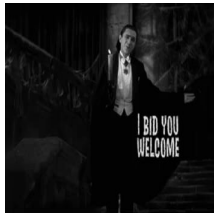


**Bram Stoker's Dracula**  
**Professor Dr. Divya A. Dohss**  
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**Indian Institute of Technology, Madras**  
**Lecture 38**  
**Gothic Transformations and Narrative Roles**

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## Week 8: Dracula

Lecture 8C: Gothic Transformations and Narrative Roles

Image source: <https://medium.com/@UniNorthants/the-undying-legacy-of-bram-stoker-5bd8cc011007>

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Hello, and welcome to week eight's lectures on the Dracula. In today's session, I will be discussing Gothic Transformations and the Nature of Narrative Roles.

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## Dracula



- "My revenge is just begun! I spread it over centuries, and time is on my side," warns Dracula. This statement is descriptive of the Gothic genre. Like the Count, the Gothic encompasses and has manifested itself in many forms. Bram Stoker and the Gothic demonstrates how Dracula marks a key moment in the transformation of the Gothic. Harking back to early Gothic's preoccupation with the supernatural, decayed aristocracy and incarceration in gloomy castles, the novel speaks to its own time, but has also transformed the genre, a revitalization that continues to sustain the Gothic today."

• Text source: <https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9781349554683>

• *Bram Stoker and the Gothic Formations to Transformations* Editor: Wynne, Catherine (Ed.)

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“My revenge is just begun. I spread it over centuries, and time is on my side, warns Dracula. This statement is descriptive of the Gothic genre. Like the Count, the Gothic encompasses and has manifested itself in many forms. Bram Stoker and the Gothic demonstrates how Dracula marks a key moment in the transformation of the Gothic. Harking back to early Gothic’s preoccupation with the supernatural, decayed aristocracy and incarceration in gloomy castles, the novel speaks to its own time but has also transformed the genre, a revitalization that continues to sustain the Gothic today.”

Dracula’s statement, the bombastic and ambitious statement that his revenge has started and it is spread across centuries and that the vampire has time on its side is symbolic of the nature of the Gothic genre itself. Gothic genre spreads over centuries. It continues to fascinate readers across time. And therefore, you can see how symbolic the vampire figure is for the genre itself.

And Bram Stoker’s Gothic is important because it gives the twist to the Gothic according to critics. And the critics argue that this novel, Dracula, plays with the original tropes of the Gothic, such as the visitations of the supernatural, the idea of crumbling aristocracy with its ruined structures and fate system, and there is also the notion of victims being incarcerated in bleak castles.

While all these attributes are still used and utilized in the Gothic narrative. The novel also addresses its own particular moment in time. It also speaks to its own culture and its anxieties. Therefore, one could say that, while Dracula addresses the key and classic Gothic attributes, it also brings something new. It revitalizes and rejuvenates the Gothic genre. And therefore, one can see why this particular mode of the novel, the Gothic continues to be relevant and fascinating to the readers.

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## Harker's Journal



- “Keeping his journal thus becomes a therapeutic act of self-preservation, apparently all the more secure from Dracula's scrutiny because it is written in short- hand. In spite of this defense, Harker's journal breaks off at the point where he has resigned himself to meeting death at Dracula's hands, and we subsequently learn that Harker has gone through a complete mental and physical collapse.”
- (David Seed, 1985, p. 65)



Let us talk about Harker's journal, which is an important element in this novel.

“Keeping his journal thus becomes a therapeutic act of self-preservation, apparently all the more secure from Dracula's scrutiny, because it is written in short-hand. In spite of this defence, Harker's journal breaks off at the point where he has resigned himself to meeting death at Dracula's hands, and we subsequently learn that Harker has gone through a complete mental and physical collapse.”

In a sense, the journal becomes a mirror of Harker's soul and experiences, his emotional vicissitudes. The journal is also very therapeutic. It kind of helps Harker preserve himself, his sanity, and it is also written in a cryptic manner. It is written in short-hand. This new invention of the short-hand becomes handy to deal with an age-old vampire. Therefore, you can see how modernity and the ancient narratives or trends come together and they learn to coexist, live cheek by jowl in this narrative world.

Harker does fail in his journal keeping when he is really at the point of mental and physical collapse and that is reflected in the journal as well. So, you can see how the journal becomes an embodiment of Harker's soul.

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## Harker's Journal



- "His journal gives the reader a "memory," a store of images that enables him to interpret the fragmentary signs that fill characters' later accounts. Their very incapacity to analyze their accounts-in this respect as in others, Harker sets the pattern- compels them to be as accurate as they can. One of the crucial events in the novel's opening sections is Harker's vision of Dracula shortly after one of his feasts. He is described thus":
- (David Seed, 1985, p. 65)



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Harker’s journal becomes a model as well as a memory. It is a vast space in which events are recorded. It becomes a store of illustrations, images and ideas. And Harker also advises the others to follow his pattern and he advises them to be as accurate as is possible to be in recording events, because these journals become crucial weapons of memory, and we have interesting episodes being captured in Harker’s journal.

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## *Dracula*



- “There lay the Count, but looking as if his youth had been half-renewed, for the white hair and moustache were changed to dark iron-grey; the cheeks were fuller, and the white skin seemed ruby-red underneath; the mouth was redder than ever, for on the lips were gouts of fresh blood, which trickled from the corners of the mouth and ran over the chin and neck. Even the deep, burning eyes seemed set amongst swollen flesh, for the lids and pouches underneath were bloated. It seemed as if the whole awful creature were simply gorged with blood. (p. 51)”
- (David Seed, 1985, p. 65)
- Image source: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p07rxf89>



And here we have one such journal entry.

“There lay the Count, but looking as if his youth had been half renewed, for the white hair and moustache were changed to dark iron-grey; the cheeks were fuller and the white skin seemed ruby-red underneath; the mouth was redder than ever, for on the lips were gouts of fresh blood, which trickled from the corners of the mouth and ran over the chin and neck. Even the deep, burning eyes seemed set amongst swollen flesh, for the lids and pouches underneath were bloated. It seemed as if the whole awful creature were simply gorged with blood.”

So, this is a fantastic description of Dracula after his feast. And you can see how fleshed out and full of blood he is. He seems to be filling out with the food that he has taken in. In fact, he seems to be getting younger and that is what is indicated in the first statement there. He looks as if his youth had been half renewed- he is regaining youthful nature. In fact, there seems to be even the reversibility of hair colour when white hair and moustache seem to go back to dark iron and grey. So the consumption of blood sustains the Count. And you can see how very visceral and graphic the description of Dracula's physical appearance is in this entry made by Harker. The burning eyes, the trickling of fresh blood and this set of details really fills out and makes this image come alive for the readers.

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## Dracula



- “The redness of his eyes visually extends the blood-symbolism to the color of the setting sun, which brings the vampires to life. Similarly Stoker plays on the double meaning of "sanguine," which defines Ren- field's temperament and hints at his susceptibility to Dracula. The main point, however, about the description is that, whatever meaning it may carry, visually it is completely unambiguous.”

- (David Seed, 1985, p. 66)

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There is a very clear symbolic association between the colour red and the vampires. There is also an association between the setting sun, which is bloody in appearance and the vampires coming to life. So you can see how vampires are almost a part of nature. They seem to be associated with natural happenings as well. Further, whatever the set of implications that may be in that description of count Dracula getting rejuvenated, one thing is utterly clear, and that is that Dracula is so attractive and so powerful in his bloody appearance that there is an inevitable attraction to the viewers as well. The people who look at him seem to be drawn by this powerful and surreal appearance of Dracula.

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## Treatment of the supernatural



- “Considering the treatment of the supernatural in nineteenth-century literature, Andrew Lang suggests that the writer is caught between the Scylla of vagueness and the Charybdis of being absurdly explicit: “If you paint your ghost with too heavy a hand, you raise laughter, not fear. If you touch him too lightly, you raise unsatisfied curiosity, not fear.”
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In the context of the description of Dracula, his appearance, after his feast, Andrew Lang’s comment about the description of the supernatural is significant. What Andrew Lang says that, if you describe too closely, then there is a possibility that the description might end up comical. But if you describe him too lightly without a lot of details, then there will be unsatisfied curiosity and dissatisfaction on the part of the reader. Therefore, it is incumbent on the writer to strike a balance in his or her description of the physical state of the vampire.

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## Harker's Journal



- “Stoker contains these rather stagy revelations within a journal that tries to avoid recognizing their disturbing implications. Nevertheless, Harker's journal conveys the overwhelming physical force of Dracula, on which later chapters can capitalize, and sensitizes the reader to the significance of dogs or wolves, bats, the sunset (which characters naively insist on treating as merely "beautiful"), and other details”.
- (David Seed, 1985, p. 66)



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What Stoker does in terms of the description of Dracula that we just saw on Harker's journal is that, by placing such description in a narrative, he is somehow managing the complications in the description of the vampire. It is removed one step with the description being inside a journal. Therefore, while the visceral nature of the vampire is communicated, it is also distanced and it also sensitizes the reader to such a description of not only the vampire but also other animals, such as dogs, wolves, bats and sunset, all of which have an association with the vampire. While the characters in the novel might look at them as being part of nature or as simply beautiful, the reader will know that there are symbolic associations between these creatures and the vampires.



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## The reader of the Gothic



- “The reader is thus invited to make a series of recognitions, to spot resemblances between later events and those in the opening four chapters. The excursion to Whitby, for example, repeats Harker’s travelogue; Mina thinks she sees Dracula’s eyes glowing in the night but dismisses it as an optical illusion, exactly the kind of rationalizing reflex that Harker makes; and Dr. Seward thinks, again like Harker, that he is going mad. In all these cases a principle of delay is involved. Until the third section of the novel, only the reader has access to all the journals and letters, and he is therefore in a position more favorable to making these recognitions”.
- (David Seed, 1985, p. 66)



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So, as I already pointed out in my previous lecture, the reader of the Gothic is in a more advantageous position. The reader knows the narrative more or less completely because of all the documentation that he or she has come across. And therefore, unlike the characters such as Harker or Mina or Dr. Seward, who cannot trust their eyes, (for instance, Mina thinks that Dracula’s eyes which are glowing might simply be an optical illusion, an illusion of the light), the readers are the ones who have the privileged access to greater knowledge and therefore, they have stronger evidence before they make their assumptions and conclusions.

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## Gothic tradition

- “The first four chapters seem to present a miniature pastiche-Gothic novel. In place of the Apennines, as in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, we now have the mountains of Transylvania. Although Dracula claims that his descendants stretch back to Attila the Hun, his literary pedigree is rather more obvious. Like Montoni and Heath-cliff, he is defined by his strength, pride, and recurring association with darkness. Transylvania clearly supplied Stoker with a revamped Gothic setting, which he then filled out by drawing on contemporary anthropological accounts.”
- (David Seed, 1985, p.69)
- [Image source: https://wesdance.com/dracula-bbc](https://wesdance.com/dracula-bbc)



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The first four chapters of Stoker's *Dracula* very clearly connects this narrative with the other Gothic narratives that we have seen and read. For instance, we are reminded of Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and the Count Montoni, as well as Heath-cliff and Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. So Dracula has his connections to all these characters because Montoni, Heath-cliff and Dracula have this similarity in terms of strength, egotism and their association with darkness.

So, Stoker's *Dracula* follows a particular tradition of the Gothic that the readers would have been familiar with, and Transylvania is also a setting that is symbolically connected to other Gothic narratives in its foreign nature and remote setting.

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## Distinct Gothic Tradition

- “After chapter 4, however, he had the problem of introducing fantastic and feudal materials into a familiar contemporary country. Here again we should turn to Wilkie Collins. Reviewing M. E. Braddon's *Aurora Floyd* in 1865, Henry James praised Collins for introducing “the mysteries which are at our own doors” into fiction and for getting rid of hackneyed Gothic props. He continues: “Instead of the terrors of 'Udolpho,' we were treated to the terrors of the cheerful country-house and the busy London lodgings. And there is no doubt that these were infinitely the more terrible.”
- David Seed, 1985, p.71
- [Image source: https://wesdance.com/dracula-bbc](https://wesdance.com/dracula-bbc)



“After chapter four, however, he had the problem of introducing fantastic and feudal materials into a familiar contemporary country”, according to David Seed, the critic that we are discussing for today.

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Now, there is a twist to the Gothic which does happen towards the second half of the 19th century. In relation to *Aurora Floyd*, Henry James argues that the Gothic props that the readers have hitherto seen are hackneyed clichéd. All these castles and terrors of Udolpho have been swapped for the terrors within country-houses and urban London settings. And he suggests that these modern edifices and domestic structures are more terrible than the previously witnessed castles in foreign and remote settings.

Now, let us see how *Dracula* fits in with this kind of perspective. We do know that the modernity does make a very strong appearance in *Dracula*. London and its modernity is introduced in this novel as well.

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## Abraham Van Helsing



- “Abraham Van Helsing combines the roles of detective, psychic investigator, philosopher, and scientist. He seems to have been based partly on Max Muller (a friend of Stoker's) and partly on Le Fanu's Dr. Hesselius. Whatever his origins, his narrative role is clear. He is called into the novel to cure Lucy, who becomes the rallying point for Dracula's opponents. It is Van Helsing who counteracts the fragmenting effects of the narrative documents in Section Two”.
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Now, before I discuss Abraham Van Helsing, I will finish up the previous point about modernity being more terrible than the ancient art settings, and that is the case with Dracula as well. In Dracula, there is a big struggle put up by a team of men who want to chase this vampire that is resisting civilized Britain and they are very successful in chasing the vampire out of their country and they chase it up back to Transylvania to destroy it. So, that particular argument of Henry James does work in Stoker's case too.

Now, let us look at Abraham Van Helsing. He is a very interesting character because he blends a lot of professions in his character. He is a detective, s a psychic investigator, a philosopher as well as a scientist. So, he is multidimensional in his talents and he comes to treat Lucy, and he becomes the rallying point of all the opponents of Dracula. He seems to marshal the men together and he is useful in explaining certain fragmented effects in the documents that we find in Section Two.

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## Abraham Van Helsing



- "His injunction at the end of chapter 12 ("wait and see") is as much a comment to the reader as to Dr. Seward, since Van Helsing is gradually leading characters and reader alike out of their bewilderment. He articulates the confidence that an explanation exists for the partial and diverse phenomena that fill the narrative and accelerates the process of coming together that takes place in the second half of Section Two."
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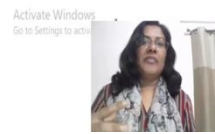
So, Van Helsing is a figure who becomes a natural leader because he is instilling a lot of confidence, not only in his team but also he is exhorting the reader to be patient and see what is yet to happen. And he instils them with the faith that whatever is happening does have a set of natural explanation.

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## Gothic solidarity



- "That section's concluding chapter (16) is startlingly homogeneous after the interruptions of letters, telegrams, and newspaper articles. It consists not only of one single journal entry but of a group action (the second killing of Lucy), whose solidarity is confirmed by the final vow of resolution."
- (David Seed, 1985, p.71)



“That section’s concluding chapter is startlingly homogenous after the interruptions of letters, telegrams and newspaper articles. It consists not only of one single journal entry but of a group action (the second killing of Lucy), whose solidarity is confirmed by the final vow of resolution.”

So, what is interesting to me here in this set of information is that the solidarity of the men is established by their group action of eliminating Lucy. And on top of that group action, they also make this resolution of eliminating the greatest threat that they have ever seen.

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## Nature’s Mysteries



- Van Helsing not only confronts the irrational but explains it. At two key points in the novel (in chapters 14 and 24) he expounds vampire lore to his skeptical companions by locating vampirism within a broad context of Nature's mysteries. Even the caves inhabited by Dracula are "full of strangeness of the geologic and chemical world." The caves become a Shelleyan metaphor of man's ignorance: "There are deep caverns and fissures that reach none know whither" (p. 319)
- (David Seed, 1985, p.71)



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Van Helsing becomes this key figure as I have been pointing out in explaining the unexplainable. He explains the irrational. He mixes it up clear and convincing to his companions, and he locates the legend of vampire, the vampire lore within the context of nature's mysteries. The vampire seemed to be part of nature. In fact, even the dark and gloomy caves inhabited and used by Dracula are full of strangeness and they contain some of the geological and chemical mysteries of nature.

And therefore, these caves become metaphors for man's ignorance as well. Nature is not all explained away so that in-explainable part of nature becomes an embodiment of man's ignorance. And there was this idea that the caverns and fissures reach to places that we do not know where on earth. So these are some of the metaphors used to talk about man's vulnerability.

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## Force of Evil



- “Van Helsing's standpoint in this respect anticipates Stoker's own in a 1908 article entitled "The Censorship of Fiction." Here, as in Dracula, Stoker suggests a battle that is both internal as well as external:
- “The force of evil, anti-ethical evil, is the more dangerous as it is a natural force. It is as natural for man to sin as to live and to take a part in the necessary strife of living. But if progress be a good and is to be aimed at in the organisation of national forces, the powers of evil, natural as well as arbitrary, must be combated all along the line. It is not sufficient to make a stand, however great, here and there; the whole frontier must be protected.”
- (David Seed, 1985, p.71-72)



“Van Helsing's standpoint in this respect anticipates Stoker's own in a 1908 article entitled The Censorship of Fiction. Here, as in Dracula, Stoker suggests a battle that is both internal

as well as external.” You can see the connection between Van Helsing’s perspective and the perspective of Stoker, which came out in the article, The Censorship of Fiction.

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Stoker is here arguing that, while it is natural for a man to commit evil actions, yet it becomes important in order to protect national forces. The whole frontier of the humanity of civilization must be protected against the anti-ethical evil. It is dangerous to allow it to take over the civilized society.

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## Dracula



- “Dracula comes from a frontier area and in a sense emerges from the mysteries of Nature herself. Van Helsing's rallying of the troops parallels the masculine rhetoric of steeling one's self to duty. The possibility of demonic depths to the self must be suppressed so that Dracula can be disposed of through external action.”
- (David Seed, 1985, p.72)
- Image source: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000cszb>



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Dracula could be a part of nature or nature's mystery, yet it has to be suppressed in order for civilizational forces to be triumphant. Dracula could be an embodiment of man's inner evil, but that evil needs to be eliminated for everyone's good.



Therefore, Van Helsing's rallying of the troops is the rallying of humanity to do their duty, to steel oneself to do their duty. So, the demonic depths have to be destroyed and it is a collective responsibility of the masculine human spaces.

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## Dracula and the Other



- "Amongst the various readings of *Dracula*, the vampire as a representation of the racial 'other' and the 'dangerous outsider' is the most prominent. The text depicts a weakening nation being invaded by a much stronger 'outsider' who tries to replicate itself. *Dracula* expresses the Victorian fear of invasion."
- (Meriem Lamara, 2018)
- Text source: <https://medium.com/@UniNorthants/the-undying-legacy-of-bram-stoker-5bd8cc011007>
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Meriem Lamara very clearly puts forward the idea that we have been indirectly addressing all along that *Dracula* could also be a representation of anybody who does not belong to the home, anybody who is an outsider- it can be a racial other, it can be a dangerous outsider. And this outsider is particularly threatening because he is invading. It is not just one, it is multiple figures from the outside that seems to be invading the homes.

So *Dracula* becomes at a presentation of Victorian fear of the foreigner. It is an embodiment of Victorian inside. So, *Dracula* becomes a catchall figure to express Victorian anxieties. There is also a suggestion that the nation is weakening, and that is why such foreign forces are invading. And therefore, it is incumbent on the men to defeat these external forces, to defeat the racial others and the dangerous outsiders, and protect the purity of the home.

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## Dracula and Otherness



- “As such, Count Dracula, leaving his home in Transylvania, crossing the boundaries of England, and preying and feeding on innocents on English soil, becomes an ‘other’ *par excellence*. This is...one of the main reasons behind the everlasting appeal of the vampire. Stoker’s vampire is both ancient and modern, reflecting issues that are, sadly, still relevant today in a world that feels threatened by ‘Otherness’.”
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Once again, Meriem Lamara very fantastically explains that Count Dracula is an excellent 'other', it becomes the classic ‘other’ to the English identity because Count Dracula comes from Transylvania. He feeds on innocent on English soil. He sucking the blood out of the English innocents, and therefore, he is a classic foreigner. And this vampire is a hybrid. It is both ancient as well as modern. It kind of combines both these apparently antithetical ideas, and it reflects those issues that are still relevant to this day when the world is being threatened by the concept of otherness.

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