

Dracula
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Lecture 37
Gothic Sexuality, Tradition, and Metaphors

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Week 8: Dracula

Lecture 8B: Gothic Sexuality, Tradition, and Metaphors

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castle_Dracula#/media/File:Dracula_Book_Cover_1916.jpg

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Hello, and welcome to Week 8's lectures on Dracula. In today's session, I will be continuing the discussion on Gothic sexuality that I began in the previous lecture. I will further be discussing the Gothic tradition and throw some light on the Gothic metaphors used in the novel.

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Lucy the vampire



- As a vampire she is even more beautiful than in life, but no longer the Lucy they had known. "The sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness.... Lucy's eyes [have become] unclean and full of hell-fire, instead of the pure, gentle orbs we knew"; they blaze with "unholy light" and she is as "callous as a devil" (211). Again and again, Seward uses the words "wanton" and "voluptuous" to describe Un-Dead Lucy's smile, her tones "diabolically sweet"-until she is thwarted, at which point she becomes overtly monstrous, her eyes throwing out "sparks of hell-fire," the brows "wrinkled as though the folds of the flesh were the coils of Medusa's snakes" (212)
- (Kathleen L Spencer, 1992, p. 211)

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Lucy, the vampire. We were talking about this particular character in the previous session. And I want to complete the discussion on this figure. Lucy dies and she arrives as a vampire.

“As a vampire, she is even more beautiful than in life, but no longer the Lucy they had known. The sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness... Lucy’s eyes have become unclean and full of hell-fire, instead of the pure, gentle orbs we knew; they blaze with unholy light and she is as callous as a devil. Again and again, Seward uses the words wanton and voluptuous to describe Un-Dead Lucy’s smile, her tones, diabolically sweet – until she thwarted, at which point she becomes overtly monstrous, her eyes throwing out sparks of hell-fire, the brows wrinkled as though the folds of the flesh were the coils of Medusa’s snakes.”

So this set of ideas are from the critic Kathleen L. Spencer, and she captures the change in Lucy. The once pure Lucy has now become wanton and voluptuous. She has become the un-dead. It is very significant to note that vampirism is associated with an excess of sexuality and I think that is outside of the bounds of normalcy is pushed to the extraordinary, the suspect, the diabolical and vampiric.

Lucy, when she is thwarted, becomes overtly, apparently monstrous, until then she tries to be diabolically sweet. It is very difficult to pin-down the evil qualities. Even though there are

suggestions of the devil in her physical appearance like the unholy light in her eyes. She is as cruel as the devil. So even the sweetness of that character is diabolical, it is associated with the devil.

So the comparisons that are used to capture Lucy, the vampire's qualities are interesting in themselves. In fact, she is compared to Medusa as well. Her brows are wrinkled as though the folds of the flesh were the coils of Medusa's snakes. Medusa, the mythical character, had snakes for hair. And now, Lucy similarly, through her appearance, through the folds of the flesh and its wrinkles suggests the presence of Medusa's snakes. So you can see the extent to which Lucy is pushed outside the bounds of normalcy.

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Mockery of Purity



- These same images are repeated when the four men, Dr. Van Helsing and Lucy's three suitors, return the next day to free Lucy's soul, to save her by killing her. "She seemed like a nightmare of Lucy as she lay there; the pointed teeth, the bloodstained, voluptuous mouth-which it made one shudder to see- the whole carnal and unspirited appearance, seeming like a devilish mockery of Lucy's sweet purity" (214)

- (Kathleen L Spencer, 1992, p. 211)



“These same images are repeated with the four men, Dr. Van Helsing, and Lucy’s three suitors, return the next day to free Lucy’s soul, to save her by killing her. She seemed like a nightmare of Lucy as she lay there; the pointed teeth, the bloodstained, voluptuous mouth-which, it made one shudder to see- the whole carnal and unspirited appearance, seemed like a devilish mockery of Lucy’s sweet purity.”

When Lucy converts into a vampire that, she does not really die. In fact, when, Dr. Van Helsing and Lucy’s three suitors successfully destroy her, that is the final death for Lucy. That is the time in which her soul could be freed from the clutches of the vampiric nature. So what these men are trying to do is symbolically rescue her from the devil. And she is not the real Lucy that they knew. She is a nightmare. She is a terrifying creature, who barely resembles the Lucy that they knew and the list of physical attributes- the pointed teeth, the bloodstained voluptuous mouth make them shudder, make them terrified to look at it.

So this is purely Gothic horror. She is completely carnal and there was no godly spirit in her, there is no benediction of God in her physical presence. And she is an utter mockery of Lucy’s original, pure and sweet soul.

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Gothic and Female Sexuality



- “In death Lucy becomes again the angel she had been in life; she also becomes a bond between her three rivals, where in life she could only have been a source of division. Despite their personal grief, it is for them an ideal solution to the problem she represented. In sacrificing Lucy, the four men purge not only their fear of female sexuality generally, of which she is the monstrous expression, but also-and more importantly-their fear of their own sexuality and their capacity for sexually-prompted violence against each other.” (Kathleen L.Spencer, 1992, p. 212)

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Lucy’s death is ideal for this narrative. It really solves the problem between her three rivals. All of whom are in love with Lucy. So with her death, the problematic sexuality that is represented by Lucy is eliminated. In fact, Lucy becomes what Kathleen L. Spencer calls the expression of monstrous sexuality. And not only that, Lucy also represents the men’s fear of their own sexuality, and their capacity to harm one another prompted by sexual jealousy.

So for all these reasons, it becomes imperative for this narrative to destroy Lucy and her problematic sexuality.

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Gothic Tradition and Dracula

- “Dracula looks back to the tradition of Gothic fiction, asserting the numinous in the world. It locates itself simultaneously in the tradition of the explained supernatural, a tradition begun in Anne Radcliffe and culminating in the detective fiction of Poe, and in that other, occult tradition that uses supernatural horror as an assertion of the Sacred in the quotidian, a tradition begun in Monk Lewis and culminating in the arabesque of Poe.”
- RONALD SCHLEIFER, 1980, p.298
- Image source:
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Now let us look at the Gothic tradition and Dracula’s position in this trajectory.

“Dracula looks back to the tradition of Gothic fiction, asserting the numinous in the world. It locates itself simultaneously in the tradition of the explained supernatural, a tradition begun in Anne Radcliffe and culminating in the detective fiction of Poe, and in that other, occult tradition that uses supernatural horror as an assertion of the Sacred in the quotidian, a tradition begun in Monk Lewis and culminating in the arabesque of Poe.”

What Ronald Schleifer, here argues, is that Dracula positions itself in between the two wearing traditions of the Gothic. On the one hand, we have the tradition of the Gothic where the supernatural is exploring the way, and that seems to be the case with Anne Radcliffe’s works. And it goes on until the detective fiction of Poe. It transformed itself into the detective fiction where all the clues and details are harnessed by the detective and everything is neatly explained away. So that tradition is also Gothic.

On the other hand, we have the supernatural horror type of Gothic where the narratives assert that there is something supernatural in every day in the world. There is sacred in the ordinary, supernatural elements prevalent in society, and we have Monk Lewis and Poe belonging to that category. So Dracula follows both traditions in a very interesting manner.

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Gothic Tradition and Dracula



- “Both of these " traditions" assert some sort of " sense " in and for the world, whether it be horror or otherwise; they assert the significance of things, residing on the surface of things as they do for the detective, or in their depths, as they do for the magician (psychologist, priest, etc.)”
- (RONALD SCHLEIFER, 1980, p.298-299)

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Schleifer argues that both these traditions have something interesting and significant to say to the society, both the horror Gothic and the terror Gothic. They explained Gothic and explained supernatural has something to communicate to the readers. The meaning can be on the surface of things, can be ‘superficial’, it could be temporal. And that kind of temporality is communicated by the detective to society.

On the other hand, the meaning could be in the depths. It could be in the profanity, it could be in the unexplainable sight of life on earth. And this art is significant for the psychologist, for the priest, for the magician. So the unexplained supernatural, the really supernatural do also possess a lot of significance for the society to the reading public.

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Dracula's Double

- “Dracula combines these in its very epistolary form which presents Dracula's double, the pseudo priest Dr. Van Helsing, who knows through arcane study what has happened (and like the initiate, refuses to tell); and the detective Dr. Van Helsing (and Mina), who can discover the meaning of the mystery simply by marshalling facts and compiling the various manuscripts that form the story”.
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The explained supernatural tradition and unexplainable tradition that we have been talking about are captured in a very resonant manner or evocative manner, in the characterization of Dr. Van Helsing.

Dr. Van Helsing can be seen as a pseudo priest. He can be a magician figure if you want to put it that way. He can also be the detective. Dr. Van Helsing knows a lot about the occult. He knows about really niche domains of knowledge and he has an instinctive understanding of how things are panning out in relation to Dracula. At the same time, he also plays the detective, along with the assistance of Mina and they marshal a lot of facts and details and put together a lot of documents and manuscripts that structure the narrative.

So you can see the dual roles played by Dr. Van Helsing and that kind of role, the duality, has something to say about the two traditions of the Gothic.

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The reader of the Gothic

“In Dracula the reader knows—he sees things and into things—before the characters do because the texts are already compiled, the hints already marshalled. Never does he doubt the veracity of Harker's story—his written journal—in the way Harker doubts his own experience.”

(RONALD SCHLEIFER, 1980, p.299)



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Now, this is a comment about the position of the reader. The reader is in a more knowledgeable and authoritative position. The reader has no doubts. In fact, Harker himself can doubt his own experience and assumptions, but the reader does not because he is in a powerful position. He trusts in the texts that had been already compiled for the eyes of the reader.

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Count Dracula

- “Stoker's world is presided over by Count Dracula, the past walking the earth, governing even dreams, and it is articulated by a host of narrators. Moreover, the book, Dracula, is presided over by writing, the transcription of living speech, itself metaphorically Un-dead...And at the very end of the novel Jonathan notes that no " authentic document" remains, only the transcription—one might call it the " transfusion "—of the experience.”
- (RONALD SCHLEIFER, 1980, p.300)



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Now let us talk about Count Dracula.

“Bram Stoker’s world is presided over by Count Dracula, the past walking the earth, governing even dreams, and it is articulated by a host of narrators. Moreover, the book, Dracula, is presided over by writing, the transcription of living speech, itself metaphorically Un-dead... And at the very end of the novel, Jonathan notes that no authentic document remains, only the transcription – one might call it the transfusion – of the experience.”

This is a very significant point raised by Schleifer and he makes a connection between Count Dracula and the narrative itself. Dracula represents the past haunting the present. It haunts even the dreams. And that past is communicated by a series of narrators. It is a ghostly presence. I would say ghostly, but a very powerful presence.

Likewise, the writing itself is vampiric in some ways. It is Undead. The writing is also ghostly. There is no authentic or original document. But there is a transcription of the experience or a transfusion of the experience. So it is second hand in a way just as ghosts are, just as the past also is in the present. So you can see the connection between Count Dracula and the narrative itself.

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The Gothic Metaphor



- “The central metaphor of Dracula is the grave, the crypt, and the space of the novel, despite all its continental movements, is defined by closings-in and confinements. The "mystery" of Dracula is to find what already is there, hidden within the grave or simply spelled out, to be deciphered, in the diaries and records of the participants or on the gravestone itself: "on it was but one word: DRACULA..... The eloquence of the empty grave is the fact that Dracula walks the earth and needs only to be followed and trapped, discovered, spelled out, the meaning of his name made manifest.”
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“The central metaphor of Dracula is the grave, the crypt, and the space of the novel, despite all its continental movements, is defined by closings-in and confinements. The mystery of Dracula is to find what already is there, hidden within the grave or simply spelled out, to be deciphered, in the diaries and records of the participants or on the gravestone itself: on it was, but one good DRACULA. The eloquence of the empty grave is the fact that Dracula walks the earth and needs only to be followed and trapped, discovered, spelled out, the meaning of his name made manifest.

There is a mystery. There is confinement. There are closings-in. All of these are classic attributes of the Gothic narrative. There is a lot of claustrophobia that is also a key characteristic of Gothic narratives. Despite a lot of continental travel, one always gets a sense that there are a lot of confinements, lots of entrapments. Everything is there in the narrative, in the grave, for the detectives to unravel, for the perceivers to find out and destroy.

So what is evident is that Dracula has to be followed. Dracula has to be trapped, discovered and laid bare. The meaning of Dracula needs to be made apparent to the audience. So there is an element of the chase as well, a chase that reminds us of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein.

So this novel has all the classic cues of the Gothic narrative.

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The world of Dracula



- “The world of Dracula is a world already too full, where the dead walk and leave no room, even in dreams, for the living. The land of the past, Transylvania, coexists with the modern world and threatens to engulf it. From Jonathan's first diary entry on his trip east there is an uncanny sense there is more to know than possibly can be known ...and his first vision of the castle is oppressive because the building, the remnant of the past, is so imposing.”

- (RONALD SCHLEIFER, 1980, p.300-301)

- Image source:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castle_Dracula#/media/File:CharlesBoner_ToerzburgCastle.jpg

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“The world of Dracula is a world already too full, where the dead walk and leave no room, even in dreams for the living. The land of the past, Transylvania, coexists with the modern world and threatens to engulf it. From Jonathan’s first diary entry on his trip east, there is an uncanny sense there is more to know than possibly can be known... and his first vision of the castle is oppressive because the building, the remnant of the past, is so imposing.”

Here, we have again, the contrast between two different entities. On the one hand, we have the land of the past, represented by Transylvania and the modern world by London, United Kingdom, and Great Britain. And there was a sense that this past of Transylvania is trying to trap and engulf, and destroy the modern world.

And Jonathan Harker is constantly aware that there is an element of the uncanny to the world of Dracula. He knows that there are things hidden that can be known if tried. And he is oppressed by the image of the castle, and that castle is an embodiment of the past. It is a remnant of the past, and that past is imposing and threatening. It is dangerous to this modern individual and to modern society and it has to be put down violently if need be.

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Dracula's Castle



- "I think I must have fallen asleep and kept dreaming of the incident, for it seemed to be repeated endlessly, and now looking back, it is like a sort of awful nightmare when I could see again the driver was climbing into the caleche, and the wolves had disappeared. This was all so strange and uncanny that a dreadful fear came upon me, and I was afraid to speak or move. The time seemed interminable as we swept on our way, now in almost complete darkness, for the rolling clouds obscured the moon." (pp.20)

• Image source:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castle_Dracula#/media/File:CharlesBoner_ToerzburgCastle.jpg



This is a description about the view of the castle. This is a quote from the novel.

“I think I must have fallen asleep and kept dreaming of the incident, for it seemed to be repeated endlessly, and now looking back, it is like a sort of awful nightmare where I could see again the driver was climbing into the caleche, and the wolves had disappeared. This was all so strange and uncanny that a dreadful fear came upon me, and I was afraid to speak or move. The time seemed interminable, as we swept on our way, now in almost complete darkness, for the rolling clouds obscured the moon.”

Again, this setting is very atmospheric. It is a very threatening, dark, gloomy or a Gothic world. Again, there are references to the nightmare- there are references to an obvious dreadful fear, the reference to complete darkness, because of the absence of the moon, which is engulfed by rolling clouds. So all these attributes of the weather also contribute to orchestrating a ghastly atmosphere in which the castle is presented for view.

You can see that the caleche is the courage, it is climbing towards the castle, and this is the view that Jonathan Harker gets of that environment. There are wolves as well, the dangerous predators. And they are somehow the notion that the real predator or the more powerful predator is inside the castle.

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Dracula's Castle



- “We kept on ascending, with occasional periods of quick descent, but in the main always ascending. Suddenly, I became conscious of the fact that the driver was in the act of pulling up the horses in the courtyard of a vast ruined castle, from whose tall black windows came no ray of light, and whose broken battlements showed a jagged line against the moonlit sky.” (pp. 22, 23)

- Image source:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castle_Dracula#/media/File:CharlesBonner_ToerzburgCastle.jpg

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“We kept on ascending with occasional periods of quick descent, but in the main always ascending. Suddenly, I became conscious of the fact that the driver was in the act of pulling up the horses in the courtyard of a vast ruined castle, from whose tall black windows came no ray of light, and whose broken battlements showed a jagged line against the moonlit sky.”

Suddenly, the carriage is in front of the castle and there is no welcoming light emanating from this castle which is vast, yet ruined. We always know that many of the castles and big houses that are present in Gothic narratives are ruined, deteriorating, falling apart, or some do get destroyed at the end as is the case with Thornfield Hall in Jane Eyre.

There is no ray of light in this castle of Dracula and its broken battlements showed a jagged line. It is a very visceral, scary and threatening description of that terrifying structure that the castle is. And it is once again, a very powerful, but classic, symbol of the Gothic trope.

And these structures are structures from the past, remnants from the past, which are not very benign. They are dangerous to the health and safety and sanctity of the individuals in present society.

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Dracula's Castle



- “This is the language of waking, waking onto a world so full of sentient creatures that the very darkness of the landscape seems to contain almost everything, to portend the larger significance of the places transversed. There is something, or seems to be, beyond, behind the landscape, locked there as Jonathan's " dream " (later he doesn't remember the experience described in his journal) seems locked behind (within) his transcription of his experience.”
- (RONALD SCHLEIFER, 1980, p.301)
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“This is the language of waking, waking onto a world so full of sentient creatures that the very darkness of the landscape seems to contain almost everything, to portend the larger significance of the places transversed. There is something, or seems to be, beyond, behind the landscape, locked there as Jonathan’s dream. Later, he does not remember the experience described in this journal seems locked behind within his transcription of his experience.”

Schleifer’s description or interpretation of this scene suggests that the landscape is extremely suggestive. It seems to contain a larger significance than what is apparent to the eyes of the person viewing it. He argues that there is something behind and beyond that landscape, but it is not yet very clear what it exactly raffles right now.

And in fact, Jonathan is later unable to remember this experience of witnessing the castle for the first time. So there is a suggestion that everything is locked somehow behind something and the pursuer or the adventurer has to strive very hard to get at the meaning.

The castle is very surreal and this castle reminds us of other Gothic castles that we have seen in the texts that we have read so far. We can talk about Thornfield Hall, which I just referred to. Thornfield Hall is also not very welcoming, there is also a gloomy ambience towards. You can remember the very first time when Jane Eyre approaches the castle and it is in a very gloomy,

bleak setting. The weather is not very conducive to comfort and there is no welcoming gesture that symbolically arises from that castle.

So Gothic castles have a particular tendency of their own. They seem to repel people from it rather than attract people towards it with its sociality. So we need to think very deeply about the nature and structure and ideological implications of such castles and Gothic narratives. We can also think about *Wuthering Heights*. It is not a massive castle, but it is a standard for the castle in that novel and *Wuthering Heights* is not very welcoming. Lockwood is repelled almost by its inhabitants and he really has to fight his way in to get comfort and warmth on a bleak window there.

So, castles do have certain tendencies, certain attributes, which are to be deeply probed and considered. The other castles that come to mind is *Northanger Abbey*. It is not physically very threatening but, psychologically and socially, it is not a very convenient or accommodative space for the central female character. So when talking about all these structures, we need to think that these castles are elements of the past, and the past always is in a kind of conflict with the present. They are disruptive presences which go against the spirit of the present, and in that battle, there was some kind of resolution that is attained at the end of the Gothic narrative.

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