Motifs

Blood

Blood coincides with many facets of this story. To start, blood can be tied to lineage, which Dracula boasts of to Jonathan early on in the novel. Also, in the context of Christian mythology (a very prevalent theme throughout the book), blood symbolizes life and is made manifest from the ritual of drinking wine. For Dracula, he requires drinking actual blood to live. Renfield will, in chapter 18, recall that “the doctor here will bear me out that on one occasion I tried to kill him for the purpose of strengthening my vital powers by the assimilation with my own body of his life through the medium of his blood, relying of course, upon the Scriptural phrase, “For the blood is the life” (Dracula, 277). This twisting of blood’s religious uses also takes on a sexual connotation in the novel – evident in its exchange between the main cast of characters. For instance, Dracula is never actually seen biting men – but rather Lucy and Mina-making the give-and-take of blood a sort of sexual perversion of the ‘sacred’ Christian rite. This is most notable in the scene where Mina is forced to drink the Count's blood from his “bosom”. Moreover, all of the men will have “entered” Lucy at some point in the novel by virtue of blood transfusion (something that Van Helsing remains conscious about for quite some time).

Hands

The motif of hands begins rather early on in the novel and is constantly harped on by Stoker. Their use offers a few interesting interpretations, this author being particularly interested in a capitalistic critique. Given the time period of the writing and the strong overlying theme of invasion, the countless references towards hands seem to suggest a sort of apprehension or anxiety about manual labor as well as its value in an increasingly modernized world. Jonathan and Quincey’s hands will deliver the final blow to Dracula with the use of knives; no guns, no Christian artifacts, nor any garlic will be the end of his reign. Furthermore, one could easily argue Mina’s hands are the organizing and structuring factor within the story, as it is eventually discovered she compiles the various media into a coherent narrative. What’s more, hands also lend themselves as an expression of sexuality within the book. For example, Mina can be seen “taking her husband’s hand in hers” while Jonathan, “her husband whose hand had, as we could see, tightened upon hers” during a passionate, moral boosting speech. Hands will also delay the group’s action on more than one occasion. For instance, within the same impassioned speech that Mina delivers in chapter XXV, Quincey, Van Helsing, Goldaming, as well as Jonathan will all unite hands as a physical sign of loyalty to Mina’s wishes.

Light vs. Dark

Literally and figuratively, light and whiteness are seen as pure, or worn on characters like Lucy and the peasants in Romania who were like “those holy men, with the white garments of the angel”, while Dracula and the female vampires are always clad in black (Dracula, 209). Stoker will also make use of a noteworthy color scheme to essentially heighten the desired emotion of either a specific character or location. For instance, Jonathan, on his first trip into Romania, will leave the “grey of the morning” with a “high sun” whose path leads towards “the distant horizon, which seems jagged” (Dracula, 11). In a sense, Stoker has identified Jonathan’s current muddled state of mind; he passes a grey morning and, with a positive outlook (high sun) sees a jagged distance (Dracula’s demented horrors). Jonathan’s ignorance towards what remains in store is portrayed through this bright pastoral setting. He will pass “a green sloping land” where “everywhere there was a bewildering mass of fruit blossom---apple, plum, pear, cherry” (Dracula, 11); beyond those “green swelling hills” Jonathan will discover “all the glorious colours of this beautiful range, deep blue and purple in the shadows of the peaks, green and brown where grass and rocks mingled, and an endless perspective of jagged rock and pointed crags” (Dracula, 12). Stoker is taking the motif of color and using it to relay Jonathan’s future to the reader: the land has infinite potential for beauty, but behind it lies a rough, unattractive feature.

Religion
Despite being described as creatures of the Devil, the vampires in *Dracula* carry an affinity with Christian symbols, mainly Catholic ones. You tell me why, when other spiders die small and soon, that one great spider lived for centuries in the tower of the old Spanish church and grew and grew, till, on descending, he could drink the oil of all the church lamps? (168-169)

Renfield's questions parallel aspects of Dracula's livelihood. Both the nobelman and the spider live within ancient ruins (his castle and estate having destroyed churches on the grounds) where they sleep and feed upon the Christians (the churches' "lights") who live in the vicinity. The reference to a Spanish church is a partial connection to the Catholic church, as are many of the tools used against the vampires. Renfield alone reveals the dark relationship between vampires and religion, as he worships Dracula as a god in return for the dominion over small animals. Whereas a follower of Christ is expected to be as pious and loving as he was, Renfield is just as bloodthirsty as Dracula, feeding upon the animals he gathers in order to absorb their life.

The Three Sisters are introduced as perversions of the respectable Christian woman, described by Harker as having "a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive" to the point where he regrets his desire for them but does not deny it (32). In comparison to Mina, the Sisters exemplify what would be a pathological sexuality by Victorian standards. At the same time, Mina herself experiences both a sacrilegious ritual and a gender reversal when she is forced by the Count to drink her blood. It reflects the Catholic tradition of communion, in which participants believe they are drinking Christ's blood in order to achieve salvation; but in this case, Mina is entering into a dark pact that will ultimately result in her damnation. Alongside this ritual is twisting of the birth story of Christ wherein the Holy Virgin Mary nursed him at her breast in order to give him life. In Mina's case, the roles are reverse: Dracula is an unholy figure nursing her into his coven of vampires, trading life for death.

However, while vampires have a connection to Christian symbols, they are extremely susceptible to Catholic idols. Early in the novel the crucifix is introduced as a ward to protect Jonathan during his stay in Dracula's castle, warding him from his captor. Van Helsing quickly equips each of the men in the group with one during their hunt for the vampires and even invokes a holy wafer chip to combat the Three Sisters.

Many of Van Helsing's and Dr. Seward's attempts to understand the nature of vampires and defend the two female protagonists against them involves delving into the occult and supernatural realm. Helsing's initial course of treatment for Lucy involved lacing her room with garlic, explaining that it will improve her health when it actually acts as preventive medicine by warding away Dracula (140). As Helsing suspects that some creature is the source of Lucy's blood loss his course of action is to create a sterile area for her to recovery. The garlic defends Lucy against the foreign parasite (the Count) and allows her to recovery. However, he never explains his theory as to what is causing her illness or how the garlic improves it until after her death, suggesting that Lucy was an experiment for him to test his theory.

In another manner he creates further defenses for Mina when they are traveling to and through Transylvania in the form of the Holy circle which wards away the Count's minions as well the frequent use of the Wafer and crucifixes to defend against the Count. Insome cases the wards are familiar symbols, such as the Catholic idols, but in others Helsing employs folk magic in his arsenal. Harker's encounter with the villagers suggests that mountain ash, crucifixes, and wild roses are forms of folk magic that defend against the evil eye; at least one of these is proven to protect him from the Count.

Once Van Helsing discovers Mina is the Count's next target he hypothesizes that she may have a mystical bond with the vampire. By hypnotizing her repeatedly, he is able to exploit that bond and discover the Count's whereabouts. In the same way the Count uses hypnotism to control Mina, Jonathon, and Renfield during their interactions with him. Just as religious idols proved to be powerful tools against the vampires, despite their strong connection with them, hypnotism proves extremely useful for the characters to track down Dracula and put an end to him.

Stroke illustrates the transformation of English society into the modern era of the early 20th century through various formats. Seward's frequent utilization of the phonograph to record the tale and in some manners act as a sibling to his diary demonstrates a reliance upon new technologies for both personal and professional tasks; in the same strain, Mina Harker compiles the collection of letters, newspaper articles, diaries, and recorders into a single collective unit via the typewriter. When the Count enters Seward's home and attempts to destroy all the information they've collected on him, it suggests at the frailty of shorthand and the decline in handwritten accounts, as the cast of heros take heart in the fact that Mina's typewriter copy was not damage or removed from the safe.

While technology is beginning to overtake the lifestyles of the characters, Stoker inserts a small lament for shorthand. In the early chapters Mina explains that she is practicing it frequently alongside her use of the typewriter, hinting that is losing its efficiency but is still relevant. Echos of that sentiment appear in the final chapter, a note written by Jonathan Harker that claims that the credibility of the novel rests upon the few pieces of handwritten manuscripts within it, not the copies made on the typewriter. Stroke suggests that shorthand holds more weight than typed accounts in recording the honest truth, as anyone can write a novel on a typewriter but a handwritten book commands the originality of the writer.
British Idealism

As the characters adhere to the English Anglican Church, their ideals stem away from the idolatry of the Catholic Church. Harker early on describes himself as “an English Churchman” and has “been taught to regard such things as in some measure idolatrous” (5). However, despite what they identify as, many of the English characters place logic above all else, even their religious dogmas. An old man Lucy and Mina visit dismisses many of the legends and folk tales surrounding Whitby while explaining the logical origin of ghosts as fables designed to scare children (55). Stoker sets up this argument to fail early on in the novel, introducing Dracula as the personification of the boogie-man. His infiltration of English society and ability to feed undeterred by the majority of the populace points to a failing of the British adheres to reason and dismissal of superstition.

A Decline and Return in Faith

As Modernity and British Idealism take up strong roots in the Victorian climate, matters of religion experience a decline. Many of Van Helsing’s theories, such as the use of Catholic idols to defend against vampires, invokes immediate disbelief from the reason-oriented, Protestant Englishmen he contends with. He takes their skepticism to heart but beseeches them to “believe in things that you cannot” and to “have an open mind” (206). Early in the novel, Jonathan Harker notes that, despite his English sense of reason, the cross he wears protects him while in Dracula’s castle.

“For it is a comfort and a strength to me whenever I touch it. It is odd that a thing which I have been taught to regard with disfavour and idolatrous should in a time of loneliness and trouble be of help. Is it that there is something in the essence of the thing itself, or that it is a medium, a tangible help, in conveying memories of sympathy and comfort?” (24).

His aversion towards wearing the cross is defined by the modernity of the world he comes from. The crucifix is an old idol of protection, utilized by superstitious villagers. However, this relic of the past turns out to be one of the main forms of protection in the novel and a powerful weapon against the vampires. Many of the superstitions that the vampire hunters take up clash with their modern, English values. However, when led by Van Helsing, the characters utilize logic to justify the use of idols as protection and weaponry. As Stoker met the changes brought by modernity and decline of religion with a level of skepticism, the mixture of spirituality and reason in his characters suggests a new wave of individuals Stoker was arguing for, ones that are capable of applying logic to the supernatural without dismissing it as a whole.

Source


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