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# ***Dracula: An Allegory of Anglican Conflict***

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***Quarante Club Prize Winner***

The idea of religion within vampire literature is nothing new. Even in its infancy, oaths and religion have played an important role in the vampire genre. However, no literary text in the vampire genre has been as overtly religious as Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Much of Stoker's writing was greatly influenced by his scientific knowledge and his Anglican religious upbringing. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the exponential progression of scientific understanding fueled religious doubts and called more traditional Christian practices into question. This scrutiny led to considerable tension between the Protestantism and Catholicism, but was especially prominent within the Anglican community. The conflicting views about practices of the Anglo-Catholic High Church and the more moderate Low Churches brought about divisive criticism within the Anglican Church (Bowles 244). This tumultuous religious environment had a lasting impact on the literary themes within *Dracula*. Through the portrayal of Christian symbolism and allusions, character metaphors, and the evolutionary concept of the soul, Bram Stoker uses *Dracula* as a platform to reflect the conflicts within these communities during the *fin de siècle*.

Christian symbolism plays a key role in the plot of *Dracula*. The main characters use religious objects such as crucifixes and communion wafers in their fight against the vampires. To a modern audience, these religious objects seem to be solely Catholic; however, "crucifixes [and] communion wafers... are not exclusively Catholic" (Bowles 244). The crucifix was still a part of some sects of the Anglican Church, although its use was controversial during the *fin de siècle*. The High Churches adopted many of the more traditional rituals and practices of the Catholic Church, including crucifixes. In contrast, the Low Churches criticized the overuse of the crucifix in Catholicism, which appears too superstitious (Bowles 247). The protagonists in *Dracula* initially share views similar to the Low Churches. As an Anglican, Jonathan Harker is reluctant to take the crucifix from the landlady in Bistritz and he believes the peasants' warnings are mere superstitions. Although the Anglican protagonists do not hold the same beliefs of the crucifix, this does not affect the efficacy of the object as a weapon against the vampire. According to Herbert, the crucifix "symbolizes the surrender of ego to Spirit so necessary to achieve Wholeness. This powerful archetype embodies the message that the lower nature of man must die first before the Higher nature can be resurrected" (65). The lower nature of man refers to the physical body, or flesh, while the Higher nature refers to the Spirit of man. The concept of the two natures of man comes from the following biblical quote: "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (*Holy*

*Bible: King James Version*, Gal 5:17). The flesh and the Spirit are conflicting, but in *Dracula*, the crucifix represents the Spirit triumphing over the flesh to achieve eternal salvation.

Similarly, communion wafers, or the Host, also has power against vampires. In Christianity, the Host symbolizes the Body of Christ (Hebert 65). In Catholicism, the Eucharist undergoes transubstantiation to become the Body of Christ, but Anglicans reject this idea and believe that the Eucharist contains the “Real Presence” of Christ (Bowles 251). In transubstantiation, the Eucharist becomes the Body of Christ; however, in the “Real Presence,” the Body of Christ becomes the Eucharist. This subtle difference suggests that the Host used in *Dracula* is more closely related to the views of the Anglican Church, because it contained the “Real Presence” of Christ even when the protagonists were suspicious of its efficacy. The power of the Host within the novel is seen directly when it “sears” Mina’s forehead “as though it had been a piece of white-hot metal” (Stoker 349). The mark formed on Mina’s forehead symbolizes that she is now “Unclean” like the rest of the Undead (Tadlock). This mark is also representative of the Mark of Cain in within the Old Testament. Like those in the race of Cain that bear the Mark, Mina is deemed unclean and her soul is damned through sins that were not her own. Therefore, salvation of her soul cannot come directly, but by ridding the world of the evil: Dracula.

Dracula is the pure incarnate of human evil and his appearance follows traditional Christian imagery. The vampire Dracula is described having red eyes and fangs, and he also has the ability to transform into various animals and scale walls like a reptile. Bowles suggests that his “associate[ion] with the reptilian is appropriate on several fronts—the Biblical connection of the serpent to evil, temptation, and hence, the Satanic—but the association for British readers is somewhat deeper” (247). The crosses of St. George for England and St. Patrick for Ireland are symbols of the nation that reference the defeat of the reptile. St. George is celebrated throughout England for slaying a dragon to save a princess, while St. Patrick is celebrated throughout Ireland for banishing the snakes from Ireland. Therefore, it is no coincidence that Jonathan Harker travels to Count Dracula’s castle on the close to St. George’s day (Bowles 247). This foreshadows the triumphant battle between the male protagonists and Dracula as they save England from the evil vampires. Dracula is also seen as the anti-Christ because of his bastardization of the Christian Holy sacraments. He drinks the blood of his victims to gain power (Communion) and he also threatens the sanctity of marriage. After turning Mina into a vampire, he states the following: “And you, their best beloved one, are now to me, flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood, kin of my kin” (Stoker 339). This is a mockery of Adam’s union to Eve from the book of Genesis, and he has locked Mina into this unholy union. Milbank also suggests that Dracula mocks the sacrament of Baptism during this scene in the following quote:

The blood-baptism scene is also a parody of the Catholic devotion to the sacred heart of Jesus, in which Christ opens his breast to show his self-giving heart.

Mina's drinking of Dracula's blood is also an act of eucharistic[sic] participation, in which the communicant drinks from the chalice (304).

There is an overwhelming amount of evidence that Count Dracula is more than just evil: he represents the anti-Christ himself. The male protagonists' roles within the plot only further prove this point.

In addition to the Christian symbolism, Stoker also named his characters with purpose to build commentary on the English people of the *fin de siècle*. The name Van Helsing is an anagram for "English," as he is the representation of the English. He also represents Catholicism and what the Lower Church Anglicans feared about Catholic practices and rituals, especially through his sacrilegious overuse of the Host (Bowles 248). Additionally, Stoker also chose a symbolic name for Arthur Holmwood, Lucy's fiancé. The surname Holmwood connects Arthur with holly, which traditionally represents masculine potency and is believed to contain healing properties. Holly also contains crimson berries and spikes which ties Holmwood to imagery of the crown of thorns on the crucified Christ. Finally, the holm oak's evergreen properties connect Holmwood with salvation and the divine (Starrs; Bowles 249). Quincy Morris also represents Christ through his offering of blood transfusions to Lucy. Morris was also "killed by a blow on his left side," so he "assumes the role of Christ dying on the cross." Since Morris experiences a Christ-like death, he has a "spiritual rebirth" and is resurrected as Mina and Jonathan's baby (Starrs). Stoker's characters not only represent the Christian discourse during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but they also represent the different camps of the scientific community. Dr. Seward is the cautious, conventional scientist and he represents the mainstream science of the *fin de siècle* and the "unwillingness to embrace matters outside the pale of contemporary science, including occult phenomena" (Stiles 147). Professor Van Helsing, on the other hand, represents a more open-minded approach to the field of science by incorporating the occult as well as "philosophy, empathy, and self-control with mastery of the scientific method." The fact that Van Helsing is Dr. Seward's teacher and is held in higher regard than Dr. Seward suggests that Stoker believes in a more open approach to the application and inquiry of science (Stiles 147). This is not the only instance of Stoker's knowledge and views about the scientific community however.

Stoker's novel also provides insightful commentary about the soul and how the philosophical ideas began to evolve during this time. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, studies like Darwin's *Origin of the Species* led many to question the existence of the soul. Many theories about the soul and "automatism" were formed and people like Stoker began to wonder what humans would be like without souls. Scientists began to acknowledge the similarity between human thought processes and machinery which brought about a spiritual despair that the scientific community "hoped to alleviate by bringing the seemingly invincible gap between Christianity and science" (Stiles 137). This is where Stoker's ideas of about the Undead mainly originate. "Count Dracula renders his victims automata: soulless beings incapable of independent thought or feeling, whose actions are governed by instinct and external influences" (Stiles 133). The

character Dracula was an allegory for the contemporary scientists of the time that were essentially making human beings soulless. “By rendering people undead, Dracula imperils their souls;” therefore “the Count embodies the horrors of modern science” (Stiles 133). Stiles also suggests that Count Dracula might be a representation of a mad scientist in the following quote:

Dracula [is] himself a scientist, albeit a “mad” one: for like all mad scientist, the Count aims at dominating others by any possible means. The Count is unscrupulous and performs experiments on people, robbing them of their souls and their essential humanity—all allegations that could be directed with equal fairness towards the most avant-garde scientists of Stoker’s day (148).

This would mean that the protagonists crusade is not merely for religious salvation, but may also incorporate the idea of scientific ethics as well. *Dracula*’s lasting popularity “suggests that the philosophical controversies raised by the concept of cerebral automatism are still very much alive today” (Stiles 151).

Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* raised many questions about religion and science inquiry, however, the views within the novel can be interpreted as strictly Anglican in its world view. The followers of the Anglican Church strived for the *Via Media*, or the “Middle Way.” The Anglican teachings and beliefs were supposed to be a common middle ground between the extreme reforms of Protestantism and the strict archaism and ritualism of Catholicism. The debates between the High and Low Anglican Churches lead to divisiveness and tension within the Anglican community, and the main goals of the Church seemed to fade during the *fin de siècle* (Milbank 294-97; Bowles 248). Similarly, the scientific community seemed to be making advancements faster than the 19<sup>th</sup> century society could understand the lasting implications of their new discoveries. Stoker’s *Dracula* not only attempts to re-unite the sects of the Anglican Church, but he also tries to instill a sense of open-mindedness within the scientific community as well. One could argue that Stoker sought after Anglican ideals in every aspect of his life and this showed greatly in his writings.

Bram Stoker uses his novel *Dracula* to reflect the religious turmoil at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the representation of Christian symbolism and allusions, character metaphors, and the evolutionary concept of the soul. Stoker uses Christian symbols such as the crucifix and the Host to illustrate the conflicting religious views within the Anglican community. He also makes references to Christian Scripture and saints to portray the contemporary beliefs of the Anglican Church and their religious views on evil and salvation during the *fin de siècle*. Additionally, Stoker wrote his characters as a representation of the different sides of the debates within the Anglican and scientific community. His male protagonists also had roles that demonstrated their religious duties within the plot of *Dracula*. Lastly, Stoker provides commentary on the changing views of the soul within the science community that led to the religious doubts. The mounting scientific evidence against the existence of the human soul left many unanswered questions at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Stoker, and many Anglicans like him, ultimately had faith in “the middle way,” which allowed them to be

flexible within their ever-evolving world. Throughout *Dracula*, Stoker challenges his audience to be more open-minded in both the world of the occult and the world of religion, and to embrace science technology with a certain level of skepticism. These are the lasting themes that have resonated with audiences and have made the story of *Dracula* a classic in vampire literature.

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