH

That's really interesting to me — in participating with the Dracula Daily zeitgeist on Tumblr and having hundreds of people reading *Dracula* together at the same time — having an internet book club and making memes about it — how much of that, like, doing work in the service of men, is — I would almost say redeemed — by the fact that Jonathan just loves her *so* much and *would* let his soul be dragged to Hell if she became a vampire because he doesn't want to do without her, and I think that it's interesting that I've almost missed *exactly how misogynist the setup is?* Because I like them as a couple.

JEN

Oh yeah, I mean they're a lovely couple. But yeah, I mean that's the first we hear of her, 'oh, let's get the recipe for *Mina*.'

HANNAH

Mm-hm.

JEN

It's interesting. And, you know. Who knows what Bram Stoker was intending, and if that even *matters*, if that even matters. I was just thinking — I was talking with a student about *Dracula*, and I don't know whether she'd read this or if it was her idea, and it — possibly could've been her idea, actually — but I forget. Because I've had a child. And it was like two weeks, but she was talking very— regardless of whose idea it was — very eruditely and brilliantly about the text, and she was saying it was interesting that Lucy was staked, you know, with a stake which is a very phallic object, but Dracula is team-knifed at the end.

HANNAH

Eh, both. He gets his throat cut and he's stabbed.

JEN

Yeah, so there's sort of this throat-cutting as well, and it almost minimizes the phallic-ness of the staking in a way — the student was saying. And we were still chatting that through and wondering whether or not that's, you know, in terms of gender, like… the female vampire is punished more, in a way, than the male vampire.

HANNAH

Interesting…

JEN

Yeah… There's a lot going on. It's a very interesting novel; it can be subjected to all different kinds of readings and that's what I love about literary criticism — you've got all these different readings and all different things and competing ideas will emerge of… endlessly fascinating.

HANNAH

I'm interested, then, as we're talking about the gender-ness of the vampire, then do you think that masculine gender roles are embodied or reversed in a way for Dracula himself? He's the only male vampire we see. Or is that, like, a non-issue

with him? Is he more about class and maybe antisemitism and maybe xenophobia?

JEN

I think he's probably all these things. There *must* be a gender thing going on with him as well. I'm trying to think how he's described.

HANNAH

Yeah, he's given an aquiline nose, he has a very hi— like, oh gosh — he's got hair on his palms?

JEN

Yeah, I was going to say—

HANNAH

—which is gross.

JEN

—kind of wolf-ish, isn't it? Yeah, I do remember the high aquiline nose. I think that seems to be quite class-coded maybe.

HANNAH

And dark, cruel eyes. And his little teeth.

JEN

I don't know. I mean, you can subject him to a very lovely queer reading, and I know you're going to speak to somebody about that, which will be fascinating. Is there a, does he— I mean, he's ultimately the Big Bad, isn't he?

HANNAH

Yes.

JEN

…and needs to be destroyed. And in particular he's like— well he's a threat to everybody, but there seems to be a way in which he's conceived of as being, like, a *real* threat to the women, because it's Lucy and Mina who become his targets. If I had to guess, I'd say probably, but I probably need to read it again and think about it in those terms. But yeah, very probably. But, alas— *(Hannah laughs)* Alas! I can't think now, off the top of my head.

HANNAH

You were talking about how much you love literary criticism, so when you think about Victorian literature and, you know, as you're teaching it, as you are reading it, as you're writing about it — what are your favorite pieces of Victorian literature?

JEN

Oh! Yes! Um, so. I love lots of things. My fave— ooh. I've got about three favorites: one is Anthony Trollope who gets— he's sort of not really celebrated as much as people like Dickens, but I think writes wonderful kind of slice-of-life in the country in Victorian England, and it's— yeah, it's very looking back on an older sort of landed gentry-type system, a lot of his novels — not all of them, but a lot of them. *The Last Chronicle of Barsetshire* is my favorite novel, and that's part of a series called *The Chronicles of Barset [transcriber's note:* The Last Chronicle of Barset *is the novel,* Chronicles of Barsetshire *is the series]* which tells varied stories about different people living in a county. Probably because I think he's very funny as a writer, but also he does character study, and he does character really, really well. And I think what he's really good at is depicting characters that are varying shades of gray — very rarely do you get someone who's an out-and-out villain, I think there's maybe two I can think of in his 40 some odd novels — and you very rarely get people who are purely, purely good. And what he tends to do is show how kind of, people who are pretty decent people can kind of get themselves into a bit of a pickle, and that's quite sad. And he often does it very funnily and sometimes with a great amount of heart, but I think a testament to how good he is as a writer is, there is a character that appears in *The Chronicles of Barsetshire*

called Mrs. Proudie, and she's married to the bishop, and she's really a thoroughly in many, many ways, and you love other characters triumphing over her, and in the last one, *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, there is a moment where one of the main characters — who himself isn't, like, the most likable character in the world, but he is clearly *[inaudible]* by her, and he triumphs over her, and the way it's written, you can really feel his, just, joy at kind of beating her, and you *feel* it too! You just feel absolutely joyous one moment and then, spoiler alert — she dies.

HANNAH

Oh no!

JEN

And— I know, sorry everyone. And she dies later on in that novel, and you genuinely feel really sad that she has even though you don't like her as a character. I just think that's an amazing feat: to make you feel sorry or sad that somebody's died who you didn't like. So, Anthony Trollope is someone who I'm a big fan of. And then my other two go-tos are Wilkie Collins who just writes *amazing* mystery fiction — some people say he wrote the first detective fiction? Detective English— nov— first novel, detective novel in, in English. Or, first English detective novel. I don't know whether that's true — that's probably almost certainly not true — I think it was someone like Eliot who said that. But that's *The Moonstone.* But *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* are *utterly* incredible books, and *Armadale* — he just writes really fantastic, fantastic mysteries that are just gripping. And, you know what you were saying about Mina and Lucy and them being quite different women and that being unusual — there's a really good kind of pairing of Laura and Marian in *The Woman in White* and Marian, in particular, is just everything Mina could be and more. She is just *utterly*, like, the best character, like, one of the best female characters, I think. I absolutely love her. So, Wilkie Collins.

And then finally, *Lady Audley's Secret* is one of my favorite books. That's by Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and she— her and Wilkie Collins are sensationalists so, again, it's like mystery and crime and— that's really great if you're interested in

gender in the 19th century and its depiction. And again, it's sort of like a little mystery novel, which is super exciting. There's loads of really god Victorian fiction — there's loads of not good Victorian fiction—

HANNAH

I was going to say — what's something you think is like, way overrated?

JEN

I *like* Dickens to an extent, but I don't love him as much as other people love him — I think he is very good, I think he's a good writer, but I think— I feel like— and maybe it's because *Great Expectations* has just been adapted again and it's just insane how much this novel has been adapted when, when Wilkie Collins's *Armadale* is right there! *Lady Audley's Secret* is right there! *The Chronicles of Barset* are right there, and they were last adapted when Alan Rickman was, like, 20—

HANNAH

(through laughter)

Oh my god.

JEN

—and played one of the very few villainous characters.

HANNAH

Oh my goodness!

JEN

I think maybe, occasionally he can get overrated — I really don't like *Little Dorrit*, for example, though I know a lot of other people do. But then, he wrote *Nicholas Nickleby* and that's very funny, so he always gets a pass, ultimately, from me. Although, not for being a person because it sounds like he was really not a very nice person. *(Hannah laughs)* I'm sure he was nice in many ways, but he wasn't nice to his wife. He was *really* awful to his wife.

HANNAH

But before we go, I want to talk a little bit about *Victoriocity* because I just really love this show.

JEN

Aw, thank you!

HANNAH

Please everyone listen to Victoriocity, it is a rollicking, Steampunk-y, Victorian-ish adventure-mystery-comedy? I don't know, it's fun.

JEN

Yeah, it's all the things! Yeah, I think… detective comedy set in a reimagined Victorian past—

HANNAH

Yes.

JEN

—I think is how I tend to describe it. So yes, probably Steampunk-adjacent. Teslapunk!

HANNAH

Ooh, Teslapunk! Which is so much more fun. I was going to say that like, in Gothic horror, they talk about grabbing the things that cause the most anxiety in a culture and a time period and exploring those with a monster or with the idea of dread, but you work in the same way with comedy, so what do you like to grab from the Victorian sensibilities to use for comedy? You know, what do you find easiest to have fun with and play with in that, and what do you find hardest?

JEN

So I think— comedy is tricky, isn't it? Because obviously you're always wanting to make people laugh, and we never want to do anything, obviously, that just, it's

not funny to make light of. You don't want to do that, and you never want to punch down, but there's so much weird and absurd and stupid, ridiculous things about the Victorian period that make it very easy to kind of lampoon, you know, particularly with gender roles and things like that. There was something we were writing — I can't remember whether it was the novel or the series, and I was reading it back and I was thinking, "God, wow, we really hate politicians!" *(Hannah laughs)* But I think that's probably a, sort of a symptom of the current state of affairs in Britain. Currently. But I think comedy — like, to speak generally — I think comedy is actually a very very powerful subversive tool — and it depends what you're doing and it depends on the tone that you're going for — but I think it really genuinely has the power to challenge in a way that surprises or people aren't expecting or don't even notice. So you can make a joke that will make people laugh, but afterwards they might make them think more seriously about something, even if it's only a tiny moment.

For us, it might be something like we have a museum called "The London Museum of Other Nations' Antiquities," which is sort of thrown away. And it's meant to be funny and people can kind of laugh at that, but there's a serious point behind that, which is that we have other people's stuff and let's just give it back; that's not okay! Like, making that joke — most people laugh at it, but afterwards might come away and be like, 'huh, yeah. I guess our museums *do* just have other people's stuff!" I think there's a— you've got to do it sensitively and carefully and, you know, particularly with comedy, you're going for a particular tone, you want it to be lighthearted, but I think there is the— you can, through comedy, be quite subversive or have those moments where you make people, but then later, hopefully, they then might think, 'oh wait yeah, maybe there was a point there.' It wasn't just funny. I think comedy has a lot of power to do that, and absolutely we almost certainly don't do it in the best way — there's lots of comics and comedians that really use comedy in a brilliant way to challenge and make people think differently. And so therefore, I think comedy can be a real force for good in that way.

HANNAH

Mm-hmm. Well, Dr. Jen Sugden, thank you so much for joining us today, telling us all about your field of study and how it applies to *Dracula*, and everyone listen to *Victoriocity*; season three is coming soon, correct?

JEN

Yes, hopefully in the back half of this year — Chris and I had a baby, so that slowed things down somewhat, because turns out—

HANNAH

(crosstalk)

You're a little busy.

JEN

—take a lot of time! But it is coming out soon, we promise!

HANNAH

And you also have a book coming out pretty soon, right?

JEN

Yeah, so that's going to be in spring 2024, and that is, yeah, the first *Victoriocity* novel, and it's a—

HANNAH

So excited.

JEN

Thank you! It's a brand new story set in the same world with our two leads, Fleet and Clara, and it's set just after season two, when they've set up their own detective agency, so I'm very excited. Thank you so much for having me, this was so great — I absolutely love talking about Victorian fiction and Victorian culture and—

HANNAH

Boy are you in the right place!

JEN

Yeah, so this has been absolutely delightful. *And* I am *utterly*, like, so excited about *Regarding Dracula*, I think it's *brilliant* to actually have one that's going to be an audio drama, and I will be making sure all my students—

HANNAH

Ha HA!

JEN

—and all my Twitter followers are listening!

HANNAH

Thank you so much!

JEN

Yeah! Well, I know it's an absolutely phenomenal team right across the board, from the actors to the production team you've got working on it, so. Yes! It's going to be — if you're listening to this and you… I'm not sure why you would be. But if you're listening to this and you haven't listened to it yet then you absolutely— it's going to be amazing, so get on it. And also, I'll give another shout-out to— if I may—

HANNAH

Oh, please.

JEN

I've just recently been listening to *Fawks and Stallion*.

HANNAH

YES! Ooh!!!

JEN

I am absolutely having the time of my life, it is *utterly* brilliant, so yeah. If you like Victorian, if you like detective, then that's going to be right up your alley, so give that a listen as well.

[Bright music plays.]

HANNAH

Thanks again to all our supporters who made this series possible, and thank you to Dr. Jen Sugden for joining us! You can find links to all the media we mentioned in the show notes. Go listen to *Victoriocity*! You can follow them on Facebook and Twitter at Victoriocity — that's V-I-C-T-O-R-I-O-C-I-T-Y — or go to their website, victoriocity.com. We'll meet again soon, listeners. Until then: come freely, go safely, and leave something of the happiness you bring.