

**The Popular Gothic Novel**  
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**Lecture - 62**  
**Lecture Overview**

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**WEEK 12. E – LECTURE OVERVIEW**

- ▶ DRACULA- BRAM STOKER
- ▶ THE MOONSTONE-WILKIE COLLINS
- ▶ THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLE-  
SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

Hello, everyone. My name is Saumitra. I am a TA for the course, The Popular Gothic Novel. So in this session, I will be giving summaries of three of the novels that were discussed as part of the course. Those novels are Dracula by Bram Stoker, The Moonstone by Wilkie Collins, and finally, The Hound of the Baskervilles by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

So starting with Dracula, Dracula was written by Abraham Stoker or Bram Stoker as he was called in 1897. Like most Gothic fiction, Dracula also looks at some of the major elements of fear and anxiety that was plaguing the late Victorian society. So these were fears about rapid advancement of science in the society and the issues related to that, and also the fears of degeneration or atomism.

And this another major fear of that time, so to say, was this concept of the New Woman. New Woman was a term that was used to describe some women who were not adhering to the social conventions of the time. These women demanded education. They said that they wanted voting

rights. They did not want to start a family, get married or become a mother. They were independent and free women.

And this sort of a concept of a woman was very different from the sort of patriarchal idea of a woman that existed during that time, during the late Victorian society. And this, so there was this great fear among the population about what would happen if women were to become free and independent and started making their own decisions. It would, it might break down the structure of the society.

And this concept of the new woman is explored very well by Bram Stoker in his novel *Dracula*. And we can see that he is sort of being critical of this concept of the New Woman. And he does this, he exposed this concept through the character of Lucy Westenra. And he compares and contrasts with the character of Mina Harker.

Mina is someone who is a traditional 19th-century woman. She is someone who wants to get married and she is someone who is very faithful and devoted to the institution of marriage as a whole and also her husband. But Lucy is not someone like that.

She, if you recall, there is an exchange of letters between Mina and Lucy, and in it, Lucy, in one of these letters, Lucy says that she received proposals from three different men on a single day. And she says that she would have preferred it if she could get married to three of the men, all three of them. So it sort of shows her independence, her sexual desires. And that is not something that the late 19th-century Victorian society accepted.

And then eventually what happens? Eventually, Lucy becomes a vampire. She becomes attacked by Dracula and she ends up being a vampire. And through this instance, Dracula is suggesting what happens when a woman becomes overtly sexual, when a woman starts making their own decisions, what happens. They become these sort of unnatural elements that cannot be part of the society.

And there is another instance where Lucy tries to attack children as a vampire. And when she is confronted by Van Helsing, she behaves in a way that was completely an anathema to the ideology of femininity and motherhood that existed during that time. She completely breaks

away from those established notions, and that is what happens. And Bram Stoker criticizes that behaviour of Lucy.

And eventually, what happens is Lucy dies. And through that, Bram Stoker is suggesting that this is what happens when a woman becomes too free and it is not something that should be allowed. While Mina Harker is someone who got into the institution of marriage and she eventually has a happy and fulfilling life ahead of her, because she did not go against the norms of the society. So that is one of the Gothic themes that was looked at in Dracula. That is Gothicism and femininity.

Some other themes that were discussed included, they are the themes of old Europe versus modern London, the theme of the West versus the East, and this fear of the immigrants that the British society had.

So during the late 19th century in London, especially, there were a lot of crimes that were happening and most of these crimes were committed by these immigrant poor people. And so, as a result, there was a certain conception of this immigrant poor as this group of people who are trying to steal the money or privileges from the well-off people, from the middle class.

And Gothic fiction mostly represented the anxieties and fears of the middle-class people, the white middle-class people. And they were very afraid of, they were very against this immigrant population.

And Dracula is representative of that immigrant population. He is someone who is coming from outside. He is representative of this foreigner. He is an immigrant and he comes to this place, to London and he wreaks havoc there. He creates a lot of problems. And this notion of Dracula wreaking havoc and the immigrants being the committers of the highest number of crimes in London is explored or it is looked into. He is sort of aligning the fear that the British society had about the immigrant population onto the figure of the vampire.

And another theme that we again see in Dracula is that he is also representative of the racialized other, the representative of the known western. And for the 19th century British society, as most of us know, they considered themselves the epitome of civilization or rationality or education or whatever. They thought they were the best in the world.

And for them, these people in the East, as we move away from the West, for them, it was a land of superstition, people were uneducated, they were barbarous, they saw the land of the east as something dangerous, something to be kept away. And there is an element of colonialism here. And if you recall, in the first chapter of the novel itself, like we can see that in the writings of Jonathan Harker.

So when the novel begins, we see Jonathan Harker at the station in Munich. He is about to leave for Austria, and the train is a bit late. And he immediately complains why it is like this. And then he specifies himself by saying that there is no escape from this because as you go away from the west, it is like this, people are unpunctual and very unruly.

And he even asks himself, what will the situation be in China? Like if it is this bad here in Austria, it will be even worse in China. So that is a very clear case of racism there that was very much inherent in the British society at that time, among the conscience of the British people. And that is very much mapped on to the character Count Dracula and the place that he comes from, that is Transylvania.

And in addition, Count Dracula is also a representative of the non-religious. He is also representing the decaying aristocracy. For example, we see that in his castle, he is an aristocrat, but he is the one who does all the jobs there. He is the housekeeper, he is the caretaker, he is the butler, he is the maid, and he is also the chauffeur. He does everything.

And in the end, he also sleeps in his grave. So that means he sleeps in the dirt that he himself collects. So that sort of is representative of this element of decaying aristocracy, how they are going down in their power and prestige.

And again, it also aligns with the earlier theme that the immigrant population, the marginalised characters are very much mapped on to this figure of Dracula. And he is very much representative of the marginalised communities in this novel.

Some of the other major Gothic elements that we can see in this novel is that of narration. So narration is done in the form of journal entries or as letters exchanged between various main characters in the novel or even newspaper articles.

So this sort of narration has a name. It is called an epistolary novel. An epistolary novel is one wherein the narration is carried in this format, like through journal entries or newspaper articles. So that is an important part of this novel, the narrative technique.

And of course, the castle, the Castle Dracula, that is a very significant part of the novel because as you know, every Gothic fiction has this abandoned, gloomy, embossing building. Sometimes it can be castles like in this case or it can be old abandoned aristocratic mansions. So, this abandoned building is always an important part of this Gothic fiction and it sort of a requirement so to say and that is filled by the Castle Dracula in this novel.

And some other extra points about the author is that Bram Stoker when he was young, he was paralyzed till the age of seven due to some unknown disease. And later in life, Bram Stoker said that he had a lot of ideas and concepts going through his mind at that period. And in his adult age, he was able to develop them and use them effectively in his novels.

And also, Stoker's mother was a woman who was very much influenced by Gothic fiction of people that, of the earlier writers like Ann Radcliffe and other people. And she always used to read to him these various Gothic fictions. And it is that what kindled this fire for Gothic writing in Bram Stoker when he was young.

And eventually, he did write his masterpiece, Dracula, a Gothic fiction. And he was very much influenced by the writings of Ann Radcliffe and that you can see in the various narrative techniques in the novel, especially in those passages where Jonathan Harker is making his way to Castle Dracula. All those incidents leading up to that are very, you can sort of recall elements from Ann Radcliffe's novels.

So we are continuing with The Moonstone by Wilkie Collins. The Moonstone was written by Wilkie Collins in the year 1868. As soon as it was published, it was a big hit and it was a combination of two different genres, that is, the detective mystery genre and the Gothic fiction genre.

Combining these two elements, The Moonstone was the first of its kind. And eventually, it became the touchstone on which the authors that came afterwards, like Arthur Conan Doyle and even Edgar Allan Poe, measured their works. T. S. Eliot, who was one of the most famous

literary critics of the 20th century said that *Moonstone* is the first and greatest of the English detective novels.

And *The Moonstone* is also like *Dracula* by Bram Stoker which follows the narrative technique of the epistolary novel. It is also narrated through journal entries, diary entries, and newspaper articles. So this one also comes under the category of the epistolary novel. And most of the 19th-century novels mostly followed this narrative technique of the epistolary novel.

Now, we will look at some of the major Gothic elements in this novel. So starting off, we will discuss the term of imperial Gothic. So *The Moonstone* is considered as an imperial Gothic. So imperial Gothic is the term that is used to refer to novels that were written towards the end of the 19th century and it was set in the British Empire.

So as I discussed in the previous summary of the *Dracula*, for the 19th century British society, they were the epitome of rationality, success, and rational positivism, etcetera. And they considered the east as the land of the uneducated, superstitions and violence. And the further east you went, the greater they considered the place as danger. And that is exactly what is happening here.

So the story is set in India, which was part of the British Empire. And India is a Gothic element in this novel. India and its customs, and its people, its tradition, everything is used very well by the author to create this atmosphere of fear and mystery that is very integral to a Gothic novel. He does that very well by making use of this racist attitude that 19th-century British society had towards India.

Now, we will look at the prologue of *The Moonstone*. The prologue is very important because that is where we see the historical narrative of the novel. It is also the place where we understand the origin of the Gothic curse that is there in this novel.

So as you have gone through many novels before reaching *The Moonstone*, you would know that one of the common features of most of the Gothic fiction is that there is a Gothic curse in every novel or in most of the novels. And similarly, in this novel also there is that element of a Gothic curse and that is made visible to us through this prologue.

So in this prologue, we hear the story of Sir John Herncastle, who stormed this place called Seringapatam and he attacked a village, a temple there in that village. And he killed three Brahmans guarding that temple to take away this diamond that was there on the forehead of this Moon God. And he took away that diamond and one of the Brahmans before dying cursed Sir John Herncastle. That is where the origin of the curse behind The Moonstone lies.

Eventually what happens is that as soon as The Moonstone reaches Herncastle, he passes on that diamond to his niece, Rachel Verinder. And as soon as the diamond reaches Rachel Verinder's household, things start falling apart there. Rachel loses her lover, she loses her household, and even her mother tragically dies.

And shortly afterwards this incident, one of her most faithful housemaids, Rosanna Spearman commit suicide by drowning herself in a marsh that was there nearby. So chaos and sadness and tragedy descend upon Rachel Verinder and her household.

So we see that there is an element of caution that is visible here in this novel. So we can sort of read The Moonstone as a cautionary tale, meaning we can say that there is an underlying message that is behind this stealing of the diamond. So if you steal a diamond like this, there is a curse that will follow you.

And if you attack a nation, if you plunder a nation and kill its people, then eventually you will pay the price for that. So there is a cautionary element in this novel that is very important to notice.

Similarly, another point to note here is that there is an element of, you can sort of read The Moonstone as a post-colonial criticism. So it is important to keep here in mind that during the late 19th century when colonialism was at its height, the people in England did not consider the empire as part of the nation.

They saw these colonialist countries and all the violence and brutality that was happening there in the colony as something that was far away from them, something that they did not need to bother about, even though they were reaping the benefits of that violence and brutality.

These nations like India were being plundered so that you could take raw materials from that place and use it for that vantage of building up the British economy. That was happening but

even then, the brutality that was accompanied with that was not considered. It was not something that registered in the conscience of the British society.

And there were a lot of people at that time that wrote against this, this turning away your head of attitude from the British people. There were a lot of people who criticized the British colonialism. And even though when the book was published, *The Moonstone* was not acknowledged or considered as a post-colonial critique work.

It was not considered as a criticism of the British empire, but even then it was only later in the 20th century that people started looking at this book as a criticism against the British colonialism. But even then, if you look closely, you can see elements of criticism embedded in the novel.

For example, the idea of the British Empire for colonizing the east is that they have this burden, they have this white man's burden to civilize the uncivilized; that is the eastern people. And that argument is criticized here in the instance where Franklin Blake steals the diamond from Rachel Verinder's cabinet and that too, an Indian cabinet.

And he does that under the influence of the, under the influence of the opium. And he says that he was unaware of it happening. He says he did not know that he was doing it. And this is very similar to this argument, this argument of the British nation that they are doing this because they are only trying to civilize the eastern. They are not doing anything evil or vial or brutal; it is just a very civilizing mission.

But that argument is very hollow as we know now and that is made visible in this incident especially. And Franklin Blake further suggests that he did that because he was afraid the three Brahmans who were spotted near Rachel's house were going to attack her or they were going to steal the diamond. But it turns out they did not do that, they were innocent people. It was Franklin who was the perpetrator, who committed the crime.

And you can see that this idea of people from the east, especially the men being very dangerous and barbaric, and the British men being very protective or being guardian figures, being, that argument being laid opened here. It is a very hollow argument that the western society had. It is a



very racist argument. And that is also criticized here. It is made visible to the people by Wilkie Collins in this novel.

Throughout the novel, we see that Collins has very cleverly used the British arguments of racial superiority and this idea of white man's burden as justifying colonialism against the Britishers, against the British nation. He represents the British people in the novel like Sir John Herncastle, and even Franklin Blake as being very greedy men who are always in constant pursuit of the material pleasures.

While on the other hand, the Brahmins in the novel who were initially suspected by the British people as being responsible for the theft, turned out to be very selfless and generous people who had sacrificed their caste by crossing the sea.

So there is this idea that Brahmans cross the sea, they will lose their caste. And these people, these three men, they did that. They crossed the sea, came to London, lost their caste, but at the end, they were able to retrieve the diamond and take it back to its rightful place, which is the temple of the Moon God.

And you can see how kindly, and bravely, and courageously these Brahmins are portrayed, while the British men are portrayed as being very greedy and men who are very superficial. So you can see that there are elements of criticism of the colonial mindset very well embedded within this novel.

And another important point to note in this novel is the narrative function that the marsh serves in this novel. It sort of functions as a synecdoche. Synecdoche is a literary device wherein a part is used to describe the whole or vice-versa, as in, like when someone says India lost the match by eight wickets, you are actually saying that the Indian cricket team lost the match. So that is what the synecdoche is.

So the marsh in this novel is described as being brown-faced and brown-faced is symbolic of South Asian or the East and it is something that is not white. And it is also placed where the marginalised characters in the novel are disposed of. For example, Rosanna Spearman is a character in the novel who is very mysterious. She has a criminal past and she is sort of a Gothic

element in this novel, her femininity. And that woman is successfully disposed of from the narrative when she commits suicide by drowning herself in this marsh.

So you can see the purpose that the marsh serves, a place like marsh serves in the narratives of Gothic fiction. And again, it is also a site from where things appear when it is needed to clarify the narrative. For example, Franklin Blake's gown, it is discovered from there at the right time and the story is set into, it has made clear to the people, to the readers.

And so, yeah, so this narrative function that the marsh serves is very important to keep in mind. It will also come again in the next novel that we will look at, that is *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Now, we will move on to *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

So now, we look at *The Hound of the Baskervilles* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. So *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is one of the most famous Sherlock Holmes stories. It is also one of the only four novels on the Sherlock Holmes series that was written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. It was serialized in the *Strand Magazine* from 1901 to 1902, and eventually, towards the end of the year 1902, it was published as a book.

So like the novel that we discussed earlier, *The Moonstone*, *The Hound of the Baskerville* is also another novel that belongs to the genre which combines detective fiction as well as the Gothic fiction.

So in Gothic fiction, it is very important that there is this atmosphere, that setting of eeriness or mystery is developed very well. And that is very well done in this novel by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. He really makes use of the settings to create that atmosphere of trepidation or fear and horror.

So beginning with the novel. The most important aspect of any Gothic fiction, as I said earlier, is there will be an element of this Gothic curse in the novel. And in this novel, as the title suggests, the key Gothic element or the major Gothic element is that of the hound. The hound is the major Gothic element in this novel.

And in the beginning of the novel itself, we are introduced to the Gothic curse, which is that story that we hear from James Mortimer when he narrates it to Sherlock Holmes. So the

Baskerville family has a curse on them that says that there is this hound that is trying to haunt them and every last member of the Baskerville family will be murdered by this hound.

This curse started way back in the 17th century with Sir Hugo Baskerville, who was a very unkind and a very cruel man. On one drunken night, he was chasing this poor village girl along the moor that was next to his mansion. And it was said that a very large hound attacked this man, this Hugo Baskerville and since then it has become a curse such that every last member of the Baskerville family will be murdered by this hound.

And recently, the last occupant of the Baskerville mansion, Sir Charles, was found dead next to his house and it was said by the doctors that he died of a heart attack. But the mysterious element in the novel is the fact that right next to his body, a few footprints of a hound and by the footprints, you could tell that it was a very large hound. And this is what is bothering Sir James Mortimer.

He is trying to bring the last heir of the Baskerville mansion that is Henry Baskerville from Canada to his ancestral home. And it is necessary that any sort of mystery or superstition that might be there be cleared out. And for this, he has approached Holmes. So that is where we see the Gothic curse.

And as usual, Holmes being a man of science and modernity and a pure believer of the ability of science to solve any mysteries, says that there is nothing to worry. It can all be explained by science and he agrees to take the case.

But due to some reason, he sends his assistant Dr. Watson along with James Mortimer and Henry Baskerville to the Baskerville mansion. And it is here that we see the incredible Gothic settings that have been created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. So we immediately move from London with this hustle and bustle and we move to this quaint little village called Devonshire. And within that village, there is this moor called Dartmoor. And that is where the Baskerville mansion is located.

And right next to the moor, within that moor, there is a marshy area called the Grimpen Mire. So within the name itself, you can see that there are a lot of symbolic elements involved, Grimpen Mire. And by the time Watson and Sir Henry Baskerville reach the Baskerville mansion, they are

also informed as the readers are, that there is also a criminal from the nearby prison loose on the moor.

He is someone who committed these very heinous, vicious, crimes, and he has managed to escape from the prison and he is believed to be wandering the moors and there are police patrolling the area attempting to catch him.

And as soon as Watson and Henry Baskerville reach the Baskerville mansion, it is described that the mansion is covered in ivy on its front side. And this covering, that coverage by the ivy it sort of suggests this notion of smothering or suffocation and it all surge to build up this atmosphere of fear interpretation very successfully.

There is this very large and desolated moor with a very dangerous marsh in the middle of it. And to add to the fear, there is also a loose criminal that is wandering around on the moor. So very successfully, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle sets this atmosphere of fear and mystery. And some of the other major trope, the major Gothic tropes that you can see in the novel is that of the Gothic trope of regression.

So as I mentioned earlier, the late Victorian society was increasingly afraid that they were, of regression, they were afraid of this concept of regression or atavism. Ever since Charles Darwin published the book on evolution, on the theory of evolution, people were suspicious that if they evolved from apes, there is a good chance that they could go back and they were very much afraid of this concept.

And this fear, this anxiety of the British society is very much explored in this novel and it begins with, begins when Henry and Watson moved from London which is this cosmopolitan, modern city to Devonshire which is a very quaint little village and with this wasp moor and this scary marsh within that. And also where this spectral hound is set to haunt the place.

And within the moor, there are also the remnants of the stone buildings of the prehistoric people still standing. So all of that sort of signifies this Dartmoor as a place of regression, a place from the past, something that is scary or superstitious, something to be afraid of unlike London, which is also the place of the central detective character, Sherlock Holmes. And Sherlock Holmes with his staunch belief in science and rationality is what represents modernity in this novel.

And finally, in the end, when Holmes does solve the case it is confirmed that rationality or science always wins over this conflict between the past and the present and that we are always progressing forward and not backward. At the same time, it is also important to notice that Holmes himself solves the case by staying on the moor in between the stone structures from the prehistoric time.

So you can already see that there is that connection or a hand in hand working of the modern times and the past things to solve the case. So you can see that the novel is not really arguing for any particular side. It is hideous on both sides, so to say.

And another trope to notice here is that this concept of the past enduring into the present, the very presence of this prehistoric stone structure still standing there in the moor among all this civilization and advancements sort of suggest that there is not really an escape from one's past and it will always be there. And the fact that this criminal sort of occupies that space is interesting because he is representative of both amoral and physical degeneration.

For example, like if you recall, the way in which he is described in the novel is such that he is describing someone who is yellowish in colour and anything that is not white is often associated by the 19th-century society as being a degenerate or something to be othered. And he is described as being yellowish in colour and his other physical features are also such that it shows signs of degeneration. It represents that idea.

And in the end, he dies at the hand of the hound, which is sort of a poetic justice, you can say. And then eventually, the case of Stapleton, Stapleton also, in the end, when he is discovered as the perpetrator, runs into this Grimpen Mire and it is assumed that he died there, even though we do not really know for sure. It is assumed that he has drowned there in the mire because it is a very scary place.

And it is here that you should note the narrative function that this marsh serves. It is very similar to the one that the marsh in the Moonstone also served as a place to dispose of marginalized or characters that really do not fit in with the white middle-class ideologies.

These kinds of characters are disposed of in settings like this as was the case with Rosanna Spearman and that is also what happens with Stapleton as well. And of course, the Gothic

Landscape, this is a novel that made very great use of the settings to create that atmosphere of fear and terror that is very much integral to a good Gothic novel.

So, thank you so much for listening in. These are the summaries of the three novels that were taught in the course. Thank you so much.