Dracula's Gothic Ship

Emily Alder

The narrative of *Dracula* (1897) is extensively informed by Bram Stoker's research into travel, science, literature, and folklore.[1] However, one feature of the novel that has never been examined in any detail is its gothic ship, the *Demeter*, which transports the vampire to Whitby. The *Demeter* is a capstone to a long tradition of nautical and maritime gothicity in literature and legend. Gothic representations of storms, shipwrecks, and traumatic journeys were shaped and inspired by the natural power of the sea and its weather, and by the reports and experiences of those who braved the dangers of ocean travel and witnessed its sublime marvels, or stood watching on the shore. The ships of Victorian fiction, more specifically, also belong to a maritime context that was distinct to the nineteenth century and that would soon change irrevocably as the Age of Sail finally drew to a close in the early 1900s.[2] The *Demeter* can be fruitfully examined against these backdrops, and against the construction and concerns of the narrative as a whole. Doing so helps to make visible the way that gothic literature is, like Stoker's research and writing practices, produced not autonomously but in conversation with other social and cultural activities, discourses, and representations.

The *Demeter*, like the Count himself, exists in an in-between state — undead, unreal, unnatural, Other. In Greek mythology, Demeter was the goddess of fertility and the harvest, who rescued her daughter Persephone from abduction to the underworld by Hades, and so the name alone of Dracula's ship suggests slippage between worlds. But there is much more than this to the *Demeter*'s significance in the novel. The ship and what happens aboard her foreshadow many elements of the rest of the story, working to develop thematic and symbolic concerns connected with the vampire at a point at which Dracula himself is still occluded by the narrative; that a vampire might exist has not yet occurred to or been admitted by the characters in Britain. Readers, however, who have figured out the story's premise or know it already, are in a position to interpret the gothic metaphorics of the *Demeter*'s story, which rely for their effect on a pre-existing web of signification associated with the sea, ships,

[1] For accounts of Stoker's researches, see *The Origins of Dracula: The Background to Bram Stoker's Gothic Masterpiece*, ed. by Clive Leatherdale (London: William Kimber, 1987); and *Bram Stoker's Notes for Dracula*, ed. by Robert Eighteen-Bisang and Elizabeth Miller (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008).

[2] See David Marcombe, *The Victorian Sailor* (Aylesbury: Shire Publications, 1985); and John Peck, *Maritime Fiction: Sailors and the Sea in British and American Novels, 1719-1917* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

storms, wrecks, and phantoms. The *Demeter* is also entangled in contemporary concerns about empire, law, gender, and science that underlie *Dracula*, and has a key role in the narrative's development. In this article, I argue that attending to the role of the *ship* in *Dracula* reveals a rewarding and hitherto neglected layer to the gothic strata from which this most famous of texts is compiled — while attending to the role of the ship in *this* novel in particular highlights a rich but little-told literary history of the gothic at sea and its place and roles in nineteenth-century culture more broadly.

That Stoker was fascinated with seascapes is apparent in other works, such as *The Watter's Mou* (1894).[3] His interest in the maritime is also evident in his research notes for *Dracula,* which, as editors Robert Eighteen-Bisang and Elizabeth Miller point out, 'contain more material on Whitby than on any other topic'.[4] Stoker collected information on coastal weather, nautical terminology, ship-wrecks, and local legends, from exploring Whitby, the Coast Guard and its documents, talking to locals, and from books such as *A Glossary of Words Used in the Neighbourhood of Whitby* (1876). A great deal of the detail and descriptions from these notes is visible in *Dracula*. 'Had Stoker not spent his summer vacation in Whitby in 1890', Eighteen-Bisang and Miller conclude, 'the book we know as *Dracula* would have taken a different form'.[5] Although the novel's action spends more time in London and Transylvania, the location of Whitby has a significant part to play, and the prominence of its maritime culture in Stoker's notes suggest that the *Demeter* and her arrival merit further attention in the context of this culture than they have thus far received.

That said, lack of critical attention to *Dracula*'s gothic ship is part of a more general neglect of the relationship between the gothic and the sea in literature, despite the many valuable studies that recognise the profound identification between the sea and British writing more widely, and despite creative engagement, in literature, art, music, and film, with the sea and the supernatural.[6] As I argue here, examining the *Demeter* not only addresses this neglect, but also draws attention to what lies behind the vessel's depiction; the gothic ship does not spring into existence in the pages of *Dracula* but arises out of a long cultural development. The gothic qualities that shape the *Demeter*'s particular representation and

[3] For Stoker's fascination with seascapes and a discussion of *The Watter's Mou*, see Carol Senf, *Bram Stoker* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010), pp. 40-42.
[4] *Bram Stoker's Notes*, p. 288.
[5] *Bram Stoker's Notes*, p. 289.
[6] See, for example, Mariaconcetta Constantini, *Venturing into Unknown Waters: Wilkie Collins and the Challenge of Modernity* (Pescara: Edizioni Tracce, 2008); Samuel Baker, *Written on the Water: British Romanticism and the Maritime Culture of Empire* (London: University of Virginia Press, 2010); *Fictions of the Sea: Critical Perspectives on the Ocean in British Literature and Culture*, ed. by Bernhard Klein (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); Peck; and Doug Lamoreux's recent novel, *Dracula's Demeter* (N.P.: Creativia, 2014).

narrative functions derive from a vast and polycultural marine imaginary in which ships and the sea serve a number of varied and powerful symbolic and metaphorical purposes. Visual art, music, writing, folklore, philosophy, and the historical realities of seafaring all contribute to this imaginary, which can be traced back through, for example, Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the Bible, or Homer's *Odyssey*.

Here, though, I will mostly limit my discussions to the context of the nineteenth century and the ideas, images, and tropes most relevant to *Dracula*. I begin by outlining the liminal, undead capacities of ships in fiction and in the maritime culture of the Age of Sail, before exploring phantom-ship traditions and the subversion by gothic ships of some conventional nautical metaphorics, such of those of departure and return. I then analyse how the representation of the *Demeter*, its journey, and its storm-driven arrival at Whitby relate to these literary and imaginative traditions. The gothic tropes prominent in *Dracula* as a whole — such as liminality, claustrophobia, persecution, revenants, control, transgression — are intensified in the microcosm of the ship, while the *Demeter*'s significance extends beyond the depiction of her last voyage, and into the wider cultural concerns and narrative trajectory of the novel.

In literature, ships can function as gothic spaces in a variety of ways. Shipwrecks, for example, conceal and preserve dark secrets that haunt the living — in Wilkie Collins' *Armadale* (1866), Midwinter passes a night of terror on the wreck of the timbership, next to the cabin in which his father murdered Allan's father; a wreck conceals the body of the eponymous Rebecca in Daphne du Maurier's 1938 novel, and its discovery exposes answers to the puzzles oppressing the second Mrs de Winter. Even viable ships can be claustrophobic spaces, or expose the extreme psychological effects of isolation, illness, or starvation, such as in Joseph Conrad's *Shadow Line* (1915), or in Prendick's near brush with cannibalism in the dinghy of the *Lady Vain* in H. G. Wells's *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896). In more explicitly supernatural texts, gothic ships cross normally uncrossable boundaries between life and death, sea and air, as does the Flying Dutchman in Frederick Marryat's *The Phantom Ship* (1839).

Ships make effective gothic spaces partly because of their broader conceptualisation, not limited to gothic modes, as liminal, in-between objects. Paul Gilroy calls the ship 'a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion'.[7] A ship in transit is constantly

[7] Quoted in Gretchen Woertendyke, 'John Howison's New Gothic Nationalism and Transatlantic Exchange', *Early American Literature*, 43.2 (2008), 309-35, (p. 317) <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/242619> [accessed 12 May 2009].

shifting on a shifting surface, self-contained and often out of communicative reach, functioning between lands, nations, or systems of governance, especially in times before modern telecommunications. For Michel Foucault, in 'Of Other Spaces' (1986), a ship is 'the heterotopia *par excellence*'; it has a unique existence as somewhere that is neither one place nor another.[8] The ship's heterotopic existence depends on its being at sea, a state that releases it from the normal rules of the land. This is deftly illustrated by Conrad's *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897). Having set sail,

> [t]he ship, a fragment detached from the earth, went on lonely and swift like a small planet. Round her the abysses of sky and sea met in an unattainable frontier. A great circular solitude moved with her, ever changing and ever the same.[9]

The ship's fragility and isolation from the rest of the world is emphasised by the cosmic vastness of the ocean, on which she maintains a solitary position yet continually pursues an 'unattainable' horizon. In Foucault's words, the ship is 'a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea'.[10] On a sea voyage, a ship is existentially unreliable; it is a space in which more than one (potentially conflicting) state or reality can hold true at the same time. In gothic narratives, ships, like castles, abbeys, cities, or prisons, can become self-contained, oppressive systems governed by their own internal rules, while their material existence as floating objects renders them isolated and unstable in unique ways.

The *Pequod* in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851) is a good example. The novel is grounded in reality by plentiful details of whaling practices and an ending recalling the wreck of the *Essex*, rammed by a sperm whale in 1820, yet Captain Ahab's vengeful, obsessive quest for the white whale, the isolation of the voyage, and the precariousness of survival lend the narrative an uneasy, fantastic quality.[11] In *Dracula*, too, the *Demeter* has a material origin in the sense that it is based on a real ship. Stoker recorded in his notes the case of a Russian schooner, the *Dimitry*, which was wrecked (relatively gently) in Whitby harbour in 1885; this ship, '(cargo silver sand — from mouth of Danube) ran into harbour, by pure chance avoiding rocks', and 'put out two anchors in harbour [which] broke & she slewed round

[8] Michael Foucault, 'Des espaces autres: hétérotopies', *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité*, 5 (October 1984), 46-49; 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias', trans. by Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, 16.1 (Spring 1986), 22-27 (p. 27).
[9] Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (New York: Norton, 1997), p. 18.
[10] Foucault, p. 27.
[11] Owen Chase, *The Wreck of the Whaleship 'Essex'* (New York: W. B. Gilley, 1821); and Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick or, The Whale* (London: Penguin, 2002).

against pier'.[12] In the novel, Stoker re-casts this unusual yet plausible incident in a gothic mode, laden with the significance of the vampire's arrival and his role in causing the wreck.

The capacity of ships to be gothic, and their significations in superstition, art, and literature more generally, are shaped by their materiality and cultural history, which need to be understood in terms of some of the precarious realities of being at sea in the Age of Sail. Even with modern marine technologies, ocean weather remains a powerful and dangerous force, but historically, seafaring posed far greater dangers to pre-twentieth-century sailors and sailing ships than they face now. Historian Marcus Rediker reports the following comments by two eighteenth-century clergymen:

> 'Sea men are to be numbered neither with the living nor the dead', explained a minister familiar with the dangers of life at sea […]. 'In their daily work, mused another cleric, seamen 'border upon the Confines of Death and Eternity, every moment'.[13]

To be at sea, then, was to be both alive and dead, between states of existence. As John Peck notes, in sea-voyage narratives, '[d]eath is the constant shadow'.[14] Until the ship reached its port, families or owners on land could not be sure of the present survival of the ship and crew, or of any individual on board; to go to sea during the Age of Sail was to run very high risks. 'Ships foundered in heavy weather, collided in crowded estuaries, ran aground as a result of navigational errors or were burned to the waterline by the spontaneous ignition of dangerous cargoes', and in the two decades 'between 1879 and 1899', calculates historian David Marcombe, '1153 British ships went missing and almost eleven thousand lives were lost'.[15] Through shipwreck, war, fire, or even ships sunk for the insurance, there is a centuries-long association between seafaring and loss of life. Stoker's research notes include a list of names found on Whitby tombstones of sailors and passengers lost or drowned since 1777, which runs to ten typed pages.[16] The serious and real tragedies of shipwreck are vividly expressed in accounts such as Henry Thoreau's description of the wreck of the *St John* off Massachusetts in 1849, in which 145 Irish emigrants lost their lives, and in the grim starvation and cannibalism experiences of the survivors of the *Essex* recounted by first mate

[12] *Bram Stoker's Notes*, pp. 139, 155.
[13] Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 3.
[14] Peck, p.11.
[15] Marcombe.
[16] *Bram Stoker's Notes*, pp. 252-71.

Owen Chase.[17] In 1872, the case of the *Mary Celeste*, a ship discovered intact but as peacefully abandoned as if its crew had simply stepped off the deck, generated another discomfiting mystery about the fates of sailors.[18] At sea, gothic narratives could all too easily become lived experience; there could be little to choose between fiction and reality.

Ships and sailors alike can therefore be thought of as occupying an in-between existence, one that manifests in a variety of ways. *Dracula* literalises the metaphors of liminality associated with the sea: Dracula *is* an undead, liminal being existing at the midpoints of a number of different binaries; the fate of the crew is *not* certain to those on the land (although it is understood by readers); and the ship herself is half-viable, half-derelict by the time she reaches Whitby's harbour. The *Demeter* does not need to be spectral to resonate with ghost stories of the sea; derelicts formed an important part of stories involving ghost-ship sightings. Illusions created by mists, hot air, or nightfall, glimpses of mysterious lights, and vessels unresponsive to signals were all implicated in such accounts, but so too were wrecks or abandoned derelicts. Margaret Baker makes the point that some reported phantoms were, in fact, 'undoubtedly wooden derelicts, captives of wind and currents, which hung about the sea-lanes for years. Not until the 1930s when the last were destroyed did "ghost ships" fall sharply in number.'[19] The persuasively real quality of some phantom sightings, then, had a literal basis that worked to reinforce the existing liminal conception of a ship at sea, and fed into legends and printed fiction.

Phantom-ship legends, which populate the folklore of maritime nations globally, are often legible in the context of the liminal existence of a voyaging ship whose fate cannot be known by those on land who are left to tell its tale.[20] Stories such as 'La Belle Rosalie' revolve around the vision of a ghost or ghost ship glimpsed from the land: the phantom has returned as a sign of a lost ship whose wreck and crew will never, can never be found.[21] These phantom sightings bring resolution or closure, ending the story by symbolically bringing the ship home. In what Hans Blumenberg calls the 'nautical metaphorics of existence', voyages, storms, doldrums, and harbours stand for the ups, downs, crises, and

[17] Henry Thoreau, *Cape Cod* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1908); and Chase.
[18] Paul Begg, *Mary Celeste: The Greatest Mystery of the Sea* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007).
[19] Margaret Baker, *Folklore of the Sea* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1979), p. 54.
[20] See, for example, Benjamin Thorpe, *Northern Mythology, Comprising the Principal Popular Traditions and Superstitions of Scandinavia, North Germany, and the Netherlands*, 3 vols (London: E. Lumley, 1851), II; Angelo Solomon Rappoport, *Superstitions of Sailors* (London, 1929); or Allan Cunningham, *Traditional Tales of the English and Scottish Peasantry* (London: G. Routledge and Sons, 1887).
[21] Emily Alder, 'The Dark Mythos of the Sea: William Hope Hodgson's Transformation of Maritime Legends', in *William Hope Hodgson: Voices from the Borderland*, ed. by Massimo Berruti, S. T. Joshi, and Sam Gafford (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2014), pp. 56-72.

resolutions of human lives that are prevalent in the imaginations of maritime cultures: crucially 'often the representation of danger on the high seas serves only to underline the comfort and peace, the safety and serenity of the harbour in which a sea voyage reaches its end'.[22] In the example of Conrad's *Narcissus*, when the ship reaches Britain, she becomes part of the land again: 'The *Narcissus* came gently into her berth; […] a swarm of strange men, clambering up her sides, took possession of her in the name of the sordid earth. She had ceased to live.'[23] If being at sea is a heterotopic existence, then to rejoin the land is to return to safety and security but also to lose that distinct self-contained yet diffuse identity. Indeed, even in ship*wreck* narratives like those of Gulliver or Robinson Crusoe, the final ending is a return to home. The protagonist may not necessarily find comfort and peace there, but the return gives the narrative some structural closure and symmetry.[24]

Gothic ship narratives, however, subvert or distort such metaphorics. The Flying Dutchman, for example, which was one of many legends researched by Stoker, defies such resolution.[25] This cursed ship (given cultural prominence in numerous artefacts from Marryat's novel and Wagner's opera to Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean* film series) haunts the Cape of Good Hope eternally in a way that pinpoints the liminal status of gothic ships: the blaspheming, defiant captain is 'imprisoned forever on his flailing vessel […] condemned neither to return home nor to reach his longed-for colonial destination'.[26] The *Dutchman* cannot rejoin the land, nor can it sink to its death, but, like a vampire, exists in perpetual liminality. In *Dracula*, the *Demeter* occupies, for a time, a similar undead state of existence. When at last she is reunited with the land, it is no serene return to safety, but a violent shipwreck that launches Dracula's reign of terror.

There are several other ways, too, in which the story of the *Demeter* subverts conventional trajectories of nineteenth-century seafaring narratives. Even while at sea, as the captain's log reveals, the *Demeter*'s voyage has hardly been the kind of heroic, romantic endeavour that would resonate with prevalent received images of sailing in the Victorian period, but a desperate struggle with madness and horror. Her voyage also has implications for British identity and foreign relations. For John Peck, a maritime story is 'a story about

[22] Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), p. 7.
[23] Conrad, p. 102.
[24] Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (London, Penguin, 2003); and Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (London: Penguin, 2003). Gulliver returns home four times, ultimately to dissatisfaction with English human society after his sojourn with the noble Houhynhnms.
[25] See *Origins of Dracula*.
[26] J. Q. Davies, 'Melodramatic Possessions: The Flying Dutchman, South Africa, and the Imperial Stage, ca. 1830', *The Opera Quarterly*, 21 (2005), 496-514 (p. 496).

enterprise, about seeing an opportunity and seizing it. This energetic, and money-making, spirit then comes to be seen as an expression of the national temperament.'[27] By using the *Demeter*, a foreign ship, to invade Britain, Dracula appropriates Victorian narratives of entrepreneurship and imperial power, and undermines assumptions about naval supremacy, domestic security, and manliness at a historical moment 'when the maritime character of Britain is losing its significance, and when, as a consequence, the maritime tale seems to be losing its capacity to embrace and sustain a broader analysis of society'.[28] *Dracula*, as a whole, is a novel often concerned with Victorian debates and anxieties around empire, national identity, spirituality, gender roles, and other social norms that were coming under pressure in the 1890s, in which the story of the *Demeter* has its own role to play.

The *Demeter* is commissioned by Dracula to transport his boxes of earth — and, unknown to the crew, Dracula himself — to Whitby. She is an archetypal nineteenth-century gothic ship, economising many of the liminal qualities, narrative tropes, and symbolic associations of ships and seafaring in a single object. She conceals dark secrets in her hold. Each night, Dracula emerges to prey on the crew, who, by the tenth day of the voyage, start to disappear. As a result of the vampire's predation, Margaret Carter notes, 'by the time [the *Demeter*] touches Whitby, there is no crew, the ship is apparently uncontrolled, Dracula is still unknown but recognized. It has become a phantom ship.'[29] The *Demeter* is not, strictly speaking, a phantom; like the *Mary Celeste*, she is not an intangible spectre but a ship of wood and canvas — nearly derelict, certainly, but real enough to be violently wrecked on Whitby's shore. The *Demeter* remains a solid ship but takes on supernatural characteristics in relation to the storm and its arrival in Whitby. Carter's selection of the term 'phantom ship' points to the ambiguous position of the *Demeter* — in one sense, as set out above, all ships are phantoms, conceptually existing on the borders between life and death, here and elsewhere, even, again like the *Mary Celeste*, on the borders between rational and supernatural explanation. But some phantom ships are more ghostly than others. The more they transgress the boundary between ghost ship and real ship, the more disruptive they become.

Generally speaking, the life/death, and this-world/other-world boundaries become less stable and more porous as the nineteenth century progresses, a shift which is stimulated in part by the rise of spiritualism and the quest, amongst many theologians, physicists, writers,

[27] Peck, p. 5.
[28] Peck, p. 8.
[29] Margaret Louise Carter, *Dracula: The Vampire and the Critics* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press), p. 211.

and the wider public alike, to reconcile faith and science in explanations of human existence. Spiritualists, rather than being supernaturalists, posited the survival of human spirits after death on the basis of natural, scientific principles; determining the existence of an other world was simply beyond the current state of knowledge, but such a world would eventually be found to exist.[30] Challenges to secure boundaries between matter and spirit and between life and death therefore also belonged to the wider culture of the late Victorian period. Gothic and ghost stories were not slow to participate in the shaping of these new narratives. As Jenny Bann has shown in her study of hands in Victorian ghost stories, for instance, ghostly hands acquire more solidity and agency as the nineteenth century progresses, tracking the increasing agency being granted to spirit.[31]

To an extent, a similar trajectory can be identified with gothic ships. In S. T. Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' (1798/1800), the ghost ship on which Death and Alive-in-Death play dice for the lives of the crew appears only at sunset, a 'spectre-bark' that vanishes into the dark as 'the sun's rim dips'.[32] Spectral intangibility and distance across water keep the 'spectre-bark' at a safe remove, but a century later neither physical nor spiritual barriers are so secure. William Hope Hodgson's *The Ghost Pirates* (1909), for example, presents a real ship (tellingly named the *Mortzestus*) sailing across dimensions *into* the other world, where the 'ghost pirates' of the title overpower her by taking on dripping, physical bodies.[33] Such *fin-de-siècle* reconfigurations of the nature of spirit and matter provide new clothing for the kinds of gothic ships that had, however, long disturbed that boundary. Arguably the most gothic ship in 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' is not the ghost ship but the Mariner's own ship, trapped between realms, even as the crew themselves are trapped alive-in-death until the Mariner can be redeemed. Like the *Demeter*, the solid vessel simultaneously becomes a liminal, 'phantom' ship.

A direct connection between the *Demeter* and the earlier text is evident in the Whitby *Dailygraph*'s newspaper report which quotes from Coleridge's poem:

> The wind fell away entirely during the evening, and at midnight there was a dead calm, [and] a sultry heat […].

[30] Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
[31] Jennifer Bann, 'Ghostly Hands and Ghostly Agency: The Changing Figure of the Nineteenth-Century Specter', *Victorian Studies*, 51 (Summer 2009), 663-86.
[32] S. T. Coleridge, 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', in *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by A. R. Jones and R. L. Brett (London: Methuen, 1981), pp. 9-35 (ll. 195-199).
[33] William Hope Hodgson, 'The Ghost Pirates', in *The Ghost Pirates and Other Revenants of the Sea*, ed. by Jeremy Lassen (San Francisco: Night Shade Books, 2005).

> The only sail noticeable was a foreign schooner with all sails set, which was seemingly going westwards. The foolhardiness or ignorance of her officers was a prolific theme for comment whilst she remained in sight, and efforts were made to signal her to reduce sail in face of her danger. Before the night shut down she was seen with sails idly flapping as she gently rolled on the undulating swell of the sea,
>
> 'As idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean.'[34]

In the poem, the 'painted ship' is, of course, the Mariner's ship, not the deathly ghost ship. Both his ship and the *Demeter* are idle, becalmed in windless weather; without steerage way, they are no longer under the crew's control. The description, meteorologically and nautically accurate, also produces a sense of uneasy anticipation, coloured by the supernatural associations that storms often garner in superstition, myth, and art.

The newspaper report mostly presents itself plausibly as a factual, straightforward account of the incident, but its descriptions of the breaking storm in particular indulge in lurid gothic imagery:

> the whole aspect of nature at once became convulsed. The waves rose in growing fury, each overtopping its fellow, till in a very few minutes the lately glassy sea was like a roaring and devouring monster. White-crested waves beat madly on the level sands and rushed up the shelving cliffs; others broke over the piers, and with their spume swept the lanthorns of the lighthouses which rise from the end of either pier of Whitby Harbour.
>
> The wind roared like thunder, and blew with such force that it was with difficulty that even strong men kept their feet, or clung with grim clasp to the iron stanchions […]. To add to the difficulties and dangers of the time, masses of sea-fog came drifting inland — white, wet clouds, which swept by in ghostly fashion, so dank and damp and cold that it needed but little effort of imagination to think that the spirits of those lost at sea were touching their living brethren with the clammy hands of death, and many a one shuddered as the wreaths of sea-mist swept by. (pp. 76-77)

The monstrousness of the stormy sea and of the uncanny wreaths of fog points to the real deadliness of storms, while invoking folkloric associations of sea mists and the ghosts of lost ships and sailors. The newspaper report locates the incident within well-established narratives and the imagery of seafaring with some relish. Indeed, the choice to present this section of the book as a newspaper article is in keeping with *Dracula*'s overall narrative strategy.

The narrative as a whole is compiled through a variety of letters, diaries, and other documents. The *Demeter*'s story is told through first-hand accounts, not by any of the novel's

[34] Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 76. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

main characters but through the newspaper report and the addendum to the ship's log. Accumulating documents characterises the novel's general strategy for providing a sense of validation to an improbable story, but these documents are re-typed by Mina, and authenticity is ultimately undermined by Jonathan's closing observation that 'in all the mass of material of which the record is composed, there is hardly one authentic document; nothing but a mass of typewriting' (p. 378). The veracity of the story is both upheld and cast into doubt; the entire narrative hovers on a boundary between the real and the unreal. The newspaper report of the *Demeter*'s arrival is a case in point. Its very existence as an artefact pasted into Mina's diary, along with its matter-of-fact framing of the incident, constructs an authentic scene, but its transcription into typewriting, the inexplicability of some of the events, and the article's representational strategies work to the opposite effect.

The quotation from Coleridge's poem, for example, contributes to a sense of the newspaper article's authenticity by tying it to a literary history that really exists in the world outside the text, but the choice of *this* quotation from *this* poem is significant because it links the *Demeter* to a literary tradition of gothicised ships. The 'painted ship upon a painted ocean' is a well-known image and need not carry supernatural connotations, but its invocation in this context — since readers quickly understand this ship has something to do with Dracula — hints that the sorts of otherworldly forces associated with the Mariner's tale are at work on the *Demeter*, too. Uncertainty over how the final stages of the *Demeter*'s journey should be interpreted is underlined in the above quotations by the way that matter-of-fact descriptions often yield to supernatural emphases.

The emphasis on the ghostliness of the sea-mist also signals the control that Dracula wields over the *Demeter* at this point; a shroud of fog concealing the ship since its departure from the Baltic, and the sudden shift of wind that drives the ship miraculously through the narrow Whitby harbour entrance instead of onto the rocks, are both implicitly attributed to his supernatural agency. The transcription of the ship's log, carefully placed directly after the newspaper article, intensifies the suspense and horror by shifting the narrative perspective from land-based observation to the stressful experiences of the crew's final days.

The captain's log, however, only offers partial explanations, hints requiring a knowledgeable reader or Mina's hindsight to make sense. The facts of the disappearing crew are hard for the captain to tally with the available explanations. The overall uncertainty of the narrative is reflected, and also caused, by the instability of Dracula himself, a figure constantly moving between states of existence. Despite his very corporeal predation on the crew, Dracula also haunts the ship like a ghost: 'On the watch last night', says the first mate,

'I saw It, like a man, tall and thin, and ghastly pale. It was in the bows, and looking out. I crept behind It, and gave It my knife; but the knife went through It, empty as the air' (p. 84). As elsewhere in the novel, Dracula shifts regularly in form; his transformations into animals, mist, and 'elemental dust' subvert conventional physical boundaries and also social ones, allowing him to enter, for example, the supposedly safe and otherwise inviolable domestic realms of Lucy's and Mina's bedrooms. He is what Christopher Craft has called 'an easeful communicant of exclusive realms'.[35] Yet the sea is the one boundary he cannot cross: only when ship touches shore can he leap to land.

In these and other ways, Stoker's narrative turns the *Demeter* into a gothic microcosm. The tight and inescapable spatial limits of a ship at sea, for instance, compound the claustrophobic horror of being trapped in the same space as a vampire. The shock of discovering Dracula's body in the boxes in the *Demeter*'s hold drives the first mate to suicide:

> 'Save me! save me!' he cried, and then looked round on the blanket of fog. His horror turned to despair, and in a steady voice he said: 'You had better come too, captain, before it is too late. *He* is there. I know the secret now. The sea will save me from Him, and it is all that is left!' (p. 85)

Moments later, he casts himself overboard. For both vampire and sailors, there is no escape from the carceral ship except into the equally deadly arms of the sea. The blanketing fog, 'which seems to move with us', is Dracula's creation, to conceal the ship from friendly eyes until it reaches the open North Sea; 'only God can guide us in the fog', the captain despairs, 'and God seems to have deserted us' (p. 84). On Dracula's return voyage, he similarly has 'the fog at his command' (p. 318). Aboard the *Demeter*, therefore, the world shrinks to the size of the ship, pinning the crew between, aptly enough, the devil and the deep blue sea; to be alive is to occupy the increasingly shaky space between the vampire and drowning. The marginal existence of a voyaging ship therefore becomes literalised through the agency of the vampire.

Ultimately, that margin collapses entirely, until the ship becomes an undead space occupied only by the vampire and the animated corpse of the captain. To the onlookers, the *Demeter*'s final rush into the harbour, achieving the impossible by avoiding the notorious Whitby reef, appears miraculously unguided. The searchlight reveals that

[35] Christopher Craft, '"Kiss Me with Those Red Lips": Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', *Representations*, 8 (Autumn 1984), 107-33.

> lashed to the helm was a corpse, with drooping head, which swung horribly to and fro with each motion of the ship. [...] A great awe came on all as they realized that the ship, as if by a miracle, had found the harbour, unsteered save by the hand of a dead man! (p. 78)

The coastguard and doctor conclude that that captain had lashed himself to the wheel while still alive, having 'tied up his own hands, fastening the knots with his teeth' (p. 80). A crucifix is found between his hands and the spoke, presumably protecting him from the same fate as his crew. Even after death, the captain remains at his post, occupying the place of a living helmsman while 'the flapping and buffeting of the sails had worked through the rudder of the wheel and dragged him to and fro, so that the cords with which he was tied had cut the flesh to the bone' (p. 79). He is received by the Whitby townsfolk as a hero, yet by reducing him to an apparently reanimated corpse and the first mate to suicidal madness, the novel also undermines the masculine construction of the heroic sailor.[36] Dracula's victims on the *Demeter* are aligned, like Jonathan, with the more explicitly vulnerable women, Lucy and Mina. The captain's bonds, which include the rosary, mark his flesh in a manner that foreshadows the mark from the Holy Wafer that Mina will later bear on the forehead of her living body. The dead captain thus perpetuates the conventional image of the brave sailor, but also suggests its fragility.

The motion of the ship, driven by Dracula through the storm, reanimates the captain's drooping and mutilated body into a hideous undead mockery of life. This sequence in the novel, along with Stoker's notes on wrecks and storms, indicate the narrative's concern with exploring ideas of natural as well as supernatural power.[37] Dracula's relationship with natural forces and phenomena such as wind, mists, sunset, sunrise, tides, and garlic suggests that the roots of the supernatural lie in the natural.[38] Van Helsing later suggests that the existence of Dracula may be explained by physical (though as-yet mysterious) means, speculating on the 'combinations of occult forces which work for physical life in a strange way' (p. 320). Natural and supernatural accounts compete as explanations for the vampire; Dracula's existence unsettles familiar distinctions between them, as is evident in the ambiguous state in which the *Demeter* and its helmsman are observed. Representing the dead captain, instead of directly representing Dracula, increases suspense by serving the vampire's destabilising functions before he is fully acknowledged by the narrative and its lead characters: the steering

[36] See Marcombe for discussions of representations of sailors.
[37] For Stoker's notes on stormy weather, see Eighteen-Bisang and Miller, pp. 133-37.
[38] Senf, p. 85.

corpse presents the onlookers with an illusion of the ship's being controlled by a 'dead hand' — which, in fact, it is.

The 'dead hand' image extends the doomed ship's intrusion into the world of the living through a legal nicety. It is not long after the wreck before

> one young law student is loudly asserting that the rights of the owner are already completely sacrificed, his property being held in contravention of the statutes of mortmain, since the tiller, as emblemship, if not proof, of delegated possession, is held in a *dead hand*. (p. 80)

The statutes of mortmain stated that it was illegal for the dead to retain control of corporate property, with the 'dead hand' metonymising ownership in perpetuity. Thus the statutes are contravened, because the dead captain did not let go of the wheel. As Anne McGillivray explains, '[t]he analysis is a piece of legal casuistry. *Mortmain*, law's dead hand, applied only to corporately-held lands and tenements. As corporations, like vampires, are eternal and never die a natural death, this may be a coded Stoker joke.'[39] McGillivray's analysis of this legal allusion draws attention to an important symbolic point — that Dracula's hand can reach from beyond the grave to violate the established laws of the social and physical worlds alike. In this way, the gothic liminality encapsulated by the ship expands beyond the maritime realm with its uncertain states of existence, and into the social infrastructures that governed shore-based Victorian Britain.

This phantom ship does not fade away into the mist, but persists in entering the public world of Whitby's harbour, with most of the town as audience. The site of the wreck is authentically precise: she 'pitched herself on that accumulation of sand and gravel washed by many tides and many storms into the south-east corner of the pier jutting under the East Cliff, known locally as Tate Hill Pier' (p. 78). This ship's reunion with the land is not calculated to reassure, as other ship narratives might by bringing a character, or at least firm news of them, safely to shore. The *Demeter* has 'found the harbour', but instead of this 'miracle' signifying the closure generally provided by homecoming or arrival into safety from the dangerous, liminal ocean realm, the ship is violently wrecked and, moreover, brings the terror of Dracula with her. Indeed, the wreck is necessary to Dracula's arrival: '*the very instant the shore was touched*, an immense dog sprang up on deck from below, as if shot up by the concussion, and running forward, jumped from the bow on the sand' (p. 78, emphasis added). The ship's

[39] Anne McGillivray, '"He Would Have Made a Wonderful Solicitor": Law, Modernity, and Professionalism in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', in *Lawyers and Vampires: Cultural Histories of Legal Professions*, ed. by W. Wesley Pue and David Sugarman (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2003), pp. 225-67 (p. 204).

contact with the land unleashes the vampire on an unsuspecting England. It is no coincidence that it is by ship that Dracula invades an Empire built on its maritime power. In such acts of reverse colonisation, Stephen Arata argues, '[i]n the marauding, invasive Other, British culture sees its own imperial practices mirrored back in monstrous forms'.[40] Naval supremacy, the security of an island nation, and the transport of disease to colonised lands all become horrifying when used against Britons, as they are through Dracula's method of invasion.

Dracula's ship, then, destabilises a number of conventional narratives associated with the maritime — of national, imperial, and personal security and identity, of the separations normally maintained between land and sea, safety and danger, life and death, of the relative power of science and the natural versus the inexplicable and supernatural, of superstition and tradition versus modernity. The story of the *Demeter* exposes the fractures in these narratives and plays a significant role in establishing and developing the unease that shapes the rest of the novel. The concerns explored in the *Demeter*'s story are partly, but only partly, resolved in the later stages of the narrative when Dracula flees for home — again by sea.

Dracula's telepathic connection with Mina is used by Van Helsing to attempt to track the vampire's return journey by water. Here Dracula's powers over nature both aid and hinder him. Dracula again uses his supernatural powers to speed his return voyage with the wind and conceal the vessel with fog, while Van Helsing deploys the modern science of hypnotism to turn Dracula's telepathic connection with Mina against him. On this return voyage, the ship incarcerates Dracula rather than the crew — a further example of the reversal that has taken place between the Count and Van Helsing's band. The vampire has become the persecuted rather than the persecutor. In one trance, Mina reports: 'Nothing; all is dark', and, later, 'I can hear the waves lapping against the ship, and the water rushing by. Canvas and cordage strain and masts and yards creak. The wind is high' (p. 333). Conversely, Dracula, too, uses Van Helsing's technique against the vampire hunters to conceal the fact that he is arriving at Galtaz, not at Varna as they expect, but again the balance of power shifts as Mina uses what she learns to work out the river route by which he is being transported back to his castle.

Dracula's identification with *sailing* ships speaks to both the extent and limits of his power. In the nineteenth century, the wooden sailing warships and merchants of the Age of Sail were giving way to steel-hulled windjammers, steam ships, and iron-clads. Dracula can control the wind that fills the sails and the fog that impedes human navigation, but he cannot

[40] Stephen D. Arata, '"The Occidental Tourist:" *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization', *Victorian Studies*, 33 (1990), 621-45 (p. 623).

affect the modern technologies of steel and steam. However, the advantages that modernity grants to his pursuers decrease the closer Dracula draws to home; they 'gradually leave behind them all their modern technological trappings and ultimately defeat him with the weapons of his own time: knives and crucifixes'.[41] The power of folklore is thus upheld, but it is also clear that Dracula belongs to a superstitious age that is on the way out. What is more, if the story of *Dracula* is in part a tale of modernity, science, and technology pitted against an obsolete social order and outdated superstition, this tale is told no less through Dracula's sea voyages than it is through the struggle between the vampire and his hunters.

Dracula's ship merits attention by readers and critics, because she highlights a neglected strand of gothic literary, imaginative, and cultural history, while also showing how closely embroiled gothic fiction is with its contemporary social values and practices, and because examining her crucial role in the story enriches our experience of Stoker's novel. Ships, I have been suggesting, have unique liminal capacities that derive from their place in the imaginaries of maritime cultures, and from their literal function as transport vessels crossing the uncertain environment of the sea. The gothic, as a narrative mode, is often characterised by its transgression of boundaries, threatening to disrupt cultural norms or social orders normally kept in place by conventional lines of demarcation. As heterotopic spaces, however, ships not only transgress such boundaries but can also hover on or at them in troubling ways. Gothic ships disrupt familiar narratives, such as those that construct the perceived security of land versus the uncertainty of the sea, the distinctions between life and death, national and gender identities, or Victorian Britain's position as unassailable empire, ruler of the seas, and explainer of scientific mysteries. In *Dracula*, the transgressive capacities of ships are aligned with those of the vampire, so that the *Demeter* becomes an undead space foreshadowing the deepest evils wrought by Dracula in the rest of the narrative.

[41] Linda Dryden, *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles: Stevenson, Wilde, and Wells* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 29.