

Bram Stoker's Dracula
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Lecture 36

Introduction to Dracula, Literary Contexts and Gothic Monsters

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Week 8



Bram Stoker's Dracula (1897)

Lecture 8A: Introduction to Dracula, Literary Contexts and Gothic Monsters

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_Burne-Jones

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Hello, and welcome to week eight's lectures on Bram Stoker's Dracula. In today's session, I am going to introduce the author, the novel and discuss some of the literary contexts and bring you up to the nature of this novel's plot.

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Bram Stoker (1847–1912)



- "The Irish-born writer Bram Stoker is best known as the author of the [Gothic](#) horror tale *Dracula*. This immensely popular [vampire novel](#) also enjoyed great success in several versions as a play and as a film..."
- "Unable to stand or walk as a child, Stoker was bedridden until he was 7. Eventually he outgrew his weakness to become an outstanding athlete at the University of Dublin. He worked for 10 years in the civil service at Dublin Castle, during which time he also served as an unpaid drama critic for the *Dublin Mail*. After making the acquaintance of his idol, the actor [Sir Henry Irving](#), Stoker became his manager, serving in that role from 1878 until the actor's death 27 years later."
- <https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/Bram-Stoker/337436>

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Bram Stoker lived between 1847 and 1912. "The Irish born writer Bram Stoker is best known as the author of the Gothic horror tale Dracula. This immensely popular vampire novel also

enjoyed great success in several versions as a play and as a film. Unable to stand or walk as a child, Stoker was bedridden until he was seven. Eventually, he outgrew his weakness to become an outstanding athlete at the University of Dublin. He worked for 10 years in the civil service at Dublin Castle, during which time he also served as an unpaid drama critic for the Dublin Mail. After making the acquaintance of his idol, the actor Sir Henry Irving, Stoker became his manager, serving in that role from 1878 until the actor's death 27 years later.”

This set of details gives you a fair bit of context about the upbringing of Bram Stoker. It also establishes Stoker as the figure, as the author who wrote this vampire novel, which was immensely popular with the readers. You can see how he outgrew his physical weakness. He becomes an outstanding athlete and then he works as a drama critic. One can call that experience as his workshop in honing his creative and critical skills. And then he works as the manager of the actor Sir Henry Irving. So, all these help him to get immersed in the world of writing.

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Sir Henry Irving

- “Irving is widely acknowledged to be one of the inspirations for [Count Dracula](#), the title character of the 1897 novel [Dracula](#) whose author, [Bram Stoker](#), was business manager of the theatre.”



- Text and Image source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Irving



“Sir Henry Irving is widely acknowledged to be one of the inspirations for Count Dracula”, which is why this actor is interesting to us now. He is the figure for whom Bram Stoker worked as a business manager. So, Irving is thought to have inspired the title character of the 1897 novel Dracula by Stoker.

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Bram Stoker



- “Stoker's first horror story, “The Chain of Destiny,” was published in 1875. *The Snake's Pass*, his first novel, was published in 1890, and in 1897 his masterpiece, *Dracula*, appeared.
- Stoker wrote several other novels—among them *The Mystery of the Sea* (1902), *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1904), and *The Lady of the Shroud* (1909)—but none of them approached the popularity, or, indeed, the quality, of *Dracula*. He died in London on April 20, 1912.”

- Text source: <https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/Bram-Stoker/337436>

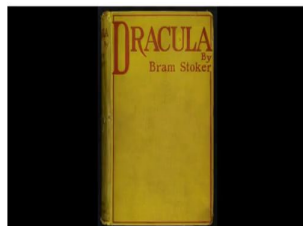


“Stoker's first horror story, *The Chain of Destiny*, was published in 1875. *The Snake's Pass*, his first novel, was published in 1890, and in 1897 his masterpiece, *Dracula*, appeared.” So, *Dracula* is Stoker's masterpiece.

“Stoker wrote several other novels among them, *The Mystery of the Sea* 1902, *The Jewel of Seven Stars* 1904, *The Lady of the Shroud* 1909, but none of them approached the popularity or indeed the quality of *Dracula*. He died in London on April 20, 1912.” So, Stoker is known as the author of *Dracula*. So, *Dracula* is his most important work.

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First Edition



- **‘I am Dracula. And I bid you welcome’**
- This is the first edition of *Dracula*, published on 16 May, 1897, by Archibald Constable and Company, London, and priced at 6 shillings.

Text source: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/first-edition-of-dracula>



On the slide, you see the illustration of the first edition of *Dracula* by Bram Stoker. “It was published on 16 May 1897 by Archibald Constable and Company, in London and was priced at 6 shillings.”

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“A good year for vampires”

- “1897 was a good year for vampires. Philip Burne-Jones’s painting *The Vampire* was exhibited for the first time and caused a sensation with its depiction of a sexually alluring female vampire looming over a prostrate male; Rudyard Kipling, inspired by Burne-Jones’s painting, wrote a poem, also called ‘The Vampire’; the spiritualist and novelist Florence Marryat published a novel about psychic vampirism called *The Blood of the Vampire* and, most enduringly of all, Bram Stoker’s iconic novel, *Dracula*, was unleashed on an unsuspecting public.”

- Text source: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/first-edition-of-dracula>



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Week 8

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Lecture 8A: Introduction to *Dracula*, Literary Contexts and Gothic Monsters

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So, the set of information on the slide tells you about the various narratives that dealt with vampires. Philip Jones' painting is illustrated for you on the title slide That is the illustration of the painting by Philip Burne-Jones. One can see that several writers of that period at the turn of the century discussed the idea of vampirism. The authors range from Kipling to Florence Marryat and finally, we have Bram Stoker's classic work *Dracula*.

In fact, it is a bit interesting to see the use of the word unsuspecting by the critic here. It is slightly ironic because there are several narratives about vampires being discussed in the public sphere. So the public would have been prepared for such a narrative in an iconic novel like *Dracula*.

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The first edition of *Dracula*

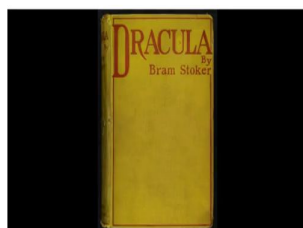


- "The cover design is simple but striking; bold red lettering standing out against a yellow cover. Yellow was synonymous with the more adventurous and transgressive elements of the [Victorian fin de siècle](#). It was the colour used for the jackets of disreputable French novels. Dorian Gray in [Oscar Wilde's](#) novel [The Picture of Dorian Gray](#) (1890) is seduced and poisoned by the contents of a yellow book (usually taken as being *À rebours* by the French novelist Joris Karl Huysmans)."

Text source: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/first-edition-of-dracula>



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We are focusing on the colour symbolism of this novel’s cover design. It has a yellow cover and yellow was traditionally associated with something that was out of the ordinary, adventurous and slightly outside the pale of respectability as well. So, it was seen as transgressive. And this kind of colour symbolism was particularly relevant during the end of the century or Victorian fin de siecle turn of the century. And in Oscar Wilde's novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian Gray is supposed to have been seduced by the contents of a yellow book and that work is referenced there on the slide for you. So, one can see that this novel is using certain cultural cues to advertise its contents for the reading public.

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Colour Symbolism



- “The quarterly periodical [The Yellow Book](#), published from 1894 to 1897, with its distinctive illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley became the definitive embodiment of the transgressive spirit of the age. By giving *Dracula* a yellow cover the publishers were deliberately aligning the novel with this more experimental, and for many rather disreputable, form of literature.”
- Text source: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/first-edition-of-Dracula>



The first edition of Dracula



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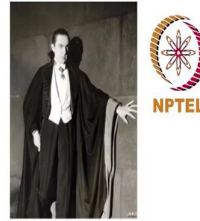
“The quarterly periodical, *The Yellow Book*, published from 1894 to 1897 with its distinctive illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley became the definitive embodiment of the transgressive spirit of the age. By giving *Dracula* a yellow cover, the publishers were deliberately aligning the novel with this more experimental, and for many rather disreputable, form of literature.”

So, in addition to that narrative that we saw earlier mentioned in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Likewise, *The Yellow Book* itself, which was a quarterly periodical published from 1894 to 1897, contains suggestions of transgression. It became the embodiment of transgression of rebellion in that age. And by giving *Dracula* that yellow cover, the publishers were aligning this novel alongside what suggest *The Yellow Book*, the book that Dorian Gray reads and other work which referenced on this yellow colour to indicate its radical or non-conservative spirit.

In addition to transgression and the idea of experimentality, this colour had associations with the disreputable. So, *Dracula* is experimental, transgressive and more importantly, is disreputable and is advertising all of these qualities pretty loudly through its physical cues.

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Dracula



- “Bram Stoker’s novel *Dracula*, published in May 1897, is one of the

outstanding works of Gothic literature. The story, told in the form of letters and journal entries,

tapped into the fears that haunted the Victorian *fin de siècle*. In *Dracula*, modern, progressive

Britain is menaced by decayed, aristocratic Europe.”

- Text source: <https://www.britishlibrary.cn/en/works/dracula/>
- Image source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Count_Dracula



“Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* published in May 1897 is one of the outstanding works of Gothic literature. The story told in the form of letters and journal entries tapped into the fears that haunted the Victorian *fin de siècle*. In *Dracula*, modern, progressive Britain is menaced to by decayed, aristocratic Europe.”

We see this work as belonging to Gothic literature. It has a Gothic horror. There are miserable descriptions of horror in this novel. So it definitely belongs to that category of Gothic horror. And it is narrated in the form of letters which is a Gothic tradition. We are reminded very strongly of *Frankenstein* because it also is narrated in the form of letters and journal entries.

And this work *Dracula* taps into the fears. It is addressing the anxieties that haunt the society at the turn of the century. And *Dracula* seems to be a novel that shows the attack on modern progressive society by a very traditional decaying, aristocratic Europe. So, once again, the Gothic trope of the past emerging and disrupting the present to cause havoc is communicated in this novel as well.

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Dracula



- “Superstition is pitted against science, and wanton female sexuality, in the guise of Lucy Westenra, is contrasted with the traditional respectability of Mina Murray. The book is an imaginative tour de force, full of terrifying and dream-like imagery, but its roots lie deep in the anxieties of late-Victorian Britain.”

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This Gothic novel *Dracula* is profoundly a discourse on the cultural anxieties of late-Victorian Britain and it is a fantastic, powerful, and experimental work that deals with these ideas. On the one hand, there was superstition, and on another we have science. We have excessive female sexuality being represented by Lucy Westenra and the traditional conservative ideas about respectability is represented by Mina Murray. So, all these contrasts make this novel a very potent narrative.

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Dracula



- “A newly qualified lawyer, Jonathan Harker, travels to meet a client, Count Dracula, who resides in the remote Transylvanian mountains on the very edge of Christian Europe in the castle that has been the home of his aristocratic family for centuries. The Count wishes to discuss his planned move to London. Harker soon learns that local superstitions against the Count have some basis in reality: Dracula is deeply feared, and he seems to prey physically on the local population in some way.”
- Source: Roger Luckhurst
- <https://www.britishlibrary.cn/en/works/dracula/>



Now, let us look at the plot of this novel Dracula.

“A newly qualified lawyer, Jonathan Harker travels to meet a client Count Dracula, who resides in the remote Transylvanian mountains on the very edge of Christian Europe in the castle that has been the home of his aristocratic family for centuries. The Count wishes to discuss his planned move to London. Harker soon learns that local superstitions against the Count have some basis in reality, Dracula is deeply feared and he seems to prey physically on the local population in some way.”

This is classic Gothic. It is set in remote Transylvanian mountains. It is a landscape that is isolated, remote, and far away. It is almost on the edge of Christian Europe. It is almost alien and pagan. And we have a castle at the heart of it, a castle that has been in the family for ages. There is a count, and counts in Gothic literature symbolize terror, horror, evil, cruelty. Harker soon realizes that there is some kind of a basis for the kind of superstitions that are associated with the count. He is in some way exploiting the local population, but we still are not very sure exactly as to the nature of the kind of exploitation that is happening.

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Dracula



- “Harker succumbs to brain fever, and can no longer quite trust his senses. Dracula makes his inexorable way to England, arriving on a ghost ship in the northern port of Whitby. The novel offers suggestive glimpses of how he begins to prey on a local beauty, Lucy, who suffers a strange wasting disease that the professional men around her are unable to diagnose.”
- Source: Roger Luckhurst
- <https://www.britishlibrary.cn/en/works/dracula/>
- Text source:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Count_Dracula#/media/File:CountDracula6.jpg



“Harker succumbs to brain fever, and can no longer quite trust his senses. Dracula makes his inexorable way to England, arriving on a ghost ship in the northern port of Whitby. The novel offers suggestive glimpses of how he begins to prey on a local beauty, Lucy Westenra, who suffers a strange wasting disease that the professional men around her are unable to diagnose.”

Harker falls sick. There is a fever from which he is suffering. The fever again takes us back to other narratives that we have read. For example, Catherine Linton suffers from fevers. So fever itself has Gothic connotations. Dracula is successful in his migration to England. He arrives at Whitby and he is preying on this local woman called Lucy. Nobody is able to find out as to the reasons for her sickness. And a lot of mystery is woven around the character of Dracula.

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Dracula



- “It is only after Professor Van Helsing arrives, with an expertise in occult lore as well as medicine, that we learn that Dracula is a vampire, not just a figure of Eastern European superstition but a horrifying reality: a creature that sustains a half-life for centuries by sucking on the blood of the living. Those drained in turn become vampires; Dracula is therefore the origin of an outbreak of a dangerous infection.”
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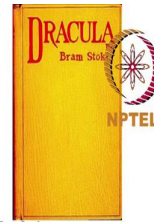
“It is only after Professor Van Helsing arrives with an expertise in occult lore as well as medicine that we learn that Dracula is a vampire, not just a figure of Eastern European superstition, but a horrifying reality; a creature that sustains a half a life, a half-life for centuries by sucking on the blood of the living. Those drained in turn become vampires. Dracula is therefore the origin of an outbreak of a dangerous infection.”

Once Professor Van Helsing is on the scene, some of the mystery is explained. People realize that Dracula is a vampire, and it is not just an Eastern European superstition. It is not just a figment of a wild imagination, it is not the stuff of legends, but it is a reality. This vampire sucks on the blood of the living and turns them into vampires. So, Dracula becomes the origin of a contagious and dangerous infection.

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Dracula

- “The disbelieving men see Lucy revived and preying on young children after her apparent death; they are forced to kill her, using a wooden stake driven through the heart. The second half of the novel focusses on Van Helsing and his friends working together first to expel the vampire from England, then to chase him back all the way to Transylvania, where they kill him, securing victory for Christian Europe over a dangerous enemy.”
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Now, Lucy who is preyed on by Dracula dies but revives as a vampire. And she, in turn, is praying on young children and those around her are forced to exterminate her by driving a stick through her heart. It is Gothic horror there right in front of you on the page. The second half of the novel is about Dracula being chased away from England first. Van Helsing and his team track him back to his home in Transylvania where they are triumphant in destroying him. Thus victory is secured by Christian Europe over this dangerous enemy.

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Literary Contexts



- “The "romance revival" of the 1880s and 1890s-more explicitly: species of romance called "the fantastic."
- cultural context - the late-Victorian world of imperialism and degeneracy theories, purity crusades and the New Woman, materialist medicine and its opponents (continental psychology on the one hand, Spiritualism and assorted occultisms on the other).” (Kathleen L Spencer, 1992, p.198)



Now, let us look at the literary context of this novel.

“The romance revival of the 1880s and 1890s more explicitly in relation to the fantastic can be seen as a context for this Gothic horror.”

There are cultural contexts as well. “The late-Victorian world of imperialism and degeneracy theories, purity crusades, and the New Woman, materialist medicine and its opponents (continental psychology on the one hand, spiritualism and assorted occultisms on the other)” all combine to produce this Gothic horror narrative called Dracula.

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The Urban Gothic



- “Northrop Frye: the romance is traditionally a psychomachia, a struggle between the forces of good and evil in which evil is defeated, and the modern romance retains this pattern.
- The Urban Gothic extends the tradition in a peculiarly modern way by defining the enemy as not only evil but unnatural: she/he/it has no right to exist at all.” (Kathleen L Spencer, 1992, p.208)



“Northrop Frye states that the romance is traditionally a psychomachia, a struggle between the forces of good and evil in which evil is defeated in the modern romance retains this pattern. The urban Gothic extends the tradition in a peculiarly modern way by defining the enemy as not only evil but unnatural. He/she/it has no right to exist at all.”

Kathleen L. Spencer draws on the idea of Northrop Frye in relation to the romance. The romance according to Frye is a fight between good and evil in which evil is destroyed, and the modern romance seems to follow this kind of pattern, but there is a slight change in relation to the urban Gothic.

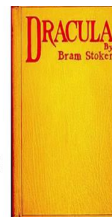
Where does this change come in? It comes in the representation of evil. This evil has no right to exist. So, the representation of evil becomes problematized in Gothic narratives. This evil can be anything that is outside of the ordinary or the norm. Let us talk more about this concept.

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Alien Element and the Gothic

- “Dracula, a classic example of the conservative fantastic: in the end Dracula is killed, the alien element expelled and the ordinary world restored. But what exactly is being expelled? In particular, how would Stoker’s original audience have read this novel? In the cultural context of 1897, what threat did Dracula represent that needed so desperately and at such cost to be driven out? How was the culture being instructed to protect itself, and from what?” (Kathleen L Spencer, 1992, p.209)

Image source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dracula>



“Dracula is a classic example of the conservative fantastic. In the end, Dracula is killed, the alien element expelled and the ordinary world restored. But what exactly is being expelled? In particular, how would Stoker’s original audience have read this novel? In the cultural context of 1897, what threat did Dracula represent that needed so desperately and at such cost to be driven out? What was the culture being instructed to protect itself and from what?”

The set of questions asked by Kathleen L Spencer are very interesting. We are asked to think about the nature of Dracula. What is Dracula? What is it representing? What are the original audience protecting themselves from? What kind of contagion is Dracula? Is Dracula a

representation of immigrants? Is Dracula a representation of the foreign? Is Dracula the representation of the non-Christian? Is Dracula the representation of sexual freedom? So questions proliferate in relation to the idea of Dracula.

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Alien Element and the Gothic



- “As Rene Girard tells us in *Violence and the Sacred*, what all sacrificial victims have in common is that they must recognizably belong to the community, but must at the same time be somehow marginal, incapable of fully participating in the social bond—slaves, criminals, the mad, the deformed. They are enough of the community to substitute for it, but between them and the community “a crucial social link is missing, so they can be exposed to violence without fear of reprisal. Their death does not automatically entail an act of vengeance.” As a result, sacrificing them will end communal violence rather than prolonging it. (Kathleen L Spencer, 1992, p.209)



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Kathleen L Spencer is using the concept of Rene Girard in the work *Violence and Sacred* to throw further light on the nature of Dracula. This is extremely useful for us because we can also think through the idea of Gothic victims by looking closely at this set of information by Girard. In a community, certain marginal characters such as slaves, criminals, the mad, the deformed can be safely eliminated.

These characters—slaves, criminals, the mad, the deformed—are like the community, but they are not exactly the community, because there is a missing link. There is a missing link. They are not the norm. They are not the ordinary figure in society. Because of that missing link, one can commit violence against these characters—slaves, criminals, the mad, deformed and

such violence will be useful to the community, where communal violence can be ended by this kind of violence against the marginal figures.

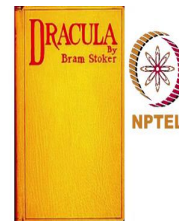
So, this is interesting for us in terms of how we understand Dracula. Dracula is hunted down and eliminated and we are left wondering, what does this character Dracula represent? What are the fears that are provoked by this strange vampire figure? There are also other victims within this narrative, victims that are not particularly the figure of Dracula himself, we will come to that.

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Gothic Victim

- “In Dracula, I argue, Lucy Westenra fills the category and the social function of the surrogate victim who is sacrificed to restore a lost order. On the surface, it would seem that Lucy belongs to the class Victorians would find least sacrificeable rather than most-a young, beautiful, virtuous girl -and that, in any case, she is a victim not of her own community but of a monstrous outsider”. (Kathleen L Spencer, 1992, p.209)

Image source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dracula>



Let us first look at Lucy Westenra as a Gothic victim.

“In Dracula, I argue, this I refers to Kathleen L Spencer, Lucy Westenra fills the category and the social function of the surrogate victim who is sacrificed to restore a lost order. On the surface, it would seem that Lucy belongs to the class Victorians would find least sacrificeable rather than most - a young, beautiful, virtuous girl - and that, in any case, she is a victim not of her own community, but of a monstrous outsider.”

So on the surface, she is a victim, not of her community, but of a monster outsider. But let us look further very closely at her character and make other conclusions. She is young, beautiful, virtuous and she becomes a victim of an outsider. But is she a victim of the outsider or of the community? is something we can think about as well.

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Lucy, Sexuality and Gothic



- “However, we are given numerous indications that Lucy, for all her sweetness, purity, and beauty, is a marginal figure. In the first place, her social connections are alarmingly tenuous: her father is dead, and she has no brothers or other family to protect her except her mother, who is herself very weak both psychologically and physically (and in fact predeceases her daughter). There is no one to protect Lucy from attack, or to revenge her death at the hands of her own community.”
- (Kathleen L Spencer, 1992, p.209)



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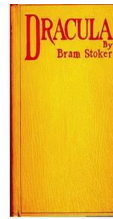
So, there are socially ambiguous contexts for Lucy Westenra. Her father is no longer there, no brothers and the mother dies before her. So she is an orphan for all intents and purposes and there is nobody to protect Lucy if there is an attack on her. So, this kind of social connections makes her a marginal figure despite her sweetness, purity and beauty.

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Lucy

- “More crucially, Lucy's character is "flawed" in a way that makes her fatally vulnerable to the vampire. She is a woman whose sexuality is under very imperfect control.
- She is loved devotedly by three different young men, which in itself is not a fault, but her reaction to this situation reveals a problem. When she writes to Mina about her suitors, she can't help gloating about "THREE proposals in one day." (Kathleen L Spencer, 1992, p.209-210)

- Image source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dracula>



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So there is a crucial flaw to Lucy's character and that relates to her sexuality, which seems to be under imperfect control. She is not in control of her sexuality. She is not in control of her purity. She is loved by three young men, but that is not the problem. She is happy about that. She cannot help boasting about it to Mina about three proposals she received.

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Lucy, Sexuality and Gothic

- “Nor is this desire to marry all three of her suitors the only sign of Lucy's suspect character. She is a sleepwalker, a habit traditionally associated with sexual looseness. She is therefore doubly vulnerable to Dracula's approach; in the symbol-system of the novel, she has signaled her sexual receptivity... Worse yet, she goes to the old cemetery, alone, and to the grave of a suicide (the only spot of unsanctified ground in the churchyard). The traditional equation of sexuality and death could hardly be clearer, nor her invitation of Dracula more explicit.” (Kathleen L Spencer, 1992, p.210)



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The third point against her is that she is a sleepwalker. She is an orphan and does not have any male figures to support her, to protect her, to take vengeance against her. And now we have realized that she is a sleepwalker which is associated with sexual immorality.

Therefore, when she goes to the churchyard and especially to the place where a person who committed suicide was buried, which is an unsanctified ground. That is not a blessing spot. When she goes there at night, sleepwalking, she is inviting the company of Dracula. So she is sending out all these cues which make her an outsider rather than an insider. She is inviting the monster's company. So, all these social cues are significant for us to analyse the nature of society as well.

Thank you for watching. I will continue in the next session.