Textuality and Sublimity in Dracula

In Chapter 22 we saw how Foucault provided us, coincidentally, with a helpful explanation for the Gothic fascination with constructions of the self, and how this related to notions of modernity. In *The History of Sexuality*, vol. I, Foucault argues that a scientific investigation into a form of sexual self-consciousness takes place in the Victorian period. As we shall see, *Dracula* can be read as a confirmation of Foucault’s treatise. However, I will also explore the presence of a sexual sublime in the novel, a version of the sublime which in part unsettles Foucault’s account of the attempts made to police, and so contain, desire. This latter reading is not hostile to Foucault’s conclusions, but I do want to explore some of the limitations of his history of sexuality and these limitations become apparent when we consider how the sublime recasts some of his conclusions. My aim is to show how this presence of a Gothic sublimity continues to challenge traditional constructions of the self; here in formations of the subject which are to be found within late-nineteenth-century debates concerning science and sexuality.

In the previous chapter we saw how Poe’s detective, C. Auguste Dupin, functioned as a cipher for neo-Kantian ideas. In my Foucauldian reading of *Dracula* I focus upon a similar process of detection, arguing that the Count poses a seemingly threatening absence for bourgeois culture, one which is articulated through an apparent clash between feudal and bourgeois knowledge claims. My historicist Foucauldian reading will thus acknowledge class relations in ways which my reading of sublimity does not (or only obliquely so).
From sexuality to textuality: the problem of ‘truth’ in *Dracula*

... not only could sex be affected by its own diseases, it could also, if it was not controlled, transmit diseases or create others that would afflict future generations. (p. 118)

... we belong to a society which has ordered sex’s difficult knowledge, not according to the transmission of secrets, but around the slow surfacing of confidential statements. (pp. 62–3)

Foucault’s formulation of a *scientia sexualis*, as outlined in these quotations, argues the case that in the nineteenth century bodies were invested with a sexuality, an examination of which would expose the ‘truth’ of the subject. That is a ‘truth’ of the subject’s position within a symbolic order which, for Foucault, has to be encouraged to express itself in order for it to be translated by a medico-psychological discourse which gauges the ‘health’ of sexuality. This is opposed to an *ars erotica* characterised by a symbolics of blood, which existed at a time when the notion of possessing a certain type of blood was of social and economic importance. The aristocrat ensured descent by virtue of noble blood and as such, blood lines were closely related to sexuality. For the emerging bourgeoisie the symbolics of blood became retranslated into theories of sexuality. This means that with the rise of the professional middle classes possession of a certain kind of blood no longer ensured group membership; rather it was health and the possibilities of inherited family wealth which assured economic success.

However, as Foucault points out, the bourgeoisie’s sexuality was precarious, subject to infection and susceptible to disease, and thus it was through the ‘slow surfacing of confidential statements’ that access to this vulnerable sexuality was made possible. The bourgeoisie considered its sexuality ‘a fragile treasure, a secret that had to be discovered at all costs’ (p. 120), and as such the bourgeoisie were encouraged to confess their secret desires. The problem of sexuality was therefore associated with a problem of truth, of its status and function and of how it was to disclose itself. This process of disclosure, this problem of sexuality, appears to construct a possible reading of *Dracula* which reveals an antagonism between a symbolics of blood (the Count) and a theory of sexuality (the opposing bourgeois group).