
Discussion on the author's style of Abraham Stoker

Abraham Stoker was born in Clontarf, Ireland, on November 8, 1847. He was a sickly child, bedridden for much of his boyhood until about the age of seven. As a youth, Stoker was intrigued by the stories told him by his mother, Charlotte. Especially influential to the mind of young Stoker were the stories she related about the cholera epidemic of 1832 which claimed thousands of lives. These cruel and vivid tales began to shape the young Stoker's imagination. Stoker's early fiction is not of particularly high quality. He wrote short stories for children and then a first novel, *The Snake's Pass* (1890), which was unsuccessful. Stoker's fortunes changed in 1897 with the publication of *Dracula*, which still stands as his greatest literary achievement. Although the novel was not an immediate popular success, it has been in print continuously since its first publication and has inspired countless films and other literary works. Many people are familiar with his novel, *Dracula*. It is typically referred to as a horror story sure to give a good scare.

However, Bram Stoker was not merely out to give his Victorian audience a thrill ride. Many symbols and themes, particularly those of the main antagonist *Dracula*, were brought into the novel to teach a lesson. Oddly enough, *Dracula* resembles other forces of evil in other religions as well. A strong comparison exists between *Dracula*, Satan, and Hindu demons. Some differences do exist, but the parallels that are apparent bring attention to a culture's idea of a monster or threatening force to order. Although the idea of vampires had already been popular in folklore long before Bram Stoker wrote *Dracula*, his adaptation of the tale led to the creation of one of literature's most symbolically sexualized characters.

Dracula has proven the 1897 novel to be truly timeless. It is arguably one of the most beloved classics of Gothic Literature. By examining the Victorian era in which *Dracula* was written, looking closely at how the female characters are portrayed, the gender relations between the characters, and the blatant homosexual undertones of the novel, this reflection will explore how the classic seamlessly manipulates the themes of women's sexuality, gender inversion, and Christian Salvation. Discussion of theme(s) and author's style(s) Throughout the novel, Bram Stoker deals with the theme of beast versus humanity. The idea of same-sex erotica also confuses what it means to be a sexual being. As seen in the combination of male blood during the transfusion scene, men may only touch each other through women; therefore *Dracula* uses the hyper-sexuality of the mutated women he controls in order to get to the men he really wants. He is the original supreme vampire and uses his offshoots of female vampires to enact his will and desire. "My jackals [will] do my bidding when I want to feed," he claims (Stoker 360). After Lucy's transformation, the men keep a careful eye on Mina, worried they will lose yet another model of Victorian womanhood to the dark side. The men are so intensely invested in the women's sexual behavior because they are afraid of associating with the socially scorned. In fact, the men fear for nothing less than their own safety. However, more important than the meaning behind the tangible concluding events, is the fact that within *Dracula* are the ever-present struggles to define, maintain, manipulate, and explore what it means to be a sexual being; to struggle with duality. Stoker stretches the concept until it becomes as distorted as his master villain, yet in the process, brings the reader closer to discovering the true spectrum of human sexuality.

Another one of the major themes in *Dracula* is the concept of Christian Salvation. This theme starts in the beginning as Harker is traveling to Castle Dracula. The locals cross themselves, make the sign of the cross, and one puts a Rosary around Jonathan Harker's neck. We see Stoker using the theme that if a person will follow Christ salvation will be found in heaven and evil will be kept at bay. Another instance was Stoker is using the theme of Christian Salvation is when Van Helsing is brought into to save Lucy Westenra from the vampire hold.

After the Count arrives at London he begins his affair with Lucy, but not in the usual sense. The Count chooses beautiful women, then seduces and converts her while she sleeps. As Mina and Dr. Seward strive to keep Lucy alive, Professor Van Helsing arrives to aid Seward in saving Lucy. After realizing that Lucy is a vampire, a cross is kept around at all times Even though Lucy did become a vampire, it was through Christian Salvation that Van Helsing tried to save her. Stoker presents a particularly liberal vision of salvation in his implication that the saved need not necessarily be believers.

In *Dracula*, all of the dead are granted the unparalleled peace of salvation—only the “Un-Dead” are barred from it. In the novel, several characters are seen following roles and actions that are usually reserved for the opposite sex, these situations allow for the Victorian reader to understand that this is a special situation and that something is not right. In clearer terms, the switching and blurring of gender roles allow for a greater sense of strangeness and wrongness for the novel to continue successfully as horror fiction. Jonathan Harker is the first character we see allowing himself to be feminized, firstly when he is captured by the Brides of Dracula and his reactions are entirely passive and feminine: “I lay quiet, looking out under my eyelashes in an agony of delightful anticipation” (Stoker, 32).

Eventually, he manages to escape them, only to end up in a bed, ill, not only physically from the Brides' blood drinking, but also mentally as his reality is altered and he believes himself to be going insane: “. . . In his delirium his ravings have been dreadful; of wolves and poison and blood; of ghosts and demons.” Jonathan's hallucinations and symptoms fit what physicians would attribute to hysteria, which is generally a woman's ailment. His six weeks in bed allow him to regain himself and therefore bring him back into the normal boundaries of manhood, this rehabilitation is fully realized and sealed by his marriage to Mina.

However, the character who challenges traditional gender roles the most is Mina. She uses a typewriter and is economically stable on her own. She is also able to act as one of the men, helping plan out situations and make sense of the chaos that Dracula brings to London. It is her notes and her work that ultimately lead to the death of Dracula. Her actions are reflective of a modern woman, as compared to a traditional Victorian woman; however she is still bound to her culture: “Ah, that wonderful Madam Mina! She has man's brain—a brain that a man should have were he much gifted—and a woman's heart. The good God fashioned her for a purpose, believe me, when He made that so good a combination” (Stoker, 201). In this case, Mina's masculinity is acceptable because she is still a woman who plays by the rules that she is meant to follow, that is, she marries and is, unlike Lucy, controllable by her husband. Dracula, on the flip side, cannot be controlled by anyone, and his own sexuality and gender roles are even more questionable than Jonathan's or Mina's. When Jonathan finds himself a victim to the brides, it is the Count, a man, who comes to his rescue, but his intentions are not in order to save a fellow man (as a general protective motion towards masculinity itself) but because: “This man belongs to me! Beware how you meddle with him, or you'll have to deal with me!” which brings his intentions into question, and further inquiring (or hinting at) about his sexuality as the narrative

continues: "Then the Count turned, after looking at my face attentively and said in a soft whisper:- "Yes, I too can love;"(Stoker, 33). This is after Jonathan finds himself being served dinner by Dracula, rather than the brides, although he does not seem to find this behavior strange, which serves as a set up for the question of the Count's own sexual roles, as later he goes on using deceptive techniques to seduce the women whose blood he drinks. In the Victorian society that the novel is set, it is women who use the deceptive techniques and the secrecy to blur the genders and try to obtain equality in terms of gender.

Men like Quincy, use strength, and other men, like Van Helsing, use knowledge, but not cleverness or seduction. Investigation of Critical Article During the Victorian Era, women struggled to attain gender equality by challenging the traditional roles that defined them. These women no longer wanted to remain passive and obey the demands of their husbands nor are domestic and the caretakers of their children. They strived to attain the role of a "New Woman", an intelligent, liberated individual who was able to openly express her ideas. Whereas some women were successful in attaining this new role, others were still dominated by their male counterparts.

The men felt threatened by the rising power of women and repressed them by not allowing them to work, giving them unnecessary medications, and diagnosing them with hysteria (Senf). When reading Bram Stoker's Dracula through gender lenses, this rising power, specifically sexual power, is apparent. After Dracula bites Lucy Westenra and Mina Murray (Stoker 340), they are liberated from their conventional womanly roles and transformed into new sexual creatures; new because sexuality was usually ascribed to men. The men feel threatened by this blurring of the traditional, male-defined gender boundary and therefore returned the women, by killing Dracula, to a manner that was prescribed as culturally appropriate for their sex (Senf). This form of repression kept Lucy and Mina from attaining the role of the "New Woman".

Conclusion

Dracula, in one aspect, is a novel about the types of Victorian women and the representation of them in Victorian English society. Stoker uses Mina and Lucy to confirm his sexist Victorian beliefs about the roles of men and women in society. The social construct of the time involved women being inferior to men in all areas of life, with the exception of childbearing and child upbringing. Their value was only seen in their maternal qualities and their submissiveness to men. Through Mina's character, Stoker exhibits the ideal, virtuous, Victorian woman and shows, through her survival, what the benefits of following this model are. By examining the characters of Mina, Lucy, and the daughters of Dracula, we begin to see how Stoker and other Victorians view what they considered to be the ideal Victorian woman. The representation of Mina shows the ideal Victorian woman through purity and intelligence. The three daughters of Dracula represent the evil and social stigma surrounding the impure and hyper-sexual woman in Victorian society. Lucy represents the possibilities for women in Victorian society to go from pure to impure. The end of this novel is the restoration of a world as the Victorians know it: the vampire destroyed, the women rid of their evil sexual desires and kept out of the dangerous world outside their homes, and the men safe and free in a male-dominated world, playing their exclusive gallant, intelligent, and adventurous roles.

For all of its greatness in character development, storytelling, concept, etc., Stoker has written a novel that served as a timely social commentary on women during the Victorian Era.

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