

Fangs and Corsets

A Book Review of
Dracula by Bram Stoker

I've always been interested in the origins of vampires in literature, which is why I chose *Dracula*. Given the wide range of contemporary vampire-themed television series and films (yes, vampire diaries and twilight in specific), I wanted to revisit the original and discover what made it so famous. I thought it would be gloomy, eerie, and perhaps a little archaic- given the aesthetics of the Victorian age, but I was taken aback by how deeply felt and complex it was.

A brief summary:

Jonathan Harker, a young attorney hailing from England, travels to Transylvania to meet the mystifying Count Dracula. But it's obvious that something is wrong, the hushed whispers of the people he met on the way and the reactions that followed when he mentioned the Count's name —Dracula is more than just a reclusive aristocrat. Things quickly unravelled out of hand as Dracula travels to England and odd things begin to happen. A small group, including the legend himself Professor Van Helsing, joined forces with Jonathan, his fiancée Mina, her best friend Lucy, and others to stop him.

Since the story is told through their letters, journal entries, and newspaper clippings, it feels personal as if you're in the story yourself. Topics like love, loyalty and fear of the unknown etc. are all explored in the book. It's an amalgam of adventure, terror, and a profound human bond.

The intensity of this book's emotions truly catches you off guard. In addition to vampires and eerie castles, it's about people attempting to shield one another from something they cannot comprehend. Although the characters are flawed, they are genuine, and the story's heart is found in their love for one another.

My experience reading this book:

I felt that Mina Harker was the star of the show. Her intelligence and composure under duress was something I couldn't help but notice and appreciate, and the way constant undervaluation by the men in her life didn't deter her is also something worth mentioning. She's the one keeping the facts organised, making connections, and maintaining focus while they're busy second-guessing or panicking. She is the reason the group stays together, not just a mere survivor. She once declared with conviction that she thought their courage and bond could defeat Dracula. She's a formidable baddie in a corset (which she also looks good in - I've seen the movie too).

Van Helsing was also a noteworthy character. Being wise, kind, and incredibly human in his ways; he always leads with empathy even if he is aware that they are dealing with a supernatural situation. One of his quotes, "We learn from failure, not from success!" honestly resonated with me, especially as a freshman in college who's learning that failing is more common than actually seeing things go your way.

Another interesting component of Stoker's work here is the undertone of queer tension. There is a definite homoerotic edge to Dracula's interactions with Jonathan Harker, particularly in the castle; Jonathan uses a charged language when describing Dracula's "burning eyes" and their intimacy.

Lucy and Mina had an intensely loving connection that borders on romance. Because of the era which it was written in, the work doesn't state it explicitly, but there are signs of repressed desires and hazed boundaries that allude to deeper meanings which cannot be missed. Something I'd like to mention is the significance of the corset (with relevance to the movie), not only was it a symbol of the societal constraints placed upon them but also the repression of women's sexuality.

The self-reflection while/after reading *Dracula*:

This novel really did touch me in unexpected ways. It reminded me of how crucial it is to be there for those you care about, particularly in times of fear or uncertainty. Because the characters had to rely on one another all the time, their conflict felt quite authentic. To be honest, it got me thinking about how I cope with fear nowadays and how much easier it is to be among others especially when the fear is enabled by huge changes.

I was really inspired by Mina's strength. Despite having every reason to crumble, she remained strong, resilient, and compassionate. She led instead of waiting and she didn't seek credit either. Her tenacity inspired me to try being bolder and more assertive in my own life, especially during trying times when it would be easy to withdraw or hide.

The hints of queer subtext also made me reflect on how fear and repression were woven into Victorian society. Whether it be identity, belief, or love, it seems as though the story implied that being different was perilous in those days. Which is not that different from today's world; although we're more progressive in technological advancements, it seems as if the mindset around topics of being queer is still narrow and stubborn.

I kind of questioned the fragility of trust while reading the book too. The group had the option to split, but instead they decided to stay together and face their fears. I was deeply moved by the sense of solidarity that remained even in the time of distress.

I also learnt that courage doesn't always manifest in being confident and sure of something; it can also be staying up late to defend someone or confronting a fear so terrifying it makes you question all of reality only because it matters.

Not only was Dracula entertaining to read, but it also caused me to consider the type of friend and person I want to be, and the type of friends I'd want to have around me as well. I wasn't prepared for it to hit me in the feels that hard, but I'm quite happy I got to experience this book that way.

So to rope everything back in;

Dracula is a multi-layered, emotionally complex novel about love, terror, and the silent strength of perseverance. It is much more than just a textbook vampire thriller. The fact that, even after over a century, it still remains relevant (as it should) is something that surprised me in the beginning. The plot gained a great deal of depth and humanity from the characters, particularly Mina. She served as a reminder to me that strength can be quiet, astute, and firmly anchored in compassion.

Anyone who appreciates rich stories that delve into the profoundness of humans and the supernatural should read this book, in my opinion. This is for those that enjoy stories that explore the true meaning of facing darkness, have strong female protagonists, and subtly LGBT themes (and for Mina Harker - the icon herself).

Whether you enjoy gothic horror or are simply searching for a peaceful, contemplative approach to feel bold, Dracula has both the heart and the fangs. You'll remember it long after you've turned the last page- because I know I did.

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