

Bram stoker's "dracula": an analysis



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Anyone you talk to these days has probably heard of Dracula. The foundation for all forms of Draculas we know today was set down by the 1897 Dracula, written by Bram Stoker. Weve all read Dracula and have a basic understanding of how Dracula is a manipulative count with the power to control his physical form and the animals around him.

When we dig deeper into Dracula we find that it isnt just about blood sucking vampires and the women they prey on but rather something much more meaningful; Dracula touches on themes such as the portrayal of the Victorian woman, gender roles of the Victorian era, and the role the asylum and mental health possesses in this particular aeon.

Dracula begins with diary entries from one of our main characters Jonathan Harker as he embarks on a journey to meet with Dracula whom has purchased real estate in London. Jonathan spends several nights in the Counts castle and soon begins to realize that the Count is hiding many secrets. While shaving with a mirror from his bag, Jonathan is approached by Dracula and Jonathan soon realizes he has no reflection. Dracula sees the mirror, gets angry, and throws it out the window. Jonathan also soon realizes he never sees his host during the day and comes to the realization that there is only two people in the castle himself and Dracula. Back in England is Jonathans devoted fianc?©e Mina Murray and her best friend Lucy Westenra. The book is comprised of various journal/diary entries and journal entries remembering certain events that happened. We ultimately learn that Dracula is a vampire and is planning to invade London and Jonathan, VanHelsing, Dr. Seward, Arthur, Quincy, Mina, and Lucy do all they can to

stop this from happening but unfortunately there are complications along the way.

While Mina and Lucy do as much as they can to help the men, they do have roles to fulfill not just in aiding the men to help put an end to Dracula but they have their gender roles to fulfill. The article by Kathryn Hughes discusses how men and women were separated into two separate spheres:

Women were considered physically weaker yet morally superior to men, which meant they were best suited to the domestic sphere. Not only was it their job to counterbalance the moral taint of the public sphere in which their husbands laboured all day, they were also preparing the next generation to carry on this way of life (2014).

Bram Stoker wanted to contrast the views of the Victorian woman in his two characters Mina & Lucy. Dracula reinforces the gender norm through Mina Murray. Mina is intelligent, wise, financially stable and a wonderful example of the new woman. She fits Ruskins description of infallibly wise, enduringly, incorruptibly good to a T. She is a faithful fiancée to Jonathan who becomes a devoted wife, I could only tell him that I was the happiest woman in all the wide world and that I had nothing to give him except myself, my life, and my trust, and that with these went my love and duty for all the days of my life (Stoker, 1897). Stoker created Lucy as an opposite to Mina. Lucy is much more frivolous, flirtatious, and indecisive. She writes to Mina telling her of her three proposals in one day, Here I am, who shall be twenty in September, and yet I have never had a proposal till to-day, not a real proposal, and to-day I have had three. Just fancy! THREE proposals in one day! (Stoker, 1897).

When Lucy is transitioning to a vampire, she defies the role of the Victorian woman even further by not behaving in a lady-like manner at all she seduces children and eventually drinks their blood. She is the opposite of how mother-like the Victorian woman should be instead of raising children she is in a sense, murdering them slowly. This can all be tied to the author and how he perceived the Victorian New Woman, in an article published by The British Library it is stated that, The fact Mina survives while Lucy meets such a horrific end perhaps indicates that stoker disliked the New Woman in particular, while admiring her more traditional counterpart (Buzzwell, 2014).

Not only were there norms set down for Victorian women of this era, there were norms as well that the populace associate with Sanatoriums and Asylums. Once Mina had heard Jonathan was okay, she then gets the news from Sister Agatha from the Hospital of St. Joseph and Ste. Mary that Jonathan is receiving care and has been receiving care for the past six weeks for his brain fever. While being treated at a hospital isn't considered terrible in the Victorian era, Jonathan's illness is mild compared to what another character in the novel is going through; this would be the character of Renfield, the asylum patient of Dr. Seward. Renfield he is described in Stokers novel as, Sanguine temperament; great physical strength; morbidly excitable; periods of gloom a possibly dangerous man (Stoker, 1897).

Renfield is an interesting character and consumes insects and other small animals in the belief that it gives him their life power and energy. In asylums throughout the ages, the mentally ill were forced to confinement, some forced onto the streets, and in one French asylum in the 15th century, patients were shackled to walls with very little room to move, were not

adequately fed, only visited when brought food, their rooms were not cleaned, and they were therefore forced to sit in their own wastes (Stanley, 2016). Renfield certainly doesn't get treated as badly as what I've read in certain articles and in the article that I have referenced. He does escape the asylum a couple of times and is fetched by workers. After he escapes, they put him into solitary confinement and keep watch on him. Renfield goes between periods of insanity and calmness as most manic patients did back in the Victorian era. We see his calmer side when Mina comes to visit him in the asylum, I was again astonished, for he addressed himself to the question with the impartiality of the completest sanity; he even took himself as an example when he mentioned certain things (Stoker, 1897). Treatment of asylum patients ultimately was raised to a higher standard in the early 20th century when reforms started to take hold and patients were treated more advantageously.

Dracula has done a superb job at conveying what gender roles and norms exist in 1897 as well as transmit the attitude of insane asylums in the late 18th century. While gender roles have drastically changed from the Victorian Era to now, much remains the same women still raise their children but also some take on full-time jobs just as their opposite gender counterpart and mental illness patients are treated infinitely better than their 18th century counterparts. We have learned a lot from our past and we are continuously working to break the stereotypical gender roles and norms that have been created for us from the past as well as learn to treat mentally ill patients with the respect they need and deserve.