

Claws of Dracula and Wounds of Empire: The Enlightened Fear of the British

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Abstract

Bram Stoker's Dracula is one of the most popular literary texts ever written in English. Like most other Victorian prose fiction, Dracula is set in a gothic atmosphere and builds a shocking suspense, evoking fear and therefore destabilising emotional equilibrium in the readers. The mysterious and exotic geography of Eastern Europe metonymically portrayed through Carpathian Mountains, textualises the imperial strategies of demonization/dehumanization of the non-British. This paper attempts a critique of the popular novel Dracula to uncover the British anxiety of an anticipated political setback and social relativism as well as the social/psychological /sexual and political hegemony.

Key words: Fear, threat, Christianity, other, discourse and diabolism

Those Marked with the seal of the beast are subject to eternal torment.

- John. Rev. 14:19

Every person be subordinate to the higher authorities . . . it is the servant of God to inflict wrath on evil doer.

-Rom. 13:1-8

Post-Enlightenment European societies are often referred to as secular societies. In Britain, the academia, political leadership and legislators favoured the establishment of secularism as the official political position of the country. Kenneth Thompson, a scholar in the philosophy of modernity, argues that in a secular society as explained by religious or other absolute moral values and set of beliefs and practices relating to the sacred no longer

play a central role as cultural bonds uniting and disuniting social relationship. He says that “secularization is the reduction of the space occupied by religion in social life” (401). The different social theories and dogmas like Communism, Marxism, Darwin’s theory of evolution and the philosophy of Enlightenment questioned the authority of Christianity and religious forbearance, and myths of morality; but, the ideology of Christianity encapsulated in various institutions survived the counter discourses. This, in fact, problematises the theoretical moorings of Enlightenment and modernity because modernity is considered to be a movement against religion and conventions.

The Victorian period was an age of social change and intellectual questioning. There were challenges to faith from science, philosophy and biblical criticism. The theory of evolution propounded through Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 and the denunciation of Christianity and beliefs by philosophers including Friedrich Nietzsche who posted the famous statement –“God is Dead”, - in his philosophical works had tempestuous influence on the intellectual realms of the period. The decline of Christianity as a powerful institution in European societies coincided with the emergence of secularism as a mighty substitute. This did not in any way prevent the European societies and culture from continuing their nexus with the Hebraic/Christian culture and affirming that solidarity. Many political thinkers share the opinion that Christianity and Christian/Judeo texts played a decisive role in the formation of Western political subjects and the modern nation states. The European states, especially Britain, followed the Christian traditions of legality. In Europe, the modern secular subject, political systems, legal and penal mechanisms are deeply Christian in their modes of governmentality. This does not mean that the state and the civil society blindly follow the conceptions and superstitions of the sectarian order of the pre-Enlightenment period. Rather, the power relation between the state and its subjects, legal system and penal mechanism are in some way announcing its Christian roots and legacy. Kenneth Thompson observes:

Some of the heirs of the Enlightenment, whether in the social sciences or in liberal, reformist, and socialist political movements, believed that science, and the reorganization of society along more rational lines, would supply adequate foundation for the new social order. At the same time, there were occasional suggestions that some elements of the sacred basis of social order might

persist, even though the process of secularization in the public sphere would mean that religion and other pre-modern or irrational philosophies would be increasingly confined to the private sphere (397).

For Post-Structuralists and Neo-Marxists, the dominant discourses and institutions of power are not purely secular, but instead, they bear the vestiges of religious or sacred philosophy, which produce a sense of morality and guilt. Despite modernity, religious beliefs and practices continued to govern the European subjects. Religion had not, as was expected, withered away with the secularization of the public sphere. Kenneth Thompson observes: “There are traces of sacred elements on three levels of culture: belief in God and certain traditional and modern values; discourses and discursive practices that regulate behaviour; and ideological or imagined communities such as nation” (398). The Enlightenment rejected the idea of obedience to rules promulgated by Christian theology and Christian churches. Nevertheless, the political systems, cultural sphere and new institutions of power have internalized Christian philosophy.

However, the moral conceptions of the post- Enlightenment period, Victorian moral dilemmas, and social fear factors regarding man-made laws are actually disguised reassertions of the Christian idea of morality. Foucault considers the Christian notion of morality as a form of subjugation that was introduced in Western philosophy and culture by Christianity. Covenants and commandments influenced the civil legislation in Britain. The Semitic legal code dealing with human relationship with God and with each other constituted the basic requirements of a law- abiding and moral society. The British Empire and nobility had a nexus with the official church, the church leadership exerting enormous influence on legislation procedures and legal framework. From the perspective of Foucault, there is an essential kinship between subjectivity, criminality and truth with pre-modern Christian experience. He says the discourse of Europe drew on the earliest discourse of Christendom altering or translating its meaning. Foucault argues:

Christianity has been involved in the construction of the individual’s relationship to his body and institutions which engage in the ordering, self control and surveillance of that body. Religion always exists as a system of power, meaning that it orders life as a set of force relations, not through a violence, which forces people to do things, but through the shaping of

individual subjects to carry out a particular way of life. Christianity is an imminent political experience which attempts to govern human life, body, and sexuality (qtd. in Carette 144).

Crime is a multi-hued construct-- if at one level it can be understood as transgressions of existing codes of law, at another level it is also a concern of moral and religious institutions which means that some aspects of human life is complicated by moral and religious constraints. Detecting crimes and displacing the criminals are essential features of Christian/Hebraic communities. As Althusser says, religion is an ideological state apparatus or more specifically religious ISA, which was predominant in the pre-capitalist period, and which continues to maintain its hegemony in the moral and ethical superstructure of the capitalist period (96). In modern states too, policies and legal programs are implemented on the basis of religious beliefs.

The Biblical texts assert that the governmental institutions are agents of God to bring punishment to wrongdoers. In short, the medieval Christian framework for culpability survives into modern criminal law, theory and practice. Law and Christian notions of morality, sin, and fall are inseparably united. Habermas also acknowledges the role that religion has played in the identity of the West. He says that religion also provides societies with a common language that they can use to address hope and discontent, and that religious statements made in the public sphere must be transformed into a general language. Habermas notices the influence of Semitic covenants and law in the rule of civil law in Christian and post-Christian Western societies so that he calls them "post secular" societies (qtd. in Furseth 100).

Victorian literature goes through the political and cultural ambiguities of the period. On the one side, society progressed on the wheels of scientific and technological development, urbanization, imperial conquest and the accumulation of capital. On the other side, fears about the dehumanising effects of industry, the decline of morality, the widening gap between the rich and poor, hike in the number of discontented and oppressed masses, anxieties about diseases and social dangers, reached a pinnacle. M. H. Abrams says, "Victorian literature whether imaginative or didactic, in verse or in prose, dealt with or reflected social, economic, religious and intellectual problems" (153).

This political, economic, cultural and intellectual turmoil of the Victorian period paved the way for the emergence of different literary genres including gothic fiction, fantastic and mystery stories, science fiction and various crime narratives. Gothic fiction is preoccupied with supernatural elements, psychological traumas, violence, imprisonment and persecution. They are usually set in archaic, mysterious and exotic landscapes and mansions. Victorian literature, with crime and supernatural forming the core of its content, painted the moral panic and cultural anxiety of society. The principal aim of such texts is “to evoke chilling terror by exploiting mystery and various horrors” (Abrams 78). Herbert Marcuse argues that Bourgeois literature of the nineteenth century affirmed a power structure dominated by business and industry. At the same time it haunted by potentially antagonistic elements, by such disruptive characters as the prostitute, the adulteresses, the great criminal and outcast. He observes:

These characters have not been banished from literature, but have been transformed into the vamp, the national hero, the beatnik, the tycoon and so on, and thus they become no longer images of another way of life but rather freaks or types of the same life, serving an affirmation rather than negation of the order (59).

The Victorian period in British history marks the heyday of British imperialism. The discourse of imperialism and Orientalism reigned supreme in the cultural/ literary constructions of the period. The literary works of the Victorian age were inextricably tied to the imperialist project. The tremendous upsurges from colonial subjects flourished and the fear of a decline of the empire prompted the cultural mechanism to take up the role of safeguarding imperial supremacy over the empire. As British imperialism gathered steam, the empire and the related subjects of race and slavery became increasingly visible in the novel because of the growing significance of Britain’s geopolitical power in the lives of ordinary Victorian people and the formal commitment of novel to social realism. Deidre David, a scholar in Victorian literature observes:

The middle class families who read newspaper accounts of successful conquests and travel, and missionary narratives sent home from imperial outposts, also read novels; they frequently had sons serving in civil and military outposts of the empire, and daughters whose marriage to colonial

officials and missionaries took them to Africa, India and the West Indies. Quite simply, Victorian fiction began to register this enlarged awareness of imperialism (86).

The colonial ideology and the anxieties of an anticipated decline of the Empire, and urges to sustain hegemony, influenced and shaped British literature in the nineteenth century. Writers like Joseph Conrad and Rudyard Kipling set their fictional work in distant and fantastic lands in Africa and Asia. They constructed exotic and savage imagery for the native people. In their narratives, the white/ British heroes indulge in adventures to fight against these natives-- portrayed as creatures with demonic features. The British fantasies of the Orient excited new sensibility for adventures stories and children's fiction.

Furthermore, these novels thus directly or indirectly participate in the construction and perpetuation of colonial ideology by providing implicit justification for colonial missions like civilizing the Orient and bringing them under the British ways of legal, moral, sacred discipline and order. The novel, as a form of literature, became prevalent in Britain as a colonial project propounding imperial aesthetics. Edward W. Said argues that "the empire became a principal subject of attention in different writers as well as in emerging discourses in ethnography, colonial administration, theory and economy, the historiography of non-European regions, and specialized subjects like Orientalism, exoticism and mass psychology" (*Culture* 74). Furthermore, these texts "can not only create knowledge, but also the reality they appear to describe" (Said, *Orientalism* 94). This was a case with the gothic and detective stories about the threats from other nations.

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is one of the most popular literary texts ever written in English. It underwent incredible reception and got countless stage, film adaptations and imitations. It also derived the academic interest because of the political and cultural significance of the textual codes. The story of the mysterious and powerful vampire who comes to London and preys on women for blood has inspired the intellect and imagination beyond academic disciplines and geographical boundaries. Like most other Victorian prose fiction *Dracula* is set in a gothic atmosphere and builds a shocking suspense, evoking fear and therefore destabilising emotional equilibrium in the readers. The novel follows the narrative structure of a travelogue and an epistolary novel. Jonathan Harker, the English lawyer, reports his mysterious and often scaring experiences in Transylvania, an Eastern

European province. The mysterious and exotic geography of Eastern Europe metonymically portrayed through Carpathian Mountains, textualizes the imperial strategies of demonisation/dehumanisation of the non-British, the Dracula.

The text also signifies the British anxiety of an anticipated political setback. The blood sucking Dracula frightens the Empire and creates panic in British society. Dracula embodies the challenges to British superiority and national identity in Europe and in the colonies. The novel constructs a cultural and social relativism, an antagonism between good /evil, male/female and British/ foreign. These binary constructions always endorse the superiority of the former, thereby establishing a cultural, gender related and political hegemony. By the end of the nineteenth century the British Empire anticipated, of course, feared and often realized the perishing of British political hegemony. *Dracula* expresses this fear of a reverse colonisation as Count Dracula attempts to colonise Britain through his diabolic and sinister methods. Lyn Pykett argues: “Count Dracula with his insatiable blood lust is represented as both primitive and ultra-civilised. He is the foreign, Eastern and “other” which threatens to invade the west” (208). Finally, Dracula is exorcised and killed. He is displaced from the material and celestial bodies he colonised. He is no longer free for his nocturnal rides. The order he distorted is restored, clearly idealising the European/ Christian concept of the triumph of good over evil. The text urges for a return to the Christian values once lost or distorted. The novel affirms the Christian model of retributive justice and destruction of evil spirits as Van Helsing pledges “we are ministers of God’s own wish: that the world, and men for whom his son die, will not be given over to monsters whose very existence would defame him” (Stoker 287).

Stoker uses animal images to describe the “other” creatures in his novels. The name Dracula itself becomes synonymous with all the embodiments of cruelty. His diabolic activities and satanic appearance suggest the same. Gary Day says: “It was through the alliance of law and medicine that state intervention in the civil society was most evident. In *Dracula* two major discourses are those of law and medicine, represented by Harker and Seward respectively” (84).

The appropriation of the sacred/ Christian justice and order implies the colonial mission of Christianizing the subjects through various practices of education and sermons. Callum G. Brown and Michael Snape, the authors of the book on secularization in the www.ijellh.com

Christian world argue that “the British colonial administrators envisaged the colony being Christianised and civilised (the two words often interchangeable) through the creation of model villages supervised by ministers and school teachers and united by universal application of rules and sacraments” (50). Stoker concretizes the Christian temperament of secular British society and the colonial mission to tackle the threats from the empire through the re-application of European Christendom.

Sherlock Holmes stories of Arthur Conan Doyle features the deductive powers of an eccentric amateur detective who solves the mystery behind the crime with the aid of superior logical reasoning. He demonstrates the power of reasoning as well as the overwhelming faith in the ability of science to solve social problems that brought about by the Enlightenment in the intellectual realms. At the same time he has to stick on to the moral as well as religious temperament and values of the society in which he lives.

Holmes and Watson are dedicated to a moral discipline, loyal to the moral order of British society. The term immoral designate those “irrational agents who violate a species of rationally – dictated -- imperatives that direct people as to how to achieve peace or cooperation or impartial behaviour” (Hampton 11). The dominant patriarchal discourses interpellate women as deviant if they disobey the authoritative commands on sexuality. Holmes and Watson concur with this patriarchal structure that polices the sexual behaviour of women and impose strict rules on sexual austerity and behaviour.

In *The Valley of Fear* Watson asserts that it is indecent behaviour, a sign of frailty from a woman’s side to have an assertive and open acquaintance with another man after the recent murder of her husband. He says: “She [Mrs. Douglas, the widower of the murdered John Douglas] must be a heartless creature to sit laughing at some jest within a few hours of her husband’s murder” (Doyle, Vol. 2: 220). Watson reports to Holmes that the grief Mrs. Douglas expressed during the interrogation session is pretentious and that she was beaming with joy while she was together with Mr. Barker in the garden. Holmes agrees with his foil’s observation which unveils the veins of Christian patriarchal authoritarianism in him. In his letters, St. Paul prescribes the rules and regulations that ask of a “woman to submit to her husband” (Col. 3:18) and “a married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives” (Rom. 7:2-3). Holmes is an ardent advocate of the norms of ideal femininity that

resonate in the patriarchal ideology of Christian scriptures, especially in St. Paul's letters. Holmes Says:

She [Mrs. Douglas] does not shine as a wife even in her own account of what occurred. I am not a whole-souled admirer of womankind, as you are aware, Watson, but my experience of life has taught me that there are few wives having any regard for their husbands, who would let any man's spoken word stand between them and that husband's dead body. Should I ever marry, Watson, I should hope to inspire my wife with some feeling which would prevent her from being walked off by a housekeeper when my corpse lying within a few yards of her. It was baldly stage managed; for even the rawest investigators must be struck by the absence of the usual feminine ululation" (Doyle, Vol.2: 221).

Watson also thinks that Mrs. Douglas and James Barker together killed Mr. Douglas and conspired to conceal the truth by giving stories corroborating each other. He asserts that they are guilty of being involved in an illegitimate relationship without any remorse and repentance and expresses his strong repugnance and revulsion. Holmes imagines and constructs different stories about the murder based on his suppositions that James Barker and Mrs. Douglas are united by the bonds of guilty love and that they determined to get rid of the man who stood between them. In his attitude to family, marriage and, relationships Holmes sticks to a system of social structures, practices and power relations which are hierarchical and unequal where men repress, suppress and regulate female subjectivities in terms of sexuality, morality, public behaviour and appearance. Even though Holmes is a hero of the Enlightenment and modernity, he supports natural law in many of his investigative practices. Despite the fact that its emergence is directly connected to the social advancement facilitated by urbanisation and scientific revolution, Doyle's detective narratives illustrate that conventional superstitions like natural justice/providential justice persisted in Victorian British society and that in turn underlines its dialectic disposition.

W. H. Auden, analysing classic British detective fiction with Aristotelian paradigms on theatre, observes that detective story asserts the truth of the doctrine of original sin. He defines detective story as a whodunit and the reason for its popular appeal is the "dialectic of innocence and guilt [encapsulated in it]" (2). He says that detective fiction offers an escape into a world of innocence where guilt is found and expelled.

Auden divides crime into three types: offenses against God and one's neighbour or neighbours, offenses against God and society and offenses against God alone. He places murder in the second category. He says murder is unique and it annihilates the party it injures. In the first category it is possible at least theoretically, either that restitution can be made to the injured party like stolen things can be returned if the case is a theft or the injured party can forgive the criminal as in the case of a rape. Suicide is a crime belonging to the third category, many detective stories begin with a death that appears to be a suicide and later discovered to be a murder. In the case of murder, "society has to take the place of the victim and on his behalf demand restitution or grand forgiveness; it is the one crime in which society has a direct interest" (4).

Christian model of retributive justice as well as the restoration of moral and sacred order continued to gain a space in the crime narratives of the succeeding period too. The society and detectives portrayed in her novels are fetishes about science and rationality at one end, but on the other, their ethics were guided by Christian theological paradigms and, their faith in providential justice and righteousness never withered away. There is never an indication of clash between the postulates of tradition and modernity, but a compromise between the both.

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