
Dracula As A Mirror Of The Late-victorian Society

Stoker's *Dracula*, written in 1897, uses its characters and setting as a reflection of the rising fears and anxieties of late-Victorian society. The Victorian Era was a time of scientific and societal development introducing new ideas of evolution and feminism which went against their traditional values. Stoker uses *Dracula* as a vessel to represent the consequences of letting problematic ideas infiltrate society.

Dracula represents the Victorians' fear of the foreign by establishing a clear distinction between the East and the West. Britain is characterised as superior: "Transylvania is not England...strange things here may be" (Stoker 28), whereas Transylvania is described as old and mysterious, through gothic imagery. Examples include *Dracula*'s castle, "courtyard of vast ruined castle" (Stoker 20), and the lack of infrastructure: "road was rugged" (Stoker 13).

Harker's comment: "It seems to me that the further East you go the more unpunctual are the trains," (Stoker 8), shows the volatility of not only the transport systems but of the East as a whole, implying that the further away from Britain, the more barbaric the culture. The following quotes: "every known superstition in the world is gathered" (Stoker 8), "as an English Churchman...taught to regard such things as in some measure idolatrous," (Stoker 11), shows Harker commenting on the difference of the strengths in their beliefs. Unlike Transylvania with their many superstitions, Britain had a central religion, Christianity, which united them as a whole.

The theory of evolution leading to the idea of degeneration, fuelled the Victorians' fear of the foreign, proposing that 'human species were suffering from an intellectual and moral decline, becoming increasingly enfeebled through everything from feminism and immigration' (according to *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*). They feared immigrants as they believed that their primitive beliefs would spread, causing reverse colonisation, the backwards movement of society. Immigrants were thought to carry disease and the desire to take over their country; *Dracula* being the physical embodiment of all said features, had plans for world-domination beginning with the infiltration of London, thought to be the 'heart of the human race'. Upon Harker's first meeting of *Dracula*, he immediately notices *Dracula*'s accent: "excellent English...strange intonation" (Stoker 22), and later on, discovers *Dracula* wanted Harker to help him achieve the vernacular of a native speaker. This was part of his plan to assimilate and blend into English society. "did I move and speak in your London, none there are who would not know me for a stranger." (Stoker 27), while fulfilling his plan of spreading vampirism and conquering Britain.

The Empire gained all their power from colonising other countries, and throughout the fin-de-siècle, they began to fear other countries wanted to do the same to them. Thus, vampirism is an analogy for reverse colonisation. As can be seen through Lucy's bout with vampirism, it is slow and painful, destroying her on the inside ultimately leading to her death and transformation into a vampire. Likewise, the Victorians believed foreigners wanted to infiltrate their country, under the disguise of civilians and destroy them from within, causing the destruction of their Empire.

The female characters of *Dracula* represent the Victorians' fears of overtly sexual women.

Women in the Victorian Era were expected to maintain their expected role in society of loyalty to their spouse and motherhood. However, in the fin-de-siècle the idea of the New Woman was developed, increasing educational and employment prospects for females and motherhood and marriage was no longer a priority. The New Woman was highly sexualised and described to have 'mannish' qualities, looked down upon by traditional Victorian society, believing the deviants would ruin the dynamic they had constructed over centuries, weakening their united front towards enemies.

Mina represents the traditional Victorian woman who remains faithful towards her husband and is able to defeat the vampirism inflicted upon her, implying what Victorian women must embody to overcome the threat of foreigners. Lucy represents what could happen to the Victorian woman who diverges from traditional values. Lucy is introduced as an innocent girl, however, her beauty highly emphasised. She expresses the yearn to break free from social roles stating, "why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her," (Stoker 67), alluding to the sexually free nature of the New Woman. She has no control over herself, causing the sleep walking, making her a submissive target for Dracula. Lucy deviates from her role as a woman in society, making her susceptible to foreign evil, reflecting the Victorians' belief of what would happen, if women were to follow the New Woman.

Dracula's wives form the remaining female vampires of the novel, representing what society feared women were becoming. The sexuality they oozed meant that they had control over men, as seen before Van Helsing kills one of them: "instinct of man...protect one of hers" (Stoker 394), reversing the roles of society. Female vampires were not only hyper sexualised: "exquisitely voluptuous" (Stoker 394), but they were also described to have animalistic sexual desires: "drew back with an angry snarl" (Stoker 225). Use of bestial descriptions implies vampirism causes degeneration, reverting humans back to primitive times. Hence, Victorians feared promiscuity as they saw it as a sign of degeneration.

In the end, all vampiric women met the same fate. Lucy and Dracula's wives were hunted down by the Crew of Light, where Lucy was killed by Holmwood, her desired suitor. This act is symbolic of a traditional Victorian man destroying the evil usurping the body of a woman, finally re-establishing male supremacy. Post-mortem, it was observed that Lucy was returned to her original, pure state: "Lucy as we had seen in her life, with her face of unequalled sweetness and purity" (Stoker 231), insinuating that lascivious behaviour is unnatural, caused only through influence of foreign power. Hence why Britain wanted to keep foreign evil out, as their antics and beliefs would have caused their citizens to adopt unnatural traits.

Dracula mirrors the late-Victorian society by reflecting their fears and anxieties of the foreign and lurid sexuality of females. Dracula himself, the main antagonist, is the physical manifestation of everything Victorians feared, everything thought to cause the downfall of the great Empire.