# Dracula Professor Dr. Divya A. Dohss Department of Humanities and Social Sciences Indian Institute of Technology, Madras Lecture 39

Gothic Symbolisms: Vampirism and residuum

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Hello and welcome to week 8's lectures on Bram Stoker's Dracula. In today's session, I will be discussing the Gothic Symbolisms in this novel. Particularly, I will be talking about the relationship between vampirism and residuum.

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# Gothic Symbolism



• "This new attention to the "embeddedness" of Stoker's text has produced a number of persuasive attempts to flesh out what the Count might represent to late Victorian readers: criminality and degeneracy, foreignness...to name the more noteworthy assertions. While in many ways dissimilar, these readings all recognize Dracula's capacity to shape and to be shaped by the late-Victorian discourses that together constitute national identity—the colonial project, scientific theory, race, and sexuality certainly among them."

• LAURA SAGOLLA CROLEY, 1995, p.85

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We have been talking about what the Count signifies, what Dracula signifies, especially to the late Victorian reading public. And we have seen that the Count could symbolize criminality, degeneracy, going backwards in time, losing the civilizational values and going back to the primitive state. So that is what degeneracy means. The Count could also represent the foreign, the strange, and the non-Christian.

So these are some of the apparent symbolic readings of the Count. All these critical perspectives recognize the fact that the nature of the discourse with regard to Dracula is shaped by late Victorian discourses on subjects such as the colonial project, scientific theory, race, and sexuality. These are some of the subjects in which the general conversation about Dracula can offer further interpretations.

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# Gothic Symbolism

- "Moreover, many of these readings share the understanding that the Count transgresses boundaries near and dear to the late Victorian frame of mind, and that the novel, betraying a fear of cultural decline occasioned by these sorts of transgression, struggles throughout to preserve boundaries and restore cultural order."
- LAURA SAGOLLA CROLEY, 1995, p.85
- Image source: https://www.nosweatshakespeare.com/resources/literature/mostinfluential-fiction/dracula/



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What happens within the narrative framework of Bram Stoker is that there is a collective effort at eliminating Dracula, and Dracula stands for transgression. Dracula stands for breaking and crossing boundaries. Therefore, in order to restore cultural order and attain normalcy, one has to eliminate this disruptive presence.

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# Symbolism of the Count



"that Stoker's Count is associated and allied with the poorest of the poor—not the industrious artisan but the vagrant, not the respectable working class but its supposedly shiftless, slum-dwelling underclass—and that the threat of Dracula and vampirism stands in for the late-century threat of the lumpenproletariat. If the wandering and slum-dwelling poor, like the vampire, presented a material threat to the sound health and social harmony of England, their moral threat was at least equally important"

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This is a further metaphor for the Count. This is the further symbolism of what the Count stands for. And according to the critic, Laura Croley, the Count stands for the slum-dwelling underclass, it stands for the poorest of the poor, it stands for the lumperproletariat.

We realize that the fear about Dracula represents various fears and is connected to various discourses and that is what we saw at the beginning of this lecture.

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To go back, we see the Dracula is embedded in all of these conversations- the conversations about colonialism, scientific theory as to what is the best kind of human species, it is embedded in conversations about the ideal race and the right sexuality.

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# Symbolism of the Count



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And we now realize, when we read Laura Croley's a criticism that the Count can stand in for the vagrant, the vagrant who shift to us, who lives in slums.

So this kind of wandering poor is also metaphorically connected to the literary representation of the vampire. And this vagrant is a threat. It is a threat to the health and harmony of England. It is a threat which has within it, a moral threat to the social and cultural values that England holds dear.

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# Vampirism and Contagion



- "Vampirism is throughout Dracula similarly figured as a disease
  with palpable physical effects—pallor, loss of appetite, loss of
  blood and eventually death (or "un-death")—and moral
  effects—libidinousness, selfishness, and a rejection of
  domesticity and motherhood. But because Stoker's readers and
  critics have so often concentrated on what the disease of
  vampirism might represent, the pairing itself of physical and
  moral contagion has gone unnoticed."
- LAURA SAGOLLA CROLEY, 1995, p.88-89



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Let us first look at what vampirism means in terms of its impact on the physique. Vampirism is associated with loss of colour, lack of healthy appearance, and loss of blood. There is also a lack of appetite and eventually, there is a deterioration to death or un-death when the vampires revive themselves. It also has a moral effect or a set of moral effects. There is overt sexuality, excessive sexuality, selfishness, a rejection of a domestic relationship, and rejection of motherhood. So all these are the physical and the moral effects of vampirism, and Croley argues that one should focus on the physical and the moral contagion really closely because that has not been paid attention to in critical studies thus far.

Let us see what further criticism that she has to offer.

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# Vampirism and Residuum



- "Scrutinizing this particular aspect of vampirism—one that, like so many others, seems "natural" to the generations of Westerners familiar with the vampire myth—reveals yet another link to contemporary representations of the residuum. For it seems that no where else in Stoker's culture were physical and moral deterioration paired and figured as contagious but in descriptions of the of the lumpenproletariat."
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The really poor, the poorest of the poor, the vagrant poor, the slum-dwelling poor are considered to be morally and physically degenerate. So this is the aspect that Laura Croley finds in her reading of vampirism in Dracula. She argues that vampirism is connected to the residuum of the society.

# Gothic Metaphor



- "Like the metaphor of disease, the metaphor of animality figures prominently in the pages of both Victorian reform literature and Stoker's novel. Dracula is "panther-like" and "lion-like" with "long and pointed" eye-teeth (305). His homes and dirt-boxes Van Helsing repeatedly refers to as "lairs" (291-92, 303), echoing Booth's (25, 40) and other reformers' descriptions of the slums as "lairs" or "dens" where the poor live like dangerous animals."
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So we see the close association between the metaphor of disease, the metaphor of contagion and the metaphor of animality. So Dracula's animal association is found in the choice of metaphors like panther-like, lion-like and Van Helsing refers to Dracula's homes as lairs and dens. And it is also important to notice that the poor are also represented to have lived like dangerous animals in dens and lairs. So there is a close association in the choice and use of language to discuss such strata in society.

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### The Count



- "The Count's aristocratic status—he is, after all, a Transylvanian nobleman—has probably gone far to obfuscate his connections to the Victorian residuum. But the contiguity of social extremes was a familiar nineteenth century theme anatomized in the aristocrat disguised as a vagrant (from Pierce Egan's 1821 Life in London to A. Conan Doyle's 1892 "The Man With the Twisted Lip") and the vagrant disguised as an aristocrat (for Dickens, "the most vicious, by far, of all idle tramps is the tramp who pretends to have been a gentleman")."
- LAURA SAGOLLA CROLEY, 1995, p.90.



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What Croley argues here is fact that the Count Dracula is aristocratic. He is a Transylvanian nobleman in the novel, has gone to suppress the association to the Victorian vagrant or poor. So what has to, according to Croley, look beyond this aristocratic label to really understand the validity or the profundity of the Gothic metaphor.

She further points out to other 19th-century literature where the association between social extremes is discussed narratively. And the best example is in my reading Conan Doyle's 1892, The Man with Twisted Lip, where we see an aristocrat disguised as a beggar and Dickens has also pointed out that the worst of all crimes is the one who pretends to be a gentleman.

So the point that Croleyis trying to bring in is the fact that even though the Count is apparently aristocratic, he is indeed a very powerful representation of the Victorian residuum.

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### The Count



- "Given that by 1861 Henry Mayhew can treat "the close resemblance between many of the characteristics of a very high class, socially, and a very low class" (1:12) as a commonplace, the meeting of social extremes in Stoker's main character should come as no surprise. These extremes meet in the Transylvanian soil Dracula totes through England, for he can be land-owner (with its attendant security and power) and vagrant (with its spatial mobility) at the same time. Like the vagrant, he sleeps in his own dirt—but it is dirt owned by him."
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By 1861 Henry Mayhew, a social scientist has expressed the fact that there is a very close resemblance between the characteristics, the attributes of the very high and the very low class. In fact, the concept that there are associations between the 2 social extremes has become a common place in society. And therefore, in Stoker's Dracula, the fact that Dracula can represent two social extremes is something that is not out of the ordinary. It comes as no surprise, according to Laura Croley.

And we can see how very easily and remarkably, the Count represents both these extremes of social status. He is a landowner and with land-owning, there come the associations of security and power and Dracula has that. And yet the vagrancy associated with the lower classes is also found in Dracula as he travels a lot of spaces.

And one can see that in Dracula as well as in the poorest of the poor. Like the vagrant, the migrant, and the travelling poor, Dracula sleeps in his own dirt, in his own soil that he collects by himself, but it is his own earth and his own dirt. So again, the association of

property there is connected to landowning and a superior status in society. So two extremes are represented by the Count.

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### The Count



- "Back at Dracula's castle social extremes also meet, for Dracula is driver, butler, and maid as well as master. Stoker structures the narrative in such a way that we suspect for several pages that the Count is performing household tasks before we actually see him making Jonathan's bed and setting his table (27). And the latter Jonathan dis covers (and readers discover) surreptitiously, "through the chink of the hinges of the door" (27). This minor secret acts as synecdoche for the Count's larger secret: he is a lumpen dressed in aristocratic clothing."
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You can see how very skillfully Croley argues her case here. Dracula embodies two social classes- the masterclass as well as the servant class. Dracula drives his own car, he manages his own house, he prepares the food as well. So that is why she states that he is a driver, butler, and maid.

And at one point, we really see that Dracula is performing the tasks that we expect a maid or a servant to perform. Though we have been suspecting that he could have been the one doing all these household chores, Jonathan Harker discovers through a chink in the hinges of the door and the readers also look alongside him and the secret is out. And what is the secret according to Laura Croley? That Dracula is a poor dressed in aristocratic clothing, that he may be, for all intents and purposes in terms of externality, an aspirant, but he is in fact, a vagrant. That is the argument.

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# Gothic and Femininity



- "After Mina Harker awakens from Count Dracula's vampiric embrace, she asks the men around her, but more pointedly herself, "What have I done to deserve such a fate, I who have tried to walk in meekness and righteousness all my days?" (285, ch. 21). As she recounts this perverse seduction in her own words, however, she contradicts her earlier disavowal: "strangely enough, I did not want to hinder him" (284). These conflicting statements capture the peculiar double bind with which Mina struggles throughout Bram Stoker's Dracula (1897)"
- Charles E. Prescott and Grace A. Giorgio, 2005, p. 487.



Now, let us now look at the association between Gothic and Femininity.

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Mina is apparently very different from Lucy, yet she becomes a victim to Count Dracula. And therefore she asks, what have I done to deserve such a fate? She who had been so blameless, she who had been so meek and righteous all through her days. So there is also, as we find within the narrative of the novel that the risk of peculiar fascination for Mina to Dracula, the vampire, and she struggles with that kind of fascination. There are conflicting statements made by her when she says, "I do not want to hinder him." The readers are at a loss as to how to interpret her words.

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# Gothic and Femininity



- "Many critics concentrate on Dracula himself and the men who
  do battle with him; interestingly, the novel also develops Mina's
  complex subjectivity through her unspoken but deep affinity with
  the vampire. Van Helsing's paranoid observation, "Madam
  Mina, our poor, dear Madam Mina, is changing" (319; ch. 24),
  epitomizes shifting cultural anxieties at the moment when a
  long-standing ideological conception of proper femininity comes
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You can see there is an obsession with women's victimhood to this vampire. Van Helsing is paranoid that Mina will change. He is worried that she would be a victim to the attack of Dracula. Yet you can see how these critics, Prescott and Giorgio read the complex circumstances of Mina.

What these critics argue is that madam Mina represents some of the fiscal cultural anxieties of the Victorians, particularly at the point when the ideal femininity is under great attack. So that is what this novel represents according to these critics about women and femininity. They are tracking down the discourses which react to changing conceptions of femininity.

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# Gothic and Femininity

 "Although nothing seems more natural to Mina than her desire to help her husband in the public sphere

while maintaining an intimate friendship with Lucy Westenra in the private, these familiar roles become estranged by the new taxonomies of deviancy popularized during the late nineteenth century. Mina Harker exists on the cusp of culturally overdetermined boundaries that were undergoing extensive revision during the Victorian fin de siecle."

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We realized that Mina wants to really assist her husband in his fight against the vampire, yet she also maintains her friendship with Lucy Westenra, whose sexualities are complicated, to say the least, and we did discuss it in the previous lectures. What Mina Harker represents is the anxiety of a culture that is very worried about the boundaries that it draws around itself. And the novel captures the cultural moment and these boundaries were under threat during the time of the century.

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- · "As David Glover has argued, Stoker's text reveals "a fixation with unfixing the boundaries, with the attractions of liminality, in order that the lines of demarcation might be all the more strictly controlled" (48). By exploring these borders and their effects, Stoker attempts to shore up the seemingly besieged categories of Englishness, manliness, and national identity. Just as Stoker's other Gothic disruptions flirt with and transgress boundaries of personal identity, his portrayal of Mina Harker as "a stereotypically 'good' little Victorian Miss" (Sally Ledger's term, "The New Woman" 30) troubles any simple definition of normative femininity"
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We got some interesting points here on the slide. David Glover's point is extremely significant. He argues that Stoker's novel Dracula is fixated with boundaries that are getting unfixed, boundaries that are under threat. He suggests that Stoker's text is attracted to the liminal spaces and the figures in the margins between domains. The reason as to why this novel is fixated with all these issues of boundaries and liminality is because it wants to show them under threat all these marginal spaces, areas and figure so that all these marginal identities can be more strictly controlled.

So what is happening in this novel is that identities of Englishness, masculinity, manliness, and national identity are under threat. All these categories under threat, are being attacked by this vampirism or by the Count Dracula. And when these categories are besieged, it becomes easy for the novel to shore up the defences of all these categories, to reestablish more triumphantly than ever before the identities of all these categories. Therefore, this novel is extremely obsessed with all these elements and boundaries.

Further, Prescott and Giorgio argue that even though Mina Harker is a stereotypically good little Victorian mess, she is apparently very pure and strives to stay within boundaries and becomes the embodiment of normative femininity. When we read the novel, we realize that that definition of normative femininity in itself becomes problematic because of all the doubts and conflicts and fascinations that Mina Harker does possess.

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- "Although Mina would like to understand herself as the ideal Victorian woman described by Van Helsing, her affinity with the vampire becomes legible through her ambivalence about the "New Woman," her passionate friendship with Lucy, and the uncanny moments when her gender performance comes into question. Following the methods of sexologists who place such friendships under suspicion, Van Helsing subjects both Mina and Lucy to an interpretive, disciplinary gaze, looking for bodily stigmata of degeneracy as well as tell-tale transgression in their letters."
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Mina is represented as the ideal Victorian woman to a certain extent. Mina herself would like to appear in such descriptions of herself yet we realized that because of her ambivalent reactions to the emergence of the concept of the New Woman, her friendship with Lucy, it becomes complicated. She is not the normative feminine identity that she herself would like to be for a greater part of the novel, and Van Helsing, the doctor, scientist, detective suspects and subjects both Mina and Lucy because of their associations with the vampire.

And therefore, he is constantly putting them under the disciplinary gaze because he is looking for not just bodily manifestations of degeneracy, going backward in time civilizationally as well as of no overt and tell-tale signs of transgressions that he might possibly find in their letters. So you can see how femininity is always under surveillance in this novel.

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# Gothic and Femininity

- "Lucy's descent into vampirism as well as Mina's
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"Lucy's descent into vampirism as well as Mina's desperate attempts to disavow her own vampiric affinities reveal not only the coercive power of Victorian femininity but also the possibility of a cultural space in which to perform a radically different female agency that neither patriarch – Van Helsing nor Dracula – can ultimately control."

Prescott and Giorgio ultimately see what Nina and Lucy as partners that desperately try to find a space of their own, where a female agency can be played out so that they will be neither under the control of Van Helsing nor under the control of Dracula. But we realize that it becomes extremely difficult for these two female figures to exhibit any kind of female agency because they are constantly under the control of different kinds of patriarchs.

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# Bibliography



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