



Rachel Klein's the Moth Diaries: An Uncanny Use of Intertextuality

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Rachel Klein's *The Moth Diaries*:
An Uncanny Use of Intertextuality

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Abstract

This thesis explores the effects of intertextuality, the idea that all literary works are related to one another, by examining Rachel Klein's 2002 Gothic novel *The Moth Diaries*. This novel has received little literary analysis, and its use of intertextuality has never been noted before in any review. This study examines the ways in which *The Moth Diaries* borrows from, reimagines, and alludes to many other written works in ways which may alter readers' interpretations of the book. In particular, *The Moth Diaries* engages with works such as Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and with thinkers such as Sigmund Freud and the culture of therapy that has resulted from his work. This thesis will explore the meanings of vampirism that the novel suggests, along with the book's critique of the anti-Semitism that has accompanied the vampire genre. Additionally, due to the narrator's intense relationship with reading and writing, this thesis will examine the questions which the novel raises about the power of literature in readers' lives.

Frontispiece



“The Nymph caught the Dryad in her arms.”
The New World Fairy Book
By Howard Angus Kennedy
Illustration by H.R. Millar

Acknowledgments

A huge thank you to all my friends and family who encouraged me throughout the writing of this thesis!

A special thank you to my mother, who initiated me into a love for literary works that were strange, supernatural, and often scary, from a young age on. Thank you to my father for encouraging those tastes by always crafting me the most frightening Halloween costumes. I was never the princess for Halloween, but always a “baddie” of some sort. It would seem I have always been drawn toward dark fictional characters. And thank you to both my parents for allowing me to watch the miniseries *Carmilla* at the age of 6 - an unusual decision no doubt, but as this thesis may suggest, the impression never left me. It’s funny how things come back around.

Thank you to my husband, who has suffered a lot of blank stares from me recently, as I’ve been going through some line of thought in my head related to this project. Your patience with my immersion was appreciated!

Thank you to my mother-in-law for babysitting my two year old on the days when I was holed up in the library - that was so very helpful. As my daughter said many times, “Were you working on your ‘Fee-sis’ AGAIN?”

Thank you to Dr. Talaya Delaney, my research advisor, who pointed me in the direction of *The Moth Diaries*, a novel I had never heard of, while I was looking for material to support my interest in a completely different vampire novel, which did not make it into this thesis!

And a very big thank you of course to Dr. Patricia Bellanca, my thesis advisor, who was very patient and insightful throughout this project, and whose comments were always invaluable and entertaining at the same time.

Lastly, thank you to Rachel Klein, who wrote a gem of a novel. Admittedly, it was often a creepy book to be writing about late at night, so I was grateful for the humor in it, which unfortunately this thesis does not concentrate on! Klein created an exceptional narrator, who became real to me in a way that made me feel sometimes that I completely understood her. (Which, considering the nature of *The Moth Diaries*, is perhaps concerning...) In any event, it was a pleasure to work on such a fascinating novel, and in so doing, the *many* other literary works that were entailed with it.

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Chapter I
Introduction

“I read, I read, I read. Everything. It doesn’t matter what. I’ve nothing but that to occupy me, to take me away from here and myself.”

—*Claudine in School*

Rachel Klein’s *The Moth Diaries* is a hauntingly beautiful Gothic novel which was published in 2002. It received minimal literary acclaim, and very little is known about the author herself, except that she graduated from the University of Michigan with her B.A. and M.A. in English Literature, and that she now resides in Brooklyn. *The Moth Diaries* is her only published novel to date. This thesis will shed light on this under-appreciated work of literature, and above all highlight its exceptional use of intertextuality with works such as *Carmilla* and *Dracula*, and the writings of Sigmund Freud. Readers’ own active participation with these works, and the many others referenced in *The Moth Diaries*, allows them to interpret the novel from many different perspectives, and notably in a way which ultimately questions the confidence with which readers can ever truly know what it is they are reading. This at-times exhilarating and often unnerving feature of the novel, as well as its commentary on the subjective and immersive experience of reading and writing, have not been addressed in any review of the novel and deserve exploration.

A summary of *The Moth Diaries* is required to appreciate the novel, which is written in the form of a diary by an unnamed narrator. The narrator records her junior

year at Brangwyn, a secluded and elite boarding school on the Eastern Coast of the U.S. that she attends in the early 1970s. The students are policed by the head matrons who run the school, and who cultivate an atmosphere of scrutiny and punishment, not to mention a veiled but insidious anti-Semitic stance, which directly affects the narrator, as she is one of three Jewish girls at the school. The narrator started at Brangwyn the year previous to the events of her diary after her father, a well-known poet, committed suicide and her mother, coping with her own grief, was unable to handle the narrator living at home anymore. The tragic circumstances of the father's suicide, and its toll on the narrator's family, invade the narrator's thoughts as they seep onto the pages of her diary with her recollections of him.

During the previous school year, the narrator's friendship with her fellow boarder Lucy Blake was a source of strength and happiness when she was sent to Brangwyn after her father's death. Lucy helped the narrator out of her depression, and gradually the two became inseparable friends. From the beginning of the new year though, Lucy becomes daily more entranced by Ernessa Bloch, a new girl in their year who lives on their hall, and who is similar to the narrator herself: smart, bookish, and also Jewish. The two even look alike. The narrator is jealous of Ernessa, and comes to view her increasingly as an enemy. Simultaneously Lucy, a pretty and popular girl, outgoing and interested in sports, dramatically loses weight and physical stamina throughout the course of the school year. Spending more and more time with Ernessa, she eats less and less, and also stops attending many of her classes and former activities. The narrator begins to suspect that Ernessa is a vampire who is making Lucy sick - an idea which originates from Ernessa's odd behavior and mysterious background and coalesces with the narrator's own reading of Sheridan Le Fanu's 1872 novel *Carmilla* in her English course, which is a story which

revolves around the relationship between two teenage girls, one of whom is a vampire preying on the other. The narrator's belief strengthens as elements of Ernessa's behavior (that she is never seen eating, is seemingly resistant to the effects of drugs, has heightened strengths and strange nocturnal habits), coincide with a number of bizarre incidents and deaths at the school which involve her. The narrator's own interests in the supernatural, her love of reading, and her continued state of mourning for her father make her suspicions questionable though, and as the school year goes on and the narrator's diary entries become more fantastic it becomes increasingly impossible to tell which events that she describes are really happening and which may be the delusions of a troubled mind.

Finally, worried about Lucy's health, the narrator has a devastating argument with her about Ernessa which ends with Lucy saying that her friendship with the narrator is over. The next day, in the early morning hours, the narrator discovers Lucy missing from her bed and runs outside to see her on the field with Ernessa, who is airborne and appears to be trying to lead her away. By the time the narrator reaches Lucy, the latter is breathing her last, and Ernessa has disappeared. Lucy dies in the narrator's arms. When the narrator is found outside with her lifeless body the next morning, she says that Lucy suffered another attack as a result of her condition, because she knows that no one will believe her about Ernessa, and indeed it's unclear whether any of the teachers or students ever accept her version of events at all. Due to the months of her increasingly paranoid and obsessive behavior the teachers and students are suspicious that the narrator herself led Lucy to her death.

Whatever the truth of Lucy's demise is, the narrator blames Ernessa, and soon after sets fire to Ernessa's trunk in the basement of the school, where she believes that

Ernessa has to sleep as a stipulation of her vampire state. The narrator hopes to punish Ernessa and destroy her if possible, but despite her efforts, she witnesses Ernessa leaving the school as it's burning. The narrator's diary ends as she hears voices approaching her while she is writing in her diary, and she knows that the school officials have come for her. Due to the preface and afterword of the novel, readers know that the narrator was then taken to a mental hospital for psychiatric treatment for a year, where she was diagnosed as suffering from "borderline personality disorder complicated by depression and psychosis" (Klein 2) but was considered "recovered" after that and never suffered another "incident." Her psychiatrist kept the diary readers are reading, which the narrator was forced to give him as part of her treatment, and he has suggested thirty years later that she publish it as influential psychiatric case material.

After an exhaustive search there are only a few critical reviews and blog posts to be found on the novel, nearly all of which are highly praiseworthy of it. Both Laura Owen and Kevin Jackson from *The Guardian* name *The Moth Diaries* as one of the top 10 vampire novels ever written, citing the sophistication with which Klein carries out the "unreliable narrator" theme, and both mentioning how reminiscent the novel is of Henry James's *Turn of the Screw* in this aspect. (Owen 1) (Jackson 1) *The Guardian's* Nicola Morgan also reviewed the novel at length in 2004, saying,

The Moth Diaries delves deeper into the neuroses and psyche of female adolescence than anything I've read. It is dark and dangerous, gothic, brutally revealing, regularly shocking and perfectly controlled... Every girl wallows in parental abandonment, clinging to friendships with a Sapphic intensity; food is friend and foe, to be gorged or rejected; life must be lived dangerously, with the

need to risk death with self-starvation, drugs, suicide attempts, or crawling along gutters 100 feet up. (Morgan 2)

These reviews have all commented on the aspects of the novel which are most readily apparent: its portrayal of some of the more troubling aspects of female adolescence and relationships, particularly in a boarding school setting, and the skill with which Klein crafts an ambiguous narrator whose diary entries belie possible mental illness while at the same time weaving a classic story of Gothic suspense. What none of the reviews have addressed is one of the most striking aspects of the novel which this thesis will focus on: its use of intertextuality. This thesis will use a definition of intertextuality based on the ideas of Julia Kristeva, a novelist, literary critic, and semiotician (one who studies signs and symbols and how they are used.) (“Semiotics” 1) *The Electronic Labyrinth* describes Julia Kristeva’s definition of *intertextuality* as:

Derived from the Latin *intertexto*, meaning to intermingle while weaving, intertextuality is a term first introduced by French semiotician Julia Kristeva in the late sixties. In essays such as "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," Kristeva broke with traditional notions of the author's "influences" and the text's "sources," positing that all signifying systems, from table settings to poems, are constituted by the manner in which they transform earlier signifying systems. A literary work, then, is not simply the product of a single author, but of its relationship to other texts and to the structures of language itself. "[A]ny text," she argues, "is constructed of a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another (66) ... Thus writing is always an iteration which is also a re-iteration, a re-writing which foregrounds the trace of the various texts it both knowingly and unknowingly places and dis-places." (Keep 1)

The Moth Diaries is a perfect example of Kristeva's ideas about intertextuality, in that it is a *book about other literature*, filled with quotes from other novels and poems, and constructed so that allusions to other works are woven into the novel itself in a manner which honors, reimagines, and critiques them. In *The Moth Diaries*, this reverence for other written works functions on another level as well: for the narrator of the story, the relationship becomes pathological, and the novel explores notions of the importance and impact of reading and writing upon a person and their perception of reality and ability to make sense of their experiences in the world. These ideas are examined through the experiences of the narrator that are recorded by her in her diary, and also by the experience of readers as they progress through the novel.

The narrator directly mentions upwards of 30 different works of literature and authors, so readers know how well-read she is. She is the best student in her class and reads a lot outside of her schoolwork as well, specifically mentioning works such as Marcel Proust's 7-volume *In Search of Lost Time*, which she begins at school before Thanksgiving, and is still reading in February of that school year, when she mentions to her English professor Mr. Davies how much she wants to finish it.

I told him about my father's set of Proust, which I brought back with me after vacation. There are twelve of them all lined up on my desk: little blue books with turquoise and white covers. I'm reading them because I like the books so much. It makes a difference reading the book if I like the way it feels and looks. It's got to be a real book, which is usually an old book, with a certain smell, musty and vegetable. I don't like new things.
(Klein 152)

The narrator is commenting on the act of reading itself, and the fact that readers' impressions of a book may be altered by their own visceral reaction to a book's physical presentation. In this way the act of reading is very personal for the narrator. In her diary she lists all the works that she is reading for her course on the supernatural, such as

“Sredni Vashtar” by Hector Hugh Monro (Saki), *The Black Spider* by Jeremias Gotthelf, and *The Man Whom the Trees Loved* by Algernon Blackwood, and even inserts quotations from these works, which seem to stand in when she herself cannot confidently say what she wants to in her own words. The narrator also mentions books which frustrate her because she finds them too abstruse - such as Friedrich Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, which the narrator struggles to understand so that she can be on par with her only two intellectual rivals, Ernessa and Dora, who discuss these works in front of her.

There are books that inspire the narrator, get her through the day, and help her to examine her own feelings. In her very first diary entry, the narrator mentions:

I read the *Claudine* books over the summer. They were a replacement for school, which I missed so much. I hope the words flow from my pen on to the paper the way they did for Colette: the exact words I need. I’ve got *Claudine at School* on my desk, for inspiration. She knows what it’s like to be shut up in a place like this, where all your emotions are focused on the girls around you, where you dream of a boyfriend but only feel comfortable with your arm around another girl’s waist. (Klein 5)

The narrator feels an affinity for the author Colette, whom she believes would understand her when others might not. Authors, and books, are a source of emotional support for her. The reference to *Claudine at School* is actually her first mention of another work, and it’s striking because of the impact that her love of these books has on her own writing and how they reflect and contrast with her own experience of school. The similarities between the narrator and the narrator of *Claudine at School*, who is the title character, are unmistakable. Both girls are around age 16 and spend most of their diary discussing the details of their school life, which is of primary concern to them. Both are the top of their class and fervent readers, and are sometimes defiant of their teachers and competitive with their classmates. Both also have passionate but troubled relationships with one other

female student in particular. In the case of *Claudine at School*, the girl that Claudine is both repelled and attracted to, and who leaves an indelible impression on her, is Luce. (Colette) This is the first of three times that Klein's choice of the name "Lucy" for the narrator's best friend is a clear and pointed allusion to another work which she either directly or indirectly refers to, which marks these works as significant to readers in interpreting the novel.

The narrator's mention of *Claudine at School* also is one of the first instances where Klein invites readers to examine another work as a result of reading this novel, an act which is repeated throughout *The Moth Diaries*. As readers realize how much the narrator incorporates what she is reading into her own understanding of the events around her, they may become intrigued and even driven to try to comprehend the *narrator's* readings by reading everything that she records in her diary. And any readers who do so will not be disappointed: their reading experience of *The Moth Diaries* is only enriched by their reading along with the narrator. In the first instance with *Claudine at School*, it becomes possible to see what the narrator of *The Moth Diaries* had intended to emulate with her own diary: the witty, jovial tone of *Claudine at School*, told by the narrator Claudine, who maintains an enviable position by surpassing her classmates academically and constantly one-upping her teachers through the force of her confident and clever personality. Claudine is everything the narrator aspires to be, and her effortless writing style and record of her time at school is the inspiration which the narrator hopes to channel. But the narrator already feels she has failed at this before she has barely begun; immediately after discussing the Claudine novels she says, "Already I've put too many sad thoughts down on these pages. I have to start all over again, very slowly and carefully. Everything has to be perfect" (Klein 5). The pressure of writing to the

standards the narrator expects of herself will be a reoccurring point of conflict for her, showing the value she places on writing as well as reading, no doubt in part due her literary father. Words are everything to her; without them she is lost. One night, several of the girls are smoking a hash pipe in the dormitories, and while everyone else is relaxed by the experience the narrator becomes increasingly upset by her reaction to the hash after she joins in.

We smoked a bit. I started to say, "I can't even feel a things..." when I couldn't finish my sentence. The last word was a million miles away, and I could only inch toward it. I stood up and started walking up and down the room, trying to escape that feeling, but the room wasn't big enough and everyone kept getting in the way. "Stop it," said Claire. "You're driving me nuts. You're like the Mad Hatter." "I can't," I said. I can't. I can't. I'm losing all my words." (Klein 128)

"Losing all her words" is a terrifying experience for the narrator, whose life is built by and around them in a way which becomes increasingly troubled as the novel progresses.

As there are works which inspire the narrator, there are also those which seem to haunt her, such as Emily Dickinson's poem, "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died" - which the narrator includes twice in the novel, both after the death of a friend. It's as though she is trying to understand death herself and, being unable to, attempts to use literature to do so. The first time she copies the poem down shortly after Dora dies she says, "Emily would have understood what interposed between Dora and her death, but I don't" (Klein 114) - suggesting that she reveres the poem and looks to its author for knowledge. But by the second time she transcribes the poem, immediately after Lucy's death, she writes, "Why does she keep lecturing me? It's like a sermon. Preacher Emily converting the Jew. I cover my ears. I close my eyes" (Klein 229). The poem and its message become bitter to the narrator; she no longer wants to hear the poem but she is compelled to write it out and unable to stop thinking about it. Novel and poems themselves imprint in the

narrator's mind; she struggles to make sense of experiences through them and when she cannot she becomes stuck like a fly in a web.

The Moth Diaries is a complicated text, but in many ways, it is simply a work about the intertextual experience of reading literature itself, told by a narrator who lives her life largely in her own head, reading and thinking about literature too much, and incorporating it into her understanding of reality. As she says, "Some days I wonder how I'll get through a whole lifetime of thinking. A life that's just words, words, words, shuffling around in my head. Was I born that way?" (Klein 40). At first she writes in her diary to, as she says, record her life as a 16-year-old girl at school. But over the course of the novel, the diary becomes more than a record - it becomes something she sees as a source of comfort, and then finally turns into an obsession. Reading and writing take on monumental importance in the life of the narrator; in fact, they become dangerous acts when she is unable to tell the difference between reality and the reality that she has created for herself from literature. The narrator thinks that by writing out everything that happens she can get a grip on the situation; that she can examine the facts by recording them and keep her head together. But the opposite happens; the more she writes in the diary the less she finds herself able to engage in the real world. The writing becomes as much an addiction as reading does for her.

As the novel goes on, the narrator incorporates parts of the novels she is reading, in particular *Carmilla*, into her own writing and perception of the events happening at Brangwyn. The plot and characters of *Carmilla* become real to her. Readers realize from the narrator's first mention of *Carmilla* how *literal* a reader the narrator is: she seems driven to take literature at face value, and not as a metaphorical device. Shortly after she has begun reading *Carmilla*, the narrator says, "Before long, I was pulled into it and

couldn't stop reading. Once I realized that Carmilla was a vampire, everything that followed made perfect sense. There was no other possible explanation" (Klein 58). Deciding that, "There was no other possible explanation" is an extremely reductive approach for someone to take towards reading. The narrator herself is aware of this though, and she explains her view of literature in her English class when they are discussing *Carmilla*.

Mr. Davies started by asking the class if we found the character Carmilla to be convincing... I said that I started to believe in the character when the writer realized what she was. Mr. Davies looked puzzled. "When the character he had created became real to him, the rest of the story did too," I explained. "In other words, you agree with Coleridge about the poet's 'willing suspension of disbelief.'" "I don't mean suspending anything. I mean creating something that exists, just the way that everything in this room exists. Bringing it to life." "It's a symbolic story," said Mr. Davies. "That's the point. Not whether things are real, but what they mean." I realized what he was trying to do. He wanted to convince me that the supernatural doesn't exist. The whole point of the course is that it's just a figment of the writer's imagination, an expression of his subconscious. Like a dream. Or memories. My father would have understood me. He would have agreed that, fundamentally, Mr. Davies has no imagination. I had to answer him. "I'm not interested in symbols," I said. "I'm interested in what's real, even if it doesn't look real. I want to know what it's like to be Carmilla. Does she ever suffer? Is it boring to live forever? What is it like to remember your own death? Things like that. Don't you want answers? Doesn't anyone else want answers?" (Klein 69)

The lengthy passage above is included here because it very cleverly encapsulates the experience of reading *The Moth Diaries* itself, and is an example of one of Klein's many creative uses of intertextuality in the novel; in this case she is communicating with the reader about her *own* book. When the narrator is discussing her views on supernatural literature, this is Klein speaking, telling readers exactly what the experience of reading *The Moth Diaries* will be. Readers are the stand-ins for "Mr. Davies" as they read her novel. By the conventions they have learned through their experiences with Gothic literature, readers are expecting *The Moth Diaries* to be "a symbolic story"; not a real story about a vampire, but a story where the vampire is a metaphor. "The whole point of

the course is that it's just a figment of the writer's imagination, an expression of his subconscious. Like a dream. Or memories." (The narrator says.) And this is what Klein suggests that readers are expecting: to discover that the narrator's belief that Ernessa is a vampire is an expression of her *subconscious*. Klein suggests that when the narrator relates her dreams and memories in her diary readers will search there for the meaning of the book. So, like Mr. Davies then, Klein suggests that the average reader suffers from "no imagination." Don't readers "want answers" about Ernessa, she queries, or are they just content to accept her as a metaphor for the narrator's subconscious? The above passage is self-conscious; it is Klein speaking from *within* the book *about* the book. Klein is telling readers that if they are looking purely to interpret the story as metaphor for the narrator's subconscious, then perhaps they are looking for the wrong meaning, or overlooking the narrator's insights in her interpretation of Ernessa as a vampire.

So what should readers of *The Moth Diaries* be looking for in the novel? When the narrator says, "I believe in what's real, even if it doesn't look real," this is Klein once again speaking to her readers, giving them the message of her novel: that it looks like a story about vampirism because it is a story about vampirism. The *nature* of the vampirism, though, is one of the issues Klein is most interested in addressing. What does it mean to be a vampire? The narrator researches vampire lore herself, going through her father's library at home to find anything she can so that she can learn more about what she believes Ernessa is. She turns to books, as she always does, for answers, but even she is forced to query, after all her research, "Has anyone ever truly seen a vampire? Can anyone stand to see it?" (Klein 175). Once again, Klein seems to be speaking directly to readers about her own book. Is vampirism something you can see, she asks? Is it merely

blood-drinking, or is it perhaps more insidious than that? Does it display itself in our social or cultural practices, and is it ignored, or even encouraged sometimes? And what role has literature played in readers' concept of a vampire, particularly literature about young female vampires and their relationships with other girls? These are some of the many questions Klein explores in *The Moth Diaries*.

Although there are many allusions to literary and cultural thinkers throughout the novel, this thesis will focus on two major works and one prominent thinker. The first of these is Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, which impacts the narrator and the course of her actions, as the narrator's reading of *Carmilla* becomes *her own reading* of the events around her. The narrator is fixated on mapping the mythology of *Carmilla* onto her understanding of the disturbing events around her, and the end result of this mapping is both distracting but also potentially illuminating: Ernessa may be a vampire, but she may not be the blood-sucking type. She may have an eating disorder, and she may lead Lucy to her death by "infecting" her with this same condition. Were it not for her engagement with literature though, and the intensity with which the narrator reads *Carmilla*, would she have the clarity to perceive this parasitic relationship between Ernessa and Lucy, in whatever form it actually takes? Klein asks the reader to examine this question, which is why *Carmilla* is such an integral part of *The Moth Diaries*.

The second work of major importance in *The Moth Diaries* is Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Although mentioned only once in the novel, the impact of this work can be felt throughout the book. The fact that *Dracula* is alluded to by the narrator with disgust gives the reader some indication of Klein's own feelings about the work; conversely, Klein's choice to allude to and reimagine one of the less-analyzed scenes from *Dracula* indicates the value she attributes to the *mise-en-scene* of that classic novel,

particularly those features which have gone unrecognized. More importantly, *Dracula* looms quietly in the background of *The Moth Diaries* to allow Klein the opportunity to address one of its more insidious themes: its anti-Semitism. The fact that the narrator and also the “vampire” Ernessa are Jewish (they are two of three girls at the school who are, and the third actually dies in the first half of the book), and the ways in which their Jewishness is a concern to the narrator make the connection with *Dracula* poignant.

Thirdly, this thesis will examine a figure whose name is never explicitly stated but whose presence is felt throughout the novel as though he were a character himself - Sigmund Freud. In the case of Freud, it is readers who provides the knowledge of him, because his presence is so much a part of their cultural milieu that his name need not be said. While Freud’s name and ideas are often invoked in discussions of Gothic novels, which frequently deal with ideas of unconscious fears and desires manifesting through the supernatural, it is the manner in which Freud and his legacy is invoked in *The Moth Diaries* which makes a discussion of the matter worth including. Freud’s influence on modern readers is so impactful that nearly all of the narrator’s actions throughout the book can be viewed as acts of wish fulfillment or the results of a repressed unconscious. But while it would be easy to read the narrator as simply a sexually repressed and emotionally damaged hysteric, there is a conflicting theme which pervades the novel: a not-so-subtle mistrust and criticism of psychiatry, alluded to by the narrator’s reflections on her experiences in therapy. This criticism, along with the general failure of all figures of authority and responsibility in the narrator’s life, create a feeling of sympathy and understanding for the narrator on the part of readers which renders her story, while incredible, also entirely moving and believable. Her own depiction of events, while they may contain elements of the fantastic which might not actually be

occurring, may be *preferable* to the reality of the neglect which pervades the girls at school and in particular the narrator. This circumstance, combined with the narrator's recollections of her experiences in therapy, help the author to pose some questions worth examining about the role of Freud, psychoanalysis, and therapy in Western culture.

The main questions that this thesis will explore are: Why does Klein choose the literary works she does to engage with in this novel, and what suggestions is she making about the power, or value, of literature in readers' lives and in controlling their perceptions of reality? She certainly engages with many literary works and thinkers, some by direct reference and some without even mentioning them by name. But arguably, when Klein does not mention these references so overtly - as in the case of Freud - the power of their presence is actually stronger. *Readers* bring these other literary works into the act of reading *The Moth Diaries*, by virtue of their awareness of them, and in this way readers become an active contributor to the work as well. Readers of *The Moth Diaries* can see how the narrator is becoming too close to literature; how she is incorporating it into the fabric of her reality. And yet at the same time readers are reproducing that behavior, because they are unable to read the narrator's text without bringing other texts that *they* have read into the experience of reading *her* text, and thus incorporating those into *their* own understanding and interpretation of *her* writing. Klein wants to draw readers' attentions to the inescapable fact of intertextuality as a part of the reading experience: to show them that they cannot leave what they have read at the door, as it were, when they read again; they bring it with them as baggage which they must learn both to heed and to interpret so as to enrich their reading experiences. For example, if readers only allow themselves the Freudian reading of the narrator's experiences in *The Moth Diaries*, viewing her only as a repressed neurotic, might they not devalue the

experiences she has and that she writes about? Might they not miss the truth hidden in her story? “In the end, it doesn’t matter if the words are true or a lie. They serve the same purpose,” the narrator says in her diary. (Klein 52) And that is one of Klein’s messages about her own novel: readers should beware that they don’t end up missing the forest through the trees as they immerse themselves in trying to separate fact from fiction in *The Moth Diaries*.

Chapter II

Carmilla in *The Moth Diaries*:

Issues of Female Hysteria, Consumption, and the Meaning of Vampirism

Sheridan Le Fanu's 1872 novel *Carmilla* begins to play a prominent role in *The Moth Diaries* from the second month of the narrator's year back at school, when she begins reading the book for her English course. Two important things also happen in her life at this time: Her best friend Lucy pulls away from her, and the second anniversary of her father's death occurs. The two figures of Lucy and her father are the most important influences at this troubling time in the narrator's life. Books are her refuge from the real world and its problems, so when *Carmilla*, a book that seems to mirror her own situation, enters her life, it begins to shape her perception of events. Klein's message about the way readers use literature to make meaning of their own lives is explored through the narrator's increasingly complicated relationship to this novel. As the narrator says in class, "I want to know what it's like to be Carmilla. Does she ever suffer? Is it boring to live forever? What is it like to remember your own death? Things like that. Don't you want answers? Doesn't anyone else want answers?" (Klein 69). The narrator will be seeking those answers during her junior year at Brangwyn, and, as we learn in the afterword, for the rest of her life. She will have a contentious relationship with *Carmilla* as the year goes on at school: The novel and its title character both repulse and fascinate her, as does Ernessa, and the possibility that *Carmilla* suggests - of life as a vampire after death from a suicide - is a particularly fraught but nonetheless alluring idea for her, having lost the father she adored to suicide only two years previous. The intertextual

relationship of the novel *Carmilla* to *The Moth Diaries* is the strongest of any reference to another work of literature in Klein's work, as an appreciation and understanding of *The Moth Diaries* is based in part on the reader being familiar with *Carmilla* themselves.

A brief summary of *Carmilla* will be necessary to begin to understand the influence that this novel has on the narrator of *The Moth Diaries*. The novel is set in "Styria" in the late 1800's, where Laura, a teenage girl, lives on a remote rural estate with only her father, her teacher, and servants. The novel begins with Laura having just learned that a long-awaited guest – a girl her age and a niece of her father's friend, the General, will no longer be able to visit them due to her sudden death from mysterious circumstances. The very evening that Laura and her father receive the letter bearing this news a carriage turns over on the road in front of them while they are out walking. The carriage contains a young lady named Carmilla, whose mother must hasten away under circumstances which she begs must remain secret after Laura's father offers to look after Carmilla until she returns.

So Carmilla stays with Laura and her father, and proves a very charming companion for Laura, who finds herself both bewitched but also occasionally repulsed by her. Carmilla betrays nothing about her past or circumstances though, and has habits which Laura finds strange. For one, she is very passionate, which Laura describes as: "It was like the ardor of a lover; it was hateful and yet over-powering; and with gloating eyes she drew me to her, and her hot lips traveled along my cheek in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs, "You are mine, you shall be mine, you and I are one forever" (Le Fanu 32). Carmilla also does not rise until late each day, never appears to eat food, and suffers convulsions at one point when a funeral procession goes by and Christian hymns are sung. Simultaneously, Laura finds herself having disturbing dreams and

waking each morning feeling drained, tired, and unwell. She doesn't associate these feelings with the idea of nightly visitations, or imagine that Carmilla might be the reason behind her state of health. Indeed no one in the household suspects Carmilla, and it is not until the arrival of previously mentioned General that the connection between Carmilla and Laura's sickness is revealed.

The General sees Carmilla and, after she strikes a blow at him and flees, he explains to the family that she was also the guest who stayed in his own household, and that she is a vampire that preyed on his daughter until her death, when the General finally realized what she was. His story is supplemented by the research he has done into Carmilla's background; he discovers that she was originally Mircalla Karnstein, a Countess who lived a century ago and who was reportedly visited and killed by a vampire, presumed dead, and buried, but whose grave was moved and who then began preying on others as a vampire herself. The General had been searching for the grave, and upon visiting Laura and her father is able to locate it and, in a ceremony accompanied by "The Imperial Commission," consisting of two medical men, the General, and Laura's father, Carmilla's body is staked, decapitated and burned, and the ashes are "borne away, and that territory has never since been plagued by the visits of a vampire" (Le Fanu 96). None of the last portion of the story is witnessed by Laura - it is told to her by others and through official documents of the incident that are shared with her.

At first glance, the story of *Carmilla* seems far removed from what is happening to the narrator in *The Moth Diaries*. And yet, the narrator very quickly latches on to the story to help her make sense of her own situation. When Ernessa begins to adopt what the narrator views as a possessive attitude over Lucy, and Lucy pulls away from her relationship with the narrator in favor of Ernessa, the narrator begins to draw parallels

between Ernessa and the character Carmilla. Like Carmilla, Ernessa's past is mysterious, which leads the narrator to speculate as she quotes from *Carmilla*. "Who is Carmilla? Dark, depressed, death-drawn. 'Her name is Carmilla.' 'Her family was very ancient and noble.' 'Her home lay in the direction of the west.' Who is Ernessa?" (Klein 63). This easily-missed passage in *The Moth Diaries* is illuminating because it shows how early on the narrator begins re-writing *Carmilla* to her own designs, inserting her own ideas into a narrative that she did not write. Carmilla is not "Dark, depressed, deathdrawn." This is the *narrator's* description of Carmilla, based on her hatred of and projection of negative qualities onto Ernessa and therefore onto the character of Carmilla. Carmilla is described in many ways, including "languid" and possessing a "smiling melancholy" at times (Le Fanu 29) but nothing approaching dark or depressed. In fact, she is quite the opposite. "She interested and won me; she was so beautiful and indescribably engaging," Laura says of her (Le Fanu 27), and: "She was always an animated talker, and very intelligent" (Le Fanu 33). The narrator sees what she wants to see, as readers will learn many times throughout the novel, and she interprets literature as it suits her own story. Readers may begin to adopt the narrator's impressions of Ernessa based on some of these initial passages, so it is telling that unless readers read *Carmilla* for themselves they will be subject only to the narrator's impressions of Ernessa. So readers have the choice to become more or less involved in their own understanding and appreciation of *The Moth Diaries*, but the more they engage with the literature that the narrator reads the more critical and enriching an experience they will have.

It is clear that, whether supernatural circumstances are involved or not, the narrator experiences an emotional breakdown by the end of her junior year at school.

Arguably, this can be attributed to the strain of her father's death on her life, and the troubles in her relationship with Lucy and the latter's death. It is the narrator's reading of *Carmilla* though which really frames her perception of the events at school: The book fuels her growing conviction that Ernessa is harming Lucy, and gives the narrator an explanation for the seemingly-unnatural pull Ernessa has over her and the bizarre and unexplained deaths at the school. The question is then, if the narrator had never read *Carmilla*, would her emotional state still have spiraled out of control, resulting in the ambiguous circumstances of Lucy's death and the fire in the basement? Or is the book *Carmilla* itself the danger that prompts the tragedies of the book? Klein hints at the power of a book to turn readers mad by including *The King in Yellow* by Robert W. Chambers on the narrator's reading list for her supernatural course. As the narrator herself writes: "*The King in Yellow*: A book whose words are beautiful, true, and simple yet destroy the reader by driving him mad. Would I be able to resist looking at it? Is there any book I could resist?" (Klein 53). In *The King in Yellow*, which is actually a series of short stories, four of the stories are connected by the allusion to a play by the same title as the book, which has driven characters mad, and which others have been warned to stay away from to avoid madness. The mystery of what exactly it is about the play that drives its readers crazy is never revealed. Klein's inclusion of this reference, and the narrator's comment on her own inability to resist looking at a book, even if it drives her crazy, are a parallel to the events of *The Moth Diaries* and the narrator's own relationship with *Carmilla* and its powerful effect on her, as well as her addiction to writing in her own diary.

Klein addresses the inescapability of intertextual reading on the part of readers of *The Moth Diaries* with her reimagining of *Carmilla*, as well as her many allusions to

literary critiques of it. This in itself is highly ironic, as readers of *The Moth Diaries* will be finding metaphors everywhere in Klein's intertextual dialogue with *Carmilla*, even while Klein's narrator, also reading *Carmilla*, is "...not interested in symbols" as she says in her English class. (Klein 69) This counterpoint between the extremely literal reader that is the narrator and readers of *The Moth Diaries* is a joke on the part of Klein: Unlike the narrator, she says, modern readers are no longer able to enjoy a book for its aesthetic value - instead every word must be dissected and searched for hidden meanings.

And so the narrator of *The Moth Diaries* may be uninterested in symbols, but the symbolism of the vampire figure is rampant throughout the novel, as many of the characters display "vampiric" behavior towards each other in the course of the story. The most basic definition of a vampire, separate from its supernatural connotation, is "one who preys on others." "Preying on others" is relevant in *The Moth Diaries*, as the relationships between the narrator and Lucy, the narrator and her parents, and Lucy and Ernessa all seem to entail elements of a love bond which progresses to something more possessive and parasitic on the part of the host than beneficial to the recipient. The narrator perceives this parasitic bond between Ernessa and Lucy as a result of reading *Carmilla*, which is primarily a story about a friendship between two teenage girls, Carmilla and Laura, who have a relationship that is passionate and predatory, and as a result of which, by the end of the novel Carmilla is dead. Similarly, in the plot of *The Moth Diaries*, Ernessa Bloch and Lucy Blake, the narrator's best friend, develop a new and close relationship during the course of the year at Brangwyn, and before the end of the school year Lucy is dead. In both novels a teenage girl literally withers away under the influence of another. The closeness of the narrator to the novel *Carmilla* at this time complicates the narrator's *reading* of Ernessa; she *reads* her as a Carmilla figure because

she herself is reading *Carmilla*, and while readers are swept along for the ride, focused on the question of the narrator's sanity and whether Ernessa could perhaps be an actual bloodsucking vampire, it's very possible to miss one of the book's strongest messages: It doesn't matter whether Ernessa drinks Lucy's blood or not. Her influence on her is harmful to Lucy either way, and literally sucks the life from her.

Although many of the incidents that take place in *The Moth Diaries* function as a retelling of *Carmilla*, seen through the eyes of the narrator who is immersed in reading the latter, as the author of her diary she herself remains unconscious of many of the parallels which can be drawn between the events of her year at Brangwyn and Le Fanu's story, which readers bring a historical knowledge to that the narrator does not, or cannot appreciate. Much has been said about *Carmilla*, and the vampiric relationship between the title character and Laura, in particular the ways in which their characters would have been read as "hysterical" at the time that *Carmilla* was written.¹ Tamara Heller's essay, "The Vampire in the House: Hysteria, Female Sexuality, and Female Knowledge in Le Fanu's *Carmilla*" is particularly relevant to *The Moth Diaries*, as Heller addresses a number of issues in *Carmilla* that *The Moth Diaries* speaks directly to - particularly hysteria, eating disorders, and sexual knowledge amongst adolescent girls. Heller writes,

In 1877 American physician Weir Mitchell... wrote a book on the treatment of neurasthenic and hysterical female patients entitled *Fat and Blood: And How to Make Them...* Characterizing the nervous woman as greedy and selfish, Mitchell uses a metaphor that implies women who lack blood are in fact blood suckers: "A hysterical girl is, as Wendell Holmes has said in his decisive phrase, a vampire who sucks the blood of the healthy people about her and I may add that pretty surely where there is

¹ See Helen Stoddart's "The Precautions of Nervous People are Infectious: Sheridan Le Fanu's Symptomatic Gothic" for a discussion of the ways in the framing device of *Carmilla* as a story within a collection of writings of a "Doctor Hesselius" presents Laura's diary as a "case study," which predates Sigmund Freud's practice of psychoanalysis but nonetheless reflects the early psychoanalytic ideas of the time.

one hysterical girl there will be soon or late two sick women.” (Mitchell 35). The narrative of the female vampire who makes another woman sick resembles the plot of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s vampire story *Carmilla*.... The parallel between this story and Mitchell’s image of the self-reproducing hysteric suggests an interdisciplinary cultural dialogue: not only, for doctors, is the hysterical woman like a vampire but, in tales like Le Fanu’s, the vampire can be read as a figure for the hysterical woman....given the anxiety about female sexuality in Victorian gender ideology, in medical discourses about hysteria the disordered - one might say *errant* - womb that was the synecdoche for Woman shifted from signifying passionless motherhood to expressing intense, even potentially insatiable, sexual desire. Hence the thematics of appetite in *Carmilla* - which I will link to medical discourses about the related female maladies of hysteria, anorexia, and chlorosis - encode this fear of the devouring, sexually voracious woman lurking beneath the docile surface of the devoured woman, her apparent victim. (Heller 77-79)

Of note, chlorosis was “A female malady particularly familiar to a Victorian audience: chlorosis, or ‘green sickness,’ the lack of energy and appetite caused by menstruation to which doctors frequently referred in discussions of female adolescence” (Heller 81). It’s as though Klein has read Heller’s article, because “hysteria, anorexia, and chlorosis” are all primary issues of concern and prominence throughout *The Moth Diaries*.

Strikingly, Klein’s narrator uses similar language as the physician Weir Mitchell to describe what Ernessa does to Lucy, to echo the idea that “...where there is one hysterical girl there will be soon or late two sick women.” “Ernessa has made Lucy sick. It’s so clear. It’s been her along,” the narrator says. (Klein 161) The narrator also employs the language of consumption to describe Ernessa’s relationship with Lucy. “Lucy doesn’t care about any of the things she used to care about. Ernessa’s taken her over. She’s consuming her” (Klein 89). In fact, the very act of eating (or not eating) is a huge concern for all the girls at Brangwyn. When the novel begins all the girls on the narrator’s hall are obsessed with food. They talk about it constantly, bemoaning their love of eating and simultaneous fears about body image. As the year goes on the girls’ collective relationship to food seems to deteriorate - as they all increasingly share their

body image worries with one another, so too do they all seem to increasingly avoid food, including even the narrator by the end, in a manner again reminiscent of what Heller calls “the self-reproducing hysteric.” No one appears to have a more antagonistic relationship with food than Ernessa and Lucy though, and the latter’s intake of food seems to diminish as she grows increasingly sick and weaker as the novel goes on, forcing readers to question if her sickness is the result of blood-sucking by Ernessa or if Ernessa has introduced her to negative feelings about eating which have culminated in an eating disorder.

The possibility that Lucy has an eating disorder seems to be the most likely non-supernatural explanation for her illness, and an idea which is actually supported by many incidents throughout the book, such as Lucy’s lack of menstruation, her abnormal blood cell count (reported by her doctors), as well as her tendency to consume a lot of coffee, and only coffee, which has been known to keep energy rates high and hunger pains down in patients with anorexia nervosa. The narrator also describes Lucy in a way that supports the idea that Lucy is suffering from a lack of nutrition. “Everything about her is faded. Her skin is so pale and smooth that it has a bluish tint. She doesn’t have a single pimple on her face. She moves slowly and deliberately, as if she has to think where to put her foot before she takes each step” (Klein 184). Readers might wonder how Lucy’s worsening condition could go so unnoticed. Readers would think that someone would notice the descent of Lucy’s health in conjunction with her food consumption, as she is surrounded by teachers and a mother back at home who is described as caring and concerned. But in the 1970s eating disorders were not as well understood, so it’s conceivable that none of the adults would be able to recognize the disorder for what it is, although they should recognize how sick and thin Lucy is. Additionally, the culture of

“thinness” that pervades amongst the girls at school blinds them to the dangers of not eating, and even worse, produces an envy in them of Lucy’s body. At a later point in the novel the narrator is talking to the other girls about her concern for Lucy. “She’s acting the way she did before she got sick. Someone needs to call her mother.”... “She can take care of herself,” said Carol. “Now she’s got a great bod. Not an ounce of fat. Even her little belly is gone. I wish I looked like her” (Klein 222). The fact that Klein reimagines *Carmilla* as a story about a girl’s death potentially brought on by an eating disorder, and not bloodsucking, is worthy of inspection because it highlights the connections between *Carmilla* and the interpretations of that novel as an allegory for hysterical women, and the complicated relation to food and sexual desire which that condition was presumed to entail.

But the narrator of *The Moth Diaries* is “not interested in symbols” and misses (or prefers to miss) the allegorical reading of *Carmilla* entirely. She doesn’t want literature to contain symbolism; that is not the type of reading she prefers. Her refusal to engage with literature on a symbolic level may be the very thing which blinds her from seeing the truth about her best friend: The less that Lucy eats, the sicker she gets. The narrator attributes this to Ernessa, who she perceives as a vampire who is killing Lucy. Again, *Carmilla*, in this way, could be viewed as blinding the narrator to the reality of what is going on around her, as she is basing her perception of events on her *literal* interpretation of *Carmilla*. The parallels she draws between that novel and Lucy and Ernessa’s relationship are no less valid though: Ernessa appears to exert the same mesmerizing influence over Lucy that Carmilla does over Laura. As Lucy’s new best friend, Ernessa does not appear to exercise a good influence over her health; in fact her appearance at Brangwyn results in the immediate and rapid decrease in Lucy’s well-being, just as the

presence of Carmilla in Laura's life causes a similar decline. Ernessa, like Carmilla, doesn't appear to eat at all, and she doesn't appear to encourage Lucy to eat either. As the narrator says of Ernessa:

When she was at the dinner table right behind mine, she was the server, and she spent so much time serving that it was almost time to clear before she sat down at her place. She was always the one to volunteer to get seconds from the kitchen when it was something good. In between she just moved the food around her plate. (Klein 33-34)

The non-supernatural explanation for this behavior is that Ernessa doesn't eat - not because she's a vampire who feeds only on blood, but because she has an eating disorder herself, or at best a very antagonistic relationship with food, and encourages Lucy to adopt the same attitude to the extent that Lucy develops an eating disorder which results in her hospitalization and eventual death. Ironically, the eating disorder itself can be seen as literally "eating away" at Lucy; sucking the life out of her in an extremely vampiric way.

Lucy's own comments on her condition, in the last scene that readers are privy to before her death, are particularly relevant to the interpretation of her condition as an eating disorder.

"Lucy, I know you're getting sick again. I'm worried. I need to call your mother." "No. I'm not afraid. You can't call her... I'm not sick, really. I know I'm not sick. It's something else. It makes me seem sick, but I'm not..." "I don't understand." "That's because you want to believe I'm still the old Lucy. That's the sad thing. You were friends with the old Lucy, not with me. You don't care about the new Lucy, the real Lucy. You don't even want to know her." (Klein 224-225)

It's very possible that Lucy does not view herself as "sick." The "old Lucy" may refer to the Lucy who ate food, and "the new Lucy" does not want to be reminded of that person by the narrator. Lucy's acceptance of her worsening condition in this passage, and her

thoughts on “her new self” are so strongly reminiscent of a passage from *Carmilla* that it seems possible that Lucy could be Laura speaking, when Laura says:

For some nights I slept profoundly; but still every morning I felt the same lassitude, and a languor weighed upon me all day. I felt myself a changed girl. A strange melancholy was stealing over me, a melancholy that I would not have interrupted. Dim thoughts of death began to open, and an idea that I was slowly sinking took gentle, and somehow, not unwelcome, possession of me. If it was sad, the tone of mine which this induced was also sweet. Whatever it might be, my soul acquiesced in it. I would not admit that I was ill, I would not consent to tell my papa, or to have the doctor sent for. (Le Fanu 53)

Klein draws a parallel between Lucy’s statement and Laura’s from *Carmilla*, a book which readers know that the narrator is reading, to highlight the susceptibility of teenage girls to each other’s influence at this time in their lives, and to the power of an idea of a different and better self, which must be obtained no matter what the cost. Female adolescence is a vulnerable, but also a *transformative* time in both these novels. Each of the “victims” in the novels allows another girl to lead her down a path towards death - one that seems “sweet” and “not unwelcome.” Klein paints Lucy as the same type of person as Laura: gentle, caring, and perhaps a little naive - one who is not a natural-born leader but instead chooses to follow a more dominating personality. Lucy gravitates toward Ernessa’s self confidence in the same way that Laura is drawn to Carmilla’s. Both allow another girl, a “vampire,” to prey on them, in a way which Le Fanu portrays as the sucking of blood each night, and Klein posits as the influence of a dangerously antagonistic view towards eating.

Of particular note is an allusion Klein makes between her own novel and *Carmilla* with her reference to “the menstruation scene,” which Tamara Heller writes of in “The Vampire in the House: Hysteria, Female Sexuality, and Female Knowledge in Le Fanu’s *Carmilla*.”

Many Victorian medical texts imply that menstruation was symbolic not so much of feminine lack-the loss or wounding of blood-letting-but of the violent sexual appetite its onset could precipitate. One of the story's more chillingly demonized menstrual images is of Laura's awaking one night to find Carmilla standing at the foot of her bed in a "white nightdress bathed, from her chin to her feet, in one great stain of blood" (308) Such violent images of vampirism literalize the violent narrative implicit in medical descriptions of menarche as a dangerous time for young girls, in which they are susceptible not only to nervous disorders but to the awakening of a potentially uncontrollable sexuality. (Heller 81-82)

The violent image of menstrual blood from *Carmilla*, and the Victorian idea of the "sexual awakening" that follows is referenced so specifically in *The Moth Diaries* that there can be no mistake that Klein intended the association. The narrator writes, towards the last third of the novel, of a particularly bad menstruation experience she has.

I'm afraid I'll forget something of what happened last night. It already feels like a dream. ... My cramps were really bad, like nothing I've ever felt before. The blood poured out of me. I pulled back the covers, and there was a huge dark stain spreading over the white sheet...When I stood up, I felt dizzy. I had to lean against the wall as I turned the doorknob. The door to Lucy's room swung open. The moonlight was streaming in, the blinds were up, and I could see everything clearly. Lucy was lying on her bed, on her back... Alongside her lay Ernessa. There was no distinction between the two bodies. They touched from head to foot... Ernessa's arm was wrapped around Lucy's naked waist. Their bodies, their hair were mixed up, black and silvery gold. The moon passed behind thick clouds, and the room grew dim. I was afraid I would pass out. I shut the door quickly and hurried back to my room. (Klein 160-161)

The narrator's writing of how she "pulled back the covers, and there was a huge dark stain spreading over the white sheet" is unmistakably reminiscent of *Carmilla*, at the foot of the bed, with her "white nightdress bathed, from her chin to her feet, in one great stain of blood." (Le Fanu 55) Likewise, the rest of the above sequence in *The Moth Diaries*, where the narrator sees Lucy and Ernessa together, is placed by Klein following the menstruation sequence so as to draw attention to the two. The narrator's recollection of these events is ambiguous, since she seems to be in a state of partial sleep, and since she also describes herself as dizzy before entering Lucy's room. So readers cannot know

what she actually witnessed or what might have been a dream or hallucination. But the narrator's description of Lucy and Ernessa is the most sexually explicit scene so far in the novel. Klein writes it as such to associate it with the Victorian idea of sexual awakening following menstruation, and specifically to allude to the bedroom scene in *Carmilla*. Klein is drawing on Victorian fears and assumptions, and retelling the *Carmilla* scene but enhancing it by adding an explicitly sexual element between Lucy and Ernessa. She leaves it entirely up to readers to decide what the narrator is seeing, and whether the narrator's "vision" is tied to her own menstruation or not, but she makes the connection nonetheless. She is forcing readers to ask: Can I ever give the narrator the benefit of the doubt about her experiences? Or is my literary background and knowledge of Victorian-era thoughts on female hysteria affecting my perception of the narrator's account of this scene? How bound am I to the impression made by literature and its cultural criticism, if the novel in question is as formative as *Carmilla*? By doing this, Klein creates a very rich and active reading experience for the reader of *The Moth Diaries*. She is not just giving readers a story; she is also forcing them to recognize their own part in the interpretation of that story. She is highlighting one of her key ideas throughout the book: that the intratextual relationship between works of literature can be a powerful one, which can enhance the reader's appreciation or, in some cases, particularly in the case of Freud, limit it.

Separate from the more overt symbolism of vampirism which the *Carmilla*/Laura and Ernessa/Lucy relationships explore, one of the more subtle allusions that Klein makes to vampiric behavior is with the narrator's father, who committed suicide, and whose death has left a stain of sadness on the narrator's life that she cannot remove. If readers understand a "vampire" or "vampirism" as "an undead person or force who sucks

the life out of the living,” then the narrator’s father is the unproclaimed vampire of *The Moth Diaries*. Because the narrator clearly loved him very much, his manner of death by suicide is a source of distress and also worry for her, which her reading of *Carmilla* only strengthens due to the relationship between suicide and vampirism explored in that novel. When the narrator says in class that a result of reading *Carmilla* she wants to know what living forever as a vampire is like, readers know that her interest in the supernatural is personal. *Carmilla*, as the narrator points out, is extremely vague on what life is like from a vampire’s perspective. There are however two lines at the very end of *Carmilla* which have to affect the narrator’s interest in vampire origins. As Baron Vordenburg explains to Laura and her father:

Assume, at starting, a territory perfectly free from that pest. How does it begin, and how does it multiply itself? I will tell you. A person, more or less wicked, puts an end to himself. A suicide, under certain circumstances, becomes a vampire. That specter visits living people in their slumbers; they die, and almost invariably, in the grave, develop into vampires. This happened in the case of the beautiful Mircalla, who was haunted by one of those demons. (Le Fanu 99)

So a vampire is created from a person who has committed suicide, Le Fanu’s character informs the others in *Carmilla* - and Carmilla herself was bitten by a vampire created by a suicide. (Carmilla is the same person as Mircalla; an absurd stipulation of her vampirism is that she must keep the same letters of her original name whenever she changes it.) Grief and suffering then, for decades if not centuries to come, is wrought by a person who commits suicide and comes back to plague others in vampire form, turning them into vampires as well, who will in turn haunt others. This must unavoidably be a difficult passage for the narrator to read, since her father committed suicide, although she never comments in her diary on the mention of suicide in *Carmilla* at all, a telling omission.

Has the narrator's father become a vampire as a result of his suicide? Has the narrator been "bitten" (by his sadness) as well, to in turn become a vampire herself who preys on others? Readers may suspect that the narrator must ruminate on these questions, but that they are not thoughts that she can stand to put down in her diary openly. Early in the novel she does mention a passage from one of the short stories she is reading for class though, and her thoughts on it.

"Rappaccini's Daughter": 'My father,' said Beatrice, feebly - and still as she spoke, she kept her hand upon her heart - 'wherefore didst thou inflict this miserable doom upon thy child?' The father slowly poisoned his daughter, until even her breath was deadly and a bouquet of fresh flowers withered in her grasp. But was her soul tainted? (Klein 38-39)

Klein's choice to have the narrator quote from a story to verbalize what the narrator herself cannot say (that her father has poisoned her life; that his suicide has touched everything she loves, and she is worried she is irrevocably damaged) is important because it emphasizes the importance of literature in the narrator's life, and how she uses it to make sense of and organize her own thoughts. In this case, her valuation of literature seems to serve her in good stead; she rarely criticizes her parents (despite how much they seem to warrant it) - so if she is able to do so through literature then at least she is able to somehow consciously process the fact that they have wronged her.

The passage from "Rappaccini's Daughter" takes on even greater significance towards the end of *The Moth Diaries* when it is indirectly referred to by the narrator. When she goes to visit Lucy in the infirmary, she says: "Next to the lamp were the flowers I had brought her. The bright burning red had turned pink. The stalks and leaves had lost their green, but they hadn't shriveled up. 'What happened to your flowers I asked?' 'I guess they're starting to die,' said Lucy. 'They were so fresh yesterday'" (Klein 150). This exchange takes place when the narrator, and therefore readers, may

fully suspect that Ernessa is a vampire, and in the lines previous to this Lucy had mentioned how Ernessa had visited her in the infirmary as well. Without the reference to the quote about the wilted flowers in *Rappaccini's Daughter* from earlier in *The Moth Diaries*, readers might assume that the flowers wilted due to Ernessa's influence and not think much of it. Though that may still be the case, Klein has already made the association between the narrator and the allegory of flowers wilting under the poisoning effect of a father on his daughter's life. Readers are therefore left wondering if the narrator *has* perhaps been "tainted" by her father's death as she so feared. This is a unique use of intertextuality in *The Moth Diaries* because it requires an active engagement on the part of readers. The quote from "Rappaccini's Daughter" is lovely, but it is a brief inclusion in a novel full of quoted works by the narrator, and was inserted into the diary many pages prior to the later scene with the flowers. The initial quotation is not something that readers would likely hang onto, or connect with the later scene even after one or even two readings of the novel. And yet there's no other reason for Klein to make a reference to wilting flowers at Lucy's hospital bed; the brief mention of them does not add anything to the scene without the original reference to *Rappaccini's Daughter*. The importance of this reference then gives credence to the value of a close reading, and the close reading in this case uncovers how an intertextual allusion to one literary work, even briefly and in passing, can affect readers' interpretation of even a small moment later in a text. Readers of *The Moth Diaries* who discover this may then begin to use intertextual references within the novel to organize their thoughts about it, in the same manner that the narrator uses other texts to organize her own feelings and perceptions of events. Literature can do this, the novel says: it can have a hold over

readers as they struggle to understand it and grasp its meaning. And other written works can be tools (or impediments) to finding that meaning.

Chapter III

Dracula in *The Moth Diaries*:

Its Anti-Semitism and Lack of Female Perspective

Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* is one of the first vampire novels written, and inspired many that followed, but is not the most famous one. That position is held by Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which, tellingly, Klein also engages in *The Moth Diaries*, although in a completely different manner. Whereas *Carmilla* is overtly referenced by the narrator's interaction with the book throughout *The Moth Diaries*, *Dracula* is only mentioned once - but even that once is unnecessary to feel the power of Stoker's influence over Klein's writing, which can be recognized in three major ways throughout *The Moth Diaries*. The first is with Klein's confrontation with *Dracula*'s anti-Semitism, which she contrasts with the figure of her own Jewish narrator and vampire. The second is with the likenesses between the personality and fate of the character of Lucy Westenra, Mina Harker's dear friend in *Dracula*, and Lucy Blake, the narrator's best friend in *The Moth Diaries*. Lucy Westenra is sweet and naive, and suffers in the end for it at the hands of incompetent authority figures. Klein reimagines this situation with her own Lucy character, and draws attention to this unanalyzed aspect of *Dracula*. And thirdly, in her own novel Klein recreates a scene from *Dracula* which is never discussed by critics: Mina Harker and Lucy Westenra's moonlight interaction with Dracula. All these intertextual instances rely on readers' working knowledge of *Dracula*, a knowledge that Klein posits is involuntary due to the entrenched position of that novel in literary history.

From the onset of *The Moth Diaries*, Klein complicates and rewrites the image of the "Jewish monster" figure with her own Jewish narrator and vampire. The "Jewish

monster” figure culminated with *Dracula*, which is widely considered to possess anti-Semitic sentiments through the depiction of its title character.² This has been pointed out by critics, notably Judith Halberstam in her essay, “Technologies of Monstrosity: Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*,” in which she discusses the many ways in which Jews have been represented as monsters in works of fiction, and how this has contributed to dangerous associations between Jewishness and behaviors such as criminality and degeneracy. In her essay she discusses the evolution of Jews being viewed and portrayed as the “monstrous other,” an idea also explored in detail by Sander Gilman in *The Jew’s Body*. Gilman traces the history of the Jewish body as being one that has been “criminalized and pathologized.” (Halberstam 340) Halberstam quotes Gilman that:

The very analysis of the nature of the Jewish body, in the broader culture or within the culture of medicine, has always been linked to establishing the difference (and dangerousness) of the Jew. This scientific vision of parallel and unequal “faces” is part of the polygenetic argument about the definition of “race” within the scientific culture of the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century it is more strongly linked to the idea that some “races” are inherently weaker, “degenerate,” more at risk for diseases than others. (Gilman 39)

Halberstam sees Stoker’s depiction of Dracula as a model of this type of figure, and in her essay she describes the physical attributes ascribed to Dracula in that novel and their relation to anti-Semitic thought at the time.

Dracula, then, resembles the Jew of anti-Semitic discourse in several ways: appearance, his relation to money and gold, his parasitism, his degeneracy, his impermanency or lack of allegiance to a fatherland, and his femininity. Dracula’s physiognomy is a particularly clear cipher for the specificity of his ethnic monstrosity. When Jonathan Harker meets the Count at Castle Dracula in Transylvania, he describes Dracula in terms of a “very marked physiognomy”: he notes an aquiline nose with “peculiarly arched nostrils,” massive eyebrows and “bushy hair,” a cruel mouth and

² See also Carol Davison’s *Anti-Semitism and British Gothic Literature* for more on *Dracula*’s anti-Semitism, and particularly Stoker’s interest and use of the “Wandering Jew” motif in the depiction of his title character.

“peculiarly sharp white teeth,” pale ears which were “extremely pointed at the top,” and a general aspect of “extraordinary pallor.” (Halberstam 337)

Halberstam goes on to explain how these descriptions of Dracula echo those of many other fictional Jews at the time, such as Charles Dickens’s Fagin in *Oliver Twist*, and that the figure of Dracula would have been recognizable to readers at the time of *Dracula*’s publication as being Jewish (338). Klein subverts this negative stereotype of Stoker’s description of the “Jewish” vampire with the narrator’s own first description of Ernesta Bloch, the vampire of *The Moth Diaries* who is also Jewish.

The new girl’s name is Ernesta Bloch. She’s quite pretty, with long, dark, wavy hair, pale skin, deep red lips, and black eyes. Only her nose is too large and curves down at the end. Pretty is actually too girlish a word for her. Maybe that’s because of her manner; she’s very polite but not at all shy. She doesn’t speak with an accent, but there’s something foreign about her. She only stayed for a minute. She wanted to know what time we had to be up in the morning and if breakfast was compulsory. I offered to sign her in tomorrow because she said she was totally exhausted from her trip. Her answer: “If it suits you.” (Klein 7)

This initial description of Ernesta is quite marked in its differences and similarities from Count Dracula’s. Similarly, they are both foreigners. The reader knows Dracula to be a foreigner because his home is located in Romania, and all the other main (non-vampire) characters in that novel are either English or American. And Ernesta’s last name “Bloch” is actually derived from a Slavic word meaning “foreigner.” (“Bloch”) Klein plays with the power of words and the association with the character of Dracula from Eastern Europe by declaring Ernesta as a foreigner of similar origin when she is introduced. But whereas Stoker describes Dracula in terms of repugnance and cruelty, Klein describes Ernesta’s Jewishness in terms of beauty, self-confidence, and later academic excellence.

Ernesta’s similarities with Dracula can also be seen in terms of the way in which both characters are able to move about their territory in manner which defies human

capabilities. In an iconic scene in *Dracula*, Jonathan Harker describes seeing the Count exit the castle in which he has imprisoned Jonathan.

I saw the whole man slowly emerge from the window and begin to crawl down the castle wall over the dreadful abyss, face down with his cloak spreading out around him like great wings. At first I could not believe my eyes. I thought it was some trick of the moonlight, some weird effect of shadow, but I kept looking, and it could be no delusion. I saw the fingers and toes grasp the corners of the stones, worn clear of the mortar by the stress of years, and by thus using every projection and inequality move downwards with considerable speed, just as a lizard moves along a wall. (Stoker 38)

Dracula's ability to move confidently around the outside of his castle at night will certainly come to mind when readers of *The Moth Diaries* read about Ernessa's own nocturnal habits, which Dora and the narrator witness.

"I'm going to find out what she's up to at night," said Dora... She went over to the window and opened it. We both stuck our heads out... The moon was completely hidden behind clouds, and in the faint greenish light from below, I could barely make out the gutter... "Look," said Dora, nudging me with her elbow. The gutter was nothing more than a thick green line... At the far end of the building, by Claire's window, I saw something... The person stood up and started to walk toward us along the gutter. She walked as if she were on the ground, without hesitation, without a single misstep, the way she played the piano. When she reached her window, she turned and stepped into the glass... (Klein 102-103)

Although both Ernessa and Dracula can defy gravity, Dracula's mode of transport differs markedly from Ernessa's in that once again, while animalistic terms are used to describe the Count, Ernessa's behavior (and by extension, her Jewishness) is described in terms of grace and elegance.

Being Jewish is also important to the narrator, who brings the fact up several times as something she is proud of, despite her feelings of discomfort and outsidership at Brangwyn. Heritage seems to be one of the only qualities she does not mind sharing with Ernessa.

Now I understand why Betsy thought that Ernessa and I would hit it off together. She made that comment the first week of school. We were the same

type. I thought she said that because Ernessa is smart. She meant Jewish, as in you're the same type of creature from another planet... I never heard an anti-Semitic remark until I came to this school. In almost two years, Miss Rood has never spoken a word to me. I've never sat at her table for dinner, but I've been at every other table. I'm the smartest girl in my class, but she never asks me what college I want to go to. She tolerates me. (Klein 75)

Even in this passage, speaking of the school's anti-Semitism, the narrator draws a complimentary connection between Jews and intelligence: She and Ernessa are both Jewish, and they are the smartest students at the school, besides Dora, who is half Jewish. Intelligence and academic rigor are a source of pride for the three girls, and this stands out against their other, non-Jewish classmates who can hardly keep up in their classes.

The narrator also expresses regret that she is not more in touch with the faith side of her Jewish background, and feels that she is in some way betraying herself by participating in the Christian observances at the school.

My mother's parents were Orthodox... She says she no longer feels like a Jew, even though she can recite every single prayer. Sometimes I wish I knew all those prayers... At my first assembly, I reached out for the red hymnbook, tucked into the little rack in the chair in front of me, along with the other girls, and opened to the correct page, just as Miss Rood instructed us. But when the music started and everyone rose to sing the hymn, I became so flustered I could barely get out of my chair. Was I supposed to sing a Christian hymn? Would I be punished if I refused to sing? Would I be punished if I did sing?... Ernessa understands this. Today in assembly, when we started to sing, her face got red. She grabbed the chair in front of her so tightly that her knuckles were about to pop out. Her dark hair fell over her face, and she stared straight down at her feet. She didn't even bother to take out the hymnbook and pretend to sing... Then she turned slightly, just enough to let me see that she wasn't suffering; she was smirking. Had she read "Carmilla" over my shoulder? (Klein 63-64)

In the above passage the narrator is referring to a scene in *Carmilla* in which the title character has a similar physical reaction to Christian hymns being sung, the implication being that her unholy vampire state renders her incapable of listening to them. That scene reads, as told by Laura:

As we sat thus one afternoon under the trees a funeral passed by... Peasants walking two-and-two came behind, they were singing a funeral hymn... She [Carmilla] sat down. Her face underwent a change that alarmed and even terrified me for a moment. It darkened, and became horribly livid; her teeth and hands were clenched, and she frowned and compressed her lips, while she stared down at the ground at her feet, and trembled all over with a continued shudder as irrepressible as ague. All her energies seemed strained to suppress a fit, with which she was breathlessly tugging; and at length a low convulsive cry of suffering broke from her, and gradually the hysteria subsided. "There! That comes of strangling people with hymns!" (Le Fanu 35)

Whether Ernessa is referencing this scene or not during assembly, when the narrator says "Ernessa understand this" she is referring to what she perceives as their shared discomfort at singing Christian hymns because of their Jewishness. Since Ernessa's response directly following this statement mimics Carmilla's response to hymns (a fit; the response of an unholy being who cannot withstand the presence of Christianity, as defined by *Carmilla*) an association is created between Jewishness and vampires. The association is sympathetic though, as if the Christian hymns were the persecuting force and not the (Jewish) vampire. The narrator is certainly a sympathetic character, and the fact that she sees herself and Ernessa as being made uncomfortable by having to sing the hymns, because of their shared Jewishness, and associates this with Carmilla's response to the hymns, also suggests that Carmilla herself might be a sympathetic figure - perhaps a misunderstood and persecuted Jew.

Ernessa herself reiterates the "persecuted Jew" theme in a conversation with the narrator and Dora.

Ernessa asked us about Miss Bobbie, who was already on her case after two weeks of school. I said that I didn't take her anti-Semitism in a totally negative way. I didn't mind being excluded. It meant I was different from the rest of them. Ernessa laughed at me. "I don't have your sentimental feelings about being Jewish. The religion is a burden, a cosmic joke. If Jews are chosen, it's only for special punishment. The whole world is their graveyard." (Klein 174)

The narrator is shocked when Ernessa says this, as being Jewish is a big part of the narrator's identity. Despite Ernessa's lack of interest in her own Jewishness, the narrator's strongest feelings of sympathy for her are when she witnesses their gym teacher, Miss Bobbie, forcing her to swim as punishment, and then ignoring Ernessa's suffering when she appears to be drowning. After Miss Bobbie's death (which the school credits to an attack by a wild animal outside in the early hours of the morning), the narrator says:

I'm not the same person that I used to be. That person would have felt sorry for Miss Bobbie. Maybe she did die in that horrible way. As I walked down the Passageway to class, I tried to feel what it would be like to have your throat torn open, to drown in your own blood, while the thing that attacked you kept at it, relentlessly, impersonally. But I don't feel the least bit sorry. I keep seeing Ernessa rising up through the water, pushing her way through the heavy liquid, digging her way out, while Miss Bobbie ignores her and keeps walking along the side of the pool, shouting instructions... After a week of swimming, Ernessa was so weak she could barely walk. She was drowning right in front of everyone. (Klein 202)

The narrator believes Miss Bobbie wouldn't treat another girl this way, but that she forces Ernessa to swim and she ignores her suffering because she despises Ernessa's Jewishness. That both the narrator and Ernessa are persecuted Jews, at the hands of their teachers, and that the narrator is so convinced of Ernessa's vampirism, continues the association throughout the novel between Jewishness and vampirism. The fact that Ernessa operates as the narrator's "double" (a topic which the following chapter will delve into) also serves to strengthen the suggestion that the narrator too is associated with vampirism. Klein subverts the *negative* Jewish vampire figure stereotype though by making *both* her narrator and her vampire figure be Jewish and sympathetic, particularly the narrator.

The narrator of *The Moth Diaries* is not only sympathetic but is also the protagonist of the story, and becomes its "vampire hunter" - researching and planning

ways to ward off and destroy Ernessa. Whether she acts from a place of delusion and madness or perfect clarity, she does not knowingly act with malice. She suffers at the hands of her teachers, her parents, her peers, and her psychiatrists. Society has basically failed her and yet she remains determined in her quest to save her best friend. This paints her as a hero; a complicated hero but a hero nonetheless. That Klein should make her hero Jewish in a novel so concerned with vampirism, its literary history and its metaphorical meaning, is a conscious step towards addressing the murky and anti-Semitic history that is associated with the subject. The narrator's inclusion of a quotation from Annette von Droste-Hulshoff's *The Jews' Beech Tree*, one of the stories she is reading for English class, suggests that Jews deserve retribution against the long line of perpetrators who have mistreated them. In her quotation from the book the narrator cites the line, "The Hebrew characters on the tree read: 'If you approach this place, you will suffer what you inflicted on me'" (Klein 90). The narrator doesn't comment on this quotation, she simply inserts it, in one of the many places where Klein uses a quotation to voice a thought that is important to the narrator but that she cannot or does not choose to articulate in her own words. Klein's novel is her *own* literary retribution for the stereotypes of *Dracula*, with her reimagining of the Jewish vampire and the vampire hunter protagonist.

Just as Ernessa's Jewishness renders an immediate comparison and contrast with the title character of *Dracula*, so too does Klein's choice of name for her novel's victim. The effect of Klein's name choice for Lucy Blake is that as soon as the narrator suspects that Ernessa is a vampire and that Lucy is her victim, readers immediately begin bringing their knowledge of *Dracula*'s Lucy to bear on *The Moth Diaries*, since Lucy Westenra is *Dracula*'s most well-known victim. Lucy Westenra's slow weakening due

to nightly visitations by the Count, and her fate to become a vampire as a result, is a significant plotline of *Dracula*. The similarity between *Dracula*'s Lucy and Klein's emphasizes the connection between the two. Both are frivolous young females who attracts many suitors and friends, and who ultimately die tragically after undergoing a physical and personality change and slowly wasting away. As the narrator describes Lucy in *The Moth Diaries*: "Lucy's not the type to have a nervous breakdown. She's not complicated enough for that. And before this year, she was always happy. I'm the one who's always anxious and upset," the narrator says of Lucy Blake. (Klein 163) And from *Dracula*, Mina Harker says:

Lucy was looking sweetly pretty in her white lawn frock; she has got a beautiful color since she has been here. I noticed that the old men did not lose any time in coming up and sitting near her when we sat down. She is so sweet with old people; I think they all fell in love with her on the spot. (Stoker 65)

Both Lucys are described in loving terms as kind, simple girls whose overflowing cheerfulness charms everyone.

Both Lucys deteriorate; both are surrounded by ineffectual guardians. In *Dracula*, over a series of several weeks, Lucy becomes more exhausted and less like herself in personality and physical vitality, as she is nightly hypnotized and then fed upon by the Count. No one can determine the cause of her deteriorating condition until Doctor Van Helsing arrives on the scene, and Lucy's last few days are spent with daily blood transfusions which need to be replenished after each night that Dracula feeds from her. The attempts of her protectors fail to save her from the vampire of course. Their efforts always stop short of confrontation, and they even leave her alone on several occasions, hoping that amulets and garlic will ward off the vampire. Van Helsing doesn't even share the importance of the garlic bulbs with Lucy's mother, such that she unknowingly

removes them, which results in another night of Dracula's visitations which further weakens Lucy. Though Van Helsing is portrayed as a loving father figure, and each of Lucy's suitors as passionately devoted to her, their inability to protect her is pathetic, considering that they leave her alone when they know that the vampire will return. Fascinated by her condition, Van Helsing doesn't do the most obvious thing to save Lucy: Take her away; remove her from the situation that is killing her. Instead Lucy is left, uninformed of her own condition, in a vulnerable position, and Dracula is able to visit her and drink her blood to the point of her eventual death. Incredibly, Van Helsing also does not share his suspicions of the vampire with Lucy's fiance, or his and Lucy's mutual friend, Doctor Seward. He keeps all knowledge of Lucy's condition to himself, enlisting only the help of the small circle of men (the "Crew of Light," as the men in *Dracula* are referred to) for blood transfusions, but not including them or anyone else on an understanding of the situation until it is too late and Lucy has been turned into a vampire.

The strange incompetent neglect that the Crew of Light displays toward Lucy has not been noted by critics, although Nancy F. Rosenberg has picked up on this factor in relation to the way in which the men treat Mina. As she notes in her paper, "Desire and Loathing in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*,"

Terror in the form of *Dracula* not only penetrates the peace of first Lucy's mother's home, then the insane asylum; it also penetrates the women... The men of *Dracula* do go out into the dangerous world to fight evil, but the way in which they attempt to protect Mina at her home in the insane asylum leaves a lot to be desired. Mina becomes pale and fatigued, and to the reader this is an obvious sign of Dracula's influence. The men, however, do not clue in on it and their protection of her is so incompetent it is almost as if they personally open the door to Mina's (and Jonathan's) bedroom for Dracula. (Rosenberg 2)

This failure of authority to protect Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker is echoed in *The Moth Diaries*, as Lucy Blake continues to weaken from whatever is ailing her, be it Ernessa or a natural cause such as an eating disorder. Lucy's increased refusal to eat, combined with extreme lethargy to the point that she cannot wake or attend class, and her peers' and teachers' willful blindness to this problem, instantly brings to mind the events of *Dracula* which precede Lucy Westenra's death, because readers cannot help but associate her condition and the continued clumsiness on the part of the people who surround her with the fate of that other, more famous Lucy. In *The Moth Diaries*, Lucy always recovers when she is removed from the school - when she is placed in the hospital and at home during vacation. "They've done all kinds of tests, and the only thing the doctors know is that she's incredibly anemic... She has been getting lots of blood transfusions. They are basically replacing all the blood in her body," the narrator writes. (Klein 163) This description of Lucy Blake's condition, when readers are already suspecting Ernessa of vampirism, makes the final connection in readers' minds that yes Ernessa could be a vampire, and draws the association between *Dracula* and *The Moth Diaries* even closer as the former informs the latter. The daily blood transfusions that Lucy Westenra receives from the Crew of Light are a vital part of her storyline; the transfusions both save her each day after they are performed but then ultimately prove pointless as her blood is re-drained by Dracula the following night. It is impossible to read of Lucy Blake's transfusions and not think of Lucy Westenra's blood transfusions - so classic are those scenes in *Dracula*. So when Lucy Blake is removed from the safety of the hospital, where Ernessa is (eventually) forbidden to enter, and begins to get better, readers may interpret this as due to Ernessa's vampiric influence, and will predict that as soon as she is removed from this protection she will be susceptible to danger again

because Lucy *Westenra* was, and because each time that the latter went “unwatched” the vampire returned.

Klein’s effect in forming the association between *Dracula* and her own novel with these similar plot points is to heighten the distraction that the knowledge of *Dracula* creates in the minds of readers of *The Moth Diaries*. For even while readers are questioning the narrator’s sanity and searching for signs of her sublimated fears and desires in her interpretation of Ernessa as a vampire, simultaneously all the pieces fit according to the vampire manual that is *Dracula*. Readers may begin to imitate the narrator’s own reading experience when the narrator says that, “Once I realized that Carmilla was a vampire, everything that followed made perfect sense. There was no other possible explanation.” (Klein 58) Readers may begin to take the same reductive approach to *The Moth Diaries*: Is Ernessa a vampire or isn’t she? Yes, she could be, readers may think - knowledge of *Dracula* has given them the clues to figure that out! On the other hand, the narrator could be suffering from a psychotic episode - the foreword of *The Moth Diaries* tells readers that she is. In any case, reading *The Moth Diaries* creates a dichotomy in the minds of readers, who may become driven to determine which version is the truth. Klein suggests the power of fiction such as *Dracula* over readers by her inclusion of the novel in a conversation between the narrator and her English teacher Mr. Davies, over halfway through *The Moth Diaries*. ““What about *Dracula*?” he asked. ‘That’s been my favorite book since I was ten.’ I must have looked disgusted. ‘I promise you it’s as good as Proust and much shorter. It’s as perfect as a book can be. There’s not a single word you would change’” (Klein 151). “There’s not a single word you would change” is a very strong statement to make about a book, particularly one whose literary history has been so fraught with ever-changing cultural attitudes and criticisms towards

it, largely in the form of feminist scholarship.³ Mr. Davies' comment implies a devotion and reverence towards *Dracula* that mimics the narrator's own relationship with literature: Passionate, and perhaps too intimate for his own good. Is *Dracula* Mr. Davies' *Carmilla* - that perfect book for a place and time in his life that then became his model for all other literature to come? Furthermore, could *Dracula* replace *Carmilla* in the narrator's world, as the book that helps her make sense of her life at a time when literature is so monumental to it? The narrator's "look of disgust" seems to suggest that she would never read *Dracula*, but there are definitely hints after this point in the novel that she does.

Lucy Blake's death scene in *The Moth Diaries* is one of the most vivid in the book, but it owes its genesis to Lucy Westenra's moonlight cemetery scene in *Dracula*. A long quotation from each of the works is important here because the similarities and differences between the phrasing and structure of each of the passages are so identifiable. The moonlight scene from *Dracula* includes lines such as:

Suddenly I became broad awake, and sat up, with a horrible sense of fear upon me, and of some feeling of emptiness around me. The room was dark, so I could not see Lucy's bed; I stole across and felt for her. The bed was empty... I lit a match, and found that she was not in the room... Finally I came to the hall-door and found it open... I took a big, heavy shawl and ran out... The clock was striking one as I was in the Crescent, but there was not a soul in sight... There was a bright, full moon, with heavy black, driving clouds, which threw the whole scene into a fleeting diorama of light and shade as they sailed across... Then as the cloud passed I could see the ruins of the Abbey coming into view; and as the edge of the narrow band of light as sharp as a sword-cut moved along, the church and the churchyard became gradually visible... The time and distance seemed endless, and my knees trembled and my breath laboured as I toiled up the endless steps to the Abbey. I must have gone fast, and yet it seemed to me as if my feet were weighted with lead, and as though every joint in my body were rusty. When I got almost to the top I could see the seat and the white figure, for I was now

³ See Christopher Craft's "Kiss Me with Those Red Lips" for an essay on the homoerotic subtexts in *Dracula*, and Phyllis Roth's "Suddenly Sexual Women in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*" for the complicated relationship between the male figures and the maternal in *Dracula*.

close enough to distinguish it even through the spells of shadow. There was undoubtedly something, long and black, bending over the half-reclining white figure. I called in fright, “Lucy! Lucy!” and something raised a head, and from where I was I could see a white face and red, gleaming eyes... When I came in view again the cloud had passed, and the moonlight shone so brilliantly that I could see Lucy half reclining with her head lying over the back of the seat. She was quite alone, and there was not a sign of any living thing about. (Stoker 87-88)

The corresponding scene from *The Moth Diaries*, as told by the narrator, includes:

I awoke and walked toward Lucy’s room... Lucy’s bed was empty... I hurried into the corridor, around to the back stairs, down to the ground floor, through the door. I ran down the driveway, past the wide staircase that leads up to the Residence, past the weeping cherry trees that line the Upper Field. The moon had just risen full above the tops of the trees on the far side of the field, and it was enormous. Its light was so bright that it threw deep shadows across the grass. It could have been the middle of the day. I stood at the top of the hill. Lucy and Ernessa were on the field. Their white nightgowns glowed. “Lucy,” I shouted. “Lucy!” I could never make them hear me. Ernessa was behind Lucy and above her. She had grabbed hold of Lucy’s hair and was pulling her up off the ground. Lucy’s hair shone like solid gold in the moonlight. They hovered, as weightless as angels. The carefully arranged folds of the nightgowns hid their feet. Angels don’t need feet. It annoys me when their toes peek out beneath their robes in old paintings. Lucy held her arms out to the side, bent at the elbows, with fingers and thumbs straight, as if she were pressing hard against something. I ran down the hill toward them. It took a long time. The air was as thick as water, and it pushed against me. My legs went up and down, but I couldn’t move forward. I’d had this dream my whole life, and I was always too late... Lucy’s body lay crumpled on the ground. Ernessa was gone. (Klein 231-232)

Klein’s novel is clearly evoking the tone and atmosphere of the original scene from *Dracula* with the drama and terror of the moonlight and the solitary and seemingly endless flight of each protagonist to find their missing friend. Klein changes the particulars of the vampire/victim relationship though. First, she evokes angel imagery, in stark contrast to the demonic description of Dracula’s “white face and red, gleaming eyes.” “Lucy’s hair shone like solid gold in the moonlight,” the narrator says. “They hovered, as weightless as angels. The carefully arranged folds of the nightgowns hid their feet” (Klein 232). Why does Klein reimagine the scene this way? Readers know that Lucy valued her Christianity, prior to meeting Ernessa, at which point she “lost” the gold

cross that she had habitually worn around her neck. The narrator even thinks of her in angelic terms, despite the narrator's own Jewishness and discomfort at singing Christian hymns. Early in the novel, she recollects when she first met Lucy.

I wanted to be like the girl in the room across the corridor, and they wouldn't let me. Her room was painted light blue, and there was tan carpeting on the floor. During the day, the door was left wide open. The light streamed into the room. I could see the white rays gathering in a pool on the floor. During the day, the door was left wide open. The light streamed into the room. I could see the white rays gathering in a pool on the floor. They were like the thin arrows of light that came through the Virgin Mary's window to announce the arrival of the archangel Gabriel. (Klein 56)

The imagery of Lucy's death scene is similarly reminiscent of a Biblical ascension painting. As a result the scene lacks the gruesome chill of the original scene in *Dracula*; it takes on an air of majesty even, and has a distinctly feminine and intimate tone as the girls are described in their long nightgowns, with Ernessa pulling on Lucy's shining hair. In this scene, Klein complicates the vampire/victim relationship as it has been articulated in *Dracula*; readers do not feel simple disgust that Lucy has been victimized by Ernessa, but more of a melancholy empathy for both girls.

It is telling that Klein chooses the moonlight scene to rewrite, as the corresponding sequence in *Dracula* is so dramatic and mysterious, not only within the novel but outside of it. Mina's only remarks on this incident in that novel are of "that terrible night" and that "we never refer to it" (Stoker 91). Indeed, literary critics never refer to it either - an exhaustive search proves that it is not one of the scenes from *Dracula* that is ever analyzed. William Hughes describes the general focus of literary analysis of the novel in *Bram Stoker's "Dracula": A Reader's Guide*.

There is a tendency in *Dracula* criticism, in other words, to reinterpret the same material from the novel rather than to develop new focuses for criticism - and *Dracula* criticism will be richer when critics consider at length and without prejudice the minor characters and less-explored scenarios of Stoker's work... These central scenes are, in order of their appearance in the novel: the depiction

of face of Count Dracula, as observed by Jonathan Harker (chapter 2); the attempted ‘seduction’ of Harker by the three female vampires (chapter 3); the staking and ‘death’ of Lucy Westenra (chapter 16); the Count’s attack upon Mina Harker (chapter 21); and – more disparate, in that it is scattered across the extent of the novel – the cohesion of the coalition against Count Dracula... These four specific scenes, and the concept of the alliance against the vampire, are, as it were, the staples of *Dracula*’s critical repertoire – and the pre-existing foundations upon which new interpretations have so often been raised. (Hughes 30-31)

What Hughes touches on is the fact that there have been so many interpretations and *re*interpretations of the same few scenes and themes from the novel. This fact makes Klein’s choice to allude to the moonlight scene from *Dracula* in her own work all the more exceptional. By doing so she is acknowledging *Dracula* but also choosing a scene which has been devalued by critics, and one of the few in the novel where Mina and Lucy are given any active roles, since they are otherwise generally bystanders. Violence happens *to* them; they are the victims of it and then they are saved from it by others, and always men. (In Lucy’s case, she is “saved” in that the “Crew of Light” kills her vampire self in order that her soul might be saved, and in Mina’s case the men kill Dracula, thereby releasing Mina from the fate of the vampire that she would likely have become as a result of being bitten by him.) But in the moonlight scene, *Mina saves Lucy*. Albeit, she does not save Lucy in the end - (Lucy is eventually turned into a vampire, significantly, after Mina has left to care for her husband Jonathan) - but Mina does interrupt Dracula in the process of feeding on Lucy, and coaxes her home through the cold. She even very lovingly takes pains to give Lucy her own shoes, since Lucy had gone out barefoot, and to cover her with her own shawl. This speaks to a strong and maternal friendship on the part of Mina, who is very similar to the narrator of *The Moth Diaries* in those aspects of concern and thoughtfulness towards her friend that the narrator exhibits. And this scene between the two girls in *Dracula* is one of the few where their every waking thought

expressed to each other is not just of their future husbands. The shared experience in the moonlight is in fact one of the few adventures they have together in this novel outside of letter-writing and receiving or caring for their male suitors.

Klein's revision of *Dracula's* moonlight scene in *The Moth Diaries* is ultimately unsurprising given one of the more subtle but underlying themes of her novel: that female adolescence is the prime time in a woman's life, and that female relationships at that time are unforgettable and incredibly impactful. This is certainly true of the narrator's relationship with Lucy, and is echoed in Laura's relationship to Carmilla. The narrator never really recovers from the events of her junior year at Brangwyn or her relationship with Lucy. It is clear that the psychiatrist credits her condition when she is admitted into the mental hospital as being due to the trauma of her father's death, but obviously readers are meant to question if the truth is not more complicated than that. What haunts the narrator, as the afterword shows, are her memories of Lucy, the good and the bad. Her recollections include this passage:

I was thinking about stretching out in one of those big tubs in the deep, scalding water with the steam rising to the ceiling. I was thinking about hair streaming out in the water like golden seaweed. The drowning Ophelia, with hard pink breasts. She closed her eyes and let her head slip underwater. The bubbles of her breath rose to the surface and remained for an instant before bursting. I wasn't at all embarrassed. We were both so happy. (Klein 245)

Though the narrator is writing this 30 years later, it seems as though it were yesterday for her. "We were both so happy" gives readers the impression that the narrator has never been as happy as that since. More than a simple longing for a time gone by and a friend she lost, the narrator has always hinted that she would stay a girl forever if she could. The eternal female youth that the narrator yearns for has been echoed throughout *The Moth Diaries* in her choice of the literature that she is drawn to. What better example

of eternal female youth than *Carmilla*? That novel speaks to the narrator, and *Dracula* doesn't - except for the one scene moonlight scene between Lucy and Mina. Which is the reason that Klein rewrites that scene into *The Moth Diaries*, with lines from *Dracula* which are so similar as to be too coincidental: to draw attention to the fact that this would be the one and only feature of the novel that the narrator would care about: the Mina-Lucy relationship.

Like so much of the novel, readers will grapple with the supposition that if the moonlight scene with Lucy and Ernest never really happens then it is a product of the narrator's mind. Readers have likely already suspected this possibility in several instances before this point, particularly in regard to the narrator's weaving of fictional literature into her perception of events as she does with *Carmilla* - so a repetition of that behavior would hardly be surprising. However, readers are definitely not expecting the narrator of *The Moth Diaries* to have read *Dracula*, since she seems so disgusted by the suggestion from Mr. Davies. But, at the end of her conversation with him about the book she does say in another easily-missed line, "Mr. Davies looked so disappointed that I added, 'Maybe when I've finished Proust'" (Klein 152). The narrator never comments on *Dracula* again, but there are 3 months between that conversation and Lucy's death scene. Readers know that the narrator doesn't record everything in her diary; she has intimated instances where she was too embarrassed or ashamed to put something in writing. So it is in fact completely possible that despite her initial scorn for the novel she *did* read *Dracula* at some point in the intervening months, and that this novel has gotten hold of her creative mind just as *Carmilla* has, shaping her dreams and her perception of events. The fact that readers have no way of knowing whether she has or not adds to the unsettling feeling they get reading this passage which feels so similar and yet so different

from *Dracula*. Because if this scene isn't a fragment of *Dracula* reworked by the narrator's mind then what is it? How is it possible that these two scenes are both happening in two separate novels, with a victim named Lucy and a narrator and friend who goes out in the moonlight to find her in each scene? Are readers supposed to believe this is just a coincidence, or once again are they being led to examine the fact that they bring their past readings with them, their memories and perceptions from *Dracula* which cannot be erased? This is one of Klein's major instances of a forced recognition of subjectivity in the novel: Are readers seeing only what they want to see in this scene, and likening it to *Dracula* because of the imprint of that book on anyone who has read it? Or is it merely just a coincidentally similar scene which seems to take on more significance because readers are expecting these literary allusions from Klein? These have been Klein's questions for readers since the very beginning of the novel, and her veiled references to *Dracula* are one of her more complex methods of exploring them. At one point in *The Moth Diaries* the narrator describes an interaction with Ernessa in such a way that mimics Klein's own method of alluding to *Dracula*. "I picked her out of the crowd immediately," the narrator says of Ernessa. "She turned her head just enough that I could see her face and know that it was her. She told me in that instant that she was in the world, wherever I was." (Klein 180) As *The Moth Diaries* explores, works such as *Dracula* are also in the world, wherever readers are; leaving indelible impressions that are instantaneously recognizable.

Chapter IV

Sigmund Freud in *The Moth Diaries*:

A Critique of His Effect on Literary History and Therapy Culture

While most of Klein's intertextual references are overt or mentioned at least once by name, there is one constant presence in *The Moth Diaries* whose name is never quite spoken aloud but which is felt all the more powerfully for it. That figure is Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis whose work affected the fields of psychology and literary studies since his work in the late 1800s through the 1930s.

Freud's ideas about the unconscious are integral to the structure of *The Moth Diaries* because the primary question that readers may be trying to answer is that of the narrator's psychological state, and by extension the validity of the supernatural elements she records. Readers may become absorbed in trying to decide if the narrator has plummeted into an inner fictional world fueled by her unconscious fears and desires and brought on by trauma, difficult circumstances, and her creative mind and immersion in supernatural literature, or if they are to understand that she has several supernatural experiences during her year at school which no one else is witness to, and all in conjunction with Ernessa, who is a vampire. The narrator's "madness," though (if it be that), is not composed of random ravings - for example she does not just hear voices and see hallucinations which are unprompted by her circumstances. Every time she has a dream or witnesses something miraculous, these actions are preceded by an event or a thought on her part that will cause readers to view that vision of hers as an expression of the "repressed unconscious" referred to by Freud in works such as *The Interpretation of*

Dreams and Psychoanalytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (1911). During each of the narrator's more questionable experiences the association with a Freudian concept is so strong that it's as if Freud is reading the book with readers, standing over their shoulders and commenting on it - and Klein indicates that this is integral to an understanding of the novel. She also employs Freud's concept of the uncanny, which he wrote about in his 1919 essay "The Uncanny," to cast doubt about the narrator's sanity by heightening the similarities between her and Ernessa to a degree that is unsettling. Klein's indirect commentary on the extent to which Freud permeates Western culture is antagonistic though, as she weaves a criticism of his effect on the field of psychiatry into her story through the narrator's comments about her experiences with therapists, and pokes fun at him herself with her own allusion to works of his such as "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria."

So why does Klein draw readers' attentions to Freudian concepts and readings of the narrator's behavior that render her as simply a neurotic, repressed wreck, while simultaneously criticizing psychiatrists who focus on Freudian interpretations of behavior in their treatments? Fundamentally, she points out the ways in which Freud has saturated readers' interpretations of fiction such as hers, to the extent that they may become fixated on uncovering unconscious motives in every character and miss the larger truth that her text explores: that the horrors of the narrator's unconscious actually pale in contrast to those of the "real world" around her. *The Moth Diaries* reveals how Freud's ideas about the unconscious have woven themselves into the texts of everything readers consume, and have become inseparable from their understanding of them. Klein finds this, as well as Freud's legacy in the fields of psychoanalysis and therapy, to be problematic. Her primary issues of complaint in this regard involve Freud's emphasis on sexuality as the

cause of neurosis, his tendency to foist his own interpretations onto his patients, and his belief that powerful emotions must be overcome, all tendencies which are enacted by the therapists in *The Moth Diaries*. Klein explores all these issues through her narrator, who manages to be the perfect Freudian case study even while she criticizes his teachings with her pithy observations of her own therapy treatments.

The presence of psychiatry as a force in the novel is evoked from the very first sentence of *The Moth Diaries*, in which the narrator mentions the name of the psychiatrist who treated her in the psychiatric hospital following her junior year at boarding school. She identifies him as a Dr. Karl Wolff. “Karl Wolff” is a completely Germanic name, and Klein’s first and most subtle suggestion of the association with Sigmund Freud, whose name is also of entirely Germanic origin. The narrator goes on to explain that the first section of text is a preface, written by her thirty years after the events of the diary the readers are about to read.

Dr. Wolff reassured me. All the names would be changed. It would be impossible to recognize me in the person of the narrator. It would even be difficult to recognize the school. Above all, he felt the journal would be an invaluable addition to the literature on female adolescence at a time when risk-taking behavior has reached epidemic proportions... Dr. Wolff also asked me to write an afterword, as a kind of closure on the experience. He felt it was relatively rare for someone suffering from borderline personality disorder complicated by depression and psychosis to recover and never have another “episode,” as he so kindly put it... When I opened this notebook, I found the razor blade I had hidden among the pages so long ago. Dr. Wolff had kept it as part of the “clinical picture,” as he explained. (Klein 1- 2)

The fact that the main text of *The Moth Diaries* is a diary, but is framed by a short preface and an afterword written by the narrator at the request of her therapist, gives the impression that the diary is part of the “clinical picture” of the narrator, just like the razor blade that she mentions. Readers may suspect that the text of the diary, along with the narrator’s preface and afterword, may be included in a larger collection of case studies

which will be published. This framing device significantly impacts readers' perceptions of the diary they are about to read. The novel *could* have just begun with the narrator's diary, with no preface at all. The presence of the preface and its explicit reference to the narrator's diagnosis as a result of the events that readers are about to read gives them the context to interpret everything the narrator records as simply hallucinations and her own mental disintegration; in fact the preface is more or less instructing them to do so. So the fact that readers might finish the novel unconvinced of this fact is in itself a challenge to the institution of psychiatry; readers have every reason to doubt the narrator's sanity and yet they might believe her.

One of the many questions readers must then ask themselves as they read *The Moth Diaries* is *why* might they believe the narrator, and not her diagnosis? This question is answered in part by Klein's insistent criticisms of psychiatry, which throw shade on readers' estimation of all the therapists in the novel, but also by the narrator's own comment about belief and the role of the author, which she mentions early on in her discussion of *Carmilla* in English class. "I said that I started to believe in the character when the writer realized what she was... 'When the character he had created became real to him, the rest of the story did too'" (Klein 69). As mentioned before, this passage is self-reflexive; it's speaking not just about the narrator's own reactions to literature but what readers' own reactions may be to *The Moth Diaries*. Readers may start to believe the narrator when they realize what she is: a highly intelligent girl trying to deal with a myriad of tragic incidents in her life, as well as challenging circumstances in intrapersonal relationships and failure on the part of the adults around her to support her - all while she is trying to keep her own moral compass as well as her sanity afloat amidst the supernatural experiences she claims to have. Readers' empathy, as well as the

narrator's strong convictions about what she sees, render it easier to believe that Ernessa *is* a vampire, and that all of the supernatural elements the narrator records are real. The doubt that the novel generates about the narrator's sanity and truthfulness is attributable to Freud's ideas of the unconscious, which permeate the book because Klein constructs each of the narrator's actions so that readers might interpret them as an expression of her repressed unconscious.

Significantly, Klein evokes Freudian ideas of the unconscious in *The Moth Diaries* by heavily employing the concept of the uncanny, a term which was not invented by Freud but developed and popularized by him in his 1919 essay "The Uncanny." Tellingly, while Freud is a psychoanalyst, in this essay he feels the need to call upon literature to best explain his theory about a particular type of dread and fear which is clearly felt but not so easily defined. To help with this task, Freud draws largely upon the literary works of E.T.A. Hoffman, whose writings he felt best expressed this particular quality. Of Hoffman's works he says,

These themes are all concerned with the idea of a "double" in every shape and degree, with persons, therefore, who are to be considered identical by reason of looking alike; Hoffman accentuates this relation by transferring mental processes from the one person to the other - what we should call telepathy - so that the one possesses knowledge, feeling, and experience in common with the other, identifies himself with another person, so that his self becomes confounded, or by the foreign self is substituted for his own - in other words, by doubling, dividing, and interchanging the self. And finally there is the constant recurrence of similar situations, a same face, or character-trait, or twist of fortune, or a same crime, or even a same name recurring throughout several consecutive generations.
(Freud *Das Unheimliche* 8-9)

The concept of the uncanny is frequently utilized in Gothic novels, and the double figure is the perfect device for this, since a character with heightened similarities to the protagonist can certainly be an alarming prospect to that protagonist, and similarly disconcerting to readers who may find it increasingly difficult to differentiate between the

two, and, by extension, encounter difficulty in ascertaining which aspects of the story are to be accepted as actually occurring within the reality inside the novel. Klein uses the concept of the uncanny in several ways in *The Moth Diaries*. More broadly, the entire novel is uncanny because of the many similarities between the events that occur in the story and their similarities to those in other novels, particularly novels that the narrator *is* or *may* be reading. But more specifically, Klein develops the uncanny concept in regard to the relationship between the narrator and Ernessa, and in regard to the extreme similarities in background, interests, personality traits, and family history between them, which take on greater import as the novel goes on.

Ernessa is the narrator's double in every sense that Freud articulates the term. Most obviously she physically looks similar to the narrator, and they are both Jewish - two of only three girls at school who are, a fact which affects them greatly in an institution that harbors both teachers and students who are anti-Semitic. The narrator describes this physical similarity. "For the first time I realized, with a shock, how much we resemble each other. I guess that's not so surprising. We're both Eastern European Jews, the only two real Jews in class. (Dora doesn't count.) We have curly black hair, large noses, dark dark eyes" (Klein 75). Ernessa also, like the narrator, arrived at school shortly after the suicide of her own father, who was a musician. She is highly intelligent and academic, and, like the narrator, plays the piano. She is also drawn to Lucy as the narrator is, like a moth to a light. In and of themselves these are bizarre coincidences to begin with, but the manner in which Ernessa's aptitude, and personality traits, seem to mirror and even enhance those of the narrator is what makes the resemblances truly uncanny. The fact that the narrator remains nameless throughout the entire novel only adds to this sense of unease on the part of readers in telling her and Ernessa apart; in a

novel where so many of the characters' names have significance, the narrator's own namelessness stands out.

Freud's theory of the repressed ego and its manifestations is the most central theme in his overarching theory of the unconscious. Two terms which he coined on this subject are *projection* and *wish fulfillment*, which he discusses in *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *Psychoanalytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia* (1911), respectively. The narrator can be seen as demonstrating both of these behaviors. Freud defines *projection* as taking place when: "An internal perception is suppressed, and, instead, its content, after undergoing a certain kind of distortion, enters consciousness in the form of an external perception" (Freud *Pelican* 204). The modern understanding of this original idea is described by Jan Grant and Jim Crawley in *Transference and Projection*:

Projection is a psychological process that involves the attribution of unacceptable thoughts, feelings, traits or behaviors to others that are characteristic of oneself. (Sandler 1989; Clark 1998). Whereas in transference the therapist or others are experienced as having the same attributes as significant others, in projection it is the disowned aspects of self that are "transferred" onto the other. In a classic sense, projection is considered a defense mechanism; it helps to protect the individual from a perceived threat and to reduce intolerable anxiety and conflict. (Grant 18)

Because of the strength of Freud's original *projection* concept, which has become so integrated into readers' literary interpretations, the similarities between Ernessa and the narrator become suspect, and Ernessa's personality traits seem reflective of the narrator's own repressed fears and desires. An example of this is when the narrator writes of an incident in the music practice rooms in the basement of the school.

She was waiting for me... The music was coming from the room I always use. That's the best piano, and I'm used to it. It's mine. Then I realized that the person was playing my Mozart sonata, in F, the one I worked on last year. I struggled so much with the allegro. I've only been with happy with the way I've played it a few times, and I've played it for almost a year... She was playing the allegro so

precisely that it sounded like a military march. She never faltered; each note was perfect... When I pushed open the door to the room, she barely acknowledged my presence. There was no music on the stand. I thought I was going to cry. It was a huge joke on me. (Klein 72)

This passage is from one of the earliest scenes where readers may begin to suspect that the narrator might sometimes be hallucinating Ernessa's presence. The coincidences are so great: that Ernessa would be playing the same piece as the narrator; that it would be perfect; and that she would be waiting in the narrator's favorite practice room to play it when she appeared. Readers can see how, if the narrator is hallucinating, this may be the first of many times that she projects onto Ernessa qualities or attributes that she herself lacks, wishes for, or cannot express or accept.

Ernessa is clearly a threat to the narrator because she possesses Lucy in a way that the narrator does not anymore. This jealousy can be seen to paint the narrator's perception of Ernessa, making her appear to the narrator as everything the narrator herself has failed to be. Certainly, the menstruation/Lucy's bedroom scene addressed earlier could be interpreted in this way; if viewed as a hallucination or a dream on the part of the narrator then it can be read as a Freudian expression of both projection as well as *wish fulfillment*, with the narrator substituting Ernessa for herself in the dream. It is helpful here to examine a passage from Freud's work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in which he writes about his theory of *wish fulfillment* and how it is enacted through dreams.

It will be seen, then, that the DAY'S RESIDUES (...) not only borrow something from the unconscious when they succeed in taking a share in the formation of the dream --namely the instinctual force which is at the disposal of the repressed wish--but that they also OFFER THE UNCONSCIOUS something indispensable--namely THE NECESSARY POINT OF ATTACHMENT FOR A TRANSFERENCE. (Freud *Interpretation* 603)

Klein points overtly to a reading of the bedroom scene as an instance of wish fulfillment through dreams with her placement of a diary entry just prior to that scene, in which the narrator records how Lucy visits her in her room.

Lucy sat down on the edge of the bed and stroked my cheek. I wanted to tell her to go away, that I had been sick for two days before she even noticed and the only reason she noticed was because Sofia told her. I wanted to tell her that I knew she didn't really care how I felt. I'm so weak. I didn't say any of the things I felt. I let her stroke my cheek in the dark. (Klein 159-160)

The diary entry immediately following this describes the sequence in which the narrator wakes up and goes to Lucy's room to find her in her bed with Ernessa. A Freudian reading of the scene in Lucy's bedroom is that the narrator wishes it was herself with Lucy, but that she cannot deal with this subconscious wish, so her sleeping mind projects it onto Ernessa, who is, in her mind, everything *she* is not, or *cannot* be. This interpretation would not seem so obvious were it not for the preceding diary entry; the placement of this scene in the novel immediately after a scene in which Lucy is stroking the narrator's cheek and the narrator expresses how moved she is cannot be accidental. This type of interaction between the two girls never happens at any other part of the novel, and there would be no other reason for Klein to place the scene there unless she is trying to draw the reader's attention to a Freudian reading of wish fulfillment on the narrator's part.

Tellingly, another uncanny instance when the narrator seems to mirror Ernessa's personality traits is when she herself seems to exhibit the "vampiric-like" tendencies towards Lucy that she has attributed to Ernessa. In her last interaction with Lucy before Lucy's death, the latter confronts the narrator.

"Leave me alone, please," said Lucy. "I can't stand having you around me all the time, wanting me only for yourself. You are a fucking drag. You pull me down. All that pain." "You never said anything." ... I left her room and closed the door to the bathroom behind me. I'll never speak to

her again. Never. I don't even understand what happened. She was so sweet the whole time, gazing up at me with that stupid smile of hers. (Klein 225-226)

Lucy's words suggest that the narrator has been *preying* on her, though perhaps not in the most typical manner - but with a sadness that is draining, and with a possessive quality to her affections. The narrator seems genuinely shocked by this revelation, but if readers are to assume that this character assessment of her is at least in part true, then they must recognize that the narrator is not entirely conscious of her own persona, which supports the idea that some of the features which she has been ascribing to Ernessa may in fact be those personality traits which she most fears and does not wish to recognize in herself and so has been *projecting* onto Ernessa instead.

But for all the doubt which an unavoidably Freudian reading of the narrator casts on her self-awareness, and by extension her sanity, the narrator of *The Moth Diaries* is still the voice of reason amongst the morally ailing cast of characters that surrounds her. If readers dismiss the narrator as a neurotic, undone by her unconscious desires and fears, then they will miss the fact that she is also an extremely observant and sensitive person who is attuned to the problems around her, and, unlike her apathetic peers, teachers, and parental figures, is the only person trying to do anything about them. Whilst everyone else is focused on themselves, she's actually focused on others. Her diary is cluttered with observations and insights into her classmates, her parents, and her teachers. It contains passages such as, "Here everyone is in boxes inside boxes - the iron fence, the Residence, the second floor, Mrs. Halton's corridor, the room, the bed. Boxes for girls who are not ready to face the big world of men and sex. I know how unreal it is. I'm not a fool" (Klein 174). If the narrator can be as mature in her observations as this, surely her interpretations *mean* something. So if she believes that events at Brangwyn are

supernatural, which involves her belief that Ernessa is a vampire - then perhaps there is some sense in adopting that perspective. The world around her certainly doesn't make any sense. She is surrounded by heartless, self-centered people. Of her mother, still processing her husband's suicide on a recent and rare weekend when the narrator is back from school, she writes,

All weekend, she kept playing the same music, over and over again. The record would finish, and she would just lift up the needle and put it back at the beginning. It drove me crazy. I anticipated where it would skip and she would have to go over and adjust it. I had to leave the house and go for a walk. Finally at breakfast on Saturday I got fed up, and I asked her why she kept playing the same record. "I'm trying to understand exactly how he felt," she said. "This music fed what ate him up, made it hungrier. I hate this music. But I think it also gave him strength to write, so I have to listen." I try not to get upset around her, but I started to cry. "Don't be sad," she said. (Klein 84)

The narrator's mother is so centered on her own grief that she forgets to take care of her daughter, completely wallowing in her feelings while her daughter is drowning right before her. It's a miracle the narrator did not have a psychotic break a long time before the events of her diary. There are no support figures in her life, only monstrous versions of caretakers. At school one of the narrator's favorite teachers, her English professor Mr. Davies, takes advantage of her distress when they are alone in the classroom one day, and takes her shirt off and kisses her. And so a hypothetical role model and source of strength uses his position not to help her, but to abuse her. The narrator occasionally peppers her diary with little mantras such as, "School, books, Lucy" (Klein 85) which indicate how very little she has to hold onto and how hard she is trying to hold onto it. But her teachers betray her and her best friend has found someone else. So if she is upset because that pillar of support in her life, Lucy, shuts her out, then readers should see why that would be devastating, and not merely an unfortunate circumstance that the narrator should just get over. It's reasonable that she be concerned about her best friend's health,

and Ernessa's influence over Lucy, but the novel is constructed so that readers interpret the narrator's actions in a Freudian light, so that they are seen as something shameful and indicative of repressed desires.

In *The Moth Diaries*, therapists consistently fail to protect, understand, or heal the narrator, in the same manner that the teachers and parents fail both her and the other girls. In fact, the failure of parents and the failure of psychiatry intersect spectacularly in the form of Dora, the narrator's friend/sometimes-nemesis at school who wages a constant intellectual battle with the narrator and who meets an untimely end crawling along the gutters outside Ernessa's room in an attempt to spy on her. Of Dora, the narrator writes,

She likes to sit with her coffee and a cigarette and read philosophy. She's so fake... It's all a pose. Like being crazy. Her father's a shrink, so he assumes everyone is crazy. He encourages her fakeness. She's been seeing a shrink since she was ten years old. She wouldn't like it so much if she were really crazy. (Klein 78)

The narrator never comments on Dora's name, so she seems unaware of the significance in the fact that a psychiatrist would name his daughter Dora, after the female subject of Freud's most famous case study, 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria.' Most readers will not miss it though, as Dora's treatment is Freud's most cited case study despite, but also because of, the many blunders Freud made with the case, the fact that the patient terminated her treatment with him, and the ensuing feminist backlash against the study which began at the end of the 20th century.⁴ As Anthony Storr sums up the case in his work, *Freud: A Very Short Introduction*:

⁴ See Claire Kahane's "Introduction Part Two" of *In Dora's Case* for Freud's failure to adequately treat his patient Dora and her termination of treatment. See Steven Marcus's "Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case History" for Freud's failure to recognize the incompleteness of his own analysis and case study as presented in "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria." See Toril Moi's "Representations of Patriarchy: Sexuality and Epistemology in Freud's Dora" and Madelon Sprengnether's "Enforcing Oedipus: Freud and Dora" for feminist criticisms of the

Dora was an 18-year-old girl, the daughter of an unhappily married couple, who were close friends of another unhappily married couple, referred to by Freud as Herr and Frau K. ... Herr K had made sexual advances to Dora when she was 14, which she violently repudiated. When she became 16, she declared her detestation of Herr K. and said that he had again made advances to her. From this time on, she developed hysterical symptoms of recurrent loss of voice, nervous cough, and fainting spells, together with depression, social withdrawal, and a threat of suicide... The case of Dora is important because, as Ernest Jones records, it served for years as a model for students of psychoanalysis... At an early point in treatment, Freud made up his mind that Dora, for years, had been in love with Herr K... Yet, Dora persisted denying being in love with Herr K. (who, after all, was much older than she was) until she had already decided to terminate her treatment. As others have remarked, Freud overwhelmed her with interpretations until, after that penultimate session, he was able to write: 'And Dora disputed the fact no longer.' Any reader who studies the case of Dora without prejudice will conclude that, once Freud had made up his mind about a point, he would not take 'No' for an answer, and that he used all his ingenuity and his considerable powers of persuasion to compel his patient to admit that he was right. (Storr 125-126)

As Storr notes, the case study of Dora is now viewed by many psychoanalysts as an extremely problematic one, but at the time when Dora from *The Moth Diaries* was born, which would have been around 1955, Freud's analysis of Dora was generally accepted by psychoanalysts. (125) The fact that Dora's father would revere Freud, and this particular study, enough to name his daughter after the patient, suggests "Freud worship" on his part. And the additional fact that the patient Dora was, post-study, revealed to have an unhappy life, returning to therapy again in part for her strong feelings of hatred towards the men in her life, makes "Dora" a telling name choice for a father to saddle his child with. That Dora's father has sent her to therapy since she was 10, and that the narrator also tells us that Dora hates him and would prefer boarding school to having to live with him, are all subtle implications that psychiatrists do not make good parents.

masculine narrative Freud crafted in his presentation of Dora's case, as well as his own tendency to disguise his own identification with the feminine.

One criticism of Freud's treatment of the Dora case is that he was so eager to promote his dream interpretation theories that he had recently published in *The Interpretation of Dreams* that he pushed Dora to agree with his interpretations of her dreams in the course of treatment.⁵ Subtly, at one point in the novel when the narrator feels unable to comprehend the Greek tragedies she hears Dora and Ernessa discussing, she asks one of her favorite teachers, her Greek Professor Miss Norris, to explain them, and Miss Norris replies that, "Ancient Greece is so foreign to our way of thinking, my dear. We tend to make of it whatever we please. The way we do our dreams" (Klein 33). This might appear to be a throwaway comment but, in a novel where dreams or potential dream sequences riddle the pages and Freud's influence is felt like that of a character himself, its significance seems greater. Once again *The Moth Diaries* seems to be sending readers a self-conscious clue, and a warning. "Mark how you interpret; your interpretations are subjective and therefore suspect," the novel says. Miss Norris is also, by extension, subtly casting derision on Freud himself. As the famous dream-interpreter, did he make of dreams what he wanted to, and now readers are subject to the lasting influence of that legacy, with the inevitable interpretations that they will make of the narrator's dreams and dream-like sequences that she records in her diary? "Signs point to yes," as Ernessa would say. (Klein 13)

As part of the novel's ongoing disparagement of psychiatric treatment and its influence, specifically due to Freud, the narrator describes an incident following her father's death when her mother took her to a therapist.

⁵ See Bernheimer, "Introduction Part One" of *In Dora's Case* and Jacqueline Rose's "Dora: Fragment of an Analysis" for the influence of *An Interpretation of Dreams* on Freud's analysis and treatment of his patient Dora.

When I was a little girl and woke during the night and was scared, I used to get my father. I would go and stand by his bed... He looked so peaceful asleep that I didn't want to disturb him. After a little while, he would open his eyes, sit up very slowly, and follow me silently down the hallway to my room. His feet shuffled on the rug in the hallway as he walked behind me because he was half asleep. When he lay down next to me on my bed, I instantly calmed down and fell asleep. I didn't like to do this too often, only when I was desperate. I was afraid he would say something during the day. But he never did. And when I awoke in the morning, he was gone, back in his own bed. Only the impression left by his sturdy body convinced me that he had really been there during the night. Now there isn't even an impression. After my father died, my mother took me to a psychiatrist a few times. I told him that what I missed most about my father was that if I wanted him during the night, I couldn't be with him. Even though I hadn't gotten him out of bed for years, I needed to know that I could do it. The psychiatrist said that he felt it was inappropriate for my father to share my bed. He spoke about him as if he were alive and his real crime were helping me to fall asleep rather than killing himself. When the doctor said that, I wondered if he had forgotten the reason why I was there... After that, I wouldn't speak to him anymore. I didn't want to think about my father sleeping in bed next to me ever again. The doctor ruined it. (Klein 156-157)

The above recollection of the narrator's is an overt indictment of Freud. In *The Guardian's* review of this novel by Nicola Morgan, she writes of the narrator of *The Moth Diaries* that, "...we suspect that Freud would have had something to say about her intense relationship with her father." (Morgan 2) This is a telling line in a book review, not least because the writer has used the word "we" as though every single person reading the novel will recognize Freud's influence, so strong is it - but also the fact that the reviewer does not specifically comment on whether *she* herself as the writer actually thinks there is something to say about the narrator's relationship with her father, but certainly that she knows Freud would have - which in turn almost suggests that *she* doesn't, but can't help thinking of Freud's reaction anyway. This is more or less the effect of the entire novel. Readers may want to believe the narrator and trust her words but the voice of Freud is sounding in the back of their heads like an incessant bell.

In the case of the recollection by the narrator of her experience with the therapist after her father's death, it's inarguable that the therapist failed to respond to the narrator in a way that inspired trust or recognition of her feelings. The narrator was there to discuss how she felt about her father's death, and was trying to open up to the therapist, who immediately invalidated her experience and cast aspersions on her father. Even if the therapist thought that the narrator and her father's particular interactions, which the narrator described as something she "hadn't done for years, that she had only done as a little girl, and that she was reluctant to ask her father to do," somehow seemed inappropriate, Klein represents the therapist's suggestion as wrong - and so this scene leaves the reader with a bad taste in their mouth for psychiatry. And if readers themselves are wondering about the appropriateness of this interaction between the younger narrator and her father, then perhaps they should ask themselves why that is. Is it because readers may consider the narrator to be unreliable, and possibly omitting information from her recollection? Sure, that is possible. But is it also because readers are trained to view any close parent-child, and particularly father-daughter relationships as suspect, and of a potentially sexual nature? Everyone is familiar with Freud's Oedipal complex, the basic concept being that, as Anthony Storr summarizes, "...by the time he has reached the 'phallic' stage of development, at around age of four or five, the small boy is sexually interested in his mother, wishes to gain exclusive possession of her, and therefore harbors hostile impulses towards his father" (Storr 33). As Storr notes, the reverse is true for girls, Freud believes, who will also be attracted to their fathers and see their mothers as a threat. Overcoming this stage of development is key for children, according to Freud. As Storr has also pointed out:

Freud's findings made sexual emotions the key emotions, which, if repressed, were the cause of neurotic symptoms... The popular perception that

psychoanalysis is chiefly concerned with sex is largely justified, although there is a good deal more to psychoanalysis than popular perceptions recognizes. For Freud, sex was especially suitable as a linchpin around which psychoanalytic theory could circle and coalesce... Freud at first concluded that, in cases of hysteria, the premature sexual experience, which constituted the core of the neurosis in early childhood, was seduction of a daughter by a father... Freud's tendency to generalization made him conclude that all these patients had suffered sexual seduction in early childhood, a conclusion which, in a number of instances, his patients were eager to confirm, but which as Freud himself realized, he might have forced on them because of the strength of his own conviction. (Storr 24-25)

Whatever readers' feelings are about the narrator's unconscious desires, the way that the narrator describes her interaction with the therapist and how he immediately seized on what he perceived as an inappropriate set of circumstances between her and her father identifies the therapist with Freud's extreme generalizations about the importance of sexual emotions, his belief in the rampant seduction of daughters by fathers, and his more general conviction that all small children desire sexual communion with their parent of the opposite sex.

Nicola Morgan's comment in her review about the "intense relationship" between the narrator and her father and what Freud would conclude from it stands out as extremely sad, and as exactly the note that Klein herself was trying to strike in *The Moth Diaries* with the episode of the narrator's remembered therapist visit. Because unlike many other suspect emotions that the narrator displays, there is nowhere in the novel that the narrator betrays any subconscious or even unconscious attraction to or idolatrous worship of her father, or hint at any nature of a sexual relationship between them. And yet this is what the therapist is searching for, and what the reviewer Nicola Morgan of feels compelled to suggest, even while acknowledging that the suggestion may not be her own, but should be addressed since it would come from *Freud*, that monolith of the unconscious. So what *does* the narrator recall of her father in the novel? She talks about their walks in the Botanical Garden, their nighttime searches outside with flashlights for

luna moths, and the stories he would read to her. Apparently when she was a small child and afraid during the night he would, at her request, come lie on her bed next to her until she fell asleep. So yes, she was very close to him. And then he committed suicide, basically in front of her, since she was the one to find him while it was happening in the family bathroom. It seems obvious that she would think about this event a lot; readers can infer that it must have been traumatizing for her. Not only did her father die but he very deliberately left her behind, and he didn't even bother to do it when she wouldn't find him in the very act. She was betrayed in an extremely traumatic way by the person she loved most. So it's a mystery what kind of memories readers of this novel such as the reviewer, or the therapist within the novel that the narrator sees after her father's death, expect the narrator to want to discuss, and by extension why her having a close relationship with her father is perceived as suspect and suggestive of darker truths. Except of course for the fact that Freud's lasting influence is an intentional and indelible stain upon readers' interpretation of *The Moth Diaries* and has been recognized as such since the first page of this novel. *The Guardian* reviewer, it seems, has fallen perfectly for the trap that Klein has set throughout the book: the Freudian web of interpretation that may hinder more than it helps readers to examine character motivation.

Klein's most damning critique of psychiatry, and of Freud's theory of the need to release the repressed unconscious, is her suggestion that none of the narrator's therapy made her a happier person. Although the preface and afterword to the diary are short, readers glimpse the life of the narrator 30 years after the events of her diary. Her personality seems muted, as if she is weighing her words, and holding back from expressing herself with the abandon that readers are used to from her teenage self. She

seems resigned to her current state, and her thoughts on her life post-therapy are bittersweet. Of her experience in the psychiatric hospital she says:

But that's what recovery was all about, about agreeing to grow older, become a woman, have children, dye my hair, have hot flashes and night sweats. Let my childhood go. Let my father go. Not blame him for his despair....It was hard to give up the person who wrote so compulsively in her crimson notebook, to watch her be sucked into the black hole of the past. That girl was self-absorbed, but she was also excruciatingly alive, as if she had been born without a skin. Everyone secretly wanted her pain. It consumed her, until there was nothing else. I had affection for her, and I have much less for the person who has replaced her. She had a father, and I don't. (Klein 245)

The fact that the narrator felt she had a father, even after his death, but doesn't post-therapy, suggests that in her "letting go of him" she feels that she lost him completely. Her thoughts on her pain, and how she was "excruciatingly alive" suggest that she now feels less alive as a result of her recovery; that maybe she wanted to keep some of her pain but wasn't allowed to. Even her choice of words with "*agreeing to grow older*" implies that her recovery included her accepting a life path that was suggested to her by her therapist. Her litany of tasks certainly makes these *agreements* sound like chores. "...Become a woman, have children, dye my hair..." she says, as though those were assignments that were given to her and not necessarily choices she would have made for herself. She seems to have lost both her father and a little of herself with her therapy, which suggests that maybe she should not have been made to completely purge her memories of the powerful emotional experiences she had in her junior year at Brangwyn, and that this may have caused more damage than healing. Significantly, as Storr notes, Freud felt that all powerful emotions need to be released, and that passionate feelings are negative. As Storr writes,

...Past emotions are the cause of present problems... such emotions are invariably shameful or painful or frightening, and therefore repudiated and repressed. Freud always believed that a dominating principle of mental life

was the need of the organism to reach a state of tranquility by completely discharging all tensions (this was later named the Nirvana principle). This basic assumption tends to treat all powerful emotions in a negative fashion, as disturbances which must be got rid of, rather than as pleasures to be sought. Bliss, in the Freudian scheme, is attained when needs have been satisfied and passions spent. (Storr 23)

Certainly Dr. Wolff, the narrator's psychiatrist from the psychiatric hospital, feels that the narrator's experiences are all "disturbances which must be got rid of." In fact, it appears that the diary that forms the text of *The Moth Diaries* almost didn't survive.

...I hadn't seen the journal since I handed it over to him in the hospital thirty years ago, and we discussed it on only one occasion, when he made it clear I needed to put that period of my life behind me. Giving up writing in the journal was a first step... Dr. Wolff kept it only because of a promise he made to my mother before I left the hospital... He happened to reread it while packing up his office before retirement and was struck by how convincing my writing was. (Klein 1-2)

The narrator reveals significant information in her recollections of the diary's history: she was forced to give it up and her therapist would have trashed it, except that her mother made him promise to keep it. Thirty years later the therapist finds the diary by accident and deems it to be "convincing." Readers might wonder if he ever read the diary in the first place, or if he did read it and it frightened him too much. To that end, the narrator never mentions Lucy or Ernessa by name in either the preface or the afterword, and only indirectly at the end of the afterword. The narrator's list of assignments (the things she had to let go of and agree to in recovery), also does not include a reference to the memory of Lucy or Ernessa, the two girls who most affected the narrator's year before she was hospitalized. Readers might question if the narrator was encouraged to talk about them at all by her therapist, or whether he might have decided that her problems were entirely due to her father's suicide, and not impacted at all by her relationship with either of the girls. Readers might think, "I had to agree that Ernessa's being a vampire was entirely a delusion" would have factored into the list of

things the narrator had to learn to accept, but there is radio silence from her on this subject. Did the therapist find her relationships at school an unworthy subject in her recovery? Certainly he did not (at the time anyway) find her journal worth holding onto, even though it was a record of a very important year of her life, whether she was sane when she wrote it or not. He felt she should let go of that person she was during the time she wrote her diary, and that therefore the diary should go too. So what makes the diary valuable when the therapist reads it 30 years later? It is possible that the context has changed; that *when* a person reads something can affect the power that a text has over them? Perhaps the therapist's younger self did not value the narrator's observations in her journal; perhaps he was not as open-minded when he first read it, but is now able to view it in a more objective light. Is it possible that in 30 years the therapist has freed himself from possible Freudian interpretations of the narrator's behavior, and is then able to see more value in her writing than just that of the repressed hysteric that Freud's teachings would no doubt have diagnosed her as?

Chapter V

Conclusion

“Every reader finds himself. The writer’s work is merely a kind of optical instrument that makes it possible for the reader to discern what, without this book, he would perhaps never have seen in himself.”

—Proust

The Moth Diaries is a thought-provoking work because it can be interpreted in a myriad of ways, many of which are enhanced by readers’ own knowledge of the writings that it both directly and indirectly engages with. It is also a novel which is written in the form of a diary by a narrator who has an uncanny relationship to literature herself. Everything she reads shows itself in her writing, but whether this act of reading and reusing is what the narrator is actually *doing* in her own diary, or it is just what readers of *The Moth Diaries* think the narrator is doing (in part dependent on their evaluation of her sanity), either way readers are forced to examine the ways in which fiction shapes the narrator’s, and their own, understanding of the world. They are able to appreciate the narrator’s writing as a structured, cohesive body of writing that incorporates the narrator’s real life experiences as well as her literary ones, which are of equal importance to her. Readers’ knowledge and understanding of the particular works of literature and thinkers that the narrator engages with changes their understanding of *The Moth Diaries* as well, and Klein provides them with all the clues as to who and what they should engage with to experience the novel in this way.

In *The Moth Diaries*, Klein goes one step further to explore not only the role of intertextuality in literary interpretation and understanding, but also the confidence with which readers perceive *the nature of what they are reading*. Early in the novel, as the

narrator describes how much she is enjoying Ramon del Valle-Inclan's *My Sister Antonia*, a short story about a family's interaction with a spectral being, she says:

I want to write a story like that, to set up everything so carefully, detail by detail, that when something totally outlandish happens, it seems perfectly natural, even inevitable. It's a perfect story. I just need something to write about. How do writers come up with really good stories? I'm sure no one else in class will like it. They'll say, 'What's the point we're supposed to get?' They want everything explained, even though they are taking a class on the supernatural. What do they expect? (Klein 15)

This is the most self-conscious statement about *The Moth Diaries* in the novel. *The Moth Diaries* itself is constructed in such a way that when the narrator starts believing Ernessa is a vampire it seems perfectly plausible to readers. It's "the perfect story." And readers may spend an inordinate amount of time thinking, "What's the point we're supposed to get?" as they try and figure out whether the narrator is mentally troubled or if her record of her experiences with the supernatural are true. Taken at face value, this an ironic passage in the novel. Examined in detail, it belies a subtle but definite potential alternate reading of the book: The novel itself is exactly what the narrator says - a perfectly crafted story in which everything has been set up carefully, "detail by detail." "I just need something to write about," the narrator says. And then she does just that, going on to record her entire year at Branwyn, which is in the form of a diary but reads as a perfectly formed story, where many outlandish things happen which somehow seem inevitable. What if the entire novel *is* just a story that she the narrator has crafted as a writing exercise for herself? It's an unnerving thought, but this passage is not the only one in the novel to support that interpretation.

At times, the narrator refers to her own diary entries in a way that suggests that she is not just a recorder of events, but that she is the *author* of them as well, an idea which will shake the confidence of readers who are assuming that what they are reading

is in fact a diary, albeit the diary of a narrator with a potentially troubled mind. But when the narrator describes Lucy and Ernessa in the moonlight scene near the end of the novel she states that: “The carefully arranged folds of the nightgowns hid their feet. Angels don’t need feet. It annoys me when their toes peek out beneath their robes in old paintings.” (Klein 232) This musing, in the middle of her description of Lucy’s dramatic death scene, strikes a note of incongruity with the events that the narrator is relaying. Also, who is carefully arranging the folds of the girls’ nightgowns? How would that be possible? Are the nightgowns carefully arranged because the narrator is the author of this scene, as she may have been the author of everything readers have been reading so far? A few diary entries later, toward the very end of the book, the narrator visits the girls’ trunks in the basement, where she discovers Ernessa’s trunk and muses on what Ernessa’s past life might have been and the suicide she imagines she committed at Brangwyn which resulted in her becoming a vampire. “She filled the long tub with warm water. It was less painful underwater. The dark curlicues of color floated around her. By the time the water had all turned red, she could no longer see. Dinner bells. Something always interrupts me” (Klein 236). That is the end of that diary entry, and the next one starts where the narrator left off. What has been interrupted though? The narrator has never before mentioned being interrupted while writing. But the very placement of these words on the page (surrounded by extra line spacing at the end of one diary entry and before the next) - and the way that they stand out to emphasize that the narrator’s *writing* has been interrupted, seem significant. They accentuate the possibility that the narrator is an *author* as much as she is a teenage girl recording her daily life. And not only she is an author, she’s a talented one. “My father was a musician,” Ernessa tells the narrator. “I inherited everything from him. Just as you did from your father” (Klein 72). Has the narrator

inherited an incredible ability to tell a story, and the product of the text that readers are reading is the narrator's adolescent literary masterpiece? This subtle suggestion is an uncanny one because it highlights the inability of readers to ever know the truth of what they are reading. And Klein's allusions to other works intentionally complicate the ability of readers to find a stable truth in *The Moth Diaries*, because each allusion points to new ways of reading the novel and interpreting the narrator's actions.

Perhaps the best example of Klein's subtle allusions affecting readers' confidence in their perception of the novel is with her reference to William Wordsworth's set of five "Lucy Poems" written between 1798-1801. The reader is aware of these poems because the narrator alludes to them twice. The first is when she is worried about Lucy, who is sick in the infirmary at school at that point. "'Oh mercy!' to myself I cried, 'If Lucy should be dead!'" This is the third time that Klein references a work with a major figure in it by the name of "Lucy," again marking this work as significant to an interpretation of the narrator's Lucy. The first time the narrator writes this quotation down readers only know that this is a reference to another work if they have read the original poem, or if they recognize the quotation marks around her text and actively research that passage. The second time, the narrator repeats the quotation, but adds, "I thought of Lucy when I first read that line" (Klein 164). Nowhere in her writing does the narrator even credit the line to Wordsworth, but the repeated use of this line marks it as significant, and curious readers will discover the source. The line is taken from the first and most famous poem of the set of five "Lucy Poems," and is called "Strange Passions Have I Known," in which a young man and suitor is fixated on and worried about a woman named Lucy. As the *Owl Eyes* website entry for "The Lucy Poems" summarizes:

Each poem follows the same basic story: a beloved young woman dies an early death. The details are unimportant; for Wordsworth, Lucy represents

a broad figure upon which to project his many passions as a quintessentially Romantic poet. Thus, Lucy takes on a variety of roles: She is the object of unrequited love, ever out of reach. She is the poet's muse, arriving to provide a surge of inspiration only to depart all too soon. She is the personification of nature in all its beauty, wildness, and perfection. She is fantasy and dream, an imagined ideal who cannot exist in the real world. Despite the tragedy of Lucy's inevitable death, these poems are often joyful in the way they indulge the great flights of the human spirit. (*Owl Eyes*)

Research into the Lucy poems thus reveals details about Wordsworth's use of Lucy in his writing: as a source of passion which was never realized, an idealized figure who died a tragically young death, and a muse. There is, again, an uncanny similarity between the fate of the two Lucys, and the narrator's Lucy is certainly an idealized muse for her in a manner which is very similar to Wordsworth's Lucy. In fact, earlier in the novel *Dora* brings this to the narrator's attention when discussing Ernessa's own interest in Lucy.

"I admit she does have an inordinate fascination with Lucy who is, well, we all know, very sweet and pretty, but not terribly compelling. Let's face it. Lucy is...an airhead, and really, when you look at her carefully, she's predictably pretty... I thought Ernessa was more interested in discussing philosophy, but I doubt she's doing much of that with Lucy. So it must be the sweet and pretty that appeals to her. Lucy is her image of what Kant calls the 'sublime.'" We all have one." She looked at me. (Klein 80)

Clearly, *Dora* believes that Lucy is the narrator's idea of the sublime, just as she is Ernessa's as well. This idea of the "sublime" image further connects the narrator to "The Lucy Poems" in a way which may prompt readers to question the motives and veracity of the narrator's writing. On the one hand, "Strange Passions Have I Known" could just be a poem that the narrator read, and a line that stuck in her head because the subject of the poem had the same name as her best friend. However, by drawing readers' attention to the poem, Klein points them towards a work wherein the subject of the author's writing served a purpose for him; Wordsworth's Lucy was a blank canvas for him to write on and exercise his Romantic writing style with. The narrator's Lucy is similarly a "blank

canvas” in many respects; she is never described in great detail to readers and does in fact seem more like an object sometimes than a fully fleshed-out person. Frances Ferguson writes in “The Lucy Poems: Wordsworth’s Quest for a Poetic Object” that:

Wordsworth’s famous note to “The Thorn” values repetition for indicating “the interest which the mind attaches to words, not only as symbols of the passion, but as things, active and efficient, which are themselves part of the passion.” The Lucy poems might be said to provide a rather radical comment upon Wordsworth’s pronouncement by repeating the quintessential poetic form of passion, the love poem, in such a way as to leave us wondering whether the passion is finally a passion for Lucy or a recognition of the primacy of words as “things, active and efficient.” (Ferguson 532)

If there’s anyone with a passion for the primacy of words it’s the narrator of *The Moth Diaries*. The narrator even says, “I wish for once someone else would mention Lucy’s name first. Those two syllables, Lu-cy. I only want to hear another girl talk about her in front of me, say her name like a charm to ward off spirits” (Klein 222). Is the narrator’s diary her love poem to words and to literature, and not to Lucy after all?

Uncannily, the narrator muses on the variants of the root word “sublime” itself towards the very end of the novel. She does this at the end of a diary entry in which she describes an interaction with Ernessa, in which the latter cuts her wrist in the library right in front of the narrator. Blood pours out of Ernessa, and she dissolves in the sunlight, after suggesting that the narrator do the same and “free herself.” (Klein 216) Immediately after describing this interaction the narrator writes:

To sublime: to pass directly from the solid to the vapor state.
To sublimate: to divert the expression of an instinctual desire or impulse from its primitive form to one that is considered more socially or culturally acceptable.
Sublime: of outstanding spiritual, intellectual, or moral worth. (Klein 216-217)

This passage is curious because the narrator has never copied down word meanings before in her diary, and yet all three of the word variants are either directly or indirectly

referred to in her own writing. “To sublime” is a phrase that could be used to refer to the incident with Ernessa that directly preceded the narrator writing these word meanings, and “sublime” is the word that has been used by Dora in a very pointed reference to the narrator’s perception of Lucy. Even more unsettling is the fact that the word “sublimate” is used in a diary entry by the narrator two days *after* this entry. The word comes up when the narrator is visiting the school psychiatrist because Mr. Davies has expressed concern for her mental health. The psychiatrist is discussing instances of the narrator’s behavior that she finds inappropriate, and tells her that, “When you feel those impulses, you must work to sublimate them and behave in a socially acceptable manner” (Klein 219). So here is the word “sublimate” in the narrator’s diary, two days *after* the diary entry in which the definition of the word appeared, and with no prior usage of the term. Is this just a strange coincidence, or is this yet more evidence that suggests that the narrator has authored every word readers have been reading, and is continuously thinking about words, the very contrasting meanings they have, and how best to write scenes which convey those dissimilar meanings? At this point in the novel, readers who are suspicious about the narrator’s sanity should now be suspicious of the very veracity of the concept that *The Moth Diaries* is comprised of a diary. What if instead, the entire work is a piece of fiction, designed to emulate those authors of the supernatural that the narrator finds so compelling?

Perhaps the most intriguing and frustratingly inconclusive part of the novel is in the very last lines of it, in the narrator’s afterword. She writes:

Sometimes the image of the two of them rises before me, unbidden, like a dream. They float somewhere, neither happy nor dead, young, untethered, free. Their arms are spread wide, their hair and clothing billow behind them. They are in a place without gravity, without sensations. Nothing tugs at them. It’s true that I never wanted to grow up. But how important was it really - to have decided to be human? (Klein 246)

Readers will conclude that the narrator is speaking of Ernessa and Lucy, and of their fate, but the narrator's imagery of their vampiric state is mysterious in that it does not appear to link to any reference to a work that the narrator has read and that she mentions in her diary. It is therefore worthwhile to examine this passage in conjunction again with "The Lucy Poems." In what are also *Wordsworth's* last lines, he writes of his Lucy that:

A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears:
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.
No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
With rocks, and stones, and trees!
(Wordsworth)

Obviously, the text of this ending of "The Lucy Poems" does not appear within the text of *The Moth Diaries*. Klein leads readers to the work though by inserting the connection between the narrator and the poem: readers knows it impacted the narrator because she immediately thought of it when she was worried about Lucy. The similarities between the two texts are then worth noting, particularly the narrator's description of her Lucy who is in a place "without gravity, without sensations" compared to the Lucy of the poems who "...could not feel/The touch of earthly years/No motion has she now, no force/She neither hears nor sees." Could the "Lucy Poems" have been even more impactful, even more haunting in their imagery to the narrator than *Carmilla* and *Dracula*? Or has the narrator just been channeling Wordsworth all along in her writing, creating a carefully constructed supernatural piece about a sublime muse, fated to an early and tragic death?

Klein's reference to the "Lucy Poems" perfectly illustrates the intricate way in which she uses intertextuality throughout *The Moth Diaries*. If readers never research her allusions to other works their readings of the novel will not suffer; however those

readings *will be* enriched if they do. Understanding the ways that Wordsworth used his own “Lucy” character enhances and complicates readers’ understanding of the narrator in relation to her own Lucy, and the question of whether or not the narrator’s diary is in fact a record of events or a work of fiction.

The Moth Diaries is full of contradictory readings, unanswered questions, and interpretations that never perfectly align. Clearly, readers will never know the truth of the events that occurred within the novel, but that seems to be the point entirely. Reading and writing will always be acts of interpretation, shaped by the experiences that readers bring with them when they read and write, and the strength of the impressions made by those experiences. In the end, readers’ interpretations of literature will say more about *they themselves* than the works they are reading.

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