

Dracula: an epitome of the gothic novel



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Alex Prather Weems British Literature August 9, 2010 Dracula, by Bram Stoker, is quite the epitome of the gothic novel. Towards the beginning of the story, the setting takes place in an old and ominous castle, which is highly characteristic of gothic literature. Harker's tribulation begins when "the driver was in the act of pulling up the horses in the courtyard of a vast ruined castle," (Stoker 18). There is also a gloomy and menacing tone given to the setting of the novel, as in most pieces of gothic literature.

This gloom is evident early on in the novel, as it reads, "Then a dog began to howl somewhere in a farmhouse far down the road--a long, agonized wailing, as if from fear." (Stoker 16). Also coinciding with the nature of gothic novels is the ever reoccurring supernatural events, such as Count Dracula scaling the castle walls, up-side down: "I saw the whole man slowly emerge from the window and begin to crawl down the castle wall over that dreadful abyss, face down, with his cloak spreading out around him like great wings." (Stoker 39). Another common theme of gothic novels is one of women in distress.

This theme is evident throughout Dracula, as Lucy Westenra is in a constant struggle for her life for many days. "She was ghastly, chalkily pale; the red seemed to have gone even from her lips and gums, and the bones of her face stood out prominently;" (Stoker 133). In novels where there is a theme of good versus evil, there is usually a "villain" with ill intentions and a hero or heroin who tries to thwart the villain's malevolent plans. Dracula, by Bram Stoker, is a perfect example of a "good versus evil" novel. Stoker uses the Christian characters such as Mina, Dr.

Seward, Van Helsing, Harker, and others to portray the side of good in the story. Dracula and his fellow vampires are depicted as the evil characters of the gothic novel. The novel begins with the evil Count Dracula holding Harker captive, in order to attain his ultimate goal, to drink his blood. Harker states in his journal that he wishes to die rather than suffer the evil of the count's desires: " He might kill me, but death now seemed the happier choice of evils," (Stoker 57). There is a constant struggle between the good and evil characters of this story to survive.

As Dracula drinks the protagonists' blood, he becomes stronger and revitalized. He is mentioned in renewed form in Mina's journal when it states, "I believe it is the Count, but he has grown young. My God if this be so! " (Stoker 187). His transformation into a younger and more powerful being depends on the carrying out of his devious plans. Lucy Westenra struggles to survive as Dracula slowly drains her life away in order to sustain his in good health. Eventually the side of good prevails as in most " good versus evil" plots, and Dracula is defeated.

The death of the Count is finalized, as the novel states, " It was like a miracle, but before our very eyes, and almost in the drawing of a breathe, the whole body crumbled into dust and passed from our sight. " (Stoker 398). The entity of Dracula embodies many themes and motifs. He is a sign of pure evil, even taking the form of a devil-resembling man. Count Dracula's features are described as devilish in the beginning of the novel: " The mouth...with peculiarly sharp white teeth...his ears were pale and at the tops extremely pointed. " (Stoker 22-23). Count Dracula also embodies sexual desire and lust.

One can see his sexual side and desire being fulfilled as he forces Mina to drink his blood, resembling a different swapping of body fluids: "...his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom...a thin stream trickled down the man's bare breast..." (Stoker 300). One may even venture to say that he portrays homosexuality. The Count desires to save Jonathan Harker as his own: " Back, I tell you all! This man belongs to me! " (Stoker 44). He is a symbol of corruption, as he turns pure women into shameless, sexually hungry harlots.

Lucy's transformation by Dracula into one of these creatures is portrayed by the words of Dr. Seward as he states, " The sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness. " (Stoker 226). Lastly, Dracula embodies a symbol of great and overwhelming power. Dracula proclaims his own might as he declares, " My revenge is just begun! I spread it over centuries, and time is on my side. Your girls that you all love are mine already; and through them you and others shall yet be mine - my creatures, to do my bidding and to be my jackals when I want to feed. Count Dracula has a profound effect on all the characters in the work of literature. Jonathan Harker's true determine and courage is brought about to prove that he is more than just a mere solicitor when he is faced with the troubling dilemma of being trapped in a vampire's castle. His testament that he will escape may be observed in his journal as so: " I shall not remain alone with them; I shall try to scale the castle wall farther than I have yet attempted. I shall take some of the gold with me, lest I want it later.

I may find a way from this dreadful place. " (Stoker 59). One may also observe the complete distraught the Count reeks on Harker. Mina's diary

reveals that he “ raved of dreadful things,” (Stoker 116). Lucy Westenra is affected at great lengths also. Dracula causes her horrible nightmares, and transforms her dreams into “ a presage of horror,” (Stoker 138). Eventually the Counts consequence is so heavy upon her that she is transformed into a vampire, “ working wickedness by night,” (Stoker 230). Dr.

Seward is perhaps revealed as very courageous man through the actions of Count Dracula. His dedication to help save the life of the woman he loved and could not have is commendable. His love is exposed as he journals the entry, “ No man knows till he experiences it, what it is like to feel his own life-blood drawn away into the woman he loves. ” (Stoker 141). When one is dealing with a book about vampires, blood is obviously going to play a key role in the story. To Dracula, the blood is his source of energy, youthfulness, and nourishment.

He bites humans and sucks their blood in order to fulfill his undying thirst. “ The whole bed would have been drenched to a scarlet with the blood the girl must have lost... ” (Stoker 137). This quote refers to poor Lucy after Dracula has feasted on her blood in order to sustain himself and his desires. Humans on the other hand do not need to constantly replenish their blood supply to live nor is it a form of nourishment for them. However, it is absolutely necessary for them to live.

This is evident throughout the novel as Lucy struggles for her life each time Dracula drains her blood. “ Young miss is bad, very bad. She wants blood, and blood she must have or die. ” (Stoker 135). In the novel, blood is not only a means of life for the humans but also a sign of love. Arthur proclaims

his love for Lucy as he states, " My life is hers, and I would give the last drop of blood in my body for her. " (Stoker 134). The mentally disturbed Renfield sums up the importance of blood in the novel when he proclaims, " The blood is the life! " (Stoker 155).

I believe Stoker chose to write Dracula by using letters and journal entries to give readers an omniscient perspective while still allowing the story to be in first person and for readers to feel a sense of empathy for the characters. One can understand and relate to the true emotions of all the characters and understand the authenticity of the story's plot through the use of letters and diary entries. For example, readers can realize Lucy's true feelings for her fiance when she proclaims in a letter to Mina, " But, oh, Mina, I love him; I love him; I love him! (Stoker 63). The use of journal entries also allows for readers to consume multiple perspectives of the same situation from separate characters. Stoker gives Dr. Seward and Van Helsing the important professions of being men of medicine and science. This proves to be key in the struggle to maintain Lucy's life, as Seward and Van Helsing both use their medical expertise and intelligence to attempt to conquer her malady. Seward is smart, but not as smart as Van Helsing, who is the backbone of the life-saving effort.

Van Helsing uses his medical knowledge and quickly assesses what must be done in order to save Lucy's life by proclaiming, " There must be a transfusion of blood at once. " (Stoker 134). Van Helsing's knowledge of science also gives him insight into the realm of the supernatural. Although science and the supernatural are polar opposites, his experience has taught him that both are equally prevalent in life. His knowledge of the supernatural

can be observed as explains how to kill Dracula: “ Find this great Un-dead and cut off his head and burn his heart or drive a stake through it, so that the world may rest for him. (Stoker 219). In Dracula, Christian mythology can be seen with an inverted twist. Count Dracula can be directly related to an inverted form of Christ himself, as Dracula is persecuted by those who wish to rid the world of his evil doings, and is eventually impaled, relating to the crucifixion. The drinking of blood in order to sustain the vampires’ lives parallels inversely to that of the story of the last supper. As the vampires “ must go on age after age adding new victims and multiplying the evils of the world,” they only achieve physical immortality (Stoker 230).

But the story of the last supper in the New Testament teaches us to drink the “ blood” of Christ in order to attain spiritual immortality and purify our souls. “ He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up in the last day” (John 6: 54). This subversion of Christian “ myth” is important because shows the true tragedy of Dracula and the other vampires’ lives. They will never truly be fulfilled as they go on being the undead, unlike those of the Christian faith who are spiritually fulfilled by the partaking of Jesus’ blood and life.

The major female characters of Dracula are Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker. These women are both noted for their innocence and intrinsic worth as women of there society. Mina is the purest and most submissive of the two, as she has only desires to serve and love her husband Jonathan. Van Helsing credits her for these attributes as he says, “ She is one of God's women, fashioned by His own hand to show us men and other women that there is a heaven where we can enter, and that its light can be here on earth.

So true, so sweet, so noble, so little an egoist - and that, let me tell you, is much in this age, so skeptical and selfish. "(Stoker 203). Lucy, on the other hand, has a more desirable physical appearance and has a slightly more lustful and sensual side to her. Early on in the novel she writes to Mina in a letter about the three men who have proposed to her. Her almost lustfully unattainable desire to have all of them is written in the letter: " Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble? " (Stoker 66).

Her sexual side is amplified when she becomes a vampire, as she is seen trying to seduce her fiance Arthur. She approaches him seductively and says, " 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 227). Mina's importance as one of the major storytellers through her insightful diary and Lucy's role as the damsel in distress makes them key factors in the development of the plot in this novel. According to the novel, vampires are attracted by the blood of humans.

It would seem as though the blood of the opposite gender is the most alluring, depending on the sex of the vampire. Dracula tends to hunt the female characters such as Lucy, and the three vampire women have a strong attraction to the blood of Jonathan Harker. The vampires are highly opposed to items such as a crucifix, or cloves of garlic. Lucy's strong opposition to the crucifix can be seen when " Van Helsing sprang forward and held between them his little golden crucifix. She recoiled from it, and, with a suddenly distorted face, full of rage, dashed past him as if to enter the tomb. (Stoker 227). In order to permanently destroy a vampire, one must thrust a stake

through its heart. “ Mr. Morris’s bowie knife plunged into the heart...the whole body crumbled into dust and passed from our sight. ” (Stoker 398). Other precautions can also be taken to ensure the vampire’s death: “ I shall cut off her head and fill her mouth with garlic,” (Stoker 216). Dracula still remains an icon in today’s society as many shows and books such as Buffy the Vampire Slayer and the Twilight saga have captured the imaginations of many people.

The vampire figures in the Twilight novels are similar to those in Dracula in that they are both very attractive and alluring to the human race. Physically they are very strong, and both need blood to sustain themselves. However, the vampires in Twilight can be either bad or good. The good vampires choose not to feed on the blood of humans but rather on that of animals, in order to keep other humans from experiencing the cursed life that they are damned to. Vampires in this novel are also limited to their human forms, and may not transform into bats, wolves, or any other forms.