

# Sexuality in bram stoker's dracula



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* is a blend of legendary motifs regarding the myth of the vampires. The author's imagination transposes the legend of Count Dracula in modern times. It is significant that the novel is a product of the Victorian Age. It is well known that the Victorians had very exact requirements regarding the social conduct and the education of the individual. The basis of their ethical system was restraint, moderation and the stifling of all instincts. Against this backdrop of inhibition and control of freedom, Stoker's vampire fantasy appears extremely exotic.

The essential element in the plot, Count Dracula's attempt to leave Transylvania and settle in the midst of the bustle of civilization in England, translates the fear of a civilization of being undermined and destroyed by this wave of exoticism, coming from a distant primitive and superstitious country. The story has moreover notable and strong sexual connotations. The vampire myth can be easily interpreted in terms of sexual symbols.

The act through which a vampire passes on the practice of vampirism as well as immortality resembles a sexual act in the utmost.

The vampire's lust for blood, the piercing bite on the neck and the idea of possession are all strong indicatives of the sexual act. The novel is therefore the fantasy of the civilized world's plunge into primitiveness, into the obscurity of the instinctual life. As it has been noted, Dracula's attempt for establishing a vampire cult in the midst of the busy London life is a key element in the novel. To add to the contrast of the primitive world represented by Count Dracula and the mysterious women in his castle and the modern world represented by the story-tellers or journal writers-Jonathan Harker, Mina, Dr.

Van Helsing, Dr. Seward, Quincey Morris and so on, Stoker shifts the place of his story from the Transylvanian strange and uncivilized world, where the castle of Dracula is located, to the London scene. The characters move from one place to the other, pointing to the clash of these two worlds. The fantastical legend seems to contain all the elements that the Victorian world perceived as threats. Beyond the obvious religious connotations, the legend imposes a predominance of the instincts over the human reason. The sexual aspect is extremely marked.

The victims of Dracula are transformed from virtuous and integer characters, into lustful and wonton creatures. Lucy Westenra, a veritable symbol of purity and sweetness before her contact with Count Dracula, becomes in the end utterly corrupted. The vampires do not only play with the life and death of the body, but also with that of the soul. Through the symbolic bite, the victim also loses his or her soul. Although the symbolism attached to this idea is very complex, one crucial aspect of it is the gradual slide of the victim into a world of complete immorality and lack of scruple.

The whole of the story seems therefore to be derived from a dark, subconscious fantasy of power, lust and immorality. The purity and uprightness of the characters is obviously not immune to this corruption. Jonathan Harker is ineluctably attracted into this fantastic world, while he stays at Count Dracula's castle in Transylvania. Although he is repulsed and horrified by the Count, he cannot be above corruption. His encounter with the three unnamed women vampires, during his stay in Transylvania, is particularly sensual.

The description itself is nearly shocking for the Victorian audience. The persistent feeling of uneasiness around the vampires is given by the man's plunge into the instinctual world. Despite his love for Mina, Harker is inescapably tempted by the voluptuousness of the three women: " There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips" (Stoker 33). The act of vampirism is, at the same time, one of promiscuity.

The sexual thrill that Harker feels is at once exciting and repulsive. His body and spirit are drawn, against his will, to the animal - like possession intended by the woman: " There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white sharp teeth" (Stoker 34). The act of vampirism is concluded through a symbolic kiss that seals the lapse into the fantastical and unnatural world.

Unknowingly, Harker is drawn precisely to these details, being fascinated with the red, voluptuous lips of the woman and her sharp white teeth. Along with Harker, Lucy is one of the most significant victims of vampirism in the novel. She is deliberately portrayed as a thoroughly innocent and vulnerable woman. Her sensibility however is one of the things that lead her to perdition. A crucial aspect of the sexual dimension of Lucy's possession by Dracula is the time and the nature of their encounters. Everything seems to happen only in her dreams.

The dreams are nightly manifestations of the subconscious and, therefore, Lucy is completely subjugated by the Count at a time when her reason is asleep. These nightly encounters with Dracula are the equivalent of erotic dreams. Dracula's influence is so pervasive, that Lucy is soon completely lost: "The sweetness was turned to adamant, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness" (Stoker 198). Her initial characteristic sweetness and innocence are transformed into a luring, demoniac voluptuousness.

Her tempting invitations to Arthur have a clearly erotic substratum: "She still advanced, however, and with a languorous, voluptuous grace, said, 'Come to me, Arthur. Leave these others and come to me. My arms are hungry for you. Come, and we can rest together. Come, my husband, come!'" (Stoker 198) The sexual act is here almost undistinguishable from the act of vampirism per se. The demoniac possession is realized through debauchery. Sexual orgies seem to be a pattern in cases of demonism. The story also evinces many other sexual connotations.

One of them is simply given in the specific conditions in which Dracula is able to exist. He is thus bound to sleep in his coffin during daytime and perpetrated his horrid crimes only during the night. Darkness itself is not only associated with the fear of the unknown, but also with the world of the subconscious. In obscurity, these deeds seem to become even more real. Another important aspect of the novel that is closely related to the sexual connotations of the text is the basic motif of corruption.

Dracula defiles precisely the most holy of the characters, choosing his victims among them in order to inflict even more pain: "Just as their hideous

bodies could only rest in sacred earth, so the holiest love was the recruiting sergeant for their ghastly ranks" (Stoker 278). The corruption of the innocent and even holy people is in itself a semi-sexual act, resembling the act of taking away someone's virginity. In this sense, Dracula's corruption of the innocents is a sign of violent rape. The gain of immortality through vampirism is another essential aspect of the work.

This state is the opposite of the Christian idea of a heaven, where all the reformed souls reside contently. Dracula's immortality is one in which only the body survives, while the soul dies forever. This demoniac state is synonymous with a state of absolute debauchery and corruption, in which the senses are free and the idea of morality does not exist. In this state, sexuality is practiced in all its forms, without restraint. The vampire symbolically feeds on other human lives, being nurtured by death and by the absence of a soul. It is also notable that this particular form of sexuality is not necessarily similar to the natural form.

What is distinct about it is that there are no restraints and no obstacles to it. It is sexuality in the purest beast-like form. This fact is emphasized by another symbol present in the novel. As it is well known, the legend of the vampires must have been initially inspired by a simple, natural element: the bat and its way of feeding itself with blood. This particular similarity between a bat and Count Dracula himself points to the clear hint towards an animal-like life: " " Do you mean to tell me that Lucy was bitten by such a bat, and that such a thing is here in London in the nineteenth century?

""(Stoker 218) The story reveals a civilization that is unable to come to terms with the inherent traces of primitiveness. The ' bat' is a symbol for this

return to nature and its eccentricities. The above quoted passage best illustrates the fear of a civilization to relapse into a primitive state. The modern world assumes that it can effectively control the whole range of natural phenomena, but as Stoker shows, civilization is still liable to its own myths and ancient beliefs and superstitions.

It is significant that the characters have to fight their enemy not only with their modern means, but also through the weapons that are prescribed by popular lore and superstition. Along with garlic and other cures which are prescribed by superstition, the characters have to use yet another weapon to vanquish the demonic influence: the pole or stick that pierces the heart of the vampire and kills it. This phallic symbol is the only weapon that is able to kill a vampire. The scene where Arthur uses this instrument in order to kill Lucy is probably one of the most significant in this sense.

Thus, the mythical and the modern world can meet in reality and the belief that science and development can completely eradicate myths and ancient beliefs, may be wrong. Although the book has a happy ending, and the evil is vanquished, the author does not share the optimism of his characters, and in an overall picture, the book actually demolishes the modern myth of a human civilization that moves steadily towards progress and that is not liable to a relapse into primitiveness. Works Cited: Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. Ed. by Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal. New York: W. W. Norton 1996.