

The Living and The UN-Dead

A Study of Dracula

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Part 1.

“There may be a clue after all, if we can find why today his paroxysms came on at high noon and at sunset. Can it be that there’s a malign influence of the sun at periods which affects certain natures – as at times the moon does others? We shall see.”

Dracula, chapter XI, Dr Seward’s diary

From eighteenth century onwards it has been the occupation of certain group of authors to make Horror a Myth. Some of their terrifying monsters have survived the history of English literature; to name the finest of them (without being condemned of monstrosity) would be Dracula.

This supposition shall immediately bring about a series of questions like the following: Why should a Monster survive at all? Where lies the power of the monster? Why are we afraid of Castles besides our ancient fear of the dark? And at last how does Fear do the Frightening?

I’ll begin with the last question:

To horrify without running the risk of getting unmasked as quickly as the grandmother – wolf in Red Ridding Hood, the writer needs be Impersonal in his or her descriptions personally.

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To make horror vivify in this way, the writer is to use sentences which are simple, objective and thus visually concentrated.

By objective and impersonal I don't mean that a third person or an omniscient narrative is to be expected but in the sense I explain in the following paragraph.

The fact that Dracula is written in the form of subsequent diaries of different characters of the novel (5 of them) does not actually make of it an impersonal document but it is impersonal in the sense that the whole structure by means of the very diversity of voices makes for a historical objectivity.

I shall give an example to clear the point. Let us consider the following Sentences and see how each of them works to its end.

A. *Mommy died.*

B. *Mommy passed away on a wintry day.*

Let's see how sentence A works: it is composed of 2 words, 2 objects of attention, 2 abstract identities and yet 2 images to concentrate upon. We are not usually taken aback by a short sentence like this but in certain moods it's most likely to send a chill through our whole frame even if we are gazing unmoved. A physical pain is caused because this time you have not been exposed to feelings in a way which always set you at ease by their concrete associations in mind, but we must deal with living Subjects as Living objects; The Living as the UN-Dead.

In other words the every day conceptions have lost their natural connotations and stand out as signifiers of abnormal states of mind.

For what is a Mother who has died within a two-word sentence structure? It's a mother who is so close to Death that starts back at you through her normally set eyes.

Now let's have a look at the next sentence.

The fact is that the mother who has passed away on a wintry day is our own dear mother who has died here too but the sentence is linguistically and psychologically consolatory in its indulgence in presenting us with things beside our mother's death. Pass – away has milder connotations:

People pass away peacefully and with quite closed eyes. Then there's the wintry day and mommy is not all we have to look at in the funeral; In a word all is not finished as in "Mommy died".

My opinion is that it's not the first sentence as may usually be expected that is Real but the latter and the first is only a mocking image of reality. It's Miss Lucy's mouth grown into an "open square, as in the passion masks of the Greeks and the Japanese".

Sentence B. presents a more cosmic reality and sentence A. an unnaturally chilling state of mind.

In early scenes of Dracula when Mr.Harker is driven to the Castle Dracula all objects have lost their morning-reality. Things inanimate and animate find their projected images on the cloth of Night. Yet not as they were in the morning. The inanimate finding itself at home with the inanimate cloth seems alive and animate; to say metaphorically:

All trees speak while in proper mood!

And the most animate (Mr.Harker here) is as in a dream of Death: The whole picture's a psychotic trick.

The background of the real existence of Dracula the UN-Dead, is the Dark night. All colors are absorbed in a vast abyss of blackness. We (the living men) become objects of attention to the Things UN-Dead in the dark.

We are to witness the cloak of Night embrace the objects around us and give them a pale hue of existence.

So it is breath – takingly frightening to be as Harker is in the Presence of a chariot that seems to have sold its soul to the black Prince of Night to carry the living right to his destruction. Nature’s metamorphoses is unbelievably real.

“My only doubt was as to whether any dream could be more terrible than the unnatural and horrible net of gloom and mystery which seemed closing around me.”

Chapter III, Jonathan Harker’s journal

No mirror can reflect Dracula; to face the UN-Dead needs miraculous courage.

It is this cavernous concentration on dead objects, materialized before the eyes of the living that leaves us transfixed with terror, like the three weird sister’s materialization by the moonlight before the paralyzed Harker.

The mommy – died structure leaves us without motion, with no speck of life whatsoever, while the “wintry day” in the other gives us a regular breathing during the solemn procession.

Our blood is sucked away while the intensity of the UN-Dead’s red eyes have us in their tightening grasp and a feeling of loss gradually overcomes our senses ... a loss of blood and with it a loss of Reality.

In Dracula Mr.Harker once away from the spell of the gloomy castle and the “uncanny stranger” can’t but wonder if he had not been through a weary dream, but Freud tells us that dreams too have their interpretations and their coming into reality. They leave their tiny punctures on our sensitive throats that could be seen in the light of morning.

We pass away peacefully in the light of morning and die Draculous in night’s hidden boxes.

In Dracula the UN-Dead materialized is like a Dream Realized (and that’s why the book has hold its interest for the psychoanalyst).

Part 2

“But we are pledged to set the world free”

Chapter XXIV, Mina Harker’s Journal

In this part of essay I shall try to answer the questions posed earlier:

Why the Monsters survive and where lies their power?

This obsession with making a show of fear in literary works may have to do with man’s longing to do away with it. Yet if we can’t make Fear commit suicide in reality we can always go sit by Mrs. Radcliffe’s fireside and see how the veins of the wicked are burned through by their own poison. There are always sinister monks and vampires to set the world free of its fears. Ours shall be the Kingdom of Heaven.

After Bram Stoker, no writer has yet succeeded to create any substantial work to add to the process of mythologizing Fear. Our present century has no more any fear of Mighty Horrors of the mysterious worlds or threats in the size of a Frankenstein; ours is a disgustingly and fearfully infinitesimal sort of fear as T.S.Eliot describes it:

... I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning rising behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

The Wasteland

Fear is within and not without in brief.

What makes the lasting charm of such works as Dracula is that we still prefer to seek the cause of certain “horrible and unnatural” murders of our life somewhere beyond ourselves in the nether world.

What makes us still enjoy the myths of ancient Greece and Rome or children's Fairy tales is the relieving fact that they leave our Humanity unstained.

All characters in Dracula are angelic except for the UN-Dead; there is a sense of security, peace and divinity in our being Human and in contrast a perpetual fear of carrying the red scar, the primitive stain of Cain's murder, on our forehead: the terror of becoming unnatural Outcasts: "deserted and decrepit".

There's either a malign influence in the sun that makes us do unnatural deeds or else we are so fond of our humanity that we create Monsters to make our Brightness more visible.

"Some natural tears they dropped but wiped them soon"

Milton, Paradise Lost, Book XII

زندگان و زنده‌شدگان^۱

« مطالعه‌ای درباره افسانه دراکولا »

مرجان بختیاری کیش^۲

از قرن هجدهم به بعد ساختن افسانه‌های ترسناک مشغولیت گروه خاصی از نویسندگان بوده است. بعضی از هیولاهای وحشتناک آنان، تاریخ ادبیات انگلیسی را جاویدان ساخته‌اند، یکی از بهترین این افسانه‌ها «دراکولا» است.

تصور این افسانه‌ها بی‌درنگ سؤال‌هایی را در ذهن بوجود می‌آورد:

به چه دلیل هیولایی باید جاویدان باقی بماند؟ قدرت این هیولا کجا قرار دارد؟

به غیر از ترس قدیمی از تاریکی چرا از قصرها می‌ترسیم؟ و سرانجام چگونه ترس موجب «وحشت» می‌شود؟

۱- زنده‌شدگان کسانی هستند که مرده‌اند و زنده نیستند اما دراکولا در آنها نفوذ کرده و به آنان جان دوباره داده است. آنها تنها کالبدشان زنده است و از این حیث به معنی تحت‌اللفظی واژه «زنده»‌ای که ما بکار می‌بریم نیست. این توضیح از آن جهت است که در اغلب متونی که به این افسانه می‌پردازد این واژه به چشم می‌خورد. (م.)

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