

Meta-textuality within dracula



Bram Stoker's revolutionary novel *Dracula* gave way to the splendor of modernism. Displaying many ground breaking modernist techniques, *Dracula* is especially reliant on the use of a meta-textual narrative. Stoker introduces his novel with a paragraph stating that how " these papers have been placed in sequence will be made manifest in the reading of them. All needless matters have been eliminated, so that a history almost at variance with the possibilities of later-day belief may stand forth as simple fact.

There is throughout no statement of past things wherein memory may err, for all the records chosen are exactly contemporary, given from the standpoints and within the range of knowledge of those who made them." (Stoker 5). Right away, Stoker draws to the reader's attention that he is using a meta-textual narrative to tell the story of *Dracula*. The book is commenting on what it is going to be doing, specifically drawing the reader's attention to the process of its own creation. Throughout the novel, Stoker creatively stitches together different forms of media, which ultimately creates the overarching narrative and a general understanding of the power structure between the characters. Stoker's creative and wide variety of media includes things such as: diaries, shipping receipts, letters, telegrams, medical notes, journals, ships logs, typewriter entries, etc. Each artifact allows the readers to see how the story is being framed and compiled. Many of the artifacts such as the unopened letters and what are supposed to be confidential medical records illustrate how important the concept of knowledge and secrets is between the characters in the novel.

Stoker begins his story of *Dracula* with Jonathan Harker's personal diary entries, herein the readers first learn of the monster that is Count *Dracula*—

in addition to personal information about Jonathan and Mina, and even his negative views on non-English culture. As the plot thickens when Jonathan realizes Dracula is holding him prisoner in Transylvania, the narrative shifts to the diaries of characters that are in London, ultimately moving the story to London. By changing between artifacts, Stoker creates and builds the suspense of secrets and the unknown that will persist throughout the rest of the novel. By using a meta-textual narrative, Stoker leaves the readers to walk a fine line between what is reality and what is fiction. For the most part, the novel consists predominantly of journal entries and diaries. The purpose of the journal entries and diaries is to form different views of the overall narrative. However, the readers must remember that first hand accounts in documents such as those are not always accurate. The documents are all written after the events have occurred, and it is safe to assume that all of the characters have a different take on how events have taken place. Stoker plays on the inaccuracies of the documents to instill a form of doubt between the readers and the events happening in the novel.

The idea that knowledge is power is a consistent theme throughout that is brought to light through the meta-textual narrative. Literally the whole plot of the novel is based around secrets, who is keeping them—and from whom, the meta-textual narrative is the perfect tool to instill this theme. As the novel traces its way back to England, huge messes of secrets begin to emerge. This massive web of secrets begins to be woven as Lucy Westerna becomes mysteriously ill. Dr. Seward is unaware of the true cause of Lucy's frightening and seemingly incurable ailment, however, Mina has seen Lucy sleep walking in a graveyard— in addition to some odd neck wounds, this

initial secret sparks a fire. As Mina goes off to take care of Jonathan, Professor Van Helsing arrives per Seward's request, to try and help cure Lucy. Readers begin to see through Van Helsing's and Seward's separate diaries that there is one massive secret being kept, Lucy is being turned into a vampire, Van Helsing kept this information from Seward until after Lucy's death and her rebirth. As Count Dracula is feeding on Lucy, Jonathan mysteriously surfaces out west, with a bundle of secrets. Jonathan asks his beloved Mina to not read his personal diary, which they sealed up for their own safety. However this diary quickly becomes public knowledge and everyone begins to know of the monster that is Count Dracula. Within the novel, the readers know all of the secrets and are seeing the story formed before their eyes, contrasting with the characters that are all encompassed by secrets.

After Lucy's death, Mina is put in charge of compiling all of the artifacts, so essentially compiling the meta-textual narrative. Throughout, the men in the novel try and protect Mina, their dear model Victorian woman. However, Mina is aspiring to be a "new woman," she does not desire to be coddled by the men, but rather solve the mystery as an equal with the men. Due to her shorthand and typewriter skills, Mina is put in charge of compiling the documents and forms of media the gang possesses in relation to Count Dracula. So in all reality, Mina knows more about what is going on than the men—she knows the full story. Yet, in their personal diaries the men comment on how Mina is changing as Count Dracula is consuming her, yet they cannot decide if they should or shouldn't include Mina in this general knowledge; the irony displayed by Stoker herein is comical.

Overall, the story of Dracula would not have the same effect without Stoker's groundbreaking use of meta-textual narrative. Use of a wide and clever variety of media and the theme of secrets and knowledge make Dracula a truly brilliant and classic novel.