

Vampiric Identity in Transition: From Stoker's Demon to the Ethical Modern Immortal

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Abstract:

This study explores the evolution of the vampire archetype from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to contemporary reinterpretations, focusing on the shifting cultural, religious, and psychological meanings attributed to vampiric figures. By analysing Stoker's depiction of the Count as an embodiment of darkness, spiritual corruption, and metaphysical threat, the text highlights how early vampire literature relied on religious binaries and sacred symbolism to frame evil as an external, objective force. In contrast, modern narratives - exemplified by works such as *Twilight*—recast the vampire as a conflicted, sympathetic figure whose monstrosity is internalized and humanized. This transformation aligns with broader cultural trends including rising secularism, changing moral frameworks, the popular fascination with morally ambiguous villains, and the psychological exploration of identity. The study argues that the vampire myth functions as a cultural mirror, adapting to society's evolving anxieties, desires, and uncertainties. Through close reading and comparative analysis, it demonstrates how the transformation of the vampire from demonic antagonist to romantic anti-hero reflects fundamental shifts in beliefs about evil, desire, selfhood, and the boundaries between the sacred and the secular. Ultimately, the persistence and adaptability of the vampire figure reveal its enduring usefulness as a symbolic tool for negotiating existential and cultural tensions across time.

"Welcome to my house! Enter freely and of your own free will and leave something of the happiness you bring! I am Dracula, and I bid you welcome ... to my house." Stoker

"Whoever fights with monsters should see to it that he does not become one himself. And when you stare for a long time into an abyss, the abyss stares back into you." Nietzsche

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Intro

To look a monster in the eye is an act that requires courage. This courage first demands resisting an existing danger, but in the allegorical depths of this attempt lies another vein of bravery. For although the monster is an entity composed of traits the person does not wish to possess, in essence it serves as a mirror in one's journey of self-recognition. While Dracula's dark and gloomy castle - surrounded by wolves - is an obvious trap even for an ordinary mind, and although this uncanny atmosphere is noticed by Jonathan Harker at first glance, the young solicitor, captivated by the lure of worldly opportunities, cannot keep himself from advancing into the belly of the beast. And as Dracula states above, he enters the castle freely and of his own free will by leaving the happiness he has brought behind.

At this point, one aspect becomes crucial: the monster's threat forms a unity with the character's weakness. In other words, the monster gives birth to the victim, while the victim defines the monster. Thus, the two halves of a whole are completed, and Nietzsche's concise maxim finds its meaning through a literary manifestation. Building on this understanding, the main aim of the study has become to analyse Bram Stoker's *Dracula* by listening to what the monster tells us - indirectly and implicitly - about human beings, and to make this secondary voice, which remains in the shadows, more audible. For although Harker's relationship with Count Dracula is presented through a Harker-centred perceptual framework, Dracula's own perspective is relegated to peripheral spaces in this relationship; yet it remains within the field of vision of literary analysis and continues to be accessible. In other words, Nietzsche's abyss, however distant, still gazes directly into our eyes.

This, in a sense, evokes a Kafkaesque unease: the initial joy of Little Red Riding Hood's rescue is overshadowed by the fact that the Big Bad Wolf is slain. By the end of the tale, the child to whom the story is told slips into bed safe and happy, unaware that the hunters—hailed as heroes—will themselves turn into bloody wolves throughout the night because of their gruesome deed.

This mentality not only redefines the monolithic roles of the monster and the victim but also destabilizes the norms of villainy by triggering a transitional process in which evil, long assumed to be lurking outside, resonates from the different shades of the human mind. Therefore, knowing ourselves—especially by confronting the ignored and unwelcome aspects of our psyche—as prescribed by the reinterpreted Greek maxim *Nosce te ipsum*, becomes highly significant. Recognizing one's darker sides and

vulnerabilities can be achieved most powerfully through a monster capable of representing that very darkness. For this reason, understanding *Dracula* constitutes an important step toward understanding ourselves.

Into the Abyss

Sigmund Freud explains the uncanny as the return of the repressed - something that should remain hidden but comes to the surface, something familiar yet disturbing because it is at the same time unrecognizable (Freud, 2003). To take a simple example: a puppet, when it is motionless on its own or moves in coordination with the puppeteer's fingers, does not produce a feeling of unease in the viewer. But when the puppet begins to move on its own, without a puppeteer, it steps outside the familiar order and takes on an unrecognizable identity beyond what is known. Entering the realm of the uncanny, the element of fear in the story draws on this Freudian principle and tends to transform the puppet into a monster. A literary manifestation of the uncanny is epitomized by Shelley. While Dr. Frankenstein's cadaver is merely a simple corpse, at the end of the successful experiment it becomes a walking dead body - distorting what is familiar and customary, turning into a phenomenon that the reader cannot easily place within a framework of acceptance, and thus opening a channel for the uncanny within the text, allowing the element of horror to dominate the story.

The character of Dracula, which Stoker constructs upon a historical figure of Romanian origin, serves as a perfect example of the mentality mentioned above. From the outside, Dracula possesses an ordinary human body, apart from a few visible defects that could be attributed to the physical deformities of old age. In this sense, he has a familiar disposition. However, as the story progresses, the reader is confronted - through Mr. Harker's eyes - with the truth that the Count is in fact an undead figure, one who has returned from death. His transformation is rooted in occult knowledge such as black magic and alchemy, and he brings about the same transformation in those who fall under his influence. These individuals use their coffins as beds of isolation during the daytime and, in a rather suggestive manner, 'rise from their coffins' at night and return to life. Viewed from this perspective, Dracula possesses a connection with the act of restoring life to death, with existence beyond death. This undead nature, which drives the other characters in the novel into a state of uncanny dread, tends on the allegorical level to become a direct reference to life after death.

Dracula, as a monster, possesses a motherly aspect. Unlike many of his violent counterparts in English literature, Dracula is not merely an agent

of destruction. Through the biological metamorphosis he spreads, he forces human beings to assume a disposition of his own making—that is, he vampirizes them. Rather than offering his victims to the dominion of annihilation, he prefers to make them a fragment of himself, aiming for a kind of transformative upheaval through those he alters. In this respect, it may be said that Dracula functions not only as the representative of a malevolent revolution and a process of change, but also as its instrument.

In the ranks of monsters, he places himself as the chief—or, more accurately, as the lord. This lordship inherently involves the corruption of what is holy, for the Count strives to demonize the innocent subjects of God by tainting their divinely bestowed humanity and compelling it into savagery and parasitism. Thus, a lecherous and degrading disposition defiles the once exalted state of human life.

When John Seward, a former associate drawn under the Count's dark influence, is confined to the asylum, his cry of "The blood is the life!" - dismissed as the rambling of a madman but in truth the core principle of Dracula's existence - offers another crucial clue to the monster at the heart of the story. This fact, which underscores the vampires' unquenchable thirst for human blood, expresses the reality that Dracula can sustain his existence only through human life. In other words, for the Count to live, ordinary people must forfeit their own vital fluids and be exposed to mortal danger. By its nature, this relationship contains the domination of the strong over the weak and is rooted in violence. Dracula satisfies his need for blood by hunting humans - luring them through various tricks and then consuming them. He does not see himself as a violator in this relationship; according to the worldview he constructs and pursues, he possesses an ethnic superiority, and thus the hegemony he inflicts upon human life is, in his eyes, a birthright.

At the foundation of this aristocratic order lies a racist division. When speaking of himself, the Count boasts of the blood of Attila that runs through his veins, seeking to legitimize his superiority as a Székely through this lineage. He invokes warrior ancestors who surged across the world like a wave of fire, believing their might gave them the right to subdue the weak. Acting with the logic of 'a wolf is born of wolves,' the Count, within this worldview, assigns to humans—whom he designates as the Other—the role of sheep, following this exploitative metaphor. The following declaration, delivered by the Count with a tirade-like air, constitutes an important step toward grasping this mentality:

"We Szekelys have a right to be proud, for in our veins flows the blood of many brave races who fought as the lion fights, for lordship..."

What devil or what witch was ever so great as Attila, whose blood is in these veins?" He held up his arms. "Is it a wonder that we were a conquering race; that we were proud"... (Stoker, 1897, p. 27)

For the reasons mentioned above, it can be said that the Count possesses an aristocratic nature founded on racism. Considering his ruthless attitudes and behaviours, this nature takes on a feudal primitiveness. The Count manipulates reality with a selfish and calculating mastery, using his supposed right to restrict human freedoms and even to violate the fundamental right of life. This domination has caused great harm in the lands of his birth and left a negative impact on human communities. However, the Count aims to move beyond the boundaries of the territories he has exploited and consumed, seeking to transfer his dominion to new lands - specifically England - through the estates he purchases. One may argue that the Count holds an imperial agenda. In imitation of the ancestors he speaks of with great admiration, he envisions a new wave of conquest, and he initiates its first phase through a commercial investment. What is noteworthy is this: the Count begins his undertaking in England by purchasing the Carfax estate. The weapon he uses is bloodstained money. In this foreign territory, he secures the hospitality he needs, so to speak, by buying it. In light of hitherto debated issues, it can be said that the Count embodies a racist, aristocratic, and imperial entity. His goal is to expand the scope of the superiority he has constructed and to carry his imperialist expansion to further dimensions through new lands.

As one delves into the depths of the Count's personal character, it becomes evident that behind his seemingly positive qualities lie certain undeniable dark tendencies. The Count, in his daily life, presents the refined identity of a well-educated nobleman belonging to a foreign culture. His castle, lifestyle, manner of thinking, and the language he uses constitute the visible insignia of this elite disposition; yet this cultivated refinement soon becomes engulfed in an aura of xenophobic dread. This fear stems from the Count's deceptive and secretive nature.

Although he behaves with the courteous manners of a sincere host, he actually acts under the guidance of a predatory mentality. While he distracts Mr. Harker - whom he regards as a clear prey and who has become trapped in his castle - by assuming the affectionate demeanour of a benevolent old man, he is in fact developing an exploitative and toxic relationship dynamic. In exchange for the false courtesy he displays, he expects thoughtful and polite behaviour from Mr. Harker, using these gestures to identify the man's weaknesses and further attempting to turn these refinements into

vulnerabilities. When, for instance, the diabolical women with whom he shares his castle attempt to harm Mr. Harker, the Count intervenes, telling them to wait until he is finished with the business he has with Mr. Harker. In this sense, an exploitative and merciless insincerity becomes visible behind the polite face and identity he puts forward. Through these behaviours, the Count indeed stands a justifiable excuse for the xenophobic dread displayed toward unwelcome strangers.

Another aspect of the Count that is of great importance to uncover is his connection to darkness. Both literally and metaphorically, the Count is shrouded in darkness. In addition to the night shadows in which he first presents himself to the reader, he inhabits a bleak climate and resides in a black, oppressive castle. He commands nocturnal creatures such as wolves and bats. He hunts by exploiting natural phenomena - fog and mist - that narrow one's field of vision, and most importantly, he cannot endure sunlight. All of this reveals the Count's inherent bond with darkness.

On the other hand, the Count uses the ignorance of those around him like a shadow or a veil of darkness, drawing strength from it. He leaves the questions of Harker - whom he has invited to his castle - unanswered, brushing them off with lies. Some rooms filled with secrets are kept locked, and the ones he leaves open are deceptively decorated to create false impressions. He forms misleading telepathic connections with the women he targets, such as Lucy and Mina, guiding them toward misguided actions through his hypnotic abilities.

In summary, the Count possesses a nature that drives people into ignorance and forces them to remain within the boundaries of unknowing. This grants him the upper hand in his relationship with human communities he regards as prey. In other words, Dracula's power feeds on the ignorance of people. Supporting this argument, the Count's death is made possible by a doctor (!), Doctor Van Helsing. Abraham Van Helsing is a medical expert and a professor of metaphysics - a man who has devoted his life to science and knowledge. He is the one who reveals the Count's weaknesses, how he can be killed, and his true purpose to the group pursuing the monster. With a title that evokes education and knowing, Van Helsing enters the story as the antidote to the Count who thrives on ignorance, and in the allegorical depths of the narrative lies the triumph of knowledge over ignorance.

In the Holy Qur'an, *shadow* is presented as a universal allegory. "To God prostrate all who are in the heavens and the earth, willingly and unwillingly, as do their shadows in the morning and the evening" (Rad 13:15, Edip & Layth, 2013). The fact that the sun - described in another surah by Allah

the Almighty as “among Our signs” - is invoked as the sovereign sustainer for the existence of the shadows by creating a cause-and-effect dynamic in this relationship. In other words, the sun and projected shadow form a visual allegory for the divine supremacy and submission to this power. As clearly expressed in the sacred passage mentioned above, the shadow is said to be in a state of prostration. This signifies the submission of human beings - who possess free will - to the divine power through their shadows. That all created beings possess shadows underscores the inclusiveness of this divine sovereignty. A shadow, therefore, becomes a direct reference to God’s omnipotent and omnipresent dominion.

Nevertheless, Dracula has no shadow; in other words, Dracula casts no shadow because it does not exist. Mr. Harker, who witnesses this, attempts - unsuccessfully and with great astonishment - to comprehend how Dracula reflects no shadow even in the light of a candle flame. When considered within the universal symbolism of the shadow mentioned above, Dracula’s lack of a shadow under light by annulling the mechanism of physics, evokes a state of complete deprivation from divine intimacy and total banishment.

The Count’s lack of a shadow, in this foretold religious yet universal context, is a skilfully constructed reference to his diabolic nature - a nature bereft of submission to divine grace. Once the literary language is deciphered, it becomes evident that the Count has irreversibly annihilated his own sublimity through a base and ignoble essence, and the absent shadow underscores this truth in bold, unmistakable terms.

Supporting the argument above, Dracula—despite all his supernatural power—shows a clear vulnerability not only to the sun but also to the religious symbols. Sanctity and faith weaken his strength and limit his dominion. Temples, holy books, consecrated objects, religious rituals, and acts of worship serve as the primary instruments that restrain the monster within the Count. By his unique nature, he is able to reside in foreign lands only through the soil of his homeland. To ensure this, he transports boxes filled with earth of his castle to England and uses these crates to defile and claim the areas he desires. Just like holy water to baptise, the Count uses the damned soil to desecrate what is clean.

Yet even the cursed power of this earth is neutralized by Van Helsing using a powder made from holy bread. The notion of the diabolic earth that the Count carries evokes, on one level, an inherent vice resembling a xenophobic prejudice toward the foreign; yet it simultaneously reinforces this perception through the theme of heathenism. Thus, the battle between vampire and human, between the lines, morphs into a duel between religion

and the diabolic. In this sense, Dracula acts as a litmus test for human faith, for what he represents in essence is a form of diabolism that draws its strength from godlessness.

The xenophobic, infidel-enemy argument is sustained in proportion to how it is supported by the other details of the story. Dracula - an unrecognizable, unknown threat living in far-off lands - is portrayed through a distinctly England-centred perspective. The Count's castle lies beyond the Carpathians, in a region where Russian, Hungarian, and Turkish communities meet, where Catholicism borders Orthodoxy and Islam, and where bloody wars have long taken place. This distant and nefarious setting becomes *desecrated* by the visit of an Englishman - Mr. Harker. In other words, Pandora's box is opened, and the enemy that emerges follows Pandora's own hands all the way to the heart of the Empire.

The irony, of course, is that Pandora - who opened Zeus's cursed box - ended up giving the artifact her own name through this mistake. Here, Stoker engages in a subtle form of self-critique. The gates of the Empire are opened to the bloodthirsty being from forsaken lands through the agency of purchased Englishmen, and this wave of evil ends only with a bloody war that advances all the way back to the homeland of Dracula himself. Evil brought in by money is repelled by the sword. While criticizing human greed, the author also emphasizes the inevitability of war as its indirect consequence. Because Dracula cannot be persuaded, simply banished, or converted to the side of good. As we learn from Van Helsing, the method required to deal with the monster (!) is to cut off his head and drive a stake through his heart.

The idea that material appetite gives rise to imperial problems that render war inevitable is woven with subtlety. The author's foresight - veiled in a literary language - took on real form in the first two quarters of the following century: the greed of the Empire resulted in British soldiers engaging in bloody wars against unknown peoples in various parts of the world. An example of this can be found in Alan Moorehead's *Gallipoli* (2007), where he recounts soldiers who believed they were fighting a horde of monsters and, fighting under the English flag, thought they were making the world a better place by ridding it of such creatures - only to realize, all too late, that they were fighting ordinary people defending their homeland. In this regard, the following statement by Arnold J. Toynbee - the author of *The Murderous Tyranny of the Turks* (1917), a work used to rally soldiers to the front - is not only remarkably but also intriguingly consistent with this underlying narrative: "The Ottoman Empire literally drained its victims'

blood, and its history as a Vampire-State is unparalleled in the history of the world” (p.12).

Another point that emerges from a detailed analysis of the character of Dracula is his ancientness - the fact that he is centuries older than the people he encounters. In this respect, the Count represents an evil born from the darkness of bygone ages, feeding on the historical ignorance of those he interacts with, for he is a remnant of a time so old that it lies far beyond the reach of their knowledge. He conceals this revenant self behind an exceedingly charismatic persona. The monstrous motive hidden beneath his courteous manners transforms him into a creature that preys upon beings far beneath him; yet the Count is in no hurry to display this wicked side, for he is an intelligent hunter and strategically patient. While creatures like werewolves, ghosts, or the giants often embody uncontrolled and explosive fury, in him this fury becomes a deliberate, silent, calculating perseverance. In this regard, the Count distances himself from radical behaviours such as sheer brutality and acts with a unique intelligence and slyness, ensnaring the humans he sees as prey only after weakening them through an elaborate mental game. The fear he spreads does not evoke an irresistible, reckless destruction but rather a cleverly constructed diabolical scheme. Like his monstrous kin, the evil he disseminates does not stem solely from himself; rather, it positions him as a spokesperson for a broader, more primordial current.

Reaching for the darkness of bygone times, the emergence of the Count embodies a fusion of black magic and the dark ancestry of exotic worlds. Yet his identity stretches beyond the shadows of occult art and points toward two distinct modes of creation. The first detail that adds dimension to the Count’s disposition is what may be called the “Demeter Effect.” The Count reaches his new target, England, from the homeland to which he had brought immense suffering, aboard a ship named *Demeter*. This naming is far more than a random decision. As is well known, Demeter is the Greek goddess of agriculture, harvest, and fertility. In this regard, she may be considered a positive figure, yet she also possesses a side that could be deemed malevolent. In the story of the abduction of Persephone, her role condemns all humanity to famine and an unending winter, effectively attempting to sacrifice the entire world for her own personal grief. In this sense, she shares the same mentality as Dracula, who likewise sees all humanity as his potential prey (Agha-Jaffar, 2002).

Another point is that from a Christian-centred perspective, Demeter represents a pagan belief system. In established Christian thought, pagan

religions are believed to be under the sway of demonic forces. In other words, pagan gods are nothing more than manifested images of the devil. From this viewpoint, the arrival in England of a ship named after Demeter, a pagan goddess, can be interpreted allegorically as a demonic intervention. The name *Demeter* becomes a semi-transparent mask designated for this particular evil, one that only the discerning eye can fully grasp.

The other side of this identity contains a form of self-critique directed at the radical rationalism of the Enlightenment. Anchoring in England as a representative of the revived ideals of ancient Greece, Demeter becomes a wolf in sheep's disguise by hiding a monster within its hold. Once that monster begins spilling blood on English soil, it is confronted by the very element the period's mindset had marginalized: faith. Because it lays beyond the boundaries of rationalism, faith had become something unfashionable, yet it is precisely this force that is mobilized to stop the Count. Even Van Helsing, a man of science, resorts to crosses, holy water, and sacred texts to destroy him. In this sense, the Count stands at the intersection of the occult and dark sciences, pagan belief, and the strict rationalism of the Enlightenment, all the while exhibiting an uncompromising intolerance toward religion.

In the final analysis, Dracula emerges not merely as a gothic antagonist but as a multilayered symbol that gathers within himself the anxieties, contradictions, and ideological undercurrents of the human condition. He is simultaneously the revenant of ancient darkness, the aristocrat who wields his feudal brutality as a birthright, the imperial predator who seeks new territories to devour, and the occult embodiment of godlessness whose very lack of a shadow signifies spiritual exile. His existence thrives on ignorance, fear, and the erosion of reason, yet his downfall is orchestrated through the alliance of knowledge, faith, and moral conviction. The Demeter Effect reveals him as both a pagan spectre rising from the ruins of antiquity and a critique of Enlightenment rationalism that blinds itself to metaphysical dangers. In this sense, Dracula functions as a mirror - reflecting humanity's vulnerability to seductive power, its capacity for moral blindness, and its perennial struggle between light and darkness, knowledge and ignorance, faith and nihilism. Listening to the monster thus becomes a means of confronting the hidden abysses within ourselves, for the true terror he represents is not merely the undead figure wandering through Stoker's pages, but the latent monstrosities that human beings, when stripped of conscience and restraint, may harbour within their own shadows.

And the Abyss Stares Back

Life after Death

Starting from the anatomy of a monster to reach the fears of contemporary human beings may seem as tenuous a connection as expecting to find a count with a bowler hat, a cloak, and glowing red eyes wandering the streets today. Yet although Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula* shuts its monster away in the distant history of the 19th century by the end of the story, the shadow of that creature still falls upon modern humanity. A count with bloodthirsty fangs roaming among us certainly does not exist, but the fears he represents continue to influence everyday life, assuming new bodies, new shapes, and new names. As elaborated in the previous chapter, these fears will now be examined under the title *Into the Abyss*, and through specific references the study will attempt to identify the new identities that Count Dracula has adopted within contemporary life.

Sigmund Freud (1909) speaks of the tendency of repressed human traumas, fears, and desires within the subconscious to take on bodies and form, manifesting themselves outwardly. These projections establish a unique symbolic link with the fear they represent. For instance, a rat can express anxieties about cleanliness or material concerns, while a horse can symbolize the fear of punishment at the hands of authority. This connection functions symbolically, much like the veiled allegories in literature. For example, the skull in *Hamlet*, ontologically speaking, may be defined as a mere anatomical object; yet when interpreted within symbolic -allegorical parameters, it signifies either an imminent mortal danger or the transience of life. Considering the outcome of the play, it becomes clear that the skull serves as a harbinger, reaching far beyond the limits of a simple object.

When approached from this framework, Dracula's resurrected state - his rising at night from the coffin in which he spends his days, his wandering the world as a walking corpse - recalls, through an allegorical-symbolic nexus, humanity's repressed and overlooked thoughts about life after death and the afterlife. Apart from a few miraculous exceptions, humankind, shaped by materialist and atheistic modes of thinking, has long regarded death as an irreversible threshold and imagined what lies beyond this definitive point as either absolute annihilation or complete non-return (Dawkins, 2006). Yet the Count and those under his influence leave death behind as though it were a mere station and return to life, walking among the living in a disposition that can be described as 'undead'. In this respect, the Count and his followers may be seen as epitomized examples of post-mortem existence.

This condition produces in the observer a sense of the *uncanny*: the figure before one's eyes possesses the body of a living human yet is, in truth, a corpse. The familiar appears in a profoundly unfamiliar aspect. Those who witness the phenomenon describe Lucy Westenra - who, despite having died recently, rises from her grave and hunts at night - as follows:

We were starting forward, but the Professor's warning hand, seen by us as he stood behind a yew-tree, kept us back; and then as we looked the white figure moved forwards again. It was now near enough for us to see clearly, and the moonlight still held. My own heart grew cold as ice, and I could hear the gasp of Arthur, as we recognised the features of Lucy Westenra.

...

She still advanced, however, and with a languorous, voluptuous grace, said:

"Come to me, Arthur. Leave these others and come to me. My arms are hungry for you. Come, and we can rest together. Come, my husband, come!" (Stoker, 1897, p.196)

Although Lucy approaches people in the guise of a compassionate wife, the fact that she is ultimately a risen, reanimated corpse allows her to inspire fear even before revealing her diabolic face. This fear, as mentioned above, is nothing other than the repressed yet ever-returning notion of the existence of an afterlife—one that refuses to be forgotten. Stoker repeatedly places this idea before the eyes of his readers through the figures of the dead who emerge from their graves.

Silent Racism

Lastly, I could show fight on natural selection having done and doing more for the progress of civilization than you seem inclined to admit. Remember what risk the nations of Europe ran, not so many centuries ago of being overwhelmed by the Turks, and how ridiculous such an idea now is! The more civilized so-called Caucasian races have beaten the Turkish hollow in the struggle for existence. Looking to the world at no very distant date, what an endless number of the lower races will have been eliminated by the higher civilized races throughout the world. (Darwin, 1887, p.316)

...

We Szekelys have a right to be proud, for in our veins flows the blood of many races who fought as the lion fights, for lordship... What devil or what witch was ever so great as Attila, whose blood is

in these veins?... When was redeemed that great shame of my nation, the shame of Cassova, when the flags of the Wallach and the Magyar went down beneath the Crescent? Who was it but one of my own race who as Voivode crossed the Danube and beat the Turk on his own ground? This was a Dracula indeed! (Stoker, 1897, p.27)

When examined with a critical eye, free from perceptual bias, it becomes evident that Darwin's statement - quoted above - transform what should be an academic pursuit into a politicized act of war-mongering; these very ideas echo within the mind of Stoker's bloodthirsty monster, Dracula. As detailed in the previous section, the Count nurtures the belief that he possesses an aristocratic superiority and seeks to justify this through an ethnicity-based distinction. The blood flowing through his veins elevates him to the position of the hunter; furthermore, in contrast to the Turks - whom he once fought and implicitly labels as an inferior race - it grants him an additional layer of exalted privilege, marking him with the indelible emblem of noble distinction. In short, the Count exploits the ethnic and aristocratic grandeur of a self-imposed value system, not only placing himself in a superior position but also condemning others to the unwelcome and inferior tiers of this dichotomy, thereby rendering them victims.

In today's world, aside from a few radical organizations, it may seem that openly practiced racist policies no longer operate visibly; yet the existence of a silently persisting, ethnicity-based worldview is an undeniable reality. To use a fitting metaphor, the racism that blazed like a bonfire during the Second World War has lost its intensity, but its embers continue to glow within the intellectual landscape of Europe. This is a new and quiet form of racism. It not only permeates thought but also functions as a perceptual filter regarding difference, condemning certain groups to ethnic and sociological marginalization and sustaining this process through a mentality that demonizes the Other (Fekete, Cole, 2005; Fekete, 2018; MacMaster, 2001). As reported in a piece by The Guardian concerning the Russia-Ukraine war, the remarks made by Europeans while speaking of the innocent civilians who suffered damage are considered to be manifestations of the very mindset in question.

It's very emotional for me because I see European people with blue eyes and blond hair ... being killed every day... We're not talking here about Syrians fleeing the bombing of the Syrian regime backed by Putin. We're talking about Europeans leaving in cars that look like ours to save their lives. (Bayoumi, 2022)

For the aforementioned reasons, the aristocratic and violence-prone racist discourse embodied by Dracula has, in today's world, transformed into a silent and covert form of racism. Unlike its notorious counterpart, this kind of ethnic segregation proceeds inconspicuously and develops an indirect system of intervention into life and everyday experience. Those who fall under Dracula's sway and embrace the credo that 'blood is life' transform into beings who regard their former companions as mere prey. This shift reflects a rupture rooted in creation itself, one that ultimately drives them toward an expansionist, dominating mentality. Once a graceful and delicate lady, Lucy Westenra, under Dracula's sway, turns into 'the Bloofer Lady,' becoming a different kind of human who sustains herself by consuming the lives of children - that is, by feeding on human life. The existence of exploitative and self-serving systems of thought that underlie the policy of belittling and devaluing human beings - the core essence of racism - is evident. Although the idea Dracula represents with sheer intensity has now taken on a covert, more veiled form, it continues to live on today.

Neo-Imperialist Facets

In the section above, it was noted that Count Dracula seeks to gain power and dominance by using money as a weapon, and in this respect evokes an imperial form of fear. By bringing with him desecrated and accursed soil from his homeland and defiling the lands of England with it, he acts under the notion of becoming a sovereign force. A crude form of Imperialism he manifests is defined by those who study the field as a practice through which a dominant entity establishes control over other societies by economic, political, military, or cultural means, directing them, managing their resources, and reorganizing them in line with its own interests. This process involves elements of hegemony, ideological expansion, and geopolitical influence. (Hobson, 2005; Luxemburg, 2024; Said, 1994)

The notion that communities mobilized by flashy uniforms, fervent and devoted oaths, and romantic ideals had been buried within the twentieth century and vanished from history was, until recently, sustained as an optimistic assumption. Yet today, the wars continuing across the world - although not always driven by a hardcore imperialist agenda - are widely believed to have been initiated by an imperialist mindset and, at the very least, to employ the violent methods historically favoured by imperialism. In some cases, the pursuit of capital that underlies these conflicts, as well as the desire to expand existing capital, is openly articulated by official state institutions and their spokespersons (Antadze, 2025; Pascual Marquina, 2025). Upon the emergence of death lists numbering in the thousands, the

transformation of worldly interests into the sole motive reflects the idea that a system once operated by empires now persists through sheer greed for profit.

The imperial expansion symbolized by Dracula manifests itself in contemporary humanity in two distinct forms. The wars launched under the plainly stated pretext of seeking natural resources demonstrate that the imperialist threat continues today, nourished by a capitalist vein. Wars erupting along the axes of north and south, east and west -erupting first as armed conflicts in peripheral regions known as the Third World and eventually managing to reach the doorsteps of Europe - have, to borrow an allusion from the story, brought Dracula's ship *Demeter* to the harbours of Europe.

The other face of the imperialism in question aligns with its neo-capitalist characterization. It denotes an economic order in which international capital has expanded, multinational corporations have become dominant actors, production dynamics are driven not by necessity but by a culture of consumption, and where weapons and brute force have been replaced by advertising and finance. In this respect, neo-capitalism may be defined as a subsequent stage of capitalism - an evolutionary phase in which the capital released into the market creates the very habitat it requires in order to remain alive. In other words, the piston-like mechanism necessary for the functioning of the market - first ignited by the capitalist engine - has been sustained through the neo-capitalist order. This culture, built upon rampant consumerism, has transformed into a self-feeding closed circuit where demand continually triggers further demand so that supply may keep pace.

It has been stated earlier that Dracula is a creature driven by the pursuit of blood, and those who fall under his influence likewise become beings who thirst for it. Yet when Dracula intends to turn someone into a vampire - in a highly suggestive manner - he does not drain their blood; rather, he makes them drink his own. In doing so, he transforms them into a fragment of himself, elevating them from the status of a mere source of blood to that of a predator who will require blood in turn. This transformation resonates with the uncontrolled consumerist frenzy of neo-capitalism: capitalist economic systems, which ruthlessly exhaust natural resources, simultaneously produce miniature versions of themselves - feral consumers whose voracious habits perpetuate a system that 'produces by consuming consumption' itself.

The Known Unknown

The paradoxical and distinctly obvious oxymoron in the title constitutes

a literary counterpart to the cloak of unknowability that Dracula dons. Its significance extends far beyond a mere wordplay, a fact that becomes evident when one examines Dracula's manner of living and hunting. Although he occupies a human body, Dracula is by no means an ordinary man. This human façade is but a pleasant and deceptive mask concealing his cruel nature - a wolf in sheep's disguise, to borrow the familiar adage. The victims in the narrative are deceived by his old age, his noble title, and his exceedingly pronounced civility, refinement, and cultured demeanour. Yet all these traits are manufactured, duplicitous character constructs designed to conceal the Count's true nature.

In essence, the Count is a profoundly formidable and diabolic monster. Conventional means of combat prove ineffectual against him. Those who pursue him are, after all, attempting to kill someone who is already dead. They are fully aware that they are surrounded by a ring of unknowability. What is known is simply the existence of an as-yet-unknown force. These men, tracking shadows in the dark, falter because they face a creature whose strength is drawn precisely from its inscrutability - at least until they receive the guidance of Dr. Van Helsing. Lucy's transformation before their eyes, Mina's gradual deterioration, and Renfield's uncontrollable madness serve as visible signs of this very enigma. In sum, while the Count terrifies the people of his time through his bloodthirsty monstrosity, he also, through his aura of unknowability, keeps his monstrous nature unreachable and preserves his superiority. The system of ignorance he constructs resembles a game of blind man's buff—except in the Count's version, he blinds everyone else while keeping his own eyes wide open. He exploits this ignorance with utmost manipulateness, driving those around him into delusion and reducing them to the roles of victim, prey, and foolishly ignorant beings. It is quite allusive that he reassures Mr. Harker - whom he keeps well-fed and locked away like a sacrificial lamb - by pointing to the wolves outside his castle, giving the illusion of safety. For the real monsters are within the castle walls, under his command, and indeed, he himself.

The symbolic fear of unknowability that the Count wears like his famed cloak emerges today as an invisible threshold that prevents individuals from stepping out of the comfort and security they desire. Scholars in the field define fear of the unknown as a universal form of anxiety experienced when one faces a complete or partial lack of information about the future or about life itself. Fed by uncertainty and obscurity, this anxiety renders foresight impossible and creates mental vacuums that paralyze the individual. The individual's sense of security weakens, and feelings of unease intensify (Carleton, 2016; Grupe & Nitschke, 2013).

This fear of the unknown - one of the most common psychological afflictions of modern life - has the potential even to trigger depression, and it negatively impacts educational, familial, social, and intimate relationships. Although it may not blind a person's eye-sight, it binds their thoughts and expectations, preventing the maintenance of a healthy cognitive framework. The rapidly changing conditions of daily life, shaped by unpredictable variables, can nullify expectations without a warning. A simple market fluctuation may drive the so-called millionaire into overnight bankruptcy, while sudden outbreaks of armed conflict may result in thousands of deaths within hours. Modernity, increasingly inclined toward chaos-driven frameworks, seems eager to impose a grand narrative of unpredictability across all aspects of life. Even AI-generated videos cast a shadow upon media reliability, causing individuals to lose their grip on reality and sink deeper into the mire of uncertainty. In this respect, the manipulative unknowability that the Count maintained in a primitive form has evolved, from the shrouded face of a monster hidden in darkness, into a social and psychological phenomenon that continues to consume contemporary individuals. The Count has long vanished; yet his absent shadow lingers, cast upon the modern world as a vast, ominous question mark.

Metamorphosis

As mentioned earlier, Count Dracula is far more than a mere creature devoted solely to destruction; for reasons known only to himself, he initiates a wave of transformation by turning the humans into vampires. It is certain that he possesses a nature that is both evolutionary and revolutionary - destroying as much as he transforms. For instance, while Quincey Morris suffers the monster's destructive disposition, Lucy undergoes the diabolic defilement of a transformative process. For this reason, when the Count's transformative aspect is considered alongside his destructive power, a social metamorphosis marked by corruption and decay becomes unmistakably evident.

The transformation triggered by the Count unfolds as a biological process. Those he bites - and to whom he makes his victims drink his own blood - experience not only identity-based alterations but also profound biological changes. The victims' blood is drained, their skin grows pale, their eyes and speech mutate, and their thoughts and behaviour become hysterical. Spiritual decay accompanies physical deterioration. The transformation of Lucy Westenra - a graceful lady - into a frail, ravenous living corpse displays both the psychological and physiological dimensions of this collapse. Once she completes her vampiric rebirth, she becomes mendaciously powerful

and violent using her dark charm as a sensual trap. This identity appears to be a total negation of her previous innocent one. Though both women carry the same body and name, Vampiric Lucy embraces a seductive, wicked and corrupt disposition. Noteworthy here is the fact that transformed individuals ascend from the status of victim to that of hunter, becoming agents in the spread of the evil the Count disseminates. This change, marked by sudden fits of rage and aggression, resembles the rabies cases of earlier centuries - diseases that induced both mental and physical breakdown.

Today, humanity is no longer terrified by a monstrous transformation transmitted through a bite; it possesses a more grounded sense of reality and the capacity to manage rabies outbreaks. Yet even medical progress has not succeeded in preventing the spread of pandemic viruses, which have produced consequences as widespread and destructive as anything Dracula could inflict. According to a study by the World Health Organization, as of 2023, the COVID pandemic claimed more than seven million lives (COVID-19, the 2019–20 coronavirus pandemic, n.d.). Bird flu, swine flu, tick-borne haemorrhagic fevers, and the well-known COVID pandemic have all triggered societal transformation processes in which careless patients could infect healthy individuals. These diseases, transmitted from person to person, have turned individuals into potential threats to one another. Accompanied by fear and alienation, pandemic-era social isolation has negatively affected psychological well-being. From this perspective, Dracula's infamous transformative bites have found their modern equivalent in the infected individual's breath and sneeze.

Another misconduct-based modern phenomenon shaped by a similar logic of 'the transformed becoming the transformer' is social media. The desire for popularity, the negative influence of unqualified influencers, the waste of time and the drift toward addiction all reveal how especially young individuals are lost day by day (Bennett 2015; Otway 2018). What begins as casual use gradually transforms - under uncontrolled engagement - into addiction. Dracula's thirst for blood evokes the irresistible craving many feel toward digital devices such as phones and computers. Excessive time spent on social media and the habits formed within it can lead to physical health problems. From skeletal disorders to obesity and diabetes, health issues fuelled by physical inactivity can, in turn, give rise to psychological difficulties. Violent content, shallow and narcissistic thinking styles, homogenizing provocative rhetoric, harmful encouragements, and morally corrosive displays all leave unwelcome psycho-social effects on individuals.

Considering these biological and psychological negative transformations,

social media addiction - though it does not drain one's blood - consumes something equally valuable: time, attention, and personal capacity. It stands as one of Count Dracula's twenty-first century manifestations. As discussed earlier, just as the Count elevates his victims into hunters and thus expands the scale of the corruption he creates, a parallel dynamic can be observed in social media use. Users influenced by the content they consume gradually turn into content producers themselves, fuelling the very frenzy that ensnared them. The rapidly spreading and largely purposeless 'challenge culture' serves as an example. The 'Ice Bucket Challenge,' originally initiated to raise awareness for ALS, ultimately transformed into a mere entertainment-driven contest among youth; the campaign's original purpose was lost as its media-driven appeal dominated. Today, such trends turn social media into a virtual landfill, drawing in more and more users and expanding its sphere of influence. For these reasons, addiction-inducing social media use has become a modern source of anxiety - one with the potential to transform into the *Count Dracula* of our age.

Representation of Darkness – Atheism – A New Identity

When the identity of Dracula is considered as a whole, it becomes clear that he serves as the representative of dark forces, by epitomizing darkness itself. This representation is not mere spokespersonship but manifests as a consciously pursued and devoted mission. The Count's demeanour, actions, and the ancestral history he strives to carry into the future are filled with examples of this representational purpose. These examples appear in the form of bloody and violent events, and in the eyes of virtuous people, Dracula embodies evil in its most literal form. In Stoker's fiction, Dracula appears as a blood-drinker, a killer, an instigator of murder, manipulative, secretive, and hegemonic. Even the rare courtesy he displays becomes a deceptive lure and a trap. The evil darkness he channels permeates the entirety of the narrative, and he ties his dominion to the power and spread of this darkness. In short, the Count is both the embodiment and the representative of evil.

At the root of this evil lies unmistakably, a pagan and atheistic orientation. The Count does not lead a life grounded in religious belief; on the contrary, he moves within a Nietzschean *Übermensch* framework toward pure power and domination. Yet this orientation surprisingly reveals a profound vulnerability toward religious symbols. The Count displays fear and weakness in the face of crosses, holy books, holy water, and consecrated bread. He travels to England - where he intends to extend his imperial dominion of evil - aboard a ship named Demeter. As previously discussed, Demeter is a figure inherited from pagan belief systems, at once nurturing

and diabolically ambivalent. In light of this information, it is plausible to argue that Dracula, shaped by pagan connotations, at times represents a covert form of atheistic and heretic, dominative evil.

Today, this fear is widely associated with the rapid rise of non-religiosity and alternative spiritual movements (Smith, 1979). Studies show a significant global increase in non-religious or unaffiliated belief systems (Hackett et al., 2025). From the perspective of religious communities, these movements appear immoral, dangerous, and devoid of values (Harris, 2005). The concerns regarding the moral and social decay that atheistic thought may provoke expressed by scholars who advocate faith in face of disbelief further reinforce this argument (Hart, 2010; Holland, 2019).

The religious communities' assumption of atheistic groups as immoral, dangerous, and valueless aligns significantly with Stoker's depiction of Count Dracula. The Count possesses no moral compass outside his own interests. His value system is pragmatic, self-serving, and abusive, lacking any sense of just ethics. He enforces and maintains his worldview through violent methodology. The central dynamic in his constructed logic is a malevolent essence devoid of religious grounding. Stoker reinforces this argument repeatedly. One of the clearest examples is Professor Van Helsing's confrontation with the Count: Van Helsing sets aside his medical identity and becomes a metaphysical specialist, wielding faith as a weapon. To protect those under Dracula's influence, he draws a circle of sacred Christian objects around them. This circle creates a metaphorical boundary, one into which the Count's influence cannot enter. When decoded, Stoker's allegorical language depicts the Count as a creature empowered by irreligion and religious opposition. His vulnerability and eventual destruction occur through faith. Thus, one may argue that the Count represents an anti-religious or irreligious worldview. In this respect, the cross image stands a substantial ground. When a peasant encounters Jonathan Harker at the beginning of the story and gives him a crucifix for protection, this gesture ventures beyond merely symbolic; it is the loading of Chekhov's gun. The crucifix becomes a narrative signpost in the form of a rally point, gathering the forces opposing the monster under the shared domain of faith. Today, the worldview symbolized by the Count - irreligion or anti-religion - remains widespread, and from the standpoint of the story's Christian-centered worldview, while such alternative belief systems rise, commitment to Christianity continues to decline (Statista, 2025).

As explained in earlier chapters, Dracula not only embodies the force that triggers transformation but also represents it. He brings with him a wave

of change, turning those under his influence into vampiric beings. Darkness and the colour black - universal archetypes of evil - serve as the main dynamic keeping this malevolence alive. Thus, he constitutes an inherent threat, and both he and the vampiric identity he represents are identities erected in the name of evil.

In contemporary forms of art such as literature, cinema, and video games, a new form of vampire figure has emerged - one that diverges from tradition. These characters, though originating from monstrous roots, increasingly transform into empathetic anti-heroes. Shaped by emotionality, humour, aesthetics, nobility, and aristocratic elitism, they evolve from feared other into admired and desired icons. Edward Cullen of the *Twilight* series, for instance, is not a monster to the ordinary human Bella Swan but a compassionate lover, a dark prince. Throughout the story, Bella willingly transforms into a vampire to sustain an otherwise impossible love. The Cullen family is not portrayed with Addams-like grotesque strangeness but with a dignified and appealing elitism, presenting readers with a 'sweet devil' test (Meyer, 2008). The question remains: can a charming yet uncanny identity alter a reader's perception of evil? Meanwhile, a deconstructive narrative framework rewarding failure becomes increasingly noticeable. When Bella Swan becomes a vampire, she is 'punished' with immortality, family life, superhuman abilities, and eternal love (!), while Stoker's Lucy Westenra pays with a stake through her heart and decapitation.

In light of the foregoing discussion, Dracula's identity can be understood as the representation of evil and darkness. This representation does not pursue the annihilation of goodness but aims to contaminate and transform it. In contemporary narratives, however, the vampire identity - framed by nobility, romantic mystery, superhuman traits, and dark allure - has shifted from an avoided identity to an admired and desired one. Stoker notes that Dracula cannot enter a house unless invited: "He may not enter anywhere at the first; unless there be some one of the household who bid him to come; though afterwards he can come as he please." (Stoker, p. 223). Within the allegorical depth of the narrative, for Dracula - the embodiment of evil - to penetrate a household, he must be welcomed. Unless he is invited, he remains outside and powerless. In other words, the evil outside poses no threat unless one opens his heart for it and enmeshes with it. Yet, in modern culture, this rule has reversed: people no longer flee from the vampire; rather, they seek him out and embrace him. This perceptual shift is striking, for the transformation of the monster into an anti-hero signals a profound deviation in the cultural understanding of good and evil.

Conclusion

In examining Stoker's *Dracula* through the intertwined lenses of religious symbolism, atheistic reinterpretation, the evolution of the vampire archetype, and the shifting cultural landscape of modern popular fiction, a larger pattern becomes visible: every age recreates its monsters according to its own fears, desires, and uncertainties. Stoker's Count stands as the embodiment of darkness, otherness, and metaphysical threat - a figure whose power derives not merely from physical predation but from his direct opposition to the sacred order. His inability to enter without being invited, his recoil from the crucifix, and his parasitic dependence on the living reflect a worldview in which evil exists as a real, objective force, and faith holds protective power. The vampire here is not a misunderstood outsider but the manifestation of spiritual corruption.

Yet as the modern world gradually secularized, the vampire narrative transformed. The sympathetic anti-hero, the beautiful monster, represents a cultural shift away from metaphysical fear toward psychological and emotional complexity. The vampire is no longer a curse imposed by dark powers but a conflicted individual negotiating morality, desire, and identity. This shift mirrors the broader cultural fascination with morally ambiguous characters suggesting a collective movement toward exploring interior darkness rather than externalizing it. The monster becomes a mirror rather than a threat.

At the same time, rising rates of unbelief, the crisis of traditional authority, and the fragmentation of moral frameworks have all contributed to a renewed interest in narratives that problematize certainty. *Dracula's* terror is rooted in the unknown; modern readers, confronted with their own forms of uncertainty - social, existential, technological - turn to stories that reflect this instability. The old religious binaries give way to emotional dilemmas, ethical ambiguities, and characters trapped between humanity and monstrosity. In this sense, the evolution of the vampire is also the evolution of cultural self-understanding.

Taken together, these transformations reveal a continuous tension between the sacred and the secular, the known and the unknown, the monstrous and the human. By comparing Stoker's original depiction with contemporary reinterpretations, it becomes clear that the vampire myth is not static but responsive - a literary vessel through which society negotiates its fears, desires, and shifting beliefs. Whether as a demonic invader or a tragic romantic figure, the vampire remains a potent symbol for examining the boundaries of identity, morality, and belief.

Ultimately, the persistence of the vampire across eras demonstrates that even as worldviews change, certain questions endure: What is evil? What is forbidden desire? What remains sacred in an increasingly secular world? And perhaps most importantly, why do we continue to be drawn to creatures that reflect the darkness we struggle to name? The answer lies not in the monsters themselves, but in the societies that create them.

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