

# The Inter-genre Gothic Discourse of Bram Stoker's Dracula

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UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL STUDIES

Leonardo Pribić

**THE INTER-GENRE GOTHIC DISCOURSE OF  
BRAM STOKER'S *DRACULA***

Submitted in partial fulfilment requirement for the B.A. in English Language and Literature  
and History at the University of Rijeka

Rijeka, September 2024

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Sintija Čuljat, PhD

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## **ABSTRACT**

The goal of this paper is to analyse the elements that sustain the inter-genre Gothic discourse of Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*. This paper will provide an overview of the most important constituents and stylistic features of Gothic fiction and its subgenres. It will interpret the Gothic rhetoric elements employed in the novel, and provide insight into the novel's characters representative of diverse aspects of the staple Gothic imaginary. The paper will provide an account of the novel's central themes, along with my personal take on Stoker's authorial choices. Finally, this paper will compare Bram Stoker's novel to other works of Gothic sublime. The convergence of Gothic fiction and other literary and nonliterary genres in *Dracula* will also be tackled.

**KEYWORDS:** *Dracula*, Gothic literature, Gothic horror, Vampire, inter-genre discourse

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## Introduction

*“Do you not think that there are things which you cannot understand, and yet which are; that some people see things that others cannot? But there are things old and new which must not be contemplate by men’s eyes, because they know -or think they know- some things which other men have told them. Ah, it is the fault of our science that it wants to explain all; and if it explain not, then it says there is nothing to explain.” - Van Helsing*

From the dawn of time Mankind has held both a fascination and a fear of the unknown. Of the mysterious and esoteric. People fear what they do not understand, and so they try to explain the unexplainable. To find the reason and meaning behind every occurrence. From dark, foreboding forests and old castles hidden in the mountains, to the howling of wolves and other creatures of the night. The further one goes from the center of civilization and approaches these far off, isolated, and mysterious places the more he surrounds himself with these very mysteries. It is in these places that myths and legends are born. Stories of magic, witches, vampires, and werewolves. The fear of the unknown is a primal one, because if we do not know or understand what something is, how can we prepare to deal with it? It is why sometimes the imagination is worse than knowing and why some myths and legends were created in the first place. To explain the unexplainable and to provide a type of comfort and direction. For if we know we can avoid it, and if we can avoid it then we will not be scared anymore. Literature would also draw from the concepts of terror. In children's stories for example, where they are used as a warning, to give guidance and sometimes prove a point, but also in other genres to provide suspense and grip the reader. That is how Gothic fiction came to be. A literary genre that started using fear of the unknown to create suspense and in that way engage the reader. To use the atmosphere and unnatural imagery to incite emotions and hinder the mind. Out of the many well-known works of Gothic literature none is more famous than Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, for it brought the myth of the vampire to widespread audiences, which grew to be a staple of the horror genre to this very day.

The goal of this paper is to probe the Gothic fiction constituents to have contributed to the inter-genre Gothic discourse in Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*. To start, this paper will relate to the emergence of Gothic literature, and set forth a catalogue of distinctive features of Gothic literary artifacts. There will also be an overview of Bram Stoker and his novel *Dracula*, the centrepiece of this paper. Firstly, there will be an account of gothic imagery found in the novel, followed by a delineation of the novel's characters representative of diverse aspects of Gothic fiction. Next, this paper will provide a view on the role of gender as rendered in this novel and other Gothic works. The late-Victorian employment of gothic complexes, the clash of the West and the East, the modern world of science and knowledge with pagan traditions and beliefs of the old world will be examined. Finally, this paper will delve into the inter-genre discourse of Gothic literature and the emergence of invasion literature. Furthermore, the ideas that had incited the novel's creation, and its connections to other literary and nonliterary genres will be regarded.

## 1. Gothic literature

Gothic literature is a literary genre that originated in England in the 18th century. It was part of the larger romantic movement prevalent in the late 18th and first half of the 19th century. Romanticism emphasized the individual and the spiritual. It was a celebration of nature, emotion, and passion.<sup>1</sup> As such Gothic literature retains some elements of Romanticism. The origin of the Gothic novel is attributed to Horace Walpole and his story “*The Castle of Otranto*” written in 1764.<sup>2</sup> He is also considered to be the one to have coined the term “gothic.” The term supposedly came to him in a dream while he was residing at Strawberry Hill which he called his “little gothic castle.” While the term at first glance shares the connection to Gothic architecture, for example the churches of the late Medieval period, it is more so connected to the entire perspective on the Middle Ages. The term is synonymous with the past, superstitious and unenlightened. It carries a fascination with death and the supernatural forces.<sup>3</sup>

Because of this, early Gothic works all share the same characteristics, for example: the story almost always plays out inside or near old and dark castles, churches, and mansions. Other common motives are curses and superstition, evil and crime, and a dark and grim atmosphere. Another separate group of Gothic constituents and features are inspired by medieval knight stories and fables. For example, men who act with honour, the damsel in distress, marriage in some form, the fight against evil and the power of God. The latter element is often represented in the power of the cross and the safety provided by the church (as a place of refuge). The theme that connects these two groups of motifs is the fight against evil. The most notable authors of early Gothic literature are Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe and Mary Shelley. Later, during the early 19th century, the genre will evolve, and new characteristics will emerge in such as: the setting will move from these old medieval locations to places more familiar to the common reader (city and its surroundings etc.). Another change present is that the characters in later novels question their beliefs, morality, and patriarchy more freely.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, gothic fiction will gain in popularity and traction, spreading to America where it

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<sup>1</sup> romantizam. *Hrvatska enciklopedija, mrežno izdanje.*

<sup>2</sup> Hogle (2015:3)

<sup>3</sup> Senf (2017).

<sup>4</sup> Drača (2017: 25-39)



will be established as American gothic with the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Emily Dickinson etc.<sup>5</sup>

A subcategory of gothic literature that is important for this essay is British Gothic fiction, which lasted between 1885 in 1930. This is the period when the novel *Dracula* was written. One element that is especially common during this time is that of a creature who is “human in shape and yet human beings with the strangest air about them of some familiar animal”<sup>6</sup>

This also introduces us to a new genre - Gothic horror. Horror is defined as a less restrained and more tasteless genre than the old “pure gothic”. There is always a presence of a physical monster or entity as a focus point. Through this entity the author indulges in much more graphic imagery as well as extreme scenarios. It uses these grotesque and horrifying images and elements to incite a much more visceral response from the reader. Thus, the focus is much more on fear of the known but unexplainable and unnatural than the mystery of the unknown. Some sources like Judith Halberstam state that ““Gothic” is identified with form and “horror” with content”.<sup>7</sup>

A great and succinct definition of the evolution of Gothic literature and the creation of Gothic horror was given by writer Ellen Moers in 1976:

*“In Gothic writings fantasy predominates over reality, the strange over the commonplace, and the supernatural over the natural, with one definite auctorial intent: to scare. Not, that is, to reach down into the depths of the soul and purge it with pity and terror (as we say tragedy does), but to get to the body itself, its glands, muscles, epidermis and circulatory system, quickly arousing and quickly allaying the physiological reactions to fear.”*<sup>8</sup>

However, this has led to a discussion on the differences between terror and horror and how each is applied in literature. This also begs the question which approach is “better”? Author Ann Radcliffe argues that terror is superior because it focuses on prolonging the experience and letting feeling consume the reader, while horror could be described as being hit with short bursts of intense fear, dread, and disgust:

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<sup>5</sup> Savoy (2015:167)

<sup>6</sup> Hurley (2015:189)

<sup>7</sup> Hurley (2015:193)

<sup>8</sup> Senf (2017)

“*Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them*”.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, if one were to summarize the most common constituents of the Gothic literature imaginary, they would be as follows: a setting which takes place in a haunted, dreary, dark building or castle. A dark atmosphere full of mystery and suspense. The importance of dreams, visions and other mental states such as insanity hysteria and the delusion.<sup>10</sup> There is the presence of esoteric rituals and arts. The presence of evil, most commonly supernatural in nature. This is sometimes (as is the case with *Dracula*) represented by the antagonist character, a monster, either literally (vampires, werewolves, ghosts, or other monsters), or figuratively (by a man that has a bestial side – ex. Mr. Hyde from *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson)<sup>11</sup>. Then we have the damsel in distress and a burdened male character, who are used to create the feeling of romance and drama. Finally, there is the permeating presence of death.

## **2. *Dracula***

*Dracula* is a gothic horror novel written by Irish author Bram Stoker in 1897. While it was not well received by contemporary critics of that time, it has since become a literary classic, most notably for establishing the horror genre and the creation of the character Count Dracula. *Dracula* rose in popularity in the 1920s, with multiple theatre and movie iterations and interpretations.<sup>12</sup> The titular character is one of the most famous horror “monster characters”, both in literature, cinema and other media. The plot is centered around the vampire Count Dracula, and a group of protagonists who discover his evil plans of moving from his home country of Transylvania to London, England to establish a dark domain and their efforts to stop him.<sup>13</sup> As a piece of Gothic literature, the novel has all the aforementioned characteristics and

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<sup>9</sup> Senf (2017)

<sup>10</sup> Hurley (2015:194)

<sup>11</sup> Stevenson (2004:207)

<sup>12</sup> Summers (2007:124-125)

<sup>13</sup> Drakula. *Hrvatska enciklopedija, mrežno izdanje.*

elements, presented in a way that manages to combine the elements of early Gothic works and later ones. In that sense, Dracula is both a synthesis and a nostalgic revival of gothic themes.<sup>14</sup>

Similar to early Gothic works, part of the setting in the novel takes place in an old castle in Transylvania, but also reminiscent of newer works it takes place closer to civilization. In this case, in England (family homes located in Whitby and Exeter, but also an asylum for the mentally ill in London). This is intentional to create a twofold effect. To create mystery and fear of the unknown, established by Jonathan Harker's journey to Transylvania and his stay in Castle Dracula<sup>15</sup>, but also to bring that feeling to a more well-known environment, closer to the reader (when the setting shifts to England), thus magnifying it. For it is one thing to hear and read stories about monsters in faraway places. It is quite another to imagine them in your surroundings and everyday life. Transylvania represents a world mystery. It is a land mostly unknown, beyond any maps, a land of fog surrounded by mountains and thick forests:

*“In the midst of the Carpathian Mountains; one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe. I was not able to light on any map or work giving the exact locality of the castle Dracula, and there are no maps of this country as yet to compare with our own[...].”*<sup>16</sup>

It is filled with strange people, rich with tradition and mystery but also carrying a bloody history. It is the place of origin of many European legends and myths:

*“I read that every known superstition in the world is gathered into the horseshoe of the Carpathians as if it were the centre of some sort of imaginative whirlpool; [...]”*<sup>17</sup>

It is exactly the kind of place that will allow the reader to imagine and even believe the existence of these myths and legends. This is why the combination of these two settings in the novel works to such an extent. Because the author managed to give a plausible origin of the supernatural, alongside giving an explanation how that same supernatural force is suddenly in our vicinity.

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<sup>14</sup> Bloom (2007:1)

<sup>15</sup> Stoker (1897: 1-55)

<sup>16</sup> Stoker (1987:2)

<sup>17</sup> Stoker (1987:2)

Like in any other Gothic novel the atmosphere is dark grim and moody, which alongside the setting, manages to convey the feeling of claustrophobia, for example during Jonathan's journey through the woods of Transylvania and his stay in Castle Dracula:

*“Soon we were hammed in with trees, which in places arched right over the roadway till we passed as through a tunnel; and again great frowning rocks guarded us boldly on either side.”<sup>18</sup>*

However, we must also consider that the atmosphere is likewise a tool to show the emotions of the characters. To portray their state of mind or spirit. Bad and dark weather, sudden storms, and wind alongside the coming of the night all mirror the times when the characters were in a bad state of mind. Similarly, the breaking of dawn and the sunlight of the day signify the feeling of hope, strength, and love.

That being said it would be remiss of me not to mention the criticism that the novel has received. Most criticism is centered around the writing itself and the characters. Some call the writing careless and sloppy with too much filler that leaves the novel feeling bloated at times. Secondly, there are arguments made that the characters are one-dimensional. That they are more “labels than individuals”.<sup>19</sup>

That being said, the first chapters provide necessary worldbuilding, while the story takes a more rapid pace once the characters start interacting with one another and with the paranormal aspects of the novel. The main purpose of the characters is to fill specific roles in the story. They serve as lenses so that the reader can experience the story. Finally, they are tools to invoke the feelings of tension and fear.

### **3. Characters mediating the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century concepts**

#### **3.1 Count Dracula**

Count Dracula is the titular character and main antagonist of the novel. He is a physical representation of all supernatural elements. As such, he is a perfect subject for the study of

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<sup>18</sup> Stoker (1897:12)

<sup>19</sup> Summers (2007:124)

gothic elements. He is a monster, a vampire, the Other. A being whose presence we cannot fathom, but who is always present and preys on unfortunate and unsuspecting souls. He is described as having a strong face with an aquiline nose and arched nostrils. He has massive eyebrows and bushy hair. A fixed and cruel looking mouth with strangely sharp white teeth which protrude over the lips. His ears are pointed, and he is extremely pale. Other peculiarities include having long pointed nails, hairy palms and rancid breath that reeks of blood.<sup>20</sup> Altogether this points a picture of a strange man, who at first glance appears normal, but there is a sense of strangeness to him. A sense of mystery. This is the element of duality, common in gothic works. Dracula is both a man and a monster. More precisely, he is a monster that acts as a man. A predator that wears a human disguise and uses human mannerisms to hunt his prey. This also serves to make him more terrifying to the reader. For he is no mindless beast. He's a being of cunning and evil intent.<sup>21</sup> This is an intentional and important characteristic.

Bela Lugosi, the Hungarian-American actor best known for this portrayal of Dracula in the 1931 movie adaptation *Dracula* had this to say about the character:

*“A monster, to be convincing, must have a character and a brain [...] such a monster is able to thrill and audience. It can plot against the hero and heroine. It is a menace which must be combated with brains, not by running away. We are all more afraid of cunning than brute force.”*<sup>22</sup> - Bela Lugosi about playing as Dracula

His visage also adheres to the political and social conventions of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. More of that will be explored in a forthcoming chapter. However, his physical appearance bears resemblance to certain racial stereotypes common for that time. His aquiline nose with wide nostrils, his pale skin-tone, along with his bushy big eyebrows draw parallels with the stereotypical description the Jews.<sup>23</sup>

His origin and identity are also very characteristic as far as Gothic characters go in that Dracula is a count who defended his land against the Turks during the Middle Ages. He belongs to the family of Dracula, a great and noble race who ruled over the peoples and lands of Transylvania:

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<sup>20</sup> Stoker (1897: 18)

<sup>21</sup> Stoker (1897: 26-27)

<sup>22</sup> Lugosi (2007:127)

<sup>23</sup> Hogle (2015:13)

*“He must, indeed, have been that Voivode Dracula who won his name against the Turk, over the great river on the very frontier of Turkeyland [...] The Draculas were, says, Aminius, a great and noble race [...]”*<sup>24</sup>

As a supernatural being, he has many unbelievable powers. He is a vampire; thus, he is immortal. He cannot die with the passing of time and he consumes the blood of the living which he can use to grow younger. He casts no shadow and he has no reflection in the mirror. He is as strong as twenty men and can transform himself into a variety of animals (wolf, bat, bird, dog). He has control over the weather, can summon storms and fog and all the creatures of the night are at his beck and call.

However, as a part of the paranormal world, he also has certain weaknesses, equally strange, unique and illogical as is his entire nature. He cannot enter a property without being previously invited in (this again could point to the older traditions of guest right), as with all other evil beings, he cannot stand in the presence of God or His symbols (cross, holy water, sacred ground etc.). He is a creature of the night so he cannot move during the day or be exposed to sunlight. Most importantly, he is through his un-life still connected to death – more precisely to his resting place (in the case of Dracula his coffin – 50 wooden boxes)<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, he also has regular human traits. His greatest strength comes from his long “life”, thus his acquired knowledge and cunning. His greatest weakness is his selfishness and so-called child-brain. In the novel, Van Helsing calls Dracula “a criminal”. This can also indicate the perspective of that time towards crime. Villainy and criminal behavior are looked at as weaknesses and disabilities. Van Helsing states that a criminal has a child-brain, not properly developed compared to man. It is a belief that good and righteous will overcome those who are evil through modern practices and knowledge:

*“This criminal has not full man-brain. He is clever and cunning and resourceful; but he be not of man-stature as to brain. He be of child-brain in much [...] But his child-mind only saw so far; and it may be that; as ever in God’s Providence, the very thing that the evil-doer most reckoned on for his selfish good, turns out to be his chiefest harm. The hunter is taken in his own snare, [...]”*<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Stoker (1897:253)

<sup>25</sup> Stoker (1897:253)

<sup>26</sup> Stoker (1897:360-361)

The final element of Gothic literature that Dracula encapsulates is that he blurs all distinctions of gender, sexuality, race, class and nature. While normal people lose blood and thus lose life, he takes blood and rejuvenates himself, even grows youthful. He displays possessive behavior with an underlying sexual context:

*“How dare you touch him, any of you? How dare you cast eyes on him when I had forbidden it? Back, I tell you all! This man belongs to me! Beware how you meddle with him, or you’ll have to deal with me.”* – Dracula claims Jonathan Harker in front of his brides<sup>27</sup>

Dracula is shown to be amoral in his sexuality, breaking social norms. He has a harem of women (a gothic element for it is a remnant of the Middle Ages), but also has an attraction to both Jonathan Harker and his wife Mina Harker. Worst of all is his act of attacking Mina and violating her person with his essence (blood). This is of course an allegorical take on sexual assault, making Dracula a sexual deviant as well.<sup>28</sup> Dracula is able to act as both a man from the West (an intellectual of great culture) and from the East (a noble with rich family history and tradition). He can conduct himself with nobility and poise (part of the aristocracy) while also able to walk among or make deals with those of lower class (*szgany*-gypsies).<sup>29</sup> Also, of note is how all of his interaction with the lowest class is shown to be amoral, shady and results in such actions as (smuggling, kidnapping, assault etc.). This shows another stereotype of how the upper class looks down on the lower class in the Victorian era.

Another, subtle trait is his ability to wear disguises (become someone else). This could point towards genderfluidity, crossdressing and bisexuality, all motifs present in gothic works and viewed by the society of that time as deviant (but for that precise reason also intriguing topics).<sup>30</sup>

In the novel, Dracula is used both as a character (antagonist) thus his actions beget the reactions of the protagonists. This moves the plot forward. However, he is also a tool in his role of a horror monster. Meant to incite fear and a sense of uneasiness. A good example would be Jonathan Harker witnessing Dracula climb down the castle walls like a lizard.<sup>31</sup> This wondrous scene is used to shock both the book character but also the reader. Before the horror

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<sup>27</sup> Stoker (1897:40)

<sup>28</sup> Stoker (1987:297)

<sup>29</sup> Hogle (2015:12)

<sup>30</sup> Hogle (2015:12)

<sup>31</sup> Stoker (1897:35)

starts, an appropriate build-up of tension is required. This is achieved more with astonishing and inscrutable scenes that outright horror and violence. A type of slow-burn where the characters first only get glimpses of the monster, wondering what is real or not, doubting the strength of their own minds (both Jonathan's and Mina's first few encounters with Dracula.<sup>32</sup> Here we slip into other elements such as dreams and insanity.

### **3.2 Jonathan Harker**

Jonathan Harker is the first protagonist introduced in the novel. He serves as the readers first and main point of contact with the unknown world of the east, the supernatural elements and the Count. He is also the one of four main characters that serve as narrators in the novel. Characters that we see through. They are the lens through which we perceive what is going on at a given time. He represents the typical British, the generic Victorian. A solicitor, he's a man of relatively good wealth, well-educated and cultured. He conducts himself with good and proper mannerisms. He is also set to be married (which happens later in the novel) thus conforming to the expectations of Victorian society. He is the burdened male character found in Gothic fiction.

His horrifying ordeal in Castle Dracula took a toll on his mental health, making him question his own mind.<sup>33</sup> However, he exemplifies the heroic traits of men who never give up no matter the cost or burden. After his encounter with Dracula in London and consequent talk with Van Helsing, he gives himself to the cause of ridding the world of Dracula's evil.<sup>34</sup>

### **3.3 Mina Harker**

The main female character of the novel, Mina Harker serves as the traditional damsel in distress character. However, Stoker does insert in her character, certain attributes of the "New Woman" that allow her step beyond that role at times. Indeed, Mina is one of the central characters of the story, both as a victim needing saving (thus giving the male characters motivation and moving the plot forward) and as protagonist herself (her talents are of great use in the hunt for

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<sup>32</sup> Stoker (1897:95)

<sup>33</sup> Stoker (1897:109)

<sup>34</sup> Stoker (1897:197)



Dracula). She represents both the ideal Victorian woman, but also shows signs of progressive beliefs that are the basis of the “New Woman”. Mina Harker and Lucy Westenra are also the main sources of romance in the novel. As mentioned previously, elements of romance are a staple of Gothic literature, and both Mina and Lucy showcase them in different ways. Mina is the perfect wife. The kind of woman men would lay down their lives for. Saving her becomes the main objective at the end of the novel, showing how a woman is worth more than justice or revenge or any other more “basic” reason:

*“This boy will someday know what a brave and gallant woman his mother is. Already he knows her sweetness and loving care; later on he will understand how some men so loved her, that they did dare much for her sake.”*<sup>35</sup>- Jonathan Harker about Mina

### **3.4 John Seward, Quincey Morris, Arthur Holmwood**

The three male characters of Seward, Morris and Holmwood share many properties and roles in the novel. All of them are Lucy Westenra’s suitors. All of them serve the abovementioned role similar to the medieval heroic knights. They are honorable, loyal, brave and willing to do whatever it takes to save Lucy. After her death, like true knights, they swear and depart on a quest for justice and vengeance to destroy evil. Another notable aspect is their bond of brotherhood and mutual love and respect.

As for individual, specific traits, Holmwood is notable for his love, devotion and strength of spirit. Shown when he vanquishes the newly turned vampire Lucy. This represents the element of good trumping over evil. The act of releasing or freeing Lucy’s soul begets the feeling of hope and salvation even in tragedy and darkness:

“But Arthur never faltered. He looked like a figure of Thor as his untrembling arm rose and fell, [...]”<sup>36</sup>

Quincey Morris is shown to represent the Victorian view on Americans. He is young and excitable (mirroring the youth of the USA compared to the British Empire) but also courageous, noble and self-sacrificing, giving his life in the end to finish the quest:

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<sup>35</sup> Stoker (1897:399)

<sup>36</sup> Stoker (1897:226)

*“I am only too happy to have been of service! Oh God! [...] It was worth this to die! Look! Look!”*<sup>37</sup> - Quincey Morris, moments before his death

John Seward is the third main narrator in the novel. He represents the modern world. The world of science and facts. He is another lens through which the reader views the story. He serves a counterweight to Van Helsing. Both are doctors and men of science. They differ in that Van Helsing accepts that the world is made of more than just facts and already proven knowledge. Seward like the reader, is a student of Van Helsing. Throughout the novel he learns and finally becomes a believer. Seward represents us, learning about the unknown world:

*“Then you want me not to let some previous conviction injure the receptivity of my mind with regard to some strange matter. Do I read your lesson aright?”*<sup>38</sup> - John Seward

### **3.5 Abraham Van Helsing**

Abraham Van Helsing serves as the main opposition. He embodies other elements of Gothic fiction with which he counters Dracula. In most ways they are perfect opposites. Both are old and wise men, knowledgeable and cunning. While Van Helsing is a stalwart protector of humanity, Dracula wants to rule it. Van Helsing is a man of the West, of the world of science and logic. That does not stop him however, in learning esoteric arts and practices. Believing in legends and stories, he is the modern man who adapts to the unknown, just how Dracula is the unknown that adapts and wants to learn about the new world. He is teaching Doctor Seward and us, the readers by proxy, that it is alright to question everything and never be satisfied by what you think you know:

*“Do not fear to think even the most not-probable.”* - Van Helsing to Seward

Van Helsing is also the only character that imbues humour in the novel, a rarity.

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<sup>37</sup> Stoker (1897:398)

<sup>38</sup> Stoker (1897:202)

### **3.6 Lucy Westenra**

Lucy Westenra is the final main narrator of the novel. She is the second half of the romance element. Unlike Mina, she represents the tragic female character and the female monster. She is a happy, kind and affectionate young woman, who enjoys life. The attention she gets from three male suitors, all vying for her hand, has a deep effect on her. It is no coincidence that Stoker has chosen such a tragic for her. Unlike Mina, who is content to live life as a loving, humble and dutiful wife, Lucy has a hunger for new experiences. It is this hunger that is later twisted when she becomes a vampire.

### **3.7 Renfield**

The character of Renfield represents a Victorian-era view on mental instability, crime and deviant behaviour. He is locked in an asylum where he is observed but given no treatment. This shows the view of how the mentally ill are a burden to society and belong on the fringes. He also exemplifies the belief in some sort of connection between mental instability and the paranormal. Throughout the novel, Renfield's mental state and behaviour changes rapidly, coinciding with numerous actions made by Dracula. He seems to be somehow connected to the count, even before Dracula arrives in England. He suffers from rapid and extreme behavioural changes, which coincide with Dracula's vicinity and other actions. He is drawn to Dracula's new lair near the asylum, even before the count himself arrives.<sup>39</sup> This can represent the view how mentally unstable people are more gullible, easy to trust and be manipulated. In turn, they are more prone to violence and criminal behaviour. Another deviant trait that Renfield exhibits is so called zoophagy – he is obsessed with consuming animals.

## **4. A view on gender in the Gothic literary tradition**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the perspective of people on sexual norms started to shift and be challenged. This, along with any other sort of sexual deviance was taken as both a symptom and cause of social degeneration, thus making it a possible threat to social stability.<sup>40</sup> Among

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<sup>39</sup> Stoker (1897:105-108)

<sup>40</sup> Hurley (2015:199)

these was the idea of the “New Woman”. This is a woman who rebels or abandons the prescribed notions and expectations of Victorian society. She is independent, capable, outspoken and modern. Capable of adapting to the rapidly evolving times and even flourishing and thriving in them. The long-held belief that was being threatened by the “New Woman” was that of established gender roles or spheres. Man (husband) is the provider, protector, worker and warrior. His is the outside sphere. On the other hand, the woman (wife) is the matron, the mother, caregiver. Hers is the inner, private sphere. So it was expected of women to be innocent in both words and actions, selfless and caring with a strong sense of purity. Women were thought to be more emotion and intuition driven, while men were driven by cold logic and facts.<sup>41</sup>

The “New Woman” upsets this established order. Most Gothic works that had the “New Woman” as a main element of motif were written by female authors. Their Gothic outputs were “Written by women for women”. This gave rise to the term Female Gothic. Most notable female authors of that genre are Ann Radcliffe, Mary Shelley and the Brontë sisters. Bram Stoker has an interesting approach to his female characters and gender roles in general. The two female characters Mina Harker and Lucy Westenra display both elements of the ideal Victorian woman, but also the “New Woman”.

Mina Harker is shown to be the perfect Victorian woman. She is pure of heart and mind, almost to the point of being asexual. She spends her honeymoon in a convent taking care of a recovering Jonathan. Her only thought regarding her marriage and husband Jonathan are of a caregiving variety, while her love remains steadfast and absolute:

*“I could only tell him that I was the happiest woman in all the wide world, and that I had nothing to give him except myself, my life and my trust, and that with these went my love and duty for all the days of my life.”*<sup>42</sup> - Mina about her marriage in a letter to Lucy

She is also sisterly and loving towards her other male companions, Van Helsing, Morris, Seward and Holmwood.:

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<sup>41</sup> Hurley (2015:199)

<sup>42</sup> Stoker (1897:111)

*“She is one of God’s women fashioned by His own hand to show us men and other women that there is a heaven where we can enter [...] So true, so sweet, so noble, so little and egoist [...]”*<sup>43</sup> – Van Helsing talks about Mina

Mina also seems to share Victorian views on the “New Woman”:

*“Some of the “New Woman” writers will someday start an idea that men and women should be allowed to see each other asleep before proposing or accepting. But I suppose the New Woman won’t condescend in the future to accept; she will do the proposing herself. and a nice job she will make of it too!”* – Mina about the “New Woman” and marriage”<sup>44</sup>

Lastly, Mina has the desire to be fully subservient to her husband, wishing to make sure she is useful to him.<sup>45</sup> However, this is also where a sort of paradox appears. Because of her desire to be useful, Mina is proactive. She becomes self-sufficient to the point that she actively helps the “men” in their quest, capable of going toe to toe with Van Helsing in their verbal debates, providing new insight and a fresh perspective. Furthermore, in numerous instances is her help vital to the group. Even though Stoker apparently cannot help himself and appoints her as the secretary of the group.

Unfortunately, however capable she may be, she cannot escape the role of the damsel in distress. Dracula’s attack on her person, in her bedroom no less, heavily skirts the line with sexual assault. Dracula not only forces himself upon her, but also forces her to consume his blood, his “essence”. However, Stoker goes a step further. Her assault is not just a single occurrence, it could be seen as a metaphor for a controlling and abusive relationship. Dracula uses his powers (force) to control her mind and body during a period of time. This makes Mina a prisoner in her own head, but also in her own home, fearing any action will incur Dracula’s wrath. This mirrors the role of married women, having no freedom or say in matters, depending on the male and unfortunately in some cases this resulted in suffering. The final piece of evidence to corroborate that this scene is a metaphor for true sexual assault is her being scarred after Van Helsing places a blessed Wafer on her forehead, which causes a mark to appear.

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<sup>43</sup> Stoker (1897:197)

<sup>44</sup> Stoker (1897:95)

<sup>45</sup> Stoker (1897:56)

*“Unclean! Unclean! Even the Almighty shuns my polluted flesh! I must bear this mark of shame upon my forehead until the Judgement Day.”*<sup>46</sup>

This is of course a nod to real female victims, who may not bear physical marks like Mina, but the feeling of shame and uncleanness is the same.

We can conclude that Mina is given properties of both a traditional Victorian woman, but also some traits of the “New Woman”. All of them show her in a positive light. The problem lays in the fact that even with Mina, who is seen as a perfect woman, all these positive attributes –are still seen as originally masculine. Van Helsing states that Mina has “man’s brain” and “woman’s heart”.<sup>47</sup>

The other character, Lucy Westenra, is written in a similar way. She also carries characteristics of both traditional and the “New Woman”. Unlike Mina, she is much more passionate and easy-going, often having unrealistic fantasies and dreams. In some instances, she manages to display both sets of characteristics at once. She harbors the same traditional beliefs, but since she enjoys the attention of her suitors, she also has some rather “deviant” fantasies. It is possible that Stoker wanted to insert a subconscious idea or feeling of promiscuity.<sup>48</sup>

*“My dear Mina, why are men so noble when we women are so little worthy of them? [...] Why can’t they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save her all this trouble? But this is heresy, and I must not say it.”*<sup>49</sup> – Lucy’s letter to Mina

There is a layer of irony present in Stoker’s decision of having Lucy become a vampire. This is another representation of Victorian beliefs. For when Lucy becomes a Vampire, her previously “mere” fantasies now become instinct. She attempts to openly seduce Holmwood who succumbs to her charms immediately, while Morris and Seward are also similarly affected. It is evidenced by both vampire Lucy and Dracula’s brides how after becoming a monster, all their deviant characteristics become more apparent. Other, by Victorian standards, more pure and innocent ones get twisted. While Lucy was beautiful and angelic in life, now her looks are seductive and lustful. Before, she was willing to share a single kiss with Morris, and now she

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<sup>46</sup> Stoker (1897:313)

<sup>47</sup> Hurley (2015:202)

<sup>48</sup> Senf (2017)

<sup>49</sup> Stoker (1897:61)

is willing to take a kiss of blood. This perspective, of a monstrous and degenerate female can be attributed to the fear of “New Woman” and the threat she poses to society.<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps the most negative view or “critique” of females is shown in the character of Mrs. Westenra, Lucy’s mother. She removes the garlic flowers from her room and opens the window, thus dooming Lucy to her fate. Again, this points to women following their emotions rather than cold logic.<sup>51</sup>

It is unclear just what precisely was Stoker’s view on the “New Woman”. Different female authors have expressed different opinions and viewpoint on Stoker’s treatment of his female characters. Some say that he is a feminist, who centers both halves of his novel around a female character. Some others feel that Stoker is using the violence and aggression inflicted on these female characters is used to make the novel more interesting. - This would imply that Stoker and his readers are attracted to such notions.<sup>52</sup>

The men in Stoker’s novel share and follow the Victorian ideals and conventions. There is no real deviation in their characteristics and the expectations of society. Truly opposite, they are shown to be perfect in their masculine roles.

## 5. Clash of the Worlds

An important theme in the novel is the clash of the East with the West, mainly represented in Dracula’s arrival to England. This parallels the real-life sentiment present in Victorian England. It was time when the British Empire’s future was coming into question as the embodiment of the East, Dracula represents a great threat to the established order. But it is more than just the clash of good vs. evil. It is a clash of cultures. In his travels Jonathan Harker remarks on how he has the impression of “leaving the West and entering the East.”<sup>53</sup> The land was strange to him, filled with different peoples and traditions. This is another contrast. While the west is a land ruled by facts, the east is ruled by superstition. It is a place of things that cannot be explained or truly understood.<sup>54</sup>

This is what Dracula carries with him on *The Demeter*. Stoker literally shows us the East coming like a great storm, the same storm created by Dracula that surrounded *The Demeter*

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<sup>50</sup> Hurley (2015:202)

<sup>51</sup> Stoker (1897:140-141)

<sup>52</sup> Senf (1982:33)

<sup>53</sup> Stoker (1897:1)

<sup>54</sup> Stoker (1897:5-6)

until it reached England. Stoker immediately shows us the danger of these two worlds colliding and the damage it could cause. The fate of the crew of *The Demeter* is a story of men who came face to face with the unimaginable. One by one they succumbed to darkness, madness and death, until only the captain remained. But even he was merely a puppet. Used so that Dracula could reach his destination.<sup>55</sup>

The conflict and clash of worlds only grows with each new move or action Dracula makes. Of note is the escape of the wolf from the zoo. Mentioned multiple times in the novel, wolves are a part of the wild, of the east. Thus, they are under Dracula's rule. Dracula manages to free a wolf from a local zoo and use it in an attack to get access to Lucy. There are two things of importance here.

The first is regarding the wolf itself. After it served its purpose, Dracula released his control, and the wolf was left wandering until he returned to the zookeeper. However, for the entire duration of its escape, a massive panic was sweeping the city. The public was afraid of animal attacks and deaths. And yet, the wolf returned home, peacefully, without harming anyone. This is another, much more real and believable example of how people fear what they don't understand. This proves just how mystery and the state of unknowing is an effective tool in creating suspense in writing. A fact that writers of Gothic literature use to great effect.<sup>56</sup>

The second bit of importance, that can be gleaned from this part of the novel is just how easily disrupted can everyday life be. The wolf, as a singular element of the East, is enough to cause a city-wide panic. We can only imagine how people would react to much larger disruptions.

Present throughout the novel is the conflict of science and the mystical. Stoker consistently mentions the power of progress and technology. The protagonists use typewriters, coded messages (written in shorthand) and transportation alongside scientific methods and cold logic to triumph over Dracula and his paranormal powers. Mina uses her typewriter to make notes and copy them, so they survive. It is because her methodical mind that they manage to piece together the list of events that happened. The use of coded messages helps Jonathan to hide information from the count, it even stumps Van Helsing, though he is quick to praise their smart thinking.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Stoker (1897:81-90)

<sup>56</sup> Stoker (1897:142-147)

<sup>57</sup> Stoker (1897:191)



One more instance that shows the power of technology is Seward's phonogram. A machine that can not only store messages or notes, but can also convey a person's emotional state:

*"That is a wonderful machine, but it is cruelly true. It told me, in its very tones the anguish of your heart. It was like a soul crying out to almighty God."*<sup>58</sup> - Mina to Seward

Another motif that is present throughout the novel is the idea of reverse colonization. This term will be explored more in-depth in the next chapter. However, there is an instance that is important to mention here. As Dracula is fleeing England back to Transylvania, he is traveling by boat. On the other hand, the group gives chase and uses the train. This is important because it also shows how these two worlds interact and differ. Dracula learnt as much as he could to prepare himself for a life in England. He learnt the language, traditions and mannerisms of British society. Again, like a predator to camouflage and hide in plain sight. However, he is still a creature of the old world (even more apparent since he is centuries old). As such, he could not have learnt to depend on and use modern technology. That is why he is using a boat as means of transportation. The same way people did throughout the centuries. Meanwhile, Van Helsing and the group are using trains, modern technology, that has learnt to conquer the land, go across it, through mountains and over ravines. In this instance, it is technology that has the upper hand.<sup>59</sup>

Both Van Helsing and Seward are doctors, they use their combined knowledge to ascertain and even explain some aspects of Dracula's powers. Indeed, even though Dracula's actions and abilities are unearthly, the way they affect his victims are not. Stoker uses medical knowledge and terms, along with descriptions of procedures to provide an explanation. Furthermore, these instances provide brief moments of relief and respite from the horror and tension filled atmosphere of the novel. Van Helsing and Seward use science to save Lucy's life multiple times, it is only by sheer bad luck and Mrs. Westenra's lack of knowledge that Lucy dies. This pertains to Stoker's perspective on how it is the human element in science that is questionable and lacking. Van Helsing himself mentions how even though they may not have all the answers yet, it is only a matter of time before science provides the necessary knowledge. Even though Dracula is a paranormal entity, his foray into England can be seen (especially

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<sup>58</sup> Stoker (1897:234)

<sup>59</sup> Stoker (1897:342)

with the kind of symptoms he causes) as a start of an epidemic. An unknown and deadly disease from the East comes to the West.<sup>60</sup>

Another crossing point between these two worlds is their perspective on life. This is shown in the case of the insane patient Renfield. He believes about the exchange of life or energy. That is why he consumes animals:

*“I used to fancy that life was a positive and perpetual entity, and that by consuming a multitude of live things, no matter how low in the scale of creation, one might indefinitely prolong life.”*<sup>61</sup> - Renfield about his beliefs

This idea is not uncommon, Renfield just displays an extreme version of it. Many ancient cultures and religions believed in the energy of life. That life is a constant circle of giving and taking. That belief is still present in the east, in India where people still believe in reincarnation and chakras. While Renfield is more focused on consuming life as a metaphysical entity, Dracula and Van Helsing are more focused on blood. Blood is ever present in the novel. It is the driving point of Dracula's actions. He came to England to feast on blood, like a chef wanting to taste some exotic cuisine. Dracula's craving for blood is explained biologically. He cannot consume anything else. Again, we see the attempt of science to explain the unnatural. Van Helsing himself also harbours both western and eastern beliefs in the properties and significance of blood. As a doctor and scientist, he knows the biological role of blood in the human body. He performs blood transfusion on Lucy, a relatively new procedure. However, he also believes in the more mystical properties of blood. That blood carries properties of the person it was taken from. That is why he puts great significance on the fact that three men gave their blood for Lucy. Even more important are the feelings they have for her:

*“A brave man's blood is the best thing on this earth when a woman is in trouble.”*<sup>62</sup> - Van Helsing to Quincey Morris

As mentioned before, Van Helsing has no qualms in using esoteric or questionable practices to fill the gaps or questions left unanswered by science. When Lucy is dying, he conducts blood transfusions to keep her alive, along with garlic flowers and prayers to keep

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<sup>60</sup> Stoker (1897:118-126)

<sup>61</sup> Stoker (1897:246)

<sup>62</sup> Stoker (1897:154)

Dracula away. This is meant to show that science and adapt and even accept certain elements of the esoteric. This may be Stoker's attempt at showing that, even though the fear of British society changing because of outside influences and reverse colonization is justified, it does not mean some of these new elements could not be useful. Just like how Van Helsing is using both science and religion in tandem to fight of Evil. While in some other instances, this would be questioned, for science and religion rarely go hand in hand. However, in this story that particular element is not pointed out because the story gives us another "obscure and unknowable" force to contend with. Here religion is shown as an opposite force to the esoteric arts. Religion (God) is on the side of science (man), while the esoteric (Dracula) is connected to evil (Devil):

"[...] Instinctively I moved forward with a protective impulse, holding the crucifix and wafer in my hand. I felt a mighty power fly along my arm; and it was without surprise that I saw the monster cower back [...]"<sup>63</sup>

Finally, we have the symbolism of the East and West with light and darkness. The sun sets in the west, and darkness (Dracula) envelops the land from the east.<sup>64</sup>

## 6. Inter-Genre Gothic discourse

As stated previously, *Dracula* is a synthesis of gothic elements. Stoker wrote his novel almost one hundred years after Gothic literature was established. It is evident that Stoker pays homage to earlier Gothic works and authors. Perhaps the biggest similarity with older Gothic works is with the novel *Frankenstein*, written by Mary Shelley. Both novels are written in epistolary form, that is a novel written as a collection of letters or other documents. Besides *Dracula*, *Frankenstein's* monster is probably the second most famous Horror monster in literature. The novels both share the troubled and burdened main character. The main difference between them is the way the novels end and what their ultimate message is. *Frankenstein* is the story of how man's hunger for knowledge leads to darkness and misery. Victor Frankenstein is forever hunted by his creation. There is no "happy ending" in *Frankenstein*.<sup>65</sup> On the other

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<sup>63</sup> Stoker (1897:323)

<sup>65</sup> Shelly (2023:277)

hand, in *Dracula*, science is used as a power to do good, it triumphs over evil. The ending is likewise hopeful. Dracula is destroyed and the main protagonists find peace.

Another similar Gothic work is Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Both works again feature a monstrous antagonist, the difference being that Dracula is a paranormal entity, while Mr. Hyde is a representation of man's bestial nature. Of a person's inner beast.<sup>66</sup>

While *Dracula* certainly takes inspiration from earlier Gothic works. The novel itself presents elements that will later evolve into new literary genres. One such source is the detective story or crime novel. Dracula is the story of unexplained and gruesome murders, of a killer stalking at night, and of intrepid investigators piecing together clues determined to stop him. The similarities are easily apparent. We can see how certain elements of gothic horror evolved, and left behind their more unearthly properties, replacing them with more plausible scenarios:

*"[...] Victorian popular fiction aimed to horrify the readers by scraping the opaque surface of every day reality, and foreground the deceptiveness of appearances [...] When sensational journalism was thriving, printing daily cases of atrocious murders and adulteries, the sensation novelists fill the newspapers [...] turning traditional eighteenth-century Gothic plots into modern Victorian criminal intrigues."*<sup>67</sup>

It should come as no surprise that the first the first detective story was written in 1841 by Edgar Allan Poe – *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*<sup>68</sup> Over the years, detective and crime novels have certainly evolved in many different forms. From Sherlock Holmes to quirky, charming and funny detectives like Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot have certainly moved away from their dark and gloomy gothic origin. Nevertheless, there are still some that have their gothic roots more apparent. Scandinavian crime novels in particular still carry that gothic feel with them. Works of authors like Jo Nesbø or Stieg Larsson.

Very similar to crime novels are spy thrillers. Even in *Dracula* there are elements reminiscent of future spy novels. The secret codes and letters exchanged by Jonathan and Mina, the use of recording devices for intelligence gathering and the use of technology to win against

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<sup>66</sup> Stevenson (2004: 207)

<sup>67</sup> Talairach-Vielmas (2007:247-248)

<sup>68</sup> Poe (1841:1)

other often superior forces. Not to mention, charming and mysterious gentlemen, romance and adventure, and despicable but memorable villains.

Romance is also an important and prevalent element. Through time, Gothic novels have evolved into a subgenre comprised of female writers called the Female Gothic, with authors like Ann Radcliffe, Mary Shelley, and sisters Brontë.

It could be argued that *Dracula* also has some documentary elements. Most notably, the entire story is actually maintained by documents, letters and diary entries. While not official, they are still more trustworthy and pure word of mouth. Jonathan Harker's journey to Transylvania and his record of the people, places, traditions and nature are akin to a traveling photographer exploring the vast world.

Lastly there are elements of adventure. There is definitely an argument to be made about the second half of *Dracula* being a horror adventure. Even in the first half there are two voyages, Jonathan Harker's visit to Transylvania and the Last Voyage of *The Demeter* (incidentally, also the name of a 2023 horror film depicting this very chapter of the novel). Voyages to strange, unexplored and exotic places are a staple of classic adventure novels, like Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. I would give special mention to Stevenson's *Treasure Island* for multiple reasons. Stevenson is also an accomplished Gothic writer, and *Treasure Island* is another novel that shares certain similarities with *Dracula*. From chapter ten of the book, the tone shifts. Suddenly a group is forming, trying to solve a mystery. Later that group undertakes a daring quest which culminates in a showdown in a faraway land. In this sense, *Dracula* draws parallels with the story of Jim Hawkins and his quest to find the treasure of famous pirate captain Flint, only without the horror.<sup>69</sup>

Finally, the novel sustains the notion of reverse colonization. During the late-Victorian era, British society was changing. I have already mentioned the "New Woman" and the perception of women in this period. However, most prevalent fear was that of reverse colonization. The British Empire was in slow decline. Their global influence was waning, other powers started to rise in the world (USA, Germany), there were murmurings of unrest in the colonies and traditional values began to lose their shine. Suddenly, the British no longer felt their future secure. This tense period was reflected in literary works, where authors would try to transform that perception and feeling into a written narrative.

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<sup>69</sup> Stevenson (2004:1-200)

According to Stephen Arata, reverse colonization is a narrative of societal decline. It is a fear that the civilized world will be conquered or colonized by a primitive force.:

*“In each case, a terrifying reversal has occurred: the colonizer finds himself in the position of the colonized, the exploiter becomes exploited, the victimizer victimized. Such fears are linked to a perceived decline – racial, moral, spiritual – which makes the nation vulnerable to attack from more vigorous, “primitive” peoples. But fantasies of reverse colonization are more than products of geopolitical fears. They are also responses to cultural guilt.”*<sup>70</sup> - Stephen Arata about reverse colonization

Another name for literature that portrays reverse colonization is invasion literature. Stories that portray a powerful outside force coming and taking over society. Possibly the most well-known work of this literature is George Herbert Wells’ novel *War of the Worlds*. In that novel, an alien race begins an invasion of Earth. Likewise, a similar scenario also occurs in *Dracula*, where a powerful and mysterious outside force (a vampire) is invading Britain. Dracula is this primitive force. The unknown, primal and powerful. He does not care about the “civilized”, he is a beast ruled by baser urges. He fears no law or punishment.

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<sup>70</sup> Arata (1990:623)

## Conclusion

During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries a new literary genre emerged from dark romanticism called Gothic literature. It used certain elements of romantic literature, while taking inspiration from medieval gothic architecture and stories to create a new type of fiction. Stories of terror and horror, set in dark and haunted castles, following characters hunted by unknown and evil forces. Gothic fiction and later Gothic horror quickly became a classic literary genre. One that grew and evolved until it was established in literature, movies, theatre and other media. Of all the elements of Gothic fictions, it is the Gothic monster that became so famous that it was soon adapted into other genres of literature and media.

Of all the works of Gothic fiction, none is more famous than Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Considered to be one of the all-time classic pieces of literature, *Dracula* established the modern vampire myth with the most famous vampire of all: Count Dracula. The story of *Dracula* follows a group of people led by Abraham Van Helsing who come face to face with the eponymous vampire. Hunted by this monstrous adversary they struggle to find a way to stop this walking nightmare before he accomplishes his plan. Making England his new hunting ground.

Bram Stoker's novel is an excellent showcase of Gothic literature. It combines elements of earlier Gothic works like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* with new, more progressive and revitalized ideas of later Gothic novels. It changes the setting, bringing it the danger and mystery closer to the reader. Now instead a monster prowling in some forgotten wood, it is stalking the streets of London. Stoker excellently crafts the atmosphere from the very first page. The moment the reader follows Johnatan Harker through the woods of Transylvania, that feeling of dread never really leaves.

*Dracula* is a story about a group of people bonded by loss and determined to fight a seemingly invincible foe. It is a depiction of the conflict between the old world and the new world. Dracula represents old traditions and legends that are being challenged by modern sciences and ideals. However, Dracula is no mere monster. He is cunning, smart, ruthless and unyielding. He commands otherworldly powers and the very night is his domain.

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