

Psychoanalytic Criticism of Dr. Van Helsing in the Novel *Dracula*

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Abstract

Set in the backdrop of Gothic horror tradition, Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* (1897) intermixes with fondness of romance. It overtly describes the love of Dr. John Seward, Arthur Holmwood and Quincey Morris to Lucy Westerna. The behaviours that they show towards main female characters in the novel express their love to women. But Dr. Van Helsing, the leader of the heroes' team, is presented as the inspiring figure who leads the band of the young people in a sacred ritual. He is from Amsterdam and we do not know anything about his family background except his insane wife who is now in "insane institution". In the novel he is the character taken for granted as an all good personality. He is presented as the benevolent father figure who is panacea for the trouble wrenched youngsters. However, we can raise some questions on his behaviours. Is he solely an ascetic person? Is he not interested in love affairs with any woman? This paper attempts to analyze the behaviours of Dr. Van Helsing from psychoanalytic perspective. This paper claims that there is the working of the unconscious at his love to the women so that he takes part in Dracula killing mission. By analyzing his behaviours from psychoanalytic perspective, he is a man unconsciously running after women. His behaviours express his unfulfilled sexual desire, a man with woman fixation.

Keywords: psychoanalytic criticism, the unconscious, woman fixation, oedipal desire, jealousy, human behavior, vampire mission.

Introduction

Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* (1897), a famous vampire novel of late Victorian period, is noted for its treatment of love. As a gothic novel, it also "brings together the fantastic elements of romance with the plausible psychology of real people" (Lynch 3). It overtly describes the love of Dr. John Seward, Arthur Holmwood and Quincey Morris to Lucy Westerna. Within a day's contest of love, Lucy Westerna chooses Arthur Holmwood for marriage and sidelines other two suitors. Even after her verdict, the situation becomes so amicable that without any jealousy and prejudice, they remain close friends and remain in tight bond to hunt Dracula. On the other hand, as the novel opens, we see Jonathan Harker and Mina Murray in betrothed situation. Later on, they get married in Budapest. Similarly, the antagonist Count Dracula is keeping three female vampires as his mistresses in his castle. By brutally sucking blood of young women, he compels them to fall in love with him. In this way, except Van Helsing, all main male characters are the subjects of love in this novel. The behaviours that they show towards main female characters in the novel express their love to women. Even at the end of the novel, seriously wounded Quincey Morris, who is near his death, feels proud of dying for the service of Mina saying, "I am only too happy to have been of service". Looking at Mina he speaks, "Now God be thanked that all has not been in vain! See! The snow is not more stainless than her forehead! The curse has passed away" (Stoker 389). And then he dies gallantly "with a smile and in silence". This death time expression and his selfless behaviour to save Mina show that he had great unconscious attachment towards Mina Harker.

The expression of love is main human behavior described in the novel *Dracula*. In Tyson's view "any literary text that accurately describes human behavior or that is the product of an author's unconscious...will include psychoanalytic principles whether or not the author had any awareness of those principle while writing the work" (37). In the early period of psychological analysis of the text predominantly the analysis was focused on how the author's psychology had been exposed in the text. But as time passed "psychoanalytic literary criticism expanded the study of psychological features beyond the author to cover the variety of intrinsic textual aspects. In many instances fictional characters of a text are subjected to a psychological analysis, almost as if they were real people" (Klarer 116). Many characters in *Dracula* are also subject to a psychological treatment as if they are real people. This paper analyzes only the behaviours of Dr. Van Helsing from psychoanalytic perspective. In Peter Brooks' observation, "classic psychoanalytic criticism displaces the object of analysis from the text to the person, be it the author, the reader or the characters, all of whom are viewed as independent personalities rather than as functions of the text" (quoted in Ellmann 3). In this paper the character Dr. Van Helsing is treated as an independent personality.

In general sense, the novel presents main characters in love affair except Dr. Van Helsing. He is presented as a scientist devoted to solve vampire problem. To solve the problem, he plays the role of team leader. As an inspiring figure, he leads the band of the young people in a sacred ritual. He is from Amsterdam and we do not know anything about his family background except his insane wife who is now in "insane institution". In the novel he is the character who is taken as an all good personality. He is presented as the benevolent father figure who is panacea for the trouble wrenched youngsters. But we can raise some questions on his behaviours. Is he solely an ascetic person? Is he not interested in love affairs with any woman? In the paper my aim is to answer these questions. I claim that there is the working of the unconscious love to women so that he takes part in *Dracula* killing mission. The nature of the unconscious "is inferred from an analysis of features in human behavior-and particularly linguistic behavior-which cannot be understood except on the hypothesis that there is an unconscious" (Esthove 4). The quality of the unconscious is that it never appears directly, but only indirectly. Dr. Van Helsing is a great scholar with MD, Ph. D., D. Lit. etc, and has acquired so many degrees at the cost of the repression of his sexuality. But woman is the object of his unconscious repressed desire.

Textual Analysis

Dr. Van Helsing is a Professor from Amsterdam "who knows as much about obscure diseases as anyone in the world" (Stoker 123). When he receives the letter from Dr. Seward mentioning about the trouble of Miss Westerna, he promises to visit her soon. He writes back to him saying "we may see the young lady not too late on tomorrow" (124). An adult Helsing at once agrees to go to see Westerna case instantly for a short visit though he is busy in Amsterdam. It is his oedipal desire that urges him to visit to London. Van Helsing is a very learned married adult whose wife is now in "mental institution" for insanity. But from psychoanalytic perspective, his instant acceptance is the expression of his unconscious repressed desire towards women. According to Tyson our "unconscious desire is always seeking out our lost

object of desire” (290). Miss Westerna is a stand-in for his unconscious desire of woman. She is metonymic representation of his desire of women. In metonymic representation a person or object is substituted for another person or object with which the first is associated to some extent (Tyson 30). By accepting the request of Dr. Seward, Dr. Van Helsing is working as per the demand of his unconscious desire. “In Freud’s view of the unconscious, the *id*, primarily sexual ones, while the *Superego* counteracts the *id* by censoring interior desires in consideration of social disciplines. The *ego* balances between the *id*’s impulses and the *superego*’s regulatory influence” (Pug and Johnson 238). Dr. Van Helsing’s ego drives him to accept the request of Dr. Seward.

When Dr. Van Helsing meets Dr. Seward at Liverpool Street, he decides to take the charge of the case of Miss Westerna and tells Dr. Seward not to tell anything to her lover Arthur Holmwood about her health condition. His unconscious mind thinks Arthur Holmwood as his rival, so he says. “Bet he not know as yet. Perhaps he will never know” (Stoker 129). Unconsciously Dr. Helsing feels fear of the obstruction of Arthur Holmwood as *Nom-du-Pere* and decides to keep him away. Since Van Helsing meets Lucy Westerna, he shows his male supremacy towards her. Her lover is away from the sight for almost all the times, and he does not even know how her treatment is going on. Even after the continuous treatment, Lucy Westerna’s health deteriorates, and they decide to transfuse blood to her. Unknown to her lover Arthur Holmwood, along with other crew, Dr. Van Helsing also donates blood to her. In general sense it is a humanitarian task, but it expresses his unconscious desire to marry her. In Victorian view blood transfusion connoted marriage between two persons. Roth et. al. also clam that “Victorian viewed marriage as the joining of bodies, in both promise of continued and intermingled bloodiness, and the legal and Christian tropes that described the wife as blood of her husband’s blood and flesh of his flesh” (360).

After her death Lucy turns into a vampire and she remains undead and becomes one of the members of the world of Dracula. “Lucy’s affliction with vampirism makes her transformation from virginal girl to sexually compromised woman” (Sparks 121). Dr. Van Helsing becomes quite jealous at finding Lucy Westerna with Dracula that he goes with other men to the tomb of Lucy, and according his plan, they cut off her head to make her free from the company of Dracula. It is the expression of his unconscious jealousy of Dr. Van Helsing towards the Count Dracula. The critic Welsch comments that “stabbing and beheading of Lucy are rich with overtones of sexual conquest and satisfaction bordering on orgiastic” (43). Tobitha Sparks also claims that

Following her death, the ‘undead’ Lucy encounters in a graveyard the army of men intent on subduing Dracula: Doctors Van Helsing and Seward, Arthur, Lucy’s fiancé, and Quincey Morris, a former suitor. All of these men have felt a romantic attachment to Lucy, and with exception of Van Helsing, they have all proposed to her. But despite that romantic history, the men are revolted by the overtly sexual Lucy they meet in the graveyard (122).

These comments clarify of Dr. Van Helsing about sexual and romantic attachment to Lucy Westerna along with her former fiancé and suitors.

The sense of jealousy is found expressed by Dr. Van Helsing even at the end of the novel. He goes to the castle of Count Dracula where he encounters one of the three mistresses of Dracula; he is “moved” by her presence, and he falls to a “sweet fascination” when he wrenches away the tomb of the third mistress. He feels enthralled by her beauty as he says that “she was so fair to look on, so radiantly beautiful, so exquisitely voluptuous, that the very instinct of man in me, which calls some of my sex to love and to protect one of hers, made my head whirl with new emotion” (Stoker 382). It is the expression of his oedipal fixation. He finished all of them by cutting off their heads mainly because he knows they belong to Dracula, and he is jealous at him. On the other hand Mina is lovelier to him than these vampire mistresses. At this time he has to finish them to save Mina who is already affected by the vampire.

Woman fixation of Dr. Van Helsing shifts to Mina Harker after the death of Lucy Westerna. Mina is also affected by the attack of Dracula whom Van Helsing determines to kill to save her. As they know that Dracula has gone back to its castle in Pensilvania, and they plan to follow him, Mina also decides to go with him. She says, “You must take me with you, and you shall be safer, too” (338). In reply he says, “You know that your safety is our solemn duty” (338). This conversation clearly shows the intimacy between Mina and Van Helsing. He wants to save her at any cost. He also thinks her as a guide. He says, “Our dear Madam Mina is once more our teacher. Her eyes have been where we were blinded” (365). It is his mother fixation to her.

At Varna they decide to hunt Count Dracula through three different routes. As giving his decision, Dr. Van Helsing says to Jonathan Harker, “Be not afraid to Madam Mina. She will be my case, if I may.... I’ll take Madam Mina right into the heart of the enemy’s country” (366). Consciously he tells the others that he will take easiest way to go to the Vampire’s castle with Mina since she is a woman and he is old, but his unconscious mind expresses his oedipal fixation. Unconsciously he tries to own her, so he separates her from her husband Jonathan, let alone other men. From Galatz Lord Godalming and Jonathan Harker take a board, and Dr. Seward and Quincey Morris take a dozen of good horses, whereas Mina and Dr. Van Helsing take a train for Veresti. In the route Dr. Van Helsing hypnotizes Mina for several times to know the journey of Count Dracula. During the hypnotic time she shuts her eyes and becomes obedient to him. It is the phallic control of Dr. Van Helsing over her. During the journey she becomes so intimate to him that he finds her in new light. He reacts his feelings saying “Madam Mina laugh, and I turn and look at her. She is now quite awake, and look so well as I never saw her since that light at Carfax when we first enter the Count’s house. I am amaze and not at ease then. But she is so bright and tender and thoughtful for me that I forget all fear” (376). She is the subject of stupefaction for him. She also prepares food for him. The journey becomes so helpful for them to be intimate. In her sleep he nurses her as to a child. He says, “the sun rise up, and up and up, and then sleep come to her too late, but so heavy that she will not wake. I have to lift her up, and place her sleeping in the carriage....” (376-377).

The novel ends with Dr. Van Helsing's praise to Mina. Taking her boy on his knee, he says, "We want no proofs; we ask none to believe us! This boy will someday know what a brave and gallant woman his mother is. Already he knows her sweetness and loving care; later on he will understand how some men so loved her, that they did dare much for her sake" (380). This is the expression given after seven years of the completion of their Dracula killing mission. This expression indicates his obsession to her. The boy is metonymic reference for him.

Conclusion

Dracula is a great novel to analyze from psychoanalytic perspective. Dr. Van Helsing is a prominent character in the novel and also the leader of the team of heroes. In the content of the novel, he is presented as a benevolent, selfless scholar who works arduously to finish Count Dracula and the vampire mission. But by analyzing his behaviours from psychoanalytic perspective, he is found as a man unconsciously running after women. His behaviours express his unfulfilled sexual desire, a man with woman fixation.

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