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Making a Monster: Queerness and Disability in Gothic Literature

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Making a Monster: Queerness and Disability in Gothic Literature

by

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Abstract

Scholars within the gothic genre have long been exploring the concept of the “other” within literature. Looking at the topics of queerness and disability through the lens of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* it’s clear that much of the rhetoric surrounding these identities in the 19th century is still very much present in modern society—even if it’s worded a bit differently. This literature review covers how queerness and disability are related, disability, eugenics, sexuality, gender, and monstrosity all within the gothic genre of literature.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....3
The Relationship Between Queerness and Disability.....5
Disability.....7
Eugenics.....10
Sexuality.....13
Gender.....16
Conclusion.....18
Works Cited.....21

Introduction

One of the most notable aspects of the gothic genre of literature is the exploration of what many would consider taboo or abnormal. The gothic takes us away from the safety of our homes and into a world in which we are faced with monsters and scary scenarios that we would never face in real life. However, much of the monstrous aspects that we see in gothic literature are based on stereotypes of those who live on the fringe of society—those that we consider being the “other”.

While there are many categories of the “other” that can be explored through the lens of gothic literature, I have chosen to focus on two—disability and queerness—because I relate to them personally and because the discussion of disability and queer studies has been quite popular recently. Furthermore, I’ll be looking at these topics through the scope of *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley and *Dracula* by Bram Stoker mostly because they’re both incredibly well known and are a good representation of the gothic genre.

My goal is not to take the queerness and disability within these books and translate them into metaphors, but rather to take them at face value. As Fuson Wang states in their article, “For example, a literary critical approach reads the theme of blindness as a metaphor for a kind of paradoxical insight, whereas a disability studies reading takes umbrage at the exploitation of the blind for narrative gain” (Wang). I think it’s easy to look at, say, *Frankenstein*, and say that it’s a metaphor for racism—in that the Creature is feared and treated with venom solely off of his appearance. Rather, I believe that it’s important to look at these novels in their simplest form.

By far the most important factor in my choosing to look at *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* is that people underestimate how relatable these novels still are today when it comes to social justice issues—it’s as they say: history tends to repeat itself. Obviously, it’s important from a historical perspective to look at novels from the 19th century to figure out what stereotypes

people held and how certain identities were viewed at the time. However, I think it's easy to point at some of the racist, sexist, or homophobic ideologies in older literature and say "wow, we've come so far" and yet a lot of what we may consider being "problematic" nowadays is still present in modern society—it's just worded a bit differently. Take, say, eugenics and the concept that disabled people shouldn't be allowed to procreate. This thought is very noticeable in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, in that Victor Frankenstein refuses to make his Creature a female companion for fear that they may procreate. Yet, the American government still makes it incredibly difficult for disabled people to marry which prevents many "unwanted" pregnancies.

Another thing that *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* have in common is that they both very clearly show the relationship between disability and sexuality. It may seem as though they're only connected by the fact that they're examples of the "other", however, there's a very long history of queerness being pathologized as a disability—whether that be mental illness or disease. On top of that, disabilities and queerness historically have been treated very similarly, for example, the fear of contagion leading to isolation.

Monstrosity in gothic literature can come in many forms—whether it be physical or psychological. However, it's clear that the monsters within Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Stoker's *Dracula* are for the most part characterized by their disability and queerness, and it's these things that make them so monstrous and frightening to the general public. Vampires may not exist, but gay people do. Frankenstein's Creature doesn't exist, but physically deformed people most definitely do. And by far the most frightening part of the "other" in gothic literature is that the monsters within the pages exist in the real world, they could even be your next-door neighbors for all you know.

The Relationship Between Queerness and Disability

While disability and queerness seem to be two completely unrelated subjects, that is far from the truth. Both identities have faced pathologization in the past—they're a medical problem that must be fixed. In his book *Crip Theory*, Robert McRuer states “[h]owever, despite the fact that homosexuality and disability clearly share a pathologized past, and despite a growing awareness of the intersection between queer theory and disability studies, little notice has been taken of the connection between heterosexuality and able-bodied identity. Able-bodiedness, even more than heterosexuality, still largely masquerades as a nonidentity, as the natural order of things” (McRuer 26). A large part of queer and disability theory rests upon recognizing heterosexuality and able-bodiedness as identities that deeply affect those who are disabled/queer. The way other people view us affects our identities way more than the way that we think of ourselves. If there were no “normal” there would be no queer or disabled identities. Both *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* make use of this by looking at queerness and disability from a relatively “normal” character point of view (for the most part) that critiques their queer and disabled counterparts.

McRuer goes on to say “I put forward here a theory of what I call ‘compulsory able-bodiedness’ which in a sense produces disability, is thoroughly interwoven with the system of compulsory heterosexuality that produces queerness: that, in fact, compulsory heterosexuality is contingent on compulsory able-bodiedness, and vice versa” (McRuer 27). Once again, there would be no need for identity labels without an existing standard that the majority of people live by. Queerness, in general, has a long history with eugenics in that many people used to believe that it was a disease or a curse from God for sinning and that all gay people should be killed and not allowed to reproduce or raise children which is eerily similar to the eugenic rhetoric surrounding disability. On top of this, there's also the definition of the word “queer” that

connects the LGBTQ+ community and the disabled community in that both of them are “queer” and separated from societal norms. In a way, all disabled people are “queer” because they aren’t “normal”, much like how in the past, queer people were viewed as being disabled.

Disability

One of the most obvious and yet overlooked examples of disability in Stoker’s *Dracula* is the vampire disease itself. “Nineteenth-century folklorist Emily Gerard, whose essay on ‘Transylvanian Superstitions’ influenced Stoker’s novel, noted that Romanian stories had long connected the ‘nosferatu’ to problematic births. The creature is said to emerge as the ‘illegitimate offspring of two illegitimate persons,’ [...] this summoned the vampire to account for extramarital liaisons, impotence, infertility, illegitimacy, deformity, and stillbirths” (Smith 40). This very early connection between vampires and difficult births ties into the eugenic theme of people with diseases needing to be feared, and that they should not be allowed to procreate in fear that they will further spread said disease.

Dracula is also much more unique than the majority of monsters within gothic literature because his disability is invisible, which in a sense, is even scarier than a visible disability in that anyone could have it and spread it to you and you wouldn’t even know until it’s too late. “In contrast to the physically deformed monsters of subsequent horror films, *Dracula*’s essential deviance is disguised by an apparently normal body and revealed only in marks of debility on the bodies he re-produces and, particularly, in the narrative’s rhetoric of blood” (Smith 43). This again ties into eugenic ideas—people with diseases should be kept away from the general public and shouldn’t be allowed to procreate. Along with this, Smith states that “[i]n *Dracula*, the rhetoric of blood generates imagery of infection and disease that corresponds to understandings

of disability as mutable and environmentally determined, rather than directly produced by procreative acts” (Smith 58). The rhetoric of blood only adds to the fear-mongering and belief that coming into close contact with someone who has a disease automatically means that someone else might catch it, even though that’s certainly not true.

In contrast, the Creature’s disability is much more visible which brings with it another set of problems. Upon first glance, it’s clear that he’s out of the norm, which plays into the characters’ and readers’ fear of the unknown. However, it’s much more important to focus on how everyone else’s opinions affect the Creature, rather than how his appearance affects the people around him because “[b]y focusing on the pain that the Creature’s appearance brings him, from Victor’s initial rejection to William’s deeming him a monster, to the cottagers’ fleeing in terror after he almost makes a friend, these disability scholars make meaning out of the ways appearance determines worth, value, and morality. Many of these scholars frame the Creature’s experience as similar to a disabled child’s and use this position to make sense of Victor’s reactions” (Kavey & Friedman). The way other people view the Creature dictates his own self-worth and value, and it’s clear from the many passages where he speaks about himself that he truly believes that he *is* a monster which he uses as an excuse for his actions against Victor.

While Victor Frankenstein could be representative of a parental figure or a love interest for the Creature is up for debate, however, his neglect and rejection of his Creature is objective. Without this mistreatment, life for the Creature would have been extremely different, much like the lives of disabled children who have been rejected by their families. Amber Knight states that “I read Frankenstein's Creature as a visibly disabled subject, as someone who is misrecognized and mistreated due to his body's physical features, in order to analyze the tragedy of the novel: how the not-so-monstrous Creature can never see himself as anything other than a monster since

he is never afforded the positive recognition he desires” (Knight). The Creature, much like many physically disabled people, isn’t viewed as a human being with thoughts and feelings and is instead simply characterized by his appearance—leading him to believe that not only is his appearance “monstrous” but that he is also monstrous at his core.

Another character that is viewed as “monstrous” due to their disability is Renfield in Stoker’s *Dracula*—however, his disability isn’t physical, instead, he struggles with mental illness. It’s certainly no secret that treatment for and of mentally ill patients in the past has been filled with abuse, misunderstanding, and neglect and this is certainly the case for Dracula’s servant, Renfield. Steward writes in his diary, “[Renfield] disgusted me much while with him, for when a horrid blowfly, bloated with some carrion food, buzzed into the room, he caught it, held it exultantly for a few moments between his finger and thumb, and before I knew what he was going to do, put it in his mouth and ate it” (Stoker 86). Whenever Steward talks about Renfield, he does so with disgust, almost treating him as an animal instead of a human. On top of this, what Renfield says is always dismissed as him just being “crazy” when at times he was trying to warn Steward about what was to come.

Along with this comes the stereotypes of “crazy” people, one of which is brought up when Steward writes, “[h]is face fell, and I could see a warning of danger in it, for there was a sudden fierce, sidelong look which meant killing. The man is an undeveloped homicidal maniac. I shall test him with his present craving and see how it will work out, then I shall know more” (Stoker 87). While Renfield has shown intent to harm animals, he hasn’t ever shown any intent to harm other humans and yet Steward believes that he’s an “undeveloped homicidal maniac”. Instead of helping Renfield with his mental illness, Steward decides to use him as a test subject—

reducing him to simply a wild animal that should be tamed and studied rather than a man who once had a life outside of a sanitarium.

Eugenics

Martha Holmes argues that reading *Frankenstein* “with” disability allows readers a clearer sense of how disabled people are treated in society. She points to how Victor acts as a parent and his monster acts as a child, and how Victor’s disappointment in his deformed son reflects how many parents of that time felt about having visibly disabled children. Holmes also references how the Creature asks for Victor to make someone “as hideous as myself”, showing how he is aware of what society deems as “desirable”. On top of that, Holmes brings up Victor’s response to his second creature, revealing the eugenic thoughts surrounding disabled people and their own desires for procreation and sexual freedom (Holmes).

As Victor ruminates on his choice on whether or not to create a female companion for his Creature he states “[e]ven if they were to leave Europe and inhabit the deserts of the new world, yet one of those first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror. Had I right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations?” (Shelley 171-2). Victor decides to take it upon himself to remove the reproductive rights of his Creature for fear that his offspring would follow after his footsteps, essentially trying to eradicate an entire species of people, much like how the reproductive rights of disabled people are often decided for them.

The infantilization and the eugenic discourse continue in *Dracula* with the pathologization of queerness. After Dracula leaves Jonathan, Mina discovers that he has been

admitted to a sanatorium as he has been afflicted with “a violent brain fever” (Stoker 124). Sister Agatha says to Mina that “[t]he traces of such an illness as his do not lightly die away” (124). Obviously, Jonathan has gone through quite a bit of trauma and most likely is suffering from PTSD, however, looking at this through the context of Dracula and Jonathan’s seemingly homoerotic relationship, it stands to reason that the “illness” that Jonathan is afflicted with that refuses to go away could also be homosexuality and that Sister Agatha and the other nuns are putting him through a conversion therapy of sorts.

In her diary, Mina writes “that the quiet dignity” in Jonathan’s face has vanished and that “the ravings of the sick were the secrets of God”. This shame and unwillingness to speak about his past as well as the allusion to sin all point toward Jonathan being recently converted. Along with this, his eagerness to marry Mina right when she arrives at the sanatorium seems like a way to prove to himself that he is straight and that he has overcome his past which he gives to Mina in the form of his journal, making her promise that she will not read it unless it’s absolutely necessary.

Along with this, the need for eradication of the vampire disease is a great example of eugenic rhetoric as well as how we treat those with criminal backgrounds within modern society. Lucy as a vampire never reportedly killed anyone in the novel, and yet she was killed just because of who she was. Van Helsing states that “[s]he have yet no life taken, though that is of time, and to act now would be to take danger from her forever” (Stoker 247). Instead of attempting to communicate with her or help her while she was obviously struggling, the group decided the best course of action was to stake and behead her simply because one person (Van Helsing) told them to.

The same thing happened when it came to Dracula himself, however, he *had* committed murder. It makes complete sense for the group to chase him off after he seduced Mina, but what doesn't make sense is their insistence to follow him all the way to Transylvania to then take his life after he had already left them alone. Instead of trying to practice harm reduction or rehabilitation, they decided that it was easiest to simply rid the world of the vampire disease. They went out of their way to chase Dracula down and murder him just because they didn't understand him and didn't even want to attempt to.

This also ties into the (assumed) death of Victor's Creature in that Victor himself swears to destroy him before dying shortly after himself. Obviously, the Creature's actions against Victor and his family weren't okay, however, they wouldn't have happened if Victor had just accepted the Creature in the beginning. Instead, Victor shunned him and then plotted revenge against his Creature who was just lashing out against his parental figure/romantic interest for neglecting him. Once again, trying to kill what one doesn't understand.

On top of that, the Creature's apparent suicide speaks volumes about the eugenic practices used against queer people. As Mair Rigby says, "[b]urning is, after all, the classically recommended punishment for sex between men" (Hughes & Smith 46). While the Creature wasn't necessarily murdered, he did feel like the only option left for him after losing Victor was to commit suicide, saying, "[y]ou hate me, but your abhorrence cannot equal that which I regard myself [...] I shall no longer feel the agonies which now consume me or be the prey of feelings unsatisfied, yet unquenched [...] and what I feel will no longer be felt. Soon these burning miseries will be extinct. I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly and exult in the agony of the torturing flames" (Shelley 233-4). It's clear that the Creature hates what he has done and who he is, mostly because he recognizes the opinions that others have on his existence. He would rather

die than continue his life constantly being seen as abnormal, which unfortunately is what everyone hoped would be his fate.

Sexuality

Scholars in the field of gothic literature have most recently been focusing on the apparently homoerotic relationship between Dracula and Jonathan Harker. Barry McCrea argues that Stoker was a closeted gay man and that *Dracula* is a look at the world of relationships and heterosexuality from within the closet and that it is set up so that heterosexuality is the “other” (McCrea). However, it’s a lot easier to look at homosexuality as the “other” in this novel and how it was a way that Stoker could discuss more “taboo” topics without backlash. As Haefele-Thomas points out, “[t]he strength of Gothic rest upon it’s being a liminal genre; it allowed many 19th century authors to look at social and cultural worries consistently haunting Victorian Britain even as the official discourse worked tirelessly to silence those concerns” (Haefele-Thomas 3).

So what is the evidence within Stoker’s novel that points to a homosexual relationship between Dracula and Harker? One of the most damning pieces of evidence is when Dracula exclaims “How dare you touch him, any of you? How dare you cast your eyes on him when I had forbidden it? Back, I tell you all! This man belongs to me!” when he finds his wives preying on Harker. One of them responds with “You yourself never loved. You never love!” to which Dracula replies “Yes, I too can love” (Stoker 48-9). The Count’s jealousy is very obvious as well as the fact that while they don’t outright say it, his wives know of his romantic/sexual intentions with Harker.

Victor Frankenstein also shares a homoerotic relationship with several of the other characters in *Frankenstein* which is best shown through the myriad of glances shared between

them. Mair Rigby states that “[a]s the name relationships in Frankenstein range from Victor’s affectionate, arguably homoerotic, friendships with Henry Clerval and Captain Walton, to the repressed desire, homosexual panic and homophobia readable in his deadly bond with the Monster, the text does seem particularly concerned with the desire between men” (Hughes & Smith 37). One particular section in which Shelley plays with the male gaze and desirability is in Captain Walton’s second letter in which he states, “I desire the company of a man who could sympathize with me, whose eyes would reply to mine. You may deem me romantic, my dear sister, but I bitterly feel the want of a friend” (Shelley 5). Later on, Walton says in reference to Victor, “[...] his full-toned voice swells in my ears; his lustrous eyes dwell on me with all with all their melancholy sweetness; I see his thin hand raised in animation, while the lineaments of his face are irradiated by the soul within” (Shelley 19). The desire that Captain Walton feels for companionship and for Victor specifically is very clear within the selected passages, and it’s certainly not a coincidence that both mention eyes and the male gaze.

As Rigby points out, “Victor Frankenstein’s question addressed to Walton, ‘do you share my madness?’, also appeals to the reader who has been allowed to come dangerously close to recognizing her or his own desire for the abnormal. But of course, the reader does not *have* to admit to knowing or recognizing anything because the dispersal of queer meaning into coded language in connotation always allows her or him to remain officially and safely ‘ignorant’” (Hughes & Smith 40). By coding queerness into longing glances and sentences that could have a double meaning, Shelley makes it so that the reader *can* choose to ignore the homosexual relationships in her novel. However, facing the uncomfortable and abnormal head-on is exactly what the gothic genre is all about, it just depends on the reader whether to take the reading at face value or to let their own identity get in the way of their reading.

Along with his homoerotic relationship with Jonathan Harker, Dracula also shares a more-than-platonic relationship with Renfield. Renfield is constantly talking about his “master” and does whatever he can to please him. In Dr. Seward’s diary, he writes of Renfield, saying, “‘I don’t want to talk to you. You don’t count now. The master is at hand.’ The attendant thinks it is some form of religious mania that has seized him. If so, we must look out for squalls, for a strong man with homicidal and religious mania at once might be dangerous. The combination is a dreadful one” (Stoker 125). Renfield’s obsession with Dracula borders on religious obsession, in that Dracula is his God. Seward goes on to write that “[i]t looks like religious mania, and he will soon think that he himself is God” (Stoker 125). All of this points to the opinion that homosexuality is a perversion of religion—to go against God’s word is to think of oneself as God-like and to worship another man is sinful.

Not only is Dracula a threat to the Christian religion, but he is also a threat to heterosexual relationships. Smith states that “*Dracula*’s narrative depicts the threat of the vampire-monster to a normality understood in terms of marital, eugenic, and sexual reproduction and figured particularly in the anticipated union of the engaged couple, Mina Seward and John Harker [...] Dracula endangers the happy, eminently normal marriage of Mina and Harker, he embodies a sexual and reproductive danger” (Smith 42). This certainly follows the homophobic rhetoric that homosexuality is a threat to the nuclear family and that the “gay agenda” is to convert happy straight people into “becoming” gay. It also goes along the line of homosexuality being something that can be spread—almost disease-like.

Vampirism serves to function as a metaphor for homosexuality being a disease that should be feared and can be spread if you come into contact with it. In reference to gothic literature in the Victorian era, it is thought that “[d]efinitions of disease began to diligently

include and pathologize anyone who was not clearly heterosexual and who did not clearly ascribe to a strictly masculine or strictly feminine demeanor”(Smith & Hughes 142). Vampires, in a way, “dream of revolutionizing the world through some startling scientific discovery or preternatural power, homosexual activists strike at the very foundations of society, seeking to infect or destroy not only those around them but the very concepts of Western Judeo-Christian thought upon which society is built” (Benshoff 1). This is also where the fear of pedophilia creeps in. Vampires and homosexuals alike prey on children in order to convert them from a young age, making all gay people an evil that needs to be vanquished.

This is seen in *Dracula* wherein Lucy preys only on young children, so much so that all of the children in the town refer to her as “the bloofer lady”. This connection between lesbianism and pedophilia is also brought up in *Dracula*’s predecessor *Carmilla* by Sheridan Le Fanu. As Haefele-Thomas points out, “[...] here, the mother figure and the pedophilic queer turn out to be one and the same. The stereotype of the vampiric Queer as pedophile will be revisited in many 19th-century vampire stories and continues to this day” (Haefele-Thomas 103). The concept of homosexuals as pedophiles is also present in the film adaptation of *Frankenstein* in which the Creature goes after a young girl, though it may also connect to the fear of nonverbal or mentally stunted people not knowing “right from wrong”.

The vampire disease also acts as a means of homosexual or asexual reproduction. While vampires don’t necessarily create new life, they still make more of their own kind through their bite. This connection between vampiric reproduction and homosexuality has become especially prevalent in recent years due to “[t]he AIDS crisis, which has spurred Christian compassion from some quarters, has also significantly fueled this ‘homosexual as monster’ rhetoric: now more than ever, gay men are contagions-vampires-who, with a single mingling of blood, can infect a

pure and innocent victim, transforming [them] into the living dead” (Benshoff 2). Along with this, Frankenstein’s Creature was also brought to life through non-heteronormative means, which could certainly add to Victor’s disgust towards his own creation and the shame he feels about his sexuality. His attempt to distance himself from or even dispose of the Creature shows his rejection of his homosexuality and his desire to embrace heteronormativity.

Gender

Along with his sexuality, Dracula’s gender is also very ambiguously queer. Thomas Stuart writes, “Quite apart from Dracula’s decidedly queer preferences, a melding of biological sex is encoded into the very weapon of the vampire. The ‘hard’ phallic teeth combined with ‘the soft, shivering touch of the lips,’ the focus on blood, temptation, and penetration mark the vampiric mouth as a sexual mixture. This is a trans-figuration of the organ, on the border between phallic and vaginal” (Stuart 220). Dracula’s own anatomy is in itself genderqueer, however, it’s also important to take into consideration that his physical form also changes, sometimes into inanimate beings such as mist. Another example that Stuart brings up is the scene in which Mina is drinking Dracula’s blood from a slit in his neck and how it can be read as a metaphor for cunnilingus or as Mina performing penetrative sex on Dracula. Not only is Dracula in a way transsexual, but he is also transfigurative and transtemporal.

Dracula exists outside of the boundaries of normal societal expectations, “[i]n these ways, these novels construct a Gothic temporality that plays on the eugenic anxieties of a society focused on a productive, linear understanding of time. Dracula and the Beetle stand apparently outside of such linearity, at once embattled vestiges of a deep past and terrifying forerunners of human obsolescence. They are not monsters of degeneracy but rather of stopped time, their

existence emphasizing humanity's failure to progress in evolutionary competition. Dracula and the Beetle are imagined as creatures outside of the rigidity of time" (Stuart 223). Tying back into eugenics, Dracula's inherent trans-ness shows the many anxieties of the time, especially those regarding the fear of anything outside of "normal". This connection of eugenics also incorporates some of the themes of ableism as well—connecting worth to being "productive" members of society, and those who are deemed as evolutionary failures (such as Dracula) should be eradicated in the name of progress.

One of the themes that consistently comes up within *Frankenstein* is shame, mostly when it comes to Victor's character. There are many instances throughout the novel in which Victor is making intense eye contact with one of his love interests and he ends up looking away with shame and guilt, particularly in the scenes with his Creature. As Mair Rigby states, "When Victor panics as he 'catches' the monster's 'opening eye', the text calls to mind a fearful threat to masculine autonomy. In *Frankenstein*, the language of the male gaze is a penetrative language; or, to put the point another way, it could be said that the language of penetration makes itself felt most forcefully through the language of the gaze" (Hughes & Smith 44). Not only is Victor's internalized homophobia holding him back from exploring the different relationships within his life, but his toxic masculinity is also holding him back too. In a way, the majority of homophobia (whether internal or external) can be traced back to toxic masculinity and the way we view gender. For many, it's the male penetration that throws them over the edge, because in our society, it's viewed that females are the only ones that should be penetrated—much like how Victor feels when it comes to the male gaze.

One of the things that's very rarely ever mentioned is the incredibly affectionate relationship between Lucy and Mina in Stoker's *Dracula*. It seems as though there's the same if

not more evidence in the novel that points to a homoerotic relationship between the two of them than with Dracula and Jonathan Harker. However, lesbian relationships are often overlooked because of misogyny and the idea that women are just naturally more affectionate than men. It's obvious that the relationship between Dracula and Harker is supposed to be at the forefront of the novel, but that certainly doesn't mean that Lucy and Mina's relationship should be overlooked. In a letter from Mina to Lucy, the former writes, "I am longing to be with you, and by the sea, where we can talk freely and build our castles in the air" (Stoker 67). Along with this, there are many instances where Mina talks about how beautiful Lucy is, or how they were holding hands and snuggling, or even signing off a letter with "your ever-loving" (Stoker 132). While there can certainly be a platonic explanation for this, it seems unfair to look into deeper meanings in Dracula and Harker's relationship without looking deeper into this. In fact, Lucy turning into a vampire could even be a metaphor for her conversion from her lesbian relationship with Mina into a heterosexual master/servant relationship with Dracula.

Conclusion

In the end, it's not the blood-sucking or the revenge killing that turned the Creature and Dracula into monsters—it's their inherent queerness and disabilities that characterize them as the frightening villains. The "other" is what's truly frightening in the gothic genre, not the blood and gore. It's the fear that those who are different from you are out to intentionally harm you and your family or even the societal structures that are in place. The key message here is that being different is equivalent to being monstrous and that both Shelley and Stoker are working in their novels to expose those assumptions.

The easiest “other” to spot is by far based on appearance and physical disability. Frankenstein’s Creature was ostracized not only by his community but by his own father which lead the Creature to believe that he was to his core “monstrous” and he ended up acting accordingly. On the other hand, Dracula is a great example of invisible disabilities and the way that people with diseases are treated—the majority of which is fear-mongering based on the assumption of contagion. Finally, there’s Renfield, who is villainized because of his mental illness and is treated as less than human simply because his brain functions differently from “normal”.

All of these conditions are of course followed closely by eugenic rhetoric—the thought that disabled people should be eradicated and shouldn’t be allowed to procreate in fear of the loss of societal “progress”. However, those with disabilities aren’t the only ones affected by eugenic rhetoric. LGBTQ+ people also have a very long history of conversion, neglect, and isolation. This is certainly shown by the horror that follows Dracula’s nonheteronormative procreation in regard to Lucy.

Along this line, it seems as though Stoker was trying to convey the idea that homosexuality is comparable to disease in that it spreads. This is mostly seen with Jonathan Harker and Dracula, the former of which has to go through a sort of conversion therapy to “fix” his homosexual behavior. This concept of shame and queerness is also present in Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, mostly when thinking about the connection between Victor and the shame he feels when it comes to the male gaze.

One of the reasons for this deep connection between shame and homosexuality is toxic masculinity in that penetrative eye contact (or any penetration for the matter) feels as though they are being emasculated. However, Dracula has no qualms when it comes to exploring gender

when it comes to his somewhat androgynous body and transgender and transtemporal ways. Yet, I wanted to bring up the queer relationship between Lucy and Mina, and how lesbian relationships are often dismissed simply because of sexism.

Overall, this kind of literary analysis in the gothic genre, in particular, is incredibly important as it helps build a sort of history for those considered to be the “other” based upon the stereotypes and assumptions that their community has held. It not only shows the ignorance and bigotry of the time that the novels were published but also helps expose what still lingers in modern society despite how much we praise ourselves on “acceptance”. As Smith and Hughes point out, “[o]ne of the problems in understanding and defining queer people has been the way that, historically, we are taught that this particular identity really was not recognized as such until after the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York City—and this current understanding of what became the beginning of the *modern-day* LGBT movement has actually got in our way and made it more difficult to look into the past." (Smith & Hughes 152). You’ll find that discussion of the “taboo” really wasn’t that rare when it comes to the gothic genre, even if it takes a little bit of reading between the lines to find it.

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