

Monster Track: Evolving Fears

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Less than forty years after Charles Darwin's cosmology-shattering treatise *On the Origin of Species* (1859), Bram Stoker's 1897 horror novel *Dracula* addresses the ongoing conflict between religion and science in an effort to prove the necessity for both influences in Victorian life¹. By looking at the characters Dracula and Lucy, one can see how Stoker wrestles with as well as reinforces the boundaries of science and religion in Victorian England, revealing the insecurities of that society.

Dracula disrupts the boundaries of science through his ability to escape the normal biological and physical laws of nature. He is hundreds of years old, yet he is not dead and cannot be killed as can the average mortal (242). Not only is he able to change shape from man to bat to dog and others, he is also able to reverse the aging process and grow younger (283). Additionally, he continually gains knowledge of his own powers (356-57). Furthermore, he does not have to obey the laws of gravity, as Jonathan Harker observes in seeing him crawl down the wall of the castle. "I saw fingers and toes grasp the corners of the stones...and by thus using every projection and inequality move downwards with considerable speed, just as a lizard moves along a wall (Stoker 45)."

With Darwin's theory of evolution in mind, a Victorian reader might well conclude that these traits are frightening precisely because Dracula all at once seems both to defy evolution and to imply that this could be where humanity is heading. Evolution requires the death of those who are unfit; Dracula's continued "life" implies that he has some kind of desirable trait that

¹ Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003.

makes him more fit. He grows stronger by making other humans his prey, while at the same time passing on his un-dead qualities, regardless of how much the person fights back (245, 333). Thus Dracula reproduces offspring which will in turn pass on his traits. He continues to usher in the evolution of humankind through their transformation into vampires. If it were not for Van Helsing and the other men, at some point, vampires would be the most physically fit beings because they would conquer mere mortals and perhaps could “live” off of the blood of animals rather than humans. Thus by the disruption of the natural order of things and the competition of various species of humankind, *Dracula* hints at many of the insecurities Victorians had about the implications of Darwin’s theory. Furthermore, Dracula’s exploitation of the natural order has negative religious implications as well. He found a way to live for a very long time, but to do so, he can no longer be close to God. This manifests itself in his inability to approach holy objects such as crucifixes and communion wafers (284, 351).

It is through the character Lucy that Stoker most fully illuminates the relationship between science and religion. As Lucy deteriorates from her blood draining episodes, Van Helsing pumps fresh blood into her veins through blood transfusions (148, 154, 162). Yet these medical practices are only enough to keep her physical body alive; religious symbols and other folk protections must be used to prevent further intrusion from the Count (158). Stoker implies that while science has some value in society, science alone is not powerful enough to conquer everything. Only when superstitious remedies (including religious rituals) are used wholeheartedly can they have their full effect. Science is good, but when things do not work logically, one must think outside the boundaries of common sense. Science said Lucy had died, but all of the men saw her in the churchyard, talking and moving (251). The men had to use “the lore and experience of the ancients and of all those who have studied the power of the Un-Dead” in order

to finally kill “the Thing” that Lucy became (254, 256). This fits well into the Victorian struggle between science and religion: science can help us, but it does not necessarily bring “Truth.”

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