

THE GOTHIC LEGACY OF DRACULA

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Abstract:

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and Francis Ford Coppola's 1992 film adaptation showcase the timeless appeal of Gothic storytelling. The novel explores Victorian anxieties, including fears of foreign invasion, societal changes, and the consequences of desire. Lucy Westenra's transformation into a vampire reflects these fears, symbolizing the dangers of unrestrained female autonomy, while Mina Murray embodies the ideal Victorian woman, balancing intelligence, loyalty, and morality. Coppola's film adapts these themes for a modern audience, reimagining Dracula as a tragic figure driven by love and loss, adding emotional depth to his character. The Gothic elements, such as the eerie Castle Dracula, fear of the unknown, and fragmented narratives, connect both versions, though Coppola uses powerful visuals, colors, and symbolism to enhance the Gothic atmosphere. The differences between the two works highlight their reflection of societal concerns, with Stoker's *Dracula* representing external threats and Coppola's version focusing on inner struggles. Together, the novel and film reveal why *Dracula* remains a captivating and enduring story across generations.

Keywords:

Gothic Literature, Victorian Fears, Dracula's Transformation, Female Autonomy, Coppola's Adaptation

Why does Dracula remain such a fascinating character? Is it his ability to terrify or the emotions behind his actions? Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) is a famous Gothic novel filled with fear, mystery, and Victorian concerns. Early on, Jonathan Harker describes the eerie landscape, saying, sometimes we saw little towns or castles on the top of steep hills such as we see in old missals¹. This line sets the scene for the novel's strange and mysterious world, filled with secrets and the unknown. Nearly 100 years later, Francis Ford

Coppola's 1992 film gave new life to the story, adding modern themes and visuals. Both the novel and the film explore Gothic ideas like fear of the unknown and forbidden desires, but they reflect the worries of their own times in different ways.

This article will compare Stoker's *Dracula* and Coppola's film, focusing on Gothic elements, Victorian fears, and modern themes. By looking at Lucy and Mina as opposites, Dracula's role as a monster and tragic figure, and the dark Gothic settings, we'll see how each

version tells the story differently. Both keep *Dracula* a powerful, timeless tale that still captivates audiences today.

Almost a hundred years later, Francis Ford Coppola's 1992 film *Bram Stoker's Dracula* brings new life to this classic story, updating its themes and imagery for a modern audience. This article will look at how both the novel and the film explore key Gothic themes. By analyzing the clash between the supernatural and reason, the lure of forbidden desire, and fear of the "other," this article will show how each version reflects the worries of its time. Both the book and the film explore universal fears, such as the fear of the unknown, the danger of female autonomy, and the threat posed by outsiders, but they reflect these fears differently. In the novel, fears of the supernatural and foreign invasion mirror Victorian anxieties about societal change and the rise of the (New Woman). For instance, from the book: Lucy was looking swetty pretty in her white lawn frock; she has got a beautiful colour since she has been here². This quote highlights Lucy's innocence and traditional beauty, with her white dress symbolizing purity. However, after becoming a vampire, Lucy changes completely, becoming dangerous and this reflects Victorian fears of independent women challenging traditional roles. To support this quote, like New Women, and Lucy and Mina, in their own ways, also show New Woman-like traits³ Moreover, Coppola's 1992 film adapts these themes for a modern audience by

showing Mina as a stronger, more independent character and presenting Dracula as more human, reflecting modern feminist ideas and changing views of outsiders. Stoker's choice of setting in *Dracula*, especially the mysterious and isolated Castle Dracula, plays a big role in creating the novel's unsettling, Gothic mood. Jonathan Harker's line, 'I was not able to light on any map or work giving the exact locality of the Castle Dracula'⁴ shows that the castle is almost mythic, existing outside normal boundaries, and adds to the sense of danger he feels as he travels deeper into this eerie landscape. Moreover, shrouded in darkness and surrounded by the wild Transylvanian wilderness, the castle not showing only mythic but also the gothic literatures focus on places that exist beyond human comprehension. The novel uses letters and diary entries to create mystery. These fragmented perspectives leave gaps and uncertainties, reflecting Gothic literature's focus on fear of the unknown. The *Dracula's* film in 1992 uses voiceovers, letters, and dreamlike scenes to show what the characters are thinking. This creates mystery and matches the Gothic style of the novel. 'The narrative structure in Stoker's work calls attention to itself; the book comes in the form of an epistolary novel which has no narration but rather presents letters and diary entries from several people'⁵. This sentence is useful because it highlights the fragmented and many perspectives nature of Stoker's narrative structure, which Coppola mirrors in his film through cinematic

techniques like voiceovers, visual fragmentation and shifting perspectives.

In his 1992 film, Coppola brings the Gothic world of *Dracula* to life with grand, decaying buildings, shadowy lighting, and colors like deep reds and blacks that suggest danger. Film scholar Veronika Bernard notes that Coppola turns *Dracula* into a morality play, 'where Dracula struggles with his faith and falls into sin and blasphemy⁶'. This theme is clear in the film's opening scene, which shows Dracula as a faithful knight. After he suffers a terrible loss, he abandons his faith and, in a moment of anger, commits a religious offense that curses him with eternal life. Coppola's use of rich costumes, detailed sets, and religious symbols heightens the sense of decay and doom, blending Gothic elements with spiritual themes. While Stoker uses descriptive language in the novel to create a dark, eerie mood, Coppola's film relies on powerful visuals and symbols to make this Gothic atmosphere come alive, creating an intense, immersive experience for viewers.

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* 1897 delves deeply into the fears and anxieties of Victorian society, capturing their concerns about desire, foreign influence, and shifting gender roles. The novel reflects how these fears manifest in its characters and Gothic elements, such as the eerie Castle Dracula and the unsettling transformations of Lucy and Mina. Through its

exploration of these themes, *Dracula* critiques a society struggling to navigate rapid cultural and moral changes, using Gothic horror to amplify the unease of its time. In the novel when it says that 'Lucy was looking swetty pretty in her white lawn frock:⁷', it shows how Lucy was cute and beautiful. So, in that case what the reason that led Lucy to be a vampire? In the novel it mentions when Lucy was tired for a couple of days and then that what happened, 'Four days and nights of peace. I am getting so strong again that I hardly know myself. It is as if I had passed through some long nightmare, and had just awakened to see the beautiful sunshine and feel the fresh air of the morning around me. I have a dim half-remembrance of long, anxious times of waiting and fearing; darkness in which there was not even the pain of hope to make present distress more poignant; and then long spells of oblivion, and the rising back⁸'. This quote shows the weirdness of Lucy's condition. Furthermore, in another place of the same page it mentions this too, 'the harsh sounds that came from I know not where and commanded me to do I know not what have all ceased⁹'. This quote also shows the weirdness of Lucy's feelings and condition, and maybe it's the start of symptoms of becoming a vampire. After that Lucy becomes a vampire when Count Dracula bites her neck¹⁰. Moreover, in the novel it was mentioned when Lucy turned into a vampire, 'The sweetness was turned to adamant, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness¹¹'. So, Lucy's transformation highlights key Gothic themes, such as the loss of

innocence, the fear of supernatural forces and Victorian anxieties about desire and morality. Her change into a vampire is not just a personal tragedy but also reflects society's fears during that time, making her story an important example of Gothic horror in *Dracula*. Mina Harker is very different from Lucy Westenra in *Dracula*. She represents the ideal Victorian woman, someone who is smart, kind and self-controlled but 'For instance, Sally Ledger presents Mina as "a woman who, firmly rooted in the maternal paradigm, settles for the 'ideal' of middle-class Victorian womanhood"¹². But the opposite with Lucy, whose transformation into a vampire shows the dangers of giving in to desire. Mina is shown as strong and reliable. The novel describes her as having '*She came into the room with an easy gracefulness which would at once command the respect of any lunatic—for easiness is one of the qualities mad people most respect*¹³'. Meaning she is intelligent and capable but still caring and loyal. This balance makes her a good example of how a woman could embrace new ideas and skills without breaking society's rules. Throughout the story, Mina plays an important role, like organizing information to help track down Dracula, while still being respectful and moral. For instance, 'While Mina's status as the sole female professional of the group and her role as amanuensis is ripe for paranoid readings, her role in the text also reflects the affective potential of a reparative reading'¹⁴. Stoker uses Mina to show what was considered an acceptable kind of progress for women in Victorian times, making her the

opposite of Lucy, whose independence leads to her downfall. So, Lucy and Mina represent two very different views of Victorian womanhood. Lucy's transformation into a vampire highlights fears of unrestrained desire and its dangers, while Mina embodies intelligence, kindness, and balance. Stoker uses Mina to show acceptable progress for women, contrasting Lucy's downfall as a warning against rejecting societal norms.

Dracula's character is an important example of Gothic fear and forbidden desire, but his role changes between the novel and Coppola's film. In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the Count represents the fear of foreign invaders and moral decay. His strange way of speaking and mysterious behavior makes him a symbol of danger to Victorian society. For instance, Jonathan Harker describes Dracula's touch as 'cold as ice', showing his unnatural and inhuman nature. Dracula's ability to control others, especially women, reflects Victorian worries about losing control over social and sexual norms. Lucy's transformation into a vampire after Dracula bites her shows these fears, as she changes from an innocent woman to someone dangerous and uncontrolled.

In Coppola's 1992 film, Dracula is shown as more than just a monster—he is also a tragic figure driven by love and loss. In the opening scene, Dracula abandons his faith after losing his wife, which explains his anger and curse. This makes him a more human character, and

viewers can feel sorry for him while also fearing him. 'Dracula not only represents the cultural fear of a foreign threat to British shores, but also serves as the novel's catalyst of sexual desire'¹⁵. This supports how Dracula as a character, embodies deep cultural and emotional fears, which Coppola reinterprets by humanizing Dracula's motivations. Coppola uses strong red and black colors in scenes with Dracula to show his two sides: he is both scary and seductive. Film scholar Veronika Bernard says that Coppola's Dracula is like a "morality play," showing the effects of sin and the power of love.

The difference between Stoker's Dracula and Coppola's version shows how each reflects the fears of their time. Stoker's Dracula is a symbol of outside threats and moral corruption, while Coppola's Dracula is more focused on inner struggles like love and grief. Both

versions make Dracula a complex character, blending fear and fascination, and showing the Gothic tradition of making villains both terrifying and human.

In summary, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Coppola's 1992 film show why this story remains so powerful. The novel focuses on Victorian fears like foreign invasion, societal changes, and uncontrolled desire, while the film adds emotions like love and grief, making Dracula more human. Lucy and Mina show two sides of Victorian womanhood: Lucy represents the dangers of desire, and Mina shows strength and balance. Both the book and the film use Gothic themes like fear and mystery but reflect the worries of their own times. Coppola's film adds modern ideas, while Stoker's novel focuses on tradition and morality. Together, they show why Dracula continues to fascinate audiences across generations.

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¹ Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, ed. by Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), p. 9. All further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically immediately following the quotation.

² Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, ed. By Maurice Hindle. P 73.

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⁴ Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, ed. by Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), p. 8.

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⁷ Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, ed. by Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), p. 73.

⁸ Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, ed. by Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), p. 146.

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¹⁰ Bram Stoker's Dracula, dir. by Francis Ford Coppola (Columbia Pictures, 1992) [on Amazon Prime Video]. Available at: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Bram-Stokers-Dracula-Gary-Oldman/dp/B00FYPG2U8>.

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