

Considering in detail
one or two passages,
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Bram Stoker's use of setting to establish some of the key gothic elements to the novel *Dracula* proves to be crucial in developing both suspense and intrigue. This can be studied particularly closely with reference to Jonathan Harker's narrative of his journey into the Carpathian Mountains and Mina Harker's description of her hometown, Whitby. Both passages highlight the natural beauty of the area as well as a lingering sense of mystery, resulting in heightened dramatic tension. This is more apparent within Jonathan Harker's account of his crossing through an area that is one of "the wildest and least known portions of Europe." Mina's description of Whitby, a "beautifully green," "lovely place," is also shrouded with legends that are a direct consequence of the way in which the setting is perceived. Indeed, the perception of Whitby Abbey as a ruin that locks in the "white lady" is linked in to the myth of the bells that ring when ships at sea are lost to cause apprehension within the reader that persistently increases throughout the novel. Meanwhile, the repetition and reiteration of the "darkness" and "grim," "solemn effect" of nightfall in Transylvania foreshadow the imminent horror that await both Jonathan and Mina. Both selected passages precede the arrival of Count Dracula- initially, before Jonathan meets him at Castle Dracula, and, subsequently, upon the Count's arrival in Whitby, England. Therefore, the use of setting as a device to create suspense is highly successful. The result is an excited anticipation of an "atmosphere" that will soon evolve into an "oppressive sense of thunder." The reader is forced to recognize the fear of the unknown. Jonathan Harker's passage through Transylvania and towards the Carpathian Mountains begins with reassuringly pleasant scenery. "A bewildering mass of fruit blossom" in a "green sloping

land” encourages a false sense of security that Stoker soon exploits. Indeed, he leaves the reader in awe of such an obscure and far-away land: “ the mighty slopes” are said to have “ towered” over Harker, while the “ jagged rock” and “ pointed crags” of the mountains present the landscape as daunting and emphasize its differences from Harker’s homeland, Britain. It must be noted that the foreign and unknown land of the East is a prominent theme throughout the book. Transylvania is said to be “ an imaginative whirlpool,” while Harker notes that “ every known superstition in the world is gathered into the horseshoe of the Carpathians.” David Rodgers remarks that Stoker creates an environment “ that with its indistinguishable location” is “ a land nether wholly material or locatable nor defined by the strict negotiations of those terms.” Indeed, to a Victorian audience that had seen the boundaries of imperialism stretch across the whole globe, an area that was so secluded was rare and unnerving. The loss of the West’s comforts and civilized nature is accentuated within the early chapters of the novel when Harker acknowledges, “ There were many things new to me: hay-ricks in the trees, and here and there, very beautiful masses of weeping birch.” It is notable that the popularity of travel books in the Victorian period was enormous - Stoker is thought to have used Emily Gerard’s *The Land Beyond the Forest* (the English translation of “ Transylvania”) to provide factual information for *Dracula*. Indeed, Victorian desire to explore and acquire knowledge for remote lands meant that the setting of books was crucial to the overall disposition of the reader. Stoker suddenly describes the setting differently, causing a major shift in mood. While previously the setting of the passage through the Carpathians was both beautiful and foreign, when night

falls, an eerie tension of the mysterious is suggested to the reader. Harker notes that “ the shadows of the night began to creep round us.” This is proof of the peculiar change that occurs as daytime ends. Stoker ensures that the reader is aware of Harker’s growing apprehension of the “ great masses of greyness,” and the “ bestrewed trees” that are said to be “ peculiarly weird.” Meanwhile, night is a “ growing twilight” that “ seemed to merge into one dark mistiness of gloom.” Stoker uses repetition of the key ideas of the landscape under nightfall to produce a relentlessness that seems to submerge the valley the carriage is traveling in, in a “ darkness” both “ grey” and “ grim.” The landscape has become a negative backdrop with an impending sense of doom. The “ ghost-like clouds,” and, later, “ dark, rolling clouds,” glide “ ceaselessly through the valleys” to give a compounding feeling of enclosure as the clouds form a ceiling to trap in the “ thunderous” and already claustrophobic atmosphere. Stoker’s intention is to establish the metonymy of gloom and horror, a characteristic of gothic drama. Metonymy, a subtype of a metaphor, uses one thing—here, darkness or gloom—to stand for something else—here, mystery and the supernatural. Prolonged darkness sets a precedent for the rest of the novel. The reader learns that darkness, – the time in which Dracula thrives as a vampire, is the time to expect the horror to climax. Like a great deal of gothic literature, such as *The Mysterious Stranger* (1860), which is thought to have influenced Stoker, dramatic tension is increased steadily, with all of the text contributing towards the author’s intention, including metaphors such as the “ snake-like vertebra ... of the road” — all used to reaffirm gothic suspense and intrigue. Mina Harker’s description of Whitby contains some of the most notable

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gothic characteristics. The easing of dramatic tension is key to enabling the building-up of suspense at a later on. The “ beautiful view” of the churchyard and the “ romantic bits” of Whitby Abbey settle the reader’s nerves, much like the initial description of Romania in the early stages of the novel. The setting of Whitby does therefore show similarities to the way in which the Carpathians are described. However, the homely feel is emphasized particularly by the manner in which Mina states, “ This is a lovely place.” Possibly most integral to the role of Whitby’s setting in understanding gothic drama is the mysterious history of Whitby Abbey and the “ legend” “ that when a ship is lost bells are heard out at sea.” Meanwhile, the “ mournful sound on the wind” that sounds during bad weather continues the sense of history in Stoker’s introduction of Transylvania. By referring to the influence of the sea Stoker highlights its significance, which is apparent later, when Dracula arrives in Whitby in a terrific tempest. Stoker successfully creates a mood of looming excitement that stresses the threat of, predominantly, the unknown. In the case of Whitby, this is clearly the unexplained legends of the setting–the “ white lady” of the abbey and mournful cries of the sea. One is naturally intrigued as Stoker uses the character of Mina Harker to accurately depict a traditional English village, while still maintaining the gothic principles of the novel. Stoker’s use of setting as a technical device to control dramatic tension and enable the contrast of the natural and unknown allow the foundations of Dracula to be formed. Through setting, and especially the effect of darkness, Stoker effects a change in mood. The thunderous atmosphere towards the end of Harker’s narrative of the Carpathians shows the suspense and claustrophobic anticipation of gothic drama. Meanwhile,

the suggestion of history and ancient legend in Mina Harker's account of Whitby ensures that the reader does not feel wholly comfortable with the supposedly "beautiful" surroundings—a sign of the terror that will ensue. The fear of the unknown in an age when imperial Britain was at its height was a topic that enticed Victorian audiences toward the idea of the supernatural and mysterious. One of the key elements that enabled such powerful themes to function was the use of setting to provide a backdrop for the impending action. In both selected passages, such ideas are explored to great effect, with the reader ultimately left intrigued and drawn into a plot that promises to submerge them in anxiety, fear and, indeed, horror.