
**EAST VS. THE WEST: A LOOK INTO REVERSE-COLONISATION,
VICTORIAN THOUGHT AND THE FEMININE IN BRAM
STOKER'S 'DRACULA'**

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Abstract:

The concept of vampires has long captured our imagination, serving as reflections for our beliefs, fears, and societal complexities. In this research article titled "East vs. West: A Look into Reverse-Colonization, Victorian Thought, and the Feminine in Bram Stoker's 'Dracula,'" we delve into the intricate layers of Stoker's iconic novel. "Dracula" transcends other horror fiction by embodying the anxieties and cultural tensions of Victorian England. Our analysis focuses on three central themes of Reverse Colonisation, where Stoker ingeniously reverses the colonial narrative, and instead of the West socio-culturally dominating the East, we encounter Count Dracula—a symbol of Eastern mystique—penetrating the heart of England. His arrival to the West challenges Victorian notions of superiority and control, Victorian Thought, and their fear of the "Other", which the novel subtly exposes the fear of the "other," i.e., the foreign and unfamiliar culture that threatens the purity of Victorian society. Dracula, with his exotic origins, becomes a conduit for exploring these anxieties and, finally, individually analyzing Stoker's female characters, primarily Mina Harker, Lucy Westenra, and the three brides of Dracula, to understand Stoker's representation of the Feminine. This paper illuminates how "Dracula" serves as a cultural prism, refracting Victorian norms, fears, and gender dynamics.

Keywords: Dracula, Reverse Colonisation, Victorian thought, Feminine representation, Victorian morality.

Introduction:

Bram Stoker's seminal work, "Dracula," has evolved to become a cultural touchstone. Beyond its chilling narrative, it represents the social idiosyncrasies of Victorian society, providing a broad depiction of the socio-political thought and ideology of the time. Authored by Bram Stoker and published in 1847, the novel is epistolary, meaning that the story is told through diary entries by the characters, newspaper articles, and letters written to each other. Apart from the 'gothicness' of the book, Dracula's symbolism throughout the story is what makes it so unique.

The ideas of Reverse- Colonisation and the Victorian fear of the 'Other':

"Once again...welcome to my house. Come freely. Go safely, and leave something of the happiness you bring." 'Dracula' begins with Jonathan Harker's journal. A recently

qualified English solicitor and happily engaged to Mina Murray, he is visiting Count Dracula in his Transylvanian Castle in the Carpathian mountains in Romania to help him buy a house in London. The local peasants warn Harker about his destination by giving him crucifixes and other charms to ward off evil. Here, as he makes his way to Castle Dracula, we get a gorgeous description of the Romanian countryside. It becomes clear from Harker's entries that he considers Transylvania less advanced and underprivileged, filled with superstition as compared to the Western 'civilized' society fostering scientific thought. The Count seems to encourage this idea as he wishes to shift to England, which he considers to be the epitome of modernity. He remarks, "We are in Transylvania, and Transylvania is not England. Our ways are not your ways, and there shall be to you many strange things." This is why Stoker, despite beginning the novel in an old castle with a gothic atmosphere, shifts the central setting to London- a place where science is an innocent victim under the horror of foreign superstition.

The nineteenth century was a time in England when innovation, especially in the medical sciences, was at its peak. One such revolutionary discovery was that blood played a significant role in sexual and racial issues. A notion titled the "Sanguine Economy," which had new social restrictions for Victorians who were skeptical of the progress of science, emerged in English society. Victorians believed that a decrease in sperm count would result in a decrease in blood. Thus, blood loss was thought to contribute to both medical disease and a loss of moral sanity. This is heavily explored in 'Dracula' as the vampires survive by feeding on the blood of others. Thus, when both Renfield and Lucy are attacked by the Count, Renfield falls into insanity, and Lucy becomes morally impure.

The "Sanguine Economy"'s principles also affected racial relations by instilling dread in the idea of foreign colonization. Due to the effects of British colonization, society was concerned about invasion and degeneration of moral codes. The fear of what they don't know, in this case, the Eastern Culture, is one of the components that made Dracula so horrifying to the West. Dracula wants to blend in with English society and "be amid the whirl and rush of humanity" to find his next meal quickly. To achieve this, he moves into a house with a view of Buckingham Palace when he arrives in London. One of the greatest Victorian nightmares is confirmed by this- his ambition to successfully invade the heart of Britain. Thus, as Dr. Van Helsing remarks, he is like the "coming of a sudden storm," a symbol of unrest and terror. This belief was significantly backed by the fact that perhaps the Victorian period was coming to an end. All this time, British imperialism was dependent on Queen Victoria's reign, and her death would end this Golden Age of colonialism. With that, England would be open to external threats, mainly invasions. European nations such as Germany challenged British supremacy on an international level, hoping for their moment as the global superpower. All of this led to fear of the imminent destruction of a highly valued social order.

Towards the end of the novel, as the characters set out to destroy Dracula in his birthplace and not England, they're confirmed within their specific racial and moral goals and beliefs, which thought that non-Europeans were inferior in every way. They set out on a mission to civilize the world, much like the Christian missionaries propagating the dominance of their religion. As Stephen D. Arata, author of "'Dracula' and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization," states, "The fear of dissolving into vampires is the fear of 'dissolving into Roumanians.'" Stoker's arrival of the vampire(s) symbolizes colonization, or more likely, reverse colonization." The Count jeopardizes not only the English's morality and integrity but also Britain's integrity as a nation.

Stoker is very skillful at portraying this victimization of the English culture. He uses the travel narrative to sideline the underlying imperialism and sets the mood to absolute Gothic to highlight the fear of reverse colonisation. This element, however, is not specific to 'Dracula.' Texts such as Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes's 'The Crooked Man,' 'The Sign of the Four'; H.G Wells's 'The War of the Worlds'; Rudyard Kipling's 'The Mark of the Beast,' etc. have similar themes. In Arata's words, "In each case, a terrifying reversal has occurred; the colonized finds himself in the position of the colonized, the exploiter becomes exploited, the victim victimized."

According to him, they also have "responses to cultural guilt". "Reverse colonisation narratives also critique the imperialist ideologies, even if the potential remains unrealised." So, texts like 'Dracula' could use the opportunity to perhaps forgive the imperialist sins as a form of 'deserved punishment'.

Stoker's portrayal of the Feminine:

Along with these rising imperialist ideologies, English society grew intensely obsessed with female chastity and purity as people became increasingly concerned about upholding the Victorian social order, particularly the Church. Even the medical community viewed masturbation and sexual behavior as 'evil.' We can somewhat compare these ideas with the characters of Dr. Seward and Dr. Van Helsing as they represent these values. Van Helsing and Dr. Seward treated blood loss as it would be by any other physician at the time. Both characters keep an eye on Lucy's blood transfusions and notice her desire to hold on to her numerous suitors and the blood donations that she receives. As Lucy's fiancé, Arthur often insists that he would be the one to donate her blood as an act of fulfilling matrimonial duties, and Van Helsing points this out to Dr. Seward by remarking, "If so that, then what about the others? Ho, ho! Then this so sweet maid is a polyandrist, and me, with my poor wife dead to me, but alive by Church's law, though no wits, all gone — even I, who am faithful husband to this now-no-wife, am bigamist." It is clear that 'donating blood' here is a symbolic way of representing sexual activity, and both doctors are aware of Lucy's 'infidelity.'

Gender and class roles were extremely defined during the Victorian era. The rise of the 'New Woman,' who opposed the social order and thereby undermined the

society from within by seeking to be not only legally independent but also for equality, political involvement, and education, posed a great threat. Women were expected to be the ideal wives and mothers, obedient to their husbands, and taking care of their children. Individual wants, particularly sexual ones, would have to be restrained for the benefit of society. However, the emerging political and social demands of strong, ambitious women were putting this idea at risk, especially the concept of the 'New Woman' who exercised her right to dream, work, and be financially independent.

'Dracula' portrays women as a combination of the stereotypical Victorian woman who is sexually repressed by the patriarchy around her and as people capable of rebelling against the same. According to Susan ParLOUR, the author of 'Vixens and Virgins in the Nineteenth-Century Anglo-Irish Novel: Representations of the Feminine in Bram Stoker's Dracula,' "Stoker's women not only realize the fears of the New Woman but also are equally reminiscent of the formidable women of Irish legend ... whose potency and power rejected a patriarchal system on the basis that women are equal and perhaps superior." Although Stoker's opinions on feminism and female sexuality are ambiguous, his work reflects the period of change that women were going through at the time. So, by shaping these two radically contrasting feminine roles, Stoker was able to influence early feminist women.

Understanding the women of 'Dracula':

The first women we meet in 'Dracula' are the three brides. Seductive and beautiful, they represent everything that the Victorians resented. The female vampires' desires reflect Victorian concerns about aggressive female sexuality, which was perceived as primarily a masculine role, and that they weren't meant to have 'sexual drive' or be 'sexually aggressive' as portrayed. This was also meant to symbolize how the English viewed the Eastern Europeans- sexually aggressive, uncontrollable, and crude. They held the power to seduce the innocent, pure English. To them, 'culture' and 'decency' meant very different things. They were uncivilized and even considered 'barbaric' by the West.

Further in the novel, Lucy Westenra and Mina Murray are introduced. Lucy is initially the perfect Victorian woman. However, due to her flirtatious nature, she is the first to fall prey to Dracula's influence. Her question to Mina, "Why can't they let a girl marry three men or as many as want her and save all this trouble?" indicates her desire, which inevitably results in her demise as Dracula manipulates her thoughts and dreams, finally turning her into a vampire. Stoker very obviously changes her description here as now she is a part of the three brides. 'Voluptuous' and 'dark-haired,' she is no longer a pure, fair, 'good' woman and must be destroyed. As the first step of the East establishing control of the West, Lucy's transformation is a metaphor for the corruption brought about by the strange Eastern values.

On the other hand, we have Mina. She is the heroine of the story and a clear symbol of the 'New Woman.' She is described by Van Helsing as "one of God's

women, fashioned by His 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...." However, there is a contradiction here. Although Mina desires independence and financial autonomy, wants to behave like the 'lady journalists,' and proves her intellectual worth well to the men around her, she occasionally points out her criticism against the 'New Woman.' One of her exchanges with Lucy during their holiday in Whitby is, "I believe we should have shocked the 'New Woman' with our appetites. Men are more tolerant; bless them." Thus, in some ways, Mina is a 'New Woman' in disguise. She is intelligent enough to lead the team in defeating Dracula, but her efforts are always for the benefit of the men around her as she is a devoted wife. Her feminism might sound bleak from a present point of view, but it signals the transition into the modern era. This is why when the Count gets hold of Mina to attack her, he has to use force. Unlike Lucy, who is easily 'fallen,' Mina shows more strength and reluctance to give in to Dracula's seduction.

Understanding Mina's character brings out the fear Victorian England had about all the social changes in the new age. Despite the passiveness, she demonstrates her bravery and strength in Whitby rescuing a sleepwalking Lucy and early takes the duty of elaborate note-taking and recording essential information to destroy the Count and is ready to travel hundreds of miles to meet a mentally and physically injured Jonathan in Budapest. Stoker manages to create a careful, clever balance where the intervening ideas of the New Age Woman are used for the advantages of the traditional society. "Ah, that's wonderful, Madam Mina! She has man's brain – a brain that a man should have were he much gifted –and woman's heart..." as Van Helsing puts it. Mina is unable to freely traverse borders based on gender. She must return to her appropriate, submissive femininity, regardless of whether she pretends to be one or not- evident as despite continuously praising her knowledge, inner strength, and confidence, Van Helsing and his group of Vampire-defeating men cut Mina out of the group. In Dr. Seward's words, "Mrs. Harker is better out of it." Though slightly bitter, she accepts this decision, considering it a 'chivalrous' step taken by the men to protect her.

But as the men leave for Carfax Abbey, we observe an interesting twist. It is here that Dracula kidnaps Mina, giving her the bite, partially making her one of his own. Reading this, two possible interpretations come to my mind. Perhaps Stoker is being subtle in portraying how patriarchy is selective- the men use Mina's journaling abilities to hunt down Dracula, allowing her to harness her intelligence, something a New Woman would do. Then, they discard her strength, reducing her importance to a passive wife. Dracula takes advantage of this, trying to transform Mina into one of his brides completely. Or perhaps he tries to show that despite a woman's intelligence, she is incapable of protecting herself. She needs men to protect her from external threats like Dracula at all times, so the absence of patriarchy is dangerous as it will harm the purity and stability of the society. As we progress towards the end of the novel, this pattern continues. Under Dracula's influence, Mina is already unstable,

and her innocence is in danger. She uses this to redeem herself and prove her worth to the men by accessing Dracula's mind to locate his whereabouts. Thus, the idea behind Mina establishes the boundary between the familiar type of femininity and the confusing cultural context of the New Woman.

Finally, at the very end of the novel, Dracula is destroyed, and the natural order is restored at the expense of Quincey Morris's life, who nobly sacrificed himself for his country's sake. To purify and preserve the British Empire, the three brides are killed as well. All characters embodying a foreign threat, both physically and sexually, are destroyed. "As the majority, the West is successful in defeating the uncivilized, weak threat of the East."¹

Conclusion:

To conclude, 'Dracula,' as a Gothic text, wasn't the first to portray 'vampirism.' Sheridan le Fanu's novella 'Carmilla' (1872) predated the novel by 25 years. Needless to say, Dracula's narrative, descriptions, and particularly the symptoms of vampirism are frequently compared to 'Carmilla.' But what sets Dracula apart is the world-building and the characterization, a nod to Stoker's unique writing. Dracula refuses to be a straightforward horror novel and creates a genre of its own by masterfully incorporating love, loss, threat, and attraction. It produces a lens to analyze the socio-cultures of Victorian society, making the characters immortal.

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