
Comparison Of The Picture Of Dorian Gray And Dracula

Significantly both writers explore the reoccurring theme of sexuality dominating both novels challenging the stereotypes of a contemporary audience due to such ideas being abhorred. Having 'sexual freedom' means being unrestricted to who one chooses to live with or love without social, political, medical or cultural prosecution which both novelists convey through the characterisation of Dorian and Lucy and their promiscuity. However both novelists also, assuming from the understanding in their readership, discomfort readers by introducing other 'forbidden' sides to sexual freedom such as homosexuality and presenting it in a covert perspective whilst also putting forth a underlying message that it is common in societies. Yet elements such as gender; how sexual freedom is received amongst both eponymous antagonists despite being equally as controversial evokes different reactions from a Victorian audience.

Both gothic melodramas Picture Of Dorian Gray and Dracula are set in a highly religious society where social acceptance for abnormal behaviours such as homosexuality were not tolerated. Yet we see in both novels forbidden passion is a prominent theme which Wilde explores through the companionship of Dorian and Lord Henry. Though it could be viewed as authentic or pure form of friendship from the outside looking in, the relationship are clearly homoerotic though the feelings were not acted upon explicitly. Elements of romantic intimacy between the two by Wilde when the character Lord Henry was asked how often he sees Dorian, in which he responded "Everyday. I couldn't be happy if I didn't see him everyday. He is absolutely necessary to me". This motif best demonstrates Lord Henry's sexual nature as he hints that he almost couldn't live without him creating this sense of reliance or dependency, which is clear to the reader and shocks a Victorian audience due to the highly religious society at the time. Almost creating biblical referencing as labelling someone a necessity comes across blasphemous as it seems he equates Dorian to God, perhaps Wilde chooses this to portray his philosophy of "aesthetic realism" and the power beauty can have on people.

Wilde presents Lord Henry to be a socially powerful in terms of his status in the book and 'respectable' by conventional Victorian standards. Such feelings he seems to acquire would have been viewed as repugnant, reflecting Wilde's reality as he too as well as Stoker was a rumoured homosexual who lived in a society in which such lifestyle was intolerable. Stereotypically men of his nature were expected to have a wife and kids, which we do see in the novel between Lord Henry and his wife but most importantly Dorian Gray and Sybil Vane. However Wilde criticises the common nuclear family as he chooses not let these heterosexual relations stand the test of time, reflecting how when one's homosexual nature is suppressed within a heterosexual union it could have a damaging effect on a pre-existing marriage. Wilde's main focal point seems to be the men within the novel as women are concisely referred to in detail like Victoria Watton, being described vaguely and whose duration is short lived in the book. This could be down to the lack of importance placed on women in the nineteenth century and reflecting society's standards in his writing, however the undeniable feeling of hatred towards women Wilde may have due to his sexuality cannot be dismissed.

Whilst in the novel Dracula, Stoker presents the queer relationship between Dracula and Harker evidently through his desire to suck Harker's blood. The act of bloodsucking could be argued to

be quite sexual as the act itself is quite passionate and intimate. Due to the act being gender neutral in terms of Dracula's victims it raises immediate concern for the reader. Elements of jealousy are explicitly shown when Dracula said "How dare you touch him? How dare you cast your eyes on him when I have forbidden it? This man belongs to me!" Stoker's language choices suggests Dracula's possessiveness and entitlement to Harker's physical body, such attitudes that can be linked to Victorian marriage. Concepts such as 'male ownership' and agency in marriage are implied here, which is interesting as they are not politically unified in marriage yet we see him emotionally tied to Harker as if they were. Perhaps sparking elements of wish fulfilment as critics have argued that the relationship between Harker and Dracula is autobiographical, as Stoker himself 'never loved, but worshipped' a man by the name of Henry Irving- thus the speculation of the novel being about him. Dracula could be interpreted to be Irving's trapped sexuality, in which he inflicts pain upon people in feelings of frustration as he cannot live his homoerotic truth- Harker (symbolising Stoker) in this instance. Whether there was any sexual relation between the two are unknown, but it is said Irving treated Stoker like a slave. But as Stoker was a 'masochist' he endured the harsh treatment as it brought him 'validation' and 'pleasure'.

The homeostatic theme is returned to through the character Basil, creating a sense of obsession and infatuation for Dorian between the two characters. Basil's painting stems from his adoration of Dorian's good looks eventually developing evident in feelings for Dorian as when he finished he had felt as though 'too much of himself' went into the painting. By Wilde using such ambiguous choice of language it implies he feels emotionally involved with Dorian and here we see him come to terms with these feelings being unrequited, this is further emphasised when Dorian takes down the painting which evokes sadness from Basil. The fact that every key male in the novel has implicit homosexual traits could be Wilde's way of arguing it is in the nature of men and is inevitable, but we as a society choose to suppress it due to the negative connotations and views it holds in society. Dorian's downfall arguably could be associated with the restraint of this forbidden side to him, as he blames the fact that he has received no punishment to purify him for the way he acts as well as how things have ended up for him. The immense feeling of guilt shockingly causes him to destroy the painting being an epitome of his duality in which at first symbolised youth, beauty and innocence but towards the end symbolises a cruel inescapable reality. Dorian has essentially ruined what the painting stood for as now his innocent youth has been infiltrated by the manifestation of hidden sexuality and battered soul. Though it could be argued Dorian's infatuation with beauty is quite feminine, the only way to regain his masculinity is through violently destroy the painting which could be seen as a masculine thing to do. Again re-emphasising the power of society's views and putting forth Wilde's ideas that by manifesting and possessing such feelings can be destructive to one's self. Perhaps he does this to evoke sympathy on people struggling with their sexual identity and the double life homosexuals had to live in that era. As they would appear as heterosexual men but then commit the crime of in buggery in secret dens. While homosexuals of today do not face the same level of taboo in most societies, there is an underlying stigma in which people still do live a double life.

Stoker presents Lucy Westenra as pure at the beginning of the novel as well as a epitome of a Victorian woman who suddenly falls to her demise due to Dracula's inhumane act of voluptuousness leaving her negatively affected. Westenra ends up being described as "the sweetness that turned to... heartless cruelty" implying that she is perhaps not the virgin she once was, and instead feels sexual liberation from collecting blood which would be raising concern from Victorian readership as she is married to Arthur but submits to Dracula. This could be viewed as Stoker directly critiquing Victorian women by putting forth the idea that a females

sexuality is supposed to be repressed or chaste as we see from her direct foil Mina who manages to retain her conventional Victorian woman image throughout the novel, being described by Van Helsing as 'So true, so sweet, so noble'. Critiques argue there are constant facile and stereotypical dichotomy between the dark woman (Lucy) and the fair (Mina) in Dracula. Stoker does this constant contrasting to highlight the importance it will play in the plot, which we soon learn that due to minas virtue and purity it helps the group defeat Dracula and prohibits her from receiving Lucy's fate.

Such sexual promiscuity would have been looked down upon, conveying the message that sexuality is associated with evil and corruption which would have been a popular view in the religious Victorian era. We can argue pre-feminist ideas are implied by Stalker through the character Lucy as she struggles to find a suiter, and is constantly affiliated with different men throughout the duration of the novel. Bringing awareness to the fact that there are women that do explore their sexuality which is a concept that a modern audience would agree with due to society being more secularised. From being conservative and reformed Stoker begins to describe Lucy's appearance to be overly seductive as well as her mannerisms, putting across the idea that by women being overly sexual they gain negative male attention. Whilst also pointing a flaw in Victorian society as while people such as prostitutes are discriminated against due to their lifestyle men still continue to engage with them implying that women are not the only ones to blame but the consumers (men). Yet this over sexual nature that she develops leads to her downfall as a character. Lucy dying due to having a stake in her heart by her fiancée could be interpreted as symbolic as it connotes phallic imagery. By her allowing Dracula into her mind to manipulate her and ultimately turn her into a vampire, this violent action is a punishment for her weakness- restoring her pure image as arguably she will start a new life after death.

Similarly in Picture Of Dorian Gray, Dorian could be described as a tabula rasa at the beginning in the novel who is infiltrated by the likes of Lord Henry. Wilde uses natural imagery to connote how Dorian's innocence was robbed of him, Lord Henry 'plucked a pink- petalled daisy... pulled the daisy to bits' we can infer here that the flower is a metaphor for Dorian expressing his prematurity and beauty. The fact that it is 'pulled apart' could foreshadow how later on in the novel the downfall of Dorian's character and how sexual desire will soon take over him or Dorian himself will have a damaging impact on Sybil as we know he is at fault for her death. However the opium den is where most acts of sexual promiscuity takes place, Wilde almost describes it as an eerie place in which helps Dorian escape reality "dens of horror where the memory of old sins could be destroyed by the madness of sins that were new". It is hinted that Dorian uses it as a coping mechanism as opposed to pleasure perhaps reflecting the degradation of his soul, by doing this Wilde gains a sense of empathy from the reader as we see Dorian in an uncontrollable vulnerable state. The fact that "sins could be destroyed by the madness of sins that were new" proves how this is a never ending cycle that has consumed Dorian and he cannot escape. Places such as the opium den

However sexual promiscuity amongst men such as Dorian would not have been shocking due to prostitution being the social norm at the time, hence why no one would have noticed Dorian's inward cry for help, instead it would be viewed as normal or a source of entertainment.

In conclusion whilst both 'The Picture Of Dorian Gray' and 'Dracula' contain similar concepts of exploration of sexual freedom, (with homosexuality and sexual promiscuity being most prevalent) though in which it is natural differs in both text. In 'The Picture Of Dorian Gray', Wilde's homoerotic views as perceived through the characterisation of the key male characters

to be natural and in a sense inevitable. Whilst in 'Dracula' it takes the character of Dracula being possessed and abnormal to reveal his homoerotic sexual nature, emphasising how it is not natural and instead something that is of demented nature. Essentially the concept raised by both texts of 'sexual promiscuity', challenge society's stereotypes. Due to gender differences how both characters Lucy and Dorian's acts of promiscuity would have received would have been different. Both Stoker and Wilde manipulate what is socially acceptable, making our readership distorted as 'Dracula's' Lucy being an erudite Victorian woman was expected to be more reserved making her promiscuity shocking. Where 'The Picture of Doran Grey's' Dorians promiscuity would have been viewed as the socially acceptable and normalized, and the women instead would have been seen as at fault. Both texts do however do put forth the message that sexual freedom is apparent in society and question how definitive "masculinity" is, through the characters Dorian and Dracula. Both in which showcase hypermasculinity to the public by having multiple sexual partners and having power, yet we see this helps mask their homoeroticism. Emphasising how ones sexual freedom is repressed behind the concept of masculinity.