
Dracula's Epistolary Reflections And Accounts: How Does This Narrative Approach Heightens The Effectiveness Of The Novel?

In this study of Bram Stoker's literary piece *Dracula* (1897), I will question the use of the diverse types of narratives chosen by the author and what the different points of view provide to the readership of the novel. Moreover, I will argue to what extent this epistolary narrative heightens the dramatic and thriller-like effectiveness of the novel with a close reading of the text and the support of secondary sources.

To start off, there are two different narrative patterns that must be made distinct before getting ourselves into the main question of this essay. As Seed states in his journal article "The Narrative Method of *Dracula*", this novel can be fragmented into 4 different sections that correspond with "the narrative preamble, the working out of Dracula's intentions, their discovery, and the final pursuit" (1985: 63, 64). However, there is a different way of organizing the narrative of the text and it regards the apparition of Count Dracula whether it is directly -through Jonathan Harker's journals- or indirectly with the several instances of Dracula's deeds in England whose ownership the reader can suspect from what they have learnt previously thanks to Harker's scope.

Stoker's principle of narration is that only Dracula's opponents are granted narrative voices and they can only record what in each case they have plausibly experienced (68). This is due to what Dracula represents in the novel; as Christine Ferguson states: Dracula is described [...] as anarchic disruption to some historically specific conventions of bourgeois culture, to an order obsessed with the maintenance of order and purity. Anxiety – about the dangers of social and sexual changes, about the replacement of social stability with chaos and mayhem -remains the dominant idiom of *Dracula* (2004: 230).

Hence, the male narrators all carry out a job characteristic of the new bourgeoisie (professor, doctor, lawyer, etc.) and, in the plot, they are the "heroes" that defeat Count Dracula and symbolically save the English society.

Having said that, the first introduction to anything related to Vampirism comes from Harker's diary, it details his travelling experience to the utmost detail to keep track and find rational solutions to everything that seems odd and supernatural: "I began to fear as I wrote in this book that I was getting too diffuse; but now I am glad that I went into detail from the first, for there is something so strange about this place and all in it that I cannot but feel uneasy" (Stoker 2013: 28). From him, the reader is able to physically recognize Count Dracula and his modus operandis. This first description serves as a long-distance "memory" (1985: 65) from what the reader is to find in the bits and pieces of information that we encounter in the second part of the narrative.

The second type of narrative is that of letters, phonograph records and telegrams among the different characters. From being used to Jonathan Harker's lineal diary, in the second part the reader jumps from one perspective to another. The main purpose of this Section Two and Three

of the book is the assimilation of everything that is irrational, both for the reader and the characters. “[This] is confirmed by the plausibility of the text, by our predisposition toward evidence, proof, and verification. All the non-Transylvanian characters keep records [...] of the action primarily serve to supply information” (1985: 74). Although we cannot see the Dracula act directly, we know from him by several instances that are rationally put together by the voice of the professor, doctor, philosopher Van Helsing. The downfall of Dracula begins when the characters work together and share their knowledge and experience (Cribb 1999: 137). As Van Helsing tells Arthur:

I know it was hard for you to quite trust me then, for to trust such violence needs to understand; and I take it that you understand. And there may be more times when I shall want you to trust when you cannot -and may not- and must not yet understand. But the time will come when you shall understand as though the sunlight himself shone through (2013: 197).

In the same way that Van Helsing asks Arthur to believe him, Stoker is persuading the reader to do the same. From the outside, the reader has already assembled all this knowledge and has been able to build a bond of intimacy with the characters. One of the aspects that make this narrative so effective is the fact that the reader is peeping into the characters’ private affairs by reading their journals, letters, telegrams or any other mean of communication. While reading Harker’s diary the role of the reader is almost voyeuristic (1999: 134) as it was only meant for his fiancé to read. The second narrative is composed by more perspectives which gives way to the reader to fill in the temporal gaps (136) Epistolary novels are narrative tools that work with the first-person basis, as the protagonist is the only narrator, the reader may have the feeling that they are not being told the whole truth, just the perspective from the main point of view may fall short. This creates a sense of unreliability that is hard for the reader to overcome.

However, Stoker saves this gap by adding other perspectives to the plot, he also uses newspaper retails and witnesses that give plausibility to the novel, so not only the reader is akin to Jonathan’s experiences, but to other sources as well. Stoker’s narrative is a mirror to the English rationality and so it is reflected in the discourse in different ways: the generic disbelief that something natural might be happening -as Mina asserts that if she had not read Jonathan’s diary, she would not have believed her own experience either-, the medical argot used among Dr. Seward and Van Helsing correspondence and blatantly ignoring the customs -and warnings- of the Transylvanian people on Harker’s account serve as examples of how the Western civilization was constructed in the Victorian literature and also its contemporary society as well. The fact that the reader can recognize themselves in the European mentality described makes the narrative more likely. Therefore, the reader participates actively into it and that helps to heighten the dramatic effectiveness of the novel.

In conclusion, stylistically, the fact that it is arranged by the different memoirs of the characters, makes the reader more alert and it helps building an environment of suspense. As well as this, Bram Stoker’s narrative is engaging because it portrays the Western European pride, more specifically, the British one - that of imperialism, punctuality, technologic developments, everything that the Victorian society was proud of. As it is put at jeopardy -Dracula presents the “reverse colonization” of Eastern Europe-, the readers fear for themselves as this novel is narrated in a way plausible enough to believe. At last, Stoker’s Dracula is not the first epistolary novel nor the first novel about vampires, but it was innovative enough to become one of the most renowned literary compositions of nowadays.

Works cited

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