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Analysis of Late 19th Century Novels: Gothic Versus Science Fiction

Classic English gothic novels were defined with novels such as *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*. Science fiction novels developed traction after the publication of *Frankenstein*. In the late 1890s, two famous, classic novels were published; *Dracula*, who was written by Bram Stoker, and *The War of the Worlds* by H. G. Wells. Being published only two years apart, there is a strong correlation between the gothic genre, and science fiction genre. Between *Dracula* and *The War of the Worlds*, there are symbols, characters, setting, motifs and beliefs that share a direct correlation. These correlations show the similarities of the writing style in the late 19th century, and of the authors of the books. Due to the nature of each genre, Stoker and Wells both created their book with a dark and ominous mood.

The constant threat of death creates an unforgettable mood in *Dracula* and *The War of the Worlds*. *The War of the Worlds* is focused around the main protagonist, the narrator, telling his viewpoint of what happened in England the two weeks the Martians invaded. He depicts a story of fear by describing exactly what was happening around him and to his brother. The most prominent mood is death. The Martians came down in cylindrical tubes from outer space, and started to wreak havoc on England. They are described to have oily brown skin, a V-shaped mouth and the absence of an upper brow and chin. The Martians showed no mercy on the living, whether that was shooting poisonous gas cartridges into towns, or using their heat ray or devouring them. The narrator described the Martians and how they ate by taking, “the fresh,

living blood of other creatures, and *injected* it into their own veins” (Wells 139). These horrific monsters help create the setting of the novel in addition to the mood. The novel starts as a normal, average day in Woking, England. The narrator describes blue skies, and a peaceful calm day. This peaceful day quickly turns to fire and ash after the Martians reached Earth. The Martians, with heat rays attached to their mechanisms, demolish anything that threatens them. After a causality and constant threat, the Martians adapt for survival by building a device which allows them to discharge a projectile and upon landing, releasing a dense, black, poisonous gas cloud. Between the fire and gas, the Martians are the main contributing to how the setting takes place. The other aspect of setting comes from the surviving humans. The humans, as they are on the run from the Martians, embody the fight or flight mechanism. Many stay to fight the Martians, while others flee and hide. The ones that hide, ransack towns just to find any hope of food or shelter. This creates desolate, deserted and rummaged cities alongside the destruction from the unknown creatures.

Just as Dracula is unknown to Jonathan Harker, Dracula contributes greatly to the setting of *Dracula*. *Dracula* is the story of a London solicitor that travels to Transylvania to help Count Dracula purchase real estate. On the journey to Dracula’s Manor, Jonathan is surrounded in a dark, eerie forest. The carriage that drove Jonathan to the manor was driven by a pale “human” with sharp white canines, foreshadowing for later in Dracula’s manor. Upon arrival to the manor, Jonathan is welcomed to enter, in the words of Dracula, “freely and of your own will” (Stoker 13). In Dracula’s manor, the setting is described as grand and welcoming, “It was a welcome sight; for here was a great bedroom well lighted and warmed with another log fire, - also added to but lately, for the top logs were fresh – which sent a hollow roar up the wide chimney” (Stoker 14). Dracula’s manor sets a picture of perfection, only leading to doubt when Jonathan puts

different pieces together. Realizations of there being no servants and Dracula is only awake at night, results in the understanding that something is obscure. This setting quickly turns dark as Jonathan encounters the three sisters upstairs, and Dracula scurrying on the outside walls. Putting the pieces together, Jonathan's fight or flight response quickly sets in, and he barely escapes his nightmare.

The nightmare that the narrator and Jonathan faced were easily distinguished by their mood. Both novels opened as a normal, "blue sky" day but rapidly changed. Once the mood shifted, the cylinder from space in the narrator's case, and the warning signs from Dracula's manor in Jonathan's case, the novels continue a grim and ominous path. Both events were obscure enough resulting in the main characters not fully rationalizing what is occurring. In discussion of the objects relating the Mars, the assistant astronomer mentioned to the narrator, "the chances against anything manlike on Mars are a million to one" (Wells 8). With these cylinders coming from Mars, the expectation was just space trash, therefore easily brushing off the idea. The narrator, however, did not believe it was just trash. He was skeptical of the idea of it being nothing. In Jonathan's case, between the crucifix, and talk from the inn-keeper's wife, he was set on his goal. The inn-keeper's wife asked him to stay a few days but Jonathan felt, "it was all very ridiculous but I did not feel comfortable. However, there was business to be done, and I could allow nothing to interfere with it" (Stoker 4). Although the narrator could not escape from the impending doom, if both Jonathan and the narrator acted on their first impression, the whole situation of death and demise could have been avoided.

As the situations were not avoided, the mood in both stories grew darker as death slowly approached the narrator and Jonathan. Both antagonists of the novels, the Martians and Dracula, created a grim outlook for the protagonists. Both unnatural beings directly advance the motifs of

the narrator and Jonathan, fight or flight. The narrator and Jonathan quickly fall into either category, sometimes a balance between the two. As each come across their counterpart, their initial response is curiosity, resulting in a panic flight. Jonathan, after linking each puzzle piece on Dracula, delves deeper into the manor only to stumble upon the three sisters. Jonathan realizes afterward, he must flee for survival. The narrator follows a similar mindset. After the cylinder has landed, he and a group of about twenty citizens surround the object out of curiosity. As the object opens and proves an inhuman being that calls for others, the narrator was “running madly” for a group of trees, initiating his flight response.

Both Jonathan and the narrator’s flight mechanism slowly turned into fight. The protagonists concluded, either to fight or to die. Jonathan affiliates with his wife, Mina; Dr. John Steward, Dr. Abraham Helsing and Quincey Morris. They share a common goal, the demise of Count Dracula; they can only achieve their goal by resorting to their fight mechanism. The narrator also turns to his fight response as the Martians pursue England. Although the narrator never directly fights the Martians, he too adapts the fight mechanism at the end of the novel. He has hidden from the Martians for the sake of his survival for too long. With all humanity (as he perceived) gone, the narrator had a revelation,

An insane resolved possessed me. I would die and end it. And I would save myself even the trouble of killing myself. I marched on recklessly toward this Titan, and then, as I drew nearer and the light grew, I saw that a magnitude of black birds was circling and clustering about the hood. And that my heart gave bound, and I began running along the road. (Wells 186)

The narrator realizes, that either he must die, or the titan must die. The birds solidified his rational, and he pressed onward to confirm the death. Both Jonathan and the narrator reach a

point in their journey that their torment is enough. They would rather die themselves than live with their inhuman torturer.

The Martians and Dracula, although inhuman, share many similar characteristics. Dracula embodies the frame of a human; a human without any color to him. Dracula is a tall, skinny man, who has almost superhuman strength and can transmogrify. The Martian however, only resembles a human in the aspect it has eyes, a mouth and presumably lungs. The correlation between Dracula and the Martians are purely action driven. Each of the beings has one goal, to take command for themselves. Dracula has a plan to carry on his legacy of creating vampires, while the monster fights any threat to gain control of its ground. The key motif of Dracula and the Martians is survival. Each ultimately wish to survive as long and as strongly as possible. As each being is being hunted to the death, they show parallel style tactics. The Martins primary tactic is to kill anything in their path. Between the heat-ray and the poisonous gas, the Martians out preform the humans on a weapons scale. Although Dracula is without weapons, he out maneuvers Jonathan and his group by wit. Dracula used Mina to see and hear what Jonathan and his group were planning, therefore staying one step ahead. As Jonathan and his group are able to pursue Dracula, and the Martians must find a way to survive on Earth, they each find a way to adapt to their surroundings to extend their life as long as possible. The Martians brought four types of machines with them to Earth to provide assurance they could acclimate to (nearly) any situation that they faced. The narrator and his brother describe the handling machine, a device to lift and manipulate objects; the fighting machine, a three-legged tripod with a heat gun and gas tubes; the flying machine, an experimental machine to dispense the poisonous smoke; and the embankment machine, to widen the cylinder landing pits. These four machines provided sufficient aid to the Martians to allow captivity of humankind until their demise. To prolong

Dracula's demise, Dracula quickly changed mindsets on how to survive his threat. Dracula has many supernatural powers that he uses to his advantage. He can control the weather and animals, vanish into dust, superhuman strength and self-transmogrify. Although Dracula can only sleep in the boxes of dirt he brought from Transylvania, he spread out twenty-one boxes to allow relocation to ensure survival.

Dracula and the Martians however, did not survive from their threats. Through the triumphs each had, the triumphs were not enough to allow for survival. Ultimately what caused the demise of the Martians and Dracula was a simple death. Both unnatural beings struggled to adapt to the environment of earth, which proved a weakness. Dracula with the wit of humans their bowie knife, the Martians with the natural elements and diseases. The death of Dracula was sudden and simple, "on the instant, came the sweep and flash of Jonathan's great knife. I shrieked as I saw it shear through the throat; whilst at the same moment Mr. Morris's bowie knife plunged into the heart" (Stoker 324). Mina recollects the moment Dracula is slain. An immense buildup of a month's journey only to be slain by a simple object. A simple object killing this "superior" being. Just as the "superior" beings in *The War of the Worlds* are killed by the simple "germs of disease." The narrator expresses the fact how the creatures were doomed upon landing, "already when I watched them they were irrevocably doomed, dying and rotting even as they went to and fro" (Wells 187). The Martians, unknown to the fatal dangers to humans, proved fatal to them. Just as Dracula perished, the Martians were suddenly gone. One minute present, the next, non-existent. A simple death for inhuman creatures. The simplicity directly correlates to perception versus reality. The perception of these uncontrollable, non-killable creatures dying a simple death shows how strong human kind truly is. Human kind has evolved to understand what the supernatural cannot, and how humans have "developed resisting

power” to what has previously killed humankind. The result of faith and evolution that humans will not succumb to a “simple death.”

H. G. Wells and Bram Stoker use faith and religion as a powerful tool in *The War of the Worlds*, and *Dracula* respectively. Wells uses the narrator to tell the story of the curate. A man who embodies religion and turns to God as an explanation for the surrounding events, “‘this must be the beginning of the end,’ he said interrupting me. ‘The end! The great and terrible day of the Lord!’” (Wells 77). The curate is used to create a negative and pessimistic outlook on religion when there is despair. Stoker, however, chooses the opposite approach. Stoker uses religion as the “saving grace” for Jonathan. Even before Jonathan meets Count Dracula, he is given a crucifix for preparation from an inn-keeper’s wife. Religion in *Dracula* is used in an optimistic solution to defeat the inhuman. Johnathan uses the crucifix and Van Helsing’s communion wafers as a method to deter Dracula. After Jonathan’s wife, Mina, was bit by Dracula, a wafer was placed on her forehead. “As he had placed the Wafer on Mina's forehead, it had seared it—had burned into the flesh as though it had been a piece of white-hot metal” (Stoker 254). The wafer allows the reader to see the effect of religion on a negative force. By using religion as a motivator, Jonathan and his group knew they had hope in the demise of Dracula. Stoker created characters that as they survive, the religion is strengthened, and strengthened as a group. Stoker put religion in characters that all had an optimistic view, and blended the theme into the novel and with modern culture. Wells created one character that embodied religion to the extreme; a character to jab at religion in culture. By creating a character virtually no reader is sad when he is eaten by the Martians, Wells paints his picture on religion through the narrator. Wells creates the curate as a hypocritical man who resembles closely with the Martians to show the negative side of religion. Wells uses the curate to make his statement about how religion is as abstract as the

Martians are to Earth, and uses the narrator as a strong apposing voice on religion. As the narrator is talking to the curate, the narrator exclaims, “Be a man!... What good is religion if it collapses under calamity? Think of what earthquakes and floods, wars and volcanoes, have done before to men! Did you think that God had exempted Weybridge? He is not an insurance agent.” (Wells 77). Wells creates an extremist character, who embraces death with the Martians, that is mocked by a trustworthy and relatable character. When this extremist character dies, Wells makes his statement on the celebration of death of religion.

By either celebrating religion or discouraging religion, Stoker and Bram each adapted their style of writing to the then, modern world. *The War of the Worlds* and *Dracula* are classic English novels that show direct correlation. Each novel captures a grim and dark mood that tells a story of adventure and death. By creating inhuman creatures, H. G. Wells and Bram Stoker created an image of perception versus reality. *Dracula* and the Martians, who were uncontrollable, unstoppable beings, were merely halted by a simple death. A simple death to symbolize how strong humankind is. With the two novels only published two years apart, Bram and Stoker each put their adaptation on the gothic and science fiction genres allowing the correlation between the genres and English culture.

Works Cited

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