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Count Madness

Centered in 19th Century Europe, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is a novel that explores fear through the actions of Count Dracula. The consequences suffered by the unfortunate people to cross his path result in madness, death and potentially eternal life feeding off of other human's blood. Most characters question their sanity in this novel starting with Jonathan Harker after his horrible experiences in Count Dracula's lair to Renfield who *is* actually insane, a ward of the asylum next door to where Dracula has moved into. Dracula drives people mad in every sense of his being. Everywhere he goes he wreaks death and destruction by controlling the minds of his subjects. First dining on Lucy, and secondly Mina. Ultimately, he controls their dreams, bodies, desires along with their sanity deciding whether they live or die. Dracula is evil in every sense and he spreads his madness to nearly every character in this novel.

In the *Contagion Age* by Dan Dinello, he explains how contagion is not just physical, it is also metaphor and as examined in *Dracula*, folklore and the unexplained could drive people mad! "Contagion" is both flesh and metaphor. Prior to the 19th century discovery that microbes cause and spread disease, people accounted for biological contagion by turning to

occult and spiritual forces. Witches and demons were blamed for the Black Death. The mystery of contagion made it useful in describing inexplicable, unexpected chains of epidemic transmission, such as the hysteria of crowds, the corruption of sin, or the wildfire spread of religious or political ideology. The capacity of "contagion" to function simultaneously as a visceral infection and as a deeply resonant metaphor for the circulation of social, moral, or political dangers helps explain its cultural resonance" (Dinello 6) Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is ultimately the folk lore coming to life in Romania and 19th Century times. The acts of fear associated with the townspeople that Jonathan Harker comes across is a fine example of such. Prayers for his safety and the gifts of the rosary bring the social fears to a forefront.

With *Dracula* approaching England, Lucy begins her childhood act of sleepwalking which she hasn't done in years, his influence over her has already begun. When the ship arrives, she sleepwalks out to the overlook where *Dracula* solidifies their union. It is the same with Renfield, who during an encounter with Dr. Seward, states "I am here to do your bidding, Master. I am your slave and You will reward me for I shall be faithful. I have worshipped You long and afar off. Now you are near I await your commands, and you will not pass me by, will You, Dear Master, in your distribution of good things"? (Stoker 88) *Dracula*'s influence over Renfield begins thousands of miles away. The draw that Renfield experiences is a form of madness, yet during times throughout the story, Renfield seems to act perfectly normal and lucid concealing his madness behind a veil of normalcy to the point where he nearly convinces the doctor to release him from the asylum.

Madness doesn't discriminate between sexes. Both Lucy and Mina experience a physical madness that festers throughout their bodies and souls draining them of energy and color. In Lucy's situation, her three suitors and Dr. Van Helsing continue to search for a cure to

save her from this madness but their efforts are futile and she dies. When they find out that she is now of the undead, her fiancé is then charged with restoring Lucy to her angelic pure self by driving a stake into her heart and releasing the evil that has taken over her soul. In nineteenth century, non-Dracula times, if a woman were to experience the symptoms Lucy displayed, surely she would have been locked aside Renfeild and died inside the asylum.

Mina questions the validity of her husband Jonathan Harker's sanity as she nurtured him while he recovering from "brain fever" which was brought on by the great emotional upset he experienced at Dracula's castle. Mina's journal entry: "I hadn't the heart to write last night; that terrible record of Jonathan's upset me so. Poor dear! How he must have suffered whether it be true or only imagination. I wonder if there is any truth in it at all. Did he get his brain fever, and then write all those terrible things, or had he some cause for it all? I suppose I shall never know, for I dare not open the subject to him... Poor fellow!" (Stoker 153) The madness subsides later in the story when Van Helsing validated Jonathan Harker's story, a new sense of being came over him with the truth freeing him from the weighted burden of insanity.

In this story, nineteenth century fears of madness are a continual occurrence, there are two doctors, Dr. Seward who runs the insane asylum and his mentor Van Helsing who is an eccentric professor and physician. Both are familiar with the mental health of that time, they are both chivalrous and misogynistic depending on one's view point. They question their own sanity at times throughout the novel because the belief of what they are seeing is unfathomable. They are experiencing such fantastic fright, that they must be mad. Dr. Seward's Diary reads: "I sometimes think we all must be mad and that we shall wake to sanity in straight-waistcoats" (Stoker 235)

Throughout the novel, Dracula is a constant but silent figure who spreads his madness to everyone with whom he comes into contact with. The sanity of the characters vary in degrees based on their understanding of the events as they unfold. All of the characters experience one form of madness or another and are fearful that they are losing their minds or their sense of reality. But in the end, they embrace their unfortunate circumstances and prevail, ridding the world of his madness by driving a stake through his heart.

Outline

Introduction

- Madness throughout Bram Stoker's, *Dracula* is a key fear clearly identified throughout the novel. Most characters question their sanity starting with Jonathan Harker after his horrible experiences in Count Dracula's lair to Renfield who is actually insane and under the control of Dracula's spell.

Thesis: The Fear of Madness is prevalent as nearly every character in Bram Stoker's novel "*Dracula*" questions their sanity at one time or another throughout the novel.

- Bram Stoker identifies madness as a disease being criminal and ungodly. The captain's log describes the madness that boarded the ship and how it crept upon all on board.
Support 1: "It was the madman who had got rid of the men one by one, and now he has followed them himself. God help me! How am I to account for all of these horrors when I get to port? When I get to port! Will that ever be?" Support 2: "The Count is criminal and of criminal type. Nordau and Lombroso would so classify him, and qua criminal, he is of imperfectly formed mind. Thus, in a difficulty, he has to seek resource inhabit".
- Madness is prevalent in both male and female characters. Lucy loses control over her mind and actions with sleepwalking and ultimately loses her life at the hands of her lovers. Van Helsing is seen here trying to describe his thoughts on the madness of the Count. Support 3 "There is this peculiarity in criminals. It is so constant, in all countries and at all times, that even police, who know not much from philosophy, come to know it empirically, that it is. That is to be empiric. The criminal always work at one crime, that

is the true criminal who seems predestinate to crime and who will of none other. This criminal has not full man-brain, he is of child-brain” (Chapter 25 pg 293)

- Throughout the novel, Dracula is a constant but silent figure who spreads his madness to everyone with whom he comes into contact. The sanity of the characters varies in degrees based on their understanding of the events as they unfold. Ultimately good prevails and sanity is restored and the lucky ones who survived live to tell their story.

Works Cited

Dinello, Dan. The Contagious Age: Overwhelmed by Vampires, Virus and Zombies of the 21st Century. September 7, 2011

Stoker, Bram. Dracula. Dover Productions, 2002.