

## Dracula: terror in a failing Empire

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### Abstract

In this essay, I analyze Bram Stoker's "Dracula" from specific perspectives, such as the representations of the female figure, the Victorian gentleman, the Industrial Revolution, foreign immigrants in London, labor legislation, and sexuality in Victorian society. I also point out the relationships between the sources of fear and conflict in the novel; and the social, cultural, and economic fears and conflicts in Victorian England.

**Keywords:** Victorian Era; Colonialism; Sexuality; Bram Stoker; Dracula.

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## 1. A meeting between two worlds

The most striking thing about Bram Stoker's book is the protagonism of women<sup>1</sup> and several symbols conventionally associated with the female figure, such as passions, sexuality and sensuality, irrationality, intuition, blood, loss of virginity, and motherhood. In *Dracula*, they display some of the fears haunting the Victorian society at the end of the 19th century, shaken by a tension of the clash of scientific rationality against folklore and superstition; the transition from old Europe to a new Europe, that threatened traditional notions of decorum and the sense of duty as references for civilized man.

Briefly, in the novel, Jonathan Harker, a young lawyer, travels to Castle Dracula in Transylvania to finish a real estate transaction with Count Dracula. Along his journey, he is warned by local peasants about the dangers he will face and receives crucifixes and other amulets against evil. Frightened but determined, he is finally picked up by the Count's carriage at a previously arranged location. The final stretch to the castle is harrowing, including an attack by a pack of ferocious wolves. Upon arriving at the old and decaying castle, Harker is welcomed by a well-mannered hospitable old gentleman. But within a few days, he realizes that he is in fact a prisoner.

The more Harker investigates his confinement, the more uneasy he becomes. He realizes that the Count has supernatural powers and diabolical ambitions. One night, he is beguiled and nearly attacked by three beautiful and seductive vampires, but at the last moment the Count appears and chases them away. Fearing for his life, he tries to escape, climbing down the outer walls. Meanwhile, in England, Mina Murray, his fiancée, exchanges letters with her friend Lucy Westenra. Lucy tells her that she has received three marriage proposals, from Dr. John Seward, Arthur Holmwood, and Quincey Morris, an American. She regrets not being able to accept all three, and decides to accept Holmwood's proposal.

Mina visits Lucy in the seaside town of Whitby when a Russian ship runs aground on the coast, its crew missing and the captain dead, tied to the wheel. The ship's entire cargo consists of fifty boxes full of soil, shipped from Castle Dracula. Shortly afterward, Lucy begins to have sleepwalking episodes. One night, Mina finds her in the cemetery, where she believes she sees a dark figure with flaming red eyes, bending over her friend. Lucy becomes increasingly pale and two small red marks appear on her throat. Neither Dr. Seward nor Mina can explain the marks. Unable to come up with a diagnosis, Seward decides to call his mentor, Professor Van Helsing.

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<sup>1</sup> In contrast to the absolutely male universe of R. L. Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, in which dominates the asepsis and organized environment of Dr. Jekyll and his comrades, here replaced by damp, dirty, and dark environments, intense odors, mystical and out-of-control events.

Suffering from brain fever, Harker reappears in Budapest, where he is hospitalized. Warned, Mina goes to meet him. In the meantime, Van Helsing arrives in Whitby and after examining Lucy, orders her room to be lined with garlic, an amulet against vampires. For a time, it seems to work, making her feel better. But then, unknowingly, her mother removes all the garlic from the room, leaving her daughter without protection from further attacks. Dr. Seward and Van Helsing spend several days trying to make Lucy feel better, but ultimately fail in their efforts. One night, the men are momentarily careless and a wolf invades the Westenra home. The shock causes Mrs. Westenra to suffer a fatal heart attack, while the wolf attacks Lucy, killing her.

After Lucy's death, Van Helsing leads Holmwood, Seward, and Quincey to her tomb, and tells them that she has become an undead, a vampire. They see her attacking a defenseless child and agree to destroy her, in a vampire-killing ritual, to give her immortal soul eternal rest. The ritual is complete, they go after Count Dracula himself.

Now married, Mina and Jonathan return to England, joining the others. She compiles the diaries of Jonathan and Seward into a single account, piecing together a narrative that will help them confront the Count. Studying everything they can about Dracula's affairs, Van Helsing and his group set out to find each of the earthen boxes that the vampire uses as a sanctuary away from his castle. Their initial efforts are successful, but then Renfield, one of the mental patients at Dr. Seward's asylum, where they are staying, lets Dracula in to attack Mina.

As Mina slowly begins to transform, the men sterilize the earth in all boxes they find, forcing Dracula to flee in the last one to his homeland. Splitting into pairs, the men pursue the vampire by sea and land. Van Helsing takes Mina with him; they purify the castle, kill the three vampires and seal all the entrances with sacred objects. The Count, transported in his coffin by gypsies in his service, is overtaken as he approaches the castle. In a violent confrontation, Harker and Quincey use knives to destroy him. Dracula's effects on Mina wear off. Quincey, mortally wounded in the clash, expires just as the sun appears on the horizon.

## 2. A civilization in conflict

In 1897, when Stoker's book was published, the idea of science and rationality as the basis of civilization had already come a long way since the 17th century, when Descartes' *Discourse on the Method* (1637); *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), both by Charles Darwin, appeared. What began as a new philosophical and cultural paradigm had already resulted in radical transformations for a large part of the European population. Combined with the *fin de*

*siècle* spirit, the accumulated scientific advances caused great changes in the social structure, economic mechanisms, control of nature, and the perception of time and space, leading to an existential crisis. This clash between an old world of traditions and the inexplicable, and a new world, determined by a logic of efficiency, is portrayed in *Dracula*.

The book is full of new technological devices. They often travel by train, they use the telegraph, the portable typewriter, and even Kodak cameras. Madness is no longer treated as a supernatural manifestation, but as an object of medical science, while blood transfusions are used as an attempt to save Lucy. But despite being useful in the battle against vampirism, all that proves insufficient, and the group led by Van Helsing will need to use non-scientific knowledge. Mystical legends and superstitions appear in the peasant villages and countryside of Eastern Europe, with their bands of gypsies, and in the warnings given to Harker on his journey to the castle. Such a mystical environment is also present in England, in the Abbey of Whitby, haunted by a woman in white; in its old cemetery, slowly devoured by the sea, while an old sailor tells Mina strange stories. There, Lucy is taken by the powers and seduction of the vampire.

The coexistence of these two worlds manifests itself as fear and conflict, leaving an ambiguously optimistic ending. The plot begins with the civilized Jonathan Harker answering a call from a dark and superstitious Romania. The first meeting takes place in a ruined castle, a Gothic setting. There, the Englishman teaches Dracula on the workings of the British Empire. The routes built by the Empire for colonizing are now the same routes allowing the colonized to invade London. There, Dracula occupies its interstices, as do immigrants, especially those from Eastern Europe. When the forces of civilization drive the monster back to its domains, the heart of the Empire is already tainted.

### 3. London, where the empire divides

The detailing of London's urban landmarks in *Dracula* reveals the unease towards immigrants. The addresses in the east and west make reference to the clash between West and East, and the characters' movements speak of the crossing of boundaries and borders, of the encounter with the Other, and the desire to force it back. It is about Eastern immigrants infiltrating the social fabric through the occupation of urban spaces. In the last decades of the 19th century, there was a clear discursive opposition between the different regions of London. The West End was already the administrative center, the residence of the rich, and concentrated in the leisure areas. The East End was referred to as "unknown England", the "underworld", "exiled London", "the abyss". Stoker reinforces such a view, selecting locations that are related to fears of invasion, contamination and disease, violence and crime. A spectrum of values can be related to the

movement of the characters in the city. Jonathan and Mina share with the American Morris Quincey a basic innocence and a moral superiority that corresponds geographically to the couple's residence in Exeter, in the west of England, and to the United States.

Dracula advances in successive approaches from East to West. He starts in Transylvania and arrives by ship in Whitby, on the east coast. He then goes to his estate in Carfax, near Dr. Seward's asylum. He leaves only twenty-nine coffins at the Carfax chapel; the other twenty-one are distributed in the east and south of the city. Nine are kept in a house at 197 Chicksand St., a fictitious address that refers to a working-class neighborhood, poverty and crime, also housing immigrants from the port area of the River Thames. Contemporary readers of Stoker would certainly associate the address with Whitechapel, where Jack the Ripper had murdered four women less than ten years earlier. Another six coffins are deposited in Jamaica Lane, a fictitious street in Bermondsey, near the east bank of the Thames. The street's fictitious name is an obvious reference to British colonialism. The last nine boxes are taken to a house in the luxurious Piccadilly, purchased by the Count. From this distribution of the coffins, Harker deduces that Dracula did not intend to be confined to just two sides of London. The relation between Dracula and his arch-enemy are also illustrative of the tension between East and West. Like the Count, Van Helsing is a character who blurs boundaries and borders.<sup>2</sup> A foreigner, with a strong Germanic accent, is from a nearby country, predominantly Protestant. However, he is not Anglican, nor even Protestant, but a fervent Catholic who has never divorced his wife, whom he considers dead, though alive to the Church, after being admitted to an asylum following the death of her son.<sup>3</sup> And the religious icons he uses against the vampire are more clearly linked to Catholicism, such as the sacred host and an indulgence, which he brings from Amsterdam. And large religious temples, such as cathedrals and Whitby Abbey, are part of the Catholic tradition, but not of Protestantism.<sup>4</sup>

As the monster's main antagonist, Van Helsing understands the supernatural and vampire legends in a way that is impossible for an English gentleman.<sup>5</sup> Like Dracula, he is interested in both the occult arts and

<sup>2</sup> At the end of the Victorian Era, the entry of immigrants, especially Jews and other populations from Eastern Europe, caused unrest among the English, which would result in the proclamation of The Aliens Act of 1905, whose main objective was precisely to prevent the entry of individuals from that European region.

<sup>3</sup> At the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign, the Anglican Church was the official church of England, but at the end of the 19th century, other non-Anglican Protestant cults were gaining ground and were already accepted, such as Methodists, in addition to Catholicism.

<sup>4</sup> Van Helsing's recourse to Catholic paraphernalia contrasts with Jonathan Harker's initial reaction when peasants offer him a crucifix on his way to Dracula's castle. Harker notes in his travel diary that as a devout Englishman, he had been taught to view Catholic symbols as objects of idolatry.

<sup>5</sup> One can draw a parallel between Van Helsing and the cowboy in Hollywood Westerns. This character from American mythology is a champion of Western civilization over the native cultures of the American territory. But after defeating the enemy, he sets off for an undetermined territory, between civilization and nature, amid the uncivilized Indians. In contrast, Stoker's character admires and wishes to integrate (and dominate) civilized society.

in the tools and workings of the scientific and technological world. If the Count is extravagant, Van Helsing is also quite eccentric, as in his simultaneous outbursts of hysterical laughter and crying after Lucy's death. His insistence on associating blood transfusions with sexual acts also brings him closer to the sensual perversion of his arch-enemy. They are both determined, fearless and resolute, with an enormous capacity to plan and execute their plans.

#### 4. Women out of control

Stoker's monster is a metaphor for the fear of the return of the oppressed (and the repressed), of the exploited by an Empire beginning its decline. The Count stands for the dissolution of the social structure, the contamination of the culture and values of the Victorian patriarchy. However, the intense immigration from East and Eastern Europe is not the only historical event that puts the identity of the Victorian gentleman at risk.

The ideal Victorian woman, a model at its height in the 1860s, suffered strong questioning and confrontation in the last decade of the 19th century. The evolution of laws regarding women's rights is revealing. The conquering of rights for middle-class women was followed by other conquests, affecting more directly the living conditions of poor women. At that time, women's only options for employment were low-wage, often risky jobs, such as street vendors, factory workers, shop assistants or, if they were lucky, domestic servants on the estate of a wealthy family. Even more educated women, such as typists and stenographers, did not earn enough to support themselves and their children without a husband. This made prostitution the only option, making it possible to work fewer hours in exchange for a better pay.

In Victorian society, prostitutes were not only sex workers, but also those who lived with men outside of marriage, or who had illegitimate children, or even those who had relations with men solely for pleasure. Prostitution, therefore, corresponded to any female behavior that went beyond the model of the Victorian woman. On the other hand, there were those who praised prostitution as a necessary evil, as a sexual escape valve for male youths and married men, to preserve the sanctity of the Victorian home. Not surprisingly, a social and family structure based on the sexual repression of women and complacency with male promiscuity ended generating unsustainable tension.

In 1894, in this context of strong oppression and growing resistance, the New Woman emerged, an expression published in two articles in the press.<sup>6</sup> The phrase quickly became popular and began to refer to

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<sup>6</sup> Both in the *North American Review*; the first was "The New Aspect of the Woman Question", by novelist Sarah Grand. Inspired

women who were beginning to emerge with new opportunities for work and education, breaking away from the intellectual and social restrictions. From a positive view, the New Woman represented those who championed the way for a more harmonious relationship between genders. Naturally, they carried the contradictions of the end of the century. Even though they did not always agree, the New Women provoked debate on controversial issues, such as the structure of marriage, motherhood and female education.

The tensions from the emergence of this New Woman are strongly marked in *Dracula*; in the ship transporting Dracula to England, named Tsarina Catherine. Catherine II, Empress of Russia, or Catherine the Great, was the widow and successor of Peter III, taking the throne in 1762, after conspiring to overthrow and assassinate him. Before ascending the throne, she was already unfaithful and as empress she carried the reputation of being promiscuous. Regardless of her sexual appetite, she was a powerful empress, having reigned until her death in 1796. In her belly, the Tsarina Catherine carries the feared New Woman.

An example of the fear of the female libido is in the scene of the encounter of Jonathan Harker with the three vampires. On a full moon night, sleepless, he disobeys his host's warnings and leaves his room to investigate other quarters. He decides to spend the night in a room where, he imagines, in ancient times ladies would sit, sing and dream of distant men in terrible wars. He drags a sofa so he can fall asleep enjoying the view of forests and mountains. He falls asleep until he wakes up to the appearance of three young women illuminated by the moon. Amazed, he notices that they do not cast shadows. All three have very white, shiny teeth that shine like pearls between voluptuous ruby lips. Looking at them, Harker feels restless, between nostalgic memories and mortal fear. He feels his heart seized by a perverse and burning desire for them to kiss him with their red lips. The next day, he removes that passage from his diary, fearing to hurt Mina.

In his entry they whisper and laugh, a sweetly melodious laugh. The fairest makes a coquettish gesture and is encouraged by the others to go first, for there is enough of him for all. He remains still, watching sideways in an agony of delicious anticipation, as she sinks to her knees, leaning over him, her gaze full of desire. Harker feels a deliberate voluptuousness, at once exciting and repulsive, as she brings her mouth close to his neck, licking her lips like an animal. He sees the gleam of the moon on her teeth, feels the softness of her mouth on his skin and the pressure of her teeth on his throat. Then he closes his eyes in languorous ecstasy, waiting with his heart racing. At that moment the Count appears, interrupting her, telling the three that Harker is his. To calm them, he hands them a bag with a child inside. As if by magic, the bag and the vampires disappear into thin air. In two paragraphs, they give Jonathan more pleasure than Mina does in the

entire narrative.

Near the end of the story, Van Helsing also encounters the three vampires, after leaving Mina at a safe distance, protected by a circle made of communion wafers. He breaks into the castle and discovers the tombs where they sleep. He describes the first as so full of life and voluptuous beauty that he shudders, as if about to commit murder. Feeling moved, taken by a paralyzing nostalgia, surrendering to a sweet fascination, he finds himself lost in this trance. Then, he hears Mina's lament in the distance, and goes on to carry out his mission. The three arouse the seduction and terror of the New Woman. They defy the myth of maternal instinct by feeding on children. For the good of the Victorian patriarchy, they must be destroyed.

## 5. Good for dating, not for marriage

Lucy is similar to Mina. Like her friend, she is concerned with following social etiquette, dreaming of marrying a gentleman and growing old as a good wife and mother. Endowed with an almost childlike beauty, she is a model of virtue and innocence, until she surrenders herself to the Count.

Other aspects indicate Lucy's conflicts with the Victorian model. Her father is absent from the story, suggesting she grew without a paternal reference, and was educated by her frivolous mother, unsuitable as a social model. Bitten by Dracula, and transitioning from a virginal lady to a debauched woman, Lucy destabilizes the men around her. To stop her transformation, she receives blood from her fiancé Arthur Holmwood, and from other men. These transfusions, however, acquire a highly sexualized connotation. After insisting that the first to offer his blood must be her fiancé, Van Helsing tells the others not to mention their donations, so as not to make Arthur jealous. He even calls himself a polygamous, for giving his blood, while a married man. Lucy's desire to give herself to several men is fulfilled. In her fragile state, she is raped under the pretext of an attempt to keep her pure.

Finally, Dracula's antagonists' fear and need to control Lucy's sexuality is quite explicit. Dr. Seward writes in his diary that her sweetness had turned into a harsh, callous cruelty, and that her purity had been replaced by a lustful shamelessness. He describes her, when sucking the blood of a child, like a nightmare version of herself, with her sharp teeth, the blood on her costume, her voluptuous mouth, provoking them with her totally carnal appearance, without any shame, as if she were a diabolical mockery of the real Lucy's purity. He notes something devilishly sweet in her voice. Upon seeing Arthur, she advances, her arms outstretched, hungry for him, begging him to leave the others and surrender to her. Hypnotized, Arthur lets her approach, until Van Helsing interferes, displaying a golden crucifix. The moon appears and illuminates the infernal malice that has taken over a face previously rosy and beautiful. Suddenly, she turns into smoke

and escapes through the crack in the door of her tomb.

The following night, Van Helsing and his three companions enter Lucy's tomb, open her grave and contemplate her in her vampire sleep. They express their hatred for that body of diabolical beauty and corrupted soul. Van Helsing claims that she will soon return to her former self. Then, methodically, he begins to arrange his equipment, including scalpels, a hammer and a stake. Before beginning, he makes a long digression about the history of vampires, since ancient times, to finally explain that by truly killing her, the children she bitten would be completely cured, free from all corruption. By truly dying, Lucy will finally take her place among the angels in heaven. Thus, claiming to act in the name of decency and purity of women, the innocence of children, and in the name of God, Van Helsing guides Arthur through an extremely violent ritual, in which poor Lucy has her heart pierced by a stake, while she writhes terribly, biting her own lips and bleeding profusely. Shaken, but at peace with his conscience, Arthur watches as his deceased bride regains her angelic expression. Finally, after returning Lucy to her place as a passive and submissive woman, he is able to kiss her tenderly. They leave the tomb for a sweet and pleasant night, leaving Van Helsing to cover the mutilated body with garlic, surgically cutting off her head.

## 6. The new woman under control

In many ways, Mina Murray is characterized as a model Victorian woman. Many times, her behavior and opinions reaffirm the feminine ideal. On the other hand, she also displays several characteristics of the New Woman, particularly in her independent disposition, her work as a schoolteacher and her interest in new technologies. Mina's conservative traits are manifested mainly in her daily domestic life, as a faithful, chaste and obedient wife. She shows great concern for her fiancé during his absence, and rushes to find him when he reappears. She explicitly condemns the sexually aggressive behavior of the New Woman, ironically commenting on their eventual approval of sex before marriage. Like Lucy, Mina becomes a battleground for men's control over women.

Mina's initiative and competence at work earn praise from Van Helsing, who even says that she has the brain of a man. She learns to use Dr. Seward's phonograph and studies to help her husband in his work. She displays her productivity and mental discipline, organizing all the notes about Dracula into a single report, but she always takes a subordinate position, helping the men in their mission.

Despite her beauty being highly praised, particularly by Van Helsing, Mina is never sexualized. Van Helsing, in fact, defends Mrs. Harker's chastity with the same dedication with which he pursues the destruction of the vampire. He mentions the passage in a letter from Mina to Lucy, which advocates marriage.

In short, Van Helsing praises her for being so true, sweet, noble and selfless, in such a skeptical and selfish time as the one they are living in.

In many ways, Mina is in the center of the battle to preserve Victorian principles and values. Though also bitten by Dracula, she never completely transforms. On the other hand, she also becomes a threat. After what happened to Lucy, the hunters take a series of precautions to save Mina. She herself asks not to participate in the planning of the vampire hunt, as the monster can now read her thoughts from a distance. When she realizes that she is having voluptuous feelings, she decides to repress them. Van Helsing determines that he needs to control her erotic impulses, especially when he finds that at dawn and dusk, he can hypnotize her in order to access Dracula's perceptions without him knowing.<sup>7</sup> Despite Mina's voluntary effort to resist Dracula's seduction, all men around her do not hesitate to control even her intimate thoughts.<sup>8</sup>

As in Nathaniel Hawthorn's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Bram Stoker places a sign on Mina, so that everyone knows that her identity is at risk.<sup>9</sup> Upon discovering that she has been possessed by Dracula, Van Helsing seals her room with several wafers. He ends the ritual by touching her forehead with one of the wafers, to bless and protect her. At this moment, Mina's skin is burned, leaving a mark, causing her to declare herself impure. Such mark will stay throughout the hunt for the Count, only disappearing after the final destruction of the monster. With the fading of the burn, everyone feels relieved and reassured.

## 7. The victorian gentleman's world hanging by a thread

In a revealing illustration of male insecurity in the face of women's emancipation movements, Mina claims she was saved from Dracula's curse because there are good men in the world, even though there are also monsters. To ensure her purity, Mina submits to hypnotism, a method for controlling women's hysterical crises. However, there are several passages in which male characters also behave hysterically. Assailed by a mental breakdown, Jonathan Harker is described as hysterical. Arthur Holmwood, upon learning of Lucy's death, cries like a woman. Van Helsing himself behaves hysterically more than once. Just like Victorian women, who suffered hysterical fits under the enormous pressure they endured, the hunters also display their terror and fragility, losing their self-control and composure. But permeating the narrative there is something

<sup>7</sup> By that time, hypnosis had already occupied people's imagination, particularly as a method of suggestion and behavior control. The famous psychiatrist Jean-Martin Charcot conducted research on hypnotism from the late 1870s until his death in 1893. He believed that only hysterics, a condition particularly associated with women, were susceptible to hypnosis.

<sup>8</sup> There is evidence that Bram Stoker was aware of Jean-Martin Chacot's investigations.

<sup>9</sup> In *The Scarlet Letter*, American writer Hawthorn tells the story of young Hester Prynne, who has a daughter as the result of adultery. The plot takes place in Boston, a Puritan town at the time. Because she is an adulteress, Hester is forced to wear the letter A embroidered in red on her clothes.

even more threatening to the Victorian gentleman.

Among the 19th century Gothic elements and conventions in *Dracula*, there is the sublime. In *Frankenstein*, this concept is based on Edmund Burke's and Immanuel Kant's definition of immeasurable landscapes crushing one's ability to organize ideas and preserve a code of morality. In Stoker's, despite the presence of frightening settings, as the count's castle and the ship, the notion of sublime acquires other connotations, as a metaphor for the fear of an Orient infiltrating the heart of the Empire; it is the frightening contamination of the metropolis by the power of alien and menacing practices and languages.

Imperial discourse presents the East as a place of primitive and elusive cultures, populated by barbaric beings, unsubmissive, obscure and threatening. Perhaps the need to reaffirm such discourse explains why the entire story is told in the form of archival records, like letters, reproductions of newspaper articles and notes in personal diaries. Everything about the vampire comes in the form of a text produced by subjects of the Queen; it is the colonizer's version. Van Helsing is the only one perceiving the alien with the perspective of a foreigner, even if he never abandons his own Christian, Western and patriarchal worldview.

Dracula's arrival does not come as the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressor. It is not as subjugated cultures taking up arms to fight back; rather, it is as a silent invasion across the borders, spreading different beliefs and worldviews. In *Frankenstein*, the monster, built from dismembered bodies, is the sublime that foreshadows the immeasurable destruction of the Holocaust; it is the sublime in the form of a horror that escapes the limits of reason, beyond any moral principle. In contrast, the sublime in *Dracula* is obscure and indefinable, inexplicable from a Western perspective. Dracula is the mystery of a ship without a crew, led by a dead captain, that reaches a port shrouded in impenetrable fog. It presents itself in enigmatic forms such as fifty boxes of earth and a wild, stray dog. The Queen's subjects find themselves helpless when facing a being that looks human, but who also turns into smoke, a bat, a shadow, that advances like an uncontrollable pack of rats and that, strangely, in order to invade the privacy of the Victorian home, needs to be invited. Bram Stoker's sublime cannot be contained, no matter how many stakes are driven into its heart, nor how many heads are decapitated, nor how many waffles and crucifixes are used.

The sublime in *Dracula* is a metaphor for the crushing of our ability to understand and judge, as we have to face a world that dissolves our established rules and references; a world in which the suspension of life is not exactly death, in which time does not imply progress, nor transformation. A world that presents itself as repugnant and incomprehensible as a mother sucking her child's blood. *Dracula* anticipates the postmodern sublime, the contemporary sublime, which has its most powerful metaphor in the zombie. But that is another story.

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