The English Novel: Interdisciplinary Approaches

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Lecture - 26

Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: Discussion II

Hello student, I'm here once again to explain the novel by Bram Stoker titled *Dracula*. As I said that I'm going to discuss this novel contextually, textually and intertextually because this is one of the best novels ever written by Bram Stoker based on Vampyre.

Initially, it was believed that Stoker started the book between 1895-1896, but the rediscovery of Stoker's notes in 1972 led to the revision of this date towards 1895-1897. Following an extensive study of these notes, it has been suggested that Stoker could have commenced writing as early as 1890. Whatever the case may be, Dracula had been completed by 1897 and was published by Archibald Constable and Company for six shillings. Stoker's publishing contract ensured he earned no royalties from the first thousand sells of the book. By 1899, Doubleday and McClure published an American edition, 1899. In the 1930s, the novel entered the public domain after it was discovered that Stoker had not properly complied with US copyright law. Although *Dracula* was critically acclaimed, it did not make much money and would not achieve true widespread acclaim until after Stoker's death. Remarkably, since Dracula first went into print, it has always been in demand. *Dracula* was translated into Icelandic in 1901 by Valdimar Asmundsson under the title *Markt Myrkranna* (Powers of Darkness), with a preface written by a Stoker. This version contains slight changes with the Stoker alleging that the events in the novel were true. The character names were changed and it was more explicitly sexual.

Several conventions or tropes that we have come to associate with vampire novels have their own origin in Stoker's narrative. The association of Transylvania to vampire, the vampire's traditional hatred of garlic sunlight and crucifixes, the ability of the vampire to transform, the association with bats, the capacity to control the weather and many other characteristics including the vampire's physical appearance owed much to or deepened by Stoker's book. The first major conflict in *Dracula* emerges when the diabolical vampire Dracula travels to England, where he preys on the novel's protagonist until they pledge to destroy him. While Dracula has erected destruction in Transylvania for hundreds of years, his move to England makes him a major threat to the foundations of the protagonist's own society. The protagonists seek not only to remove this threat to their safety, but to rid the

world of Dracula's evil forever. Their underlying motivation includes a sense of duty to both nation and religion. Dracula's presence is not only a danger to English society but also a threat to Christian life as he can make dutiful Christians into unholy agents like himself. The rising action begins with Jonathan Harker's visit to Castle Dracula, where he unknowingly assists Dracula with preparations for his transfer to England. Harker helps Dracula to finalize his purchase of an English estate and spends many nights discussing the nuances of English society with him. While at castle, Dracula, however, Harker also discovers that Dracula is a vampire and that he himself is a prisoner. Although Harker manages to escape and later reunite with his fiancée Mina, Dracula successfully travels to England in the interim. Arriving at the seaside town of Whitby, Dracula preys on the beautiful Lucy Westenra. Lucy is friends with Mina and a love interest for three different men: the English aristocrat Arthur Holmwood, who becomes her fiancé, the English doctor John Seward and the American Quincey Morris. Lucy becomes increasingly ill under Dracula's influence. The mysterious nature of her sickness baffles her friends and family who do not see that supernatural forces are at work. Dr. Seward invites his friend Professor Van Helsing who embraces both old world superstitions and modern science to attend to Lucy. He initiates four blood transfusions to save Lucy's life. Holwood, Morris, Seward and Van Helsing himself all donate blood.

Despite their efforts, Lucy finally perishes at Dracula's hands. She soon rises again as a vampire. The novel's climax takes place when Van Helsing reveals Lucy's vampirism to his companion. He visits the graveyard with Dr. Seward where they see Lucy in vampire form. They visit again, this time bringing Morris and Homer who mercifully drive a stake through Lucy's heart. Joining forces with Harker and Mina, they all pledge to destroy Dracula together. So the story becomes very, very interesting. At this point, there is no turning back either in terms of belief or action. They know Dracula for what he is and they are committed to stamping out his evil. Drawing on Van Helsing's knowledge as well as on records of their experiences compiled by Mina, they realize that they must find and consecrate the 50 boxes of earth that Dracula has brought with him to England as safe resting places.

In the novel's falling action, the protagonists execute their plans to defeat Dracula. The men search for the boxes of earth, excluding Mina from their proceedings in order to protect her. Dracula meanwhile begins to prey on Mina. The men realize that Mina is in danger after they find one of the patients at Dr. Seward's asylum, Renfield, mortally wounded. Before he dies, Renfield explains that he gave Dracula access to the asylum. The men rush

to the room where Mina and Jonathan are staying, finding Dracula there. Although they drive the vampire out, they realize that Mina will become a vampire herself unless they destroy him. Mina's endless reprises that of Lucy's, although this time the protagonist, have the knowledge and the foresight they need to save her. Meanwhile, Mina realizes that she has a mental connection to Dracula. Under hypnosis, she can provide crucial information about his movements. The protagonists learn that Dracula is escaping England by boat and they set out to chase him across Europe. Although Mina becomes increasingly difficult to hypnotize, she continues to provide key details about his location. At castle Dracula, Van Helsing destroys the three vampire women. A second climatic moment occurs as Van Helsing and company converse with Dracula outside the castle. The men attack the gypsy caravan transporting Dracula's coffin. Morris destroys him with a knife to the heart although he dies in the battle as well.

The English society that Bram Stoker portrayed in *Dracula* reflected many recognizably modern aspects of life in the last decade of the 19th century. Mechanized technologies, trains, typewriters, phonographs, changing gender roles, the bustling streets of populous cities, and increasingly scientific modes of thought. The protagonist's conflict with Count Dracula stages this society and its modern sensibilities against old world ways of knowing and understanding, including beliefs in the supernatural. Prominent among the social changes that Stoker tracks our developments in science and medicine, as represented by the character of Dr. John Seward and the asylum over which he presides. Dr. Seward's mind operates scientifically, causing him to balk at supernatural evidence until the moment he sees the vampire Lucy.

Just as enlightenment and rationalism existed alongside supernatural and religious belief in the 18th century, Science and faith also had a side-by-side relationship in the 19th century. Published in 1859, Darwin's *On the Origin of Species and its Theory and Evolution* inspired fierce debate in the second half of the century. As the sciences, including medicine, became increasingly professionalized and specialized, across the century, the gap between scientific leaders and religious leaders widened. In other words, science and medicine increasingly became the sole province of trained specialists like Dr. Seward. Indeed, mental hospitals or lunatic asylums, or they were commonly known like Dr. Seward's, became increasingly prevalent in England during the second half of the 19th century. While publicly- and privately-funded asylums existed before then, much care for the mentally ill took place in homes and through the churches. In this context, Dr. Seward's private lunatic asylum proves to be a hallmark of the modernity with which the novel struggles to come

to terms: institutional, scientific, detached, rationalist, Dr. Seward is perhaps the clearest example of a mind guided entirely by scientific rationalism dependent on the evidence of his own eyes and loathe to accept supernatural explanations even when the evidence points that way. The chapel embodies the spiritual forces which modern medical men like Dr. Seward reject. In fact, Dr. Seward's asylum proves powerless to keep out these forces. The men attempt to protect Mina by confining her to the asylum, but Dracula invades the building and attacks her. This attack then can also be read as an assault on the philosophies of modern science that the asylum represents. Dr. Seward's inability to diagnose Renfield, who ultimately admits Dracula into the asylum, further proves this modern institution's powerlessness against old world supernatural forces. The blood transfusions that Van Helsing performs on Lucy offer another example of modern medical advancement. The first recorded successful transfusion of blood between humans took place in England in 1818. Making blood transfusion of the kind that Van Helsing performs a distinctly 19th century phenomenon. While Van Helsing attends the latest signs to save Lucy's life, it also becomes clear that blood transfusions alone cannot save her.

In the English literary tradition, Dracula was also preceded and informed by key texts from the Romantic period. In 1819, English author and physician John William Polidori's published his short story, *The Vampyre: A Tale.* Polidori's vampire is a mysterious nobleman who kills young women by draining their blood. The story was immensely popular. Inspiring several stage adaptations and paving the way for additional 19th century vampire stories such as James Malcom Rhymer and Thomas Peckett Prest's popular story *Varney the Vampire*. Equally influential was Irish author Joseph Sheridan Lee Fanu's 1872 novella *Carmilla*. Featuring a female vampire, Carmilla, this gothic tale includes several elements echoed in Dracula. Lucy's appearance and sleepwalking, for instance, both make her reminiscent of Carmilla. For instance, the vampire's ability to transform into a bat was not a regular feature in vampire fiction prior to *Dracula*. Since Stoker's novel, it has become one of the powers most stereotypical, associated with vampires in popular culture.

After *Dracula*, the tradition of vampire fiction has introduced new levels of moral complexity into the vampire narrative. 20th century and 21st century vampires increasingly straddle the line between good and evil, inspiring human sympathy and romantic feelings. Stoker's *Dracula* is neither morally complex nor sympathetic. It is only Mina's sense of Christian duty that encourages her to feel sympathy for the vampire. Narratives from Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles* and Stephenie Mayer's *Twilight* series depict vampires as fully developed characters and often a character worthy of romantic love. In these

narratives, vampires can be as sympathetic and emotionally complex as their human counterparts. Such narratives are often less invested in hunting vampires than they are in exploring vampires as part of a community. While there are plenty of vampire narratives that continue the tradition established by Stoker's *Dracula*, the great development in vampire fiction across the last hundred years may be in drawing out the humanity of vampires and developing more fully the sympathy that Mina first extends towards Dracula.

Undoubtedly, it is a thrilling story which attracts readers of several generations. In spite of its popularity, *Dracula* is initially treated by reviewers only as a sensational novel. And because classical literature was dominant at the time of its publication, it attracted little scholars' attention. Contemporary reactions to the archetypal vampire tale at the time of its publication did not look deeper than its generic identity. However, since the early 1970s, along with the revitalization of vampires in popular fiction, there has aroused considerable scholarly interest in vampire novels. Comments on *Dracula* from a variety of critical points of view are too numerous to list in detail. Among them, one of the most famous general collections is 'Dracula the Vampire and the Critics' edited by Margaret L. Carter in 1988, who has gathered many of the best essays together on Stoker's novels, mostly *Dracula*, in about three decades. In view of literary criticism, most of the studies may be categorized as historical, political, psychosexual or structural.

Close reading of *Dracula* in terms of psychological analysis is undertaken more rigorously than others. The research can be categorized as two views. One is to show that the novel arises directly from a Stoker's life experiences. Joseph Bierman is a leading critic in this respect. The other is to discuss that a stalker's portrayal of female vampires symbolizes male fear or female revolt. Based on the fact that the Count can only go where he is first visited, desired, he expresses or fulfills a need or desire for innocent victims. So, the Count arouses such feelings as sexuality and anti-maternity which were suppressed in the Victorian England. The view prevailed in 1970s and 1980s. Generally speaking, most of the studies are confined to the orthodox Freudian interpretation. The structural analysis focuses on the narrative technique of *Dracula*.

A few critics introduced the novel's multiple narrative structure, such as diaries, memorandum, telegrams, and newspaper cuttings, and alike. But in recent years, some critics further explored *Dracula*'s theme. From the narrative point of view, David Seed compares its narration with that of Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*. Some latest studies offer new perspectives to read the text of *Dracula*. Most critics, both at home and abroad, discuss the vampire symbolic of alien power only from the orthodox psychoanalytical

perspective and few of them further analyze the real reason for the vampire symbolic of 'the other'. Here, 'the other' is similar to is designated as a form of cultural projection of concepts. The projection constructs the identities of cultural subject through a relationship of power in which the other is subjugated element. The question of one's identity is a very simple and a very complex issue. Identity refers to the qualities and attitude you have that make you feel you have your own character and are different from other people. That is by the Longman Dictionary. The affirmation of one's identity is an inner and unconscious demand. An individual tries to confirm his or her identity in order to obtain, maintain and protect a kind of psychological security which is vital to a stable and healthy psyche. However, such an affirmation is not easy to achieve. So from the definition of identity, one will find that it is constructed in contrast with other people. So one has to draw a line between his, her own and the other as identity is based on contrast.

If Dracula is the embodiment of the other, what is the other then? To answer this question, we must look briefly at good characters in *Dracula*. Some of these characters, Quincey Morris, Arthur Godalmin and Lucy Westenra Mina Harker are independently wealthy. Others, Jonathan Harker, Dr. Seward and Professor Van Helsing are engaged in such eminently respectable profession as law or medicine. However, they seem less to earn a living than to do good for humanity. Anyhow, they are all members of the ruling class in England. Among them, Godalmin represents bourgeois aristocrat, that is, English tradition, while Harker and Seward represent the group that keep English society functioning. As a lawyer, Harker represents the state, the juridical and political system. Seward is a psychiatrist dedicated to exploring the causes of unreason and eliminating them. As a cultural and ethnic concept, the term Eastern Europe was defined as opposed to Western Europe in the 19th century. *Dracula* also focuses on the conflicts between Western and Eastern Europe. No doubt, that numerous psychological and sociological explanations for the novel's popularity might be offered. Among these possibilities is a political theme which would appeal to the audiences throughout the series of crises presented by the two wars and the Cold War. Count Dracula in the novel represent those forces in Eastern Europe which seeks to overthrow through violence and subversion and more progressive democratic civilization of the West. To a large extent, Dracula is interpreted as the threat of the barbarian attempting to overtake the civilized world.

In *Dracula*'s Jonathan Harker, whose journal begins the story, takes trains-a symbol of progress, in industrial society-to Castle Dracula. However, “the deeper he goes to the east, the more unpunctual are the trains. What ought they to be in China?” As for Harker, who

has been accustomed to the western life, the east seems to fail to keep up his pace. The place where the story happens near the border of three Balkan territories in the center of Romania is also suggestive enough. Jonathan Harker describes it as a distinctly eastern portion of Europe where the laws and customs of the West do not apply. He writes in his diary, "Certainly an imaginative whirlpool of races where hardly a foot of soil has not been enriched by the blood of men, patriots and invaders." While the Western Europe frees herself to develop economy and education, instead the Eastern one is still exhausted by wars, let alone civilization. For example, when Harker is aware that he has become a prisoner and even lost the elementary right as a prisoner, he is at the end of his wit. The political theme becomes more complicated in the novel. From one aspect, in the old days, the count had to exist on the primitive frontier of Western culture, whereas now his best chance for survival is in England, the most progressive, rational and democratic nation in Europe. From the other aspect, it is obvious that modern victory can be better won by subversion than by invasion.

Thus, *Dracula* has been understood to respond to the fears of late Victorians. Most notably, Dracula has received considerable critical attention on the novel's reliance on a model of degeneracy that articulates contemporary anxieties relating to criminality and race. Due to Darwinian thought, degeneration threatens both the British race and the British Empire. The key decisions in the Victorian society are made by people like Godalming, Harker and Seward. They justify their power and privilege from such women as Lucy Westernra and Mina Harker. They are immune from such human feelings as lust, envy, anger and fear until Count Dracula appears. The other two good characters are not English, but they are also dedicated to protecting the purity of England too. One is Quincey Morris, a rich Texan, who proposes Lucy early in the novel. Though he is refused by her, he still dedicates himself to serving for her. His devotion to the cause of women's purity seems to make him at least an honorary Englishman. The other foreigner is the Dutch doctor Van Helsing, who is undoubtedly the most memorable of the good male characters. He also shows his virtue by wholeheartedly dedicating himself to protecting the purity of English women.

So, comparing the above-mentioned good characters, Dracula's identity as the other can be defined from three aspects. Firstly, Dracula's identity as a racial outsider is suggested by some of his conversation with no good mastery of the English language. Even Dracula himself has the same feeling. He intends to learn English intonation with Harker early in the novel for he aims at speaking English in London like a native. Secondly, his peculiar sexual taste are the key factor as a racial outsider because no Englishman would do

something like that as ever mentioned. Dracula seduces victorian woman into giving up her conservative thought in sex. Unconsciously, the woman breaks away from the male domination and pursues her own happiness in sex. Thirdly, that Dracula symbolizes the racial outsider is also suggested by his smell. This subject is repeatedly referred to by the narrators of the novel, especially Harker. "As the count leaned over me and his hand touched me, I could not repress a shudder. It may have been that his breath was rank, but a horrible feeling of nausea came over me, which, do what I would, I could not conceal." Furthermore, the supposed smell of other. We, of course, don't smell, is clearly associated with their presumed hypersexuality.

> “As Freud argued, there seems to be an inescapable connection between sex and smell. The fear that the racial outsider will creep out of the stinking sewer to rape our women has been endemic in our century. And in the figure of the Count Dracula, we find a nightmarish embodiment of these fears.”

Thus, while Stoker drew inspiration from his predecessors, his novel also played a huge role in canonizing tropes popularly associated with the vampire narrative today. For instance, the vampire's ability to transform into a bat was not a regular feature in vampire fiction prior to *Dracula*. Since Stoker's novel, it has become one of the powers most stereotypical associated with vampires is popular culture. With this, I conclude the discussion textually and contextually. And I'm sure that this is going to help you because being an important novel, *Dracula* is still not much discussed in many courses.

Thank you very much.