

An analysis of women's roles in Bram Stoker's "Dracula" essay sample

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"Dracula" is a complicated novel with many themes. Perhaps the most prominent theme is the derogatory portrayal of women. During the time period "Dracula" was written, there was a large feminist movement and women's traditional roles were starting to change. As seen in "A Doll's House", women were supposed to be the angles of the house. They were not expected to do any work other than keeping the house clean, and entertaining the guests and children. Stoker used Dracula as a median to express his opinions towards on the subject. Stoker, like many other males of his day accepted this role of women, and was not open to the idea of women changing their roles. Women were starting to make their own decisions, and were starting to hold jobs and positions of authority. Bram Stoker himself grew up in a feminist household, but soon changed his beliefs, as he grew older. Dracula is a sexist novel.

Stoker, a sexist, was conservative and did not approve of this. His beliefs can be seen in the novel through Lucy, a typical ditz, and a woman with no inner strength. Lucy fits into the "angel" stereotype perfectly. Mina, on the other hand, represents the new breed of women, those who are independent, smart, and resourceful, like current men of the time. Mina is successful in her battle against Dracula, where Lucy is not. This was perhaps a prophecy on Stoker's part as to how he thought the women's rights scene would play out. Stoker portayed women as zipper heads, utter ditzes, and incompetante of

doing most simple things. Mina cannot be used as a counter argument because she is a "man."

There are only two prominent female characters in the book: Lucy, and Mina. This is not a coincidence; intentionally or not, Stoker has the large majority of characters men, mainly because he found them to be more versatile. Stoker, with his sexist approach did not feel that he could create as compelling or as detailed of a character with a female host. Many of the characters that were men could have easily been women: Van Helsing, Seward, Renfield, Harker, etc. Perhaps it would have even made the story more interesting, with the reader wondering if one of them could be a potential target.

Another example of Stoker's sexist beliefs can be seen through the male characters. All of the male characters: Quincey, Van Helsing, Dr. Seward, and even Dracula, are all seen as very manly men. All of three characters fit squarely in the traditional male stereotype in place at the time. They all fill roles which women were not seen as competent to fulfill. These male characters are to further establish that it would be impossible for a woman to a job of the same magnitude, and to show that women are only able to be trusted with small, petty tasks.

These three elements, combined with many social prejudices in place at the time, make Dracula a sexist novel. Personally, I do not find it offensive, but I can see how some feminists would. Stoker could have made the story less controversial if he had included more positive female characters, instead of

displaying them as incompetent and inferior. Perhaps some of the “ heroes” could have been female, or perhaps Stoker could have even made Dracula himself a female. This would have to be done carefully, however, in such a way that it would not detract from the overall theme.