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## "A Race of Devils": Frankenstein, Dracula and Science Fiction

### Cover Page Footnote

Dr Robert James Frost studied at the Shakespeare Institute, Birmingham University, England. Since 1986 he has worked as a Lecturer in a London College where he has taught modules on Frankenstein and Dracula.

**“A Race of Devils”:  
Frankenstein, Dracula, and Science Fiction**

**R J Frost**

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Victor Frankenstein has hidden himself away on one of the remote Orkney Islands, off the northeast coast of Scotland, where he is on the verge of creating a second monster – a She-creature. He has been working on the project for some time since he made his promise to the Creature to make him a mate, but now he is having second thoughts:

Even if they were to leave Europe, and inhabit the new world, yet one of the 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. (160)

An interesting idea for a Science Fiction sequel perhaps. But Mary Shelley’s novel takes a different direction when Victor destroys the unfinished She-creature and prepares himself instead to face the Creature’s wrath.

Many of the motifs in *Frankenstein* (1818) resonate not only in *Dracula*, the most significant monster novel of the late nineteenth century, but also in the fin-de-siècle classic SF tale, H G Wells’s *The War of The Worlds* (1898). But first we need to examine how Mary Shelley deals with scientific ideas in *Frankenstein* and establishes the general outline that helps shape the later texts.

In terms of genre, *Frankenstein* is generally considered a Gothic Horror novel. Indeed, it clearly owes much to the Gothic literary tradition of the eighteenth century dating back to Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto* (1764). But to pigeon-hole Shelley’s novel in

this way is to understate how it anticipates Science Fiction. In *Trillion Year Spree*, Brian Aldiss argues the case for Mary Shelley as the first writer of SF. Now whether we agree that Shelley was the first, and not Swift for instance, is irrelevant here. Later SF writers such as Wells clearly exploited the model of *Frankenstein*, including the horror elements, in their own work.

In essence *Frankenstein*’s claim to be SF rests on the way it represents the character of Victor Frankenstein as “The Modern Prometheus.” The Greek myth of the fire-thief and the terrible retribution of the gods certainly would have resonated with Shelley’s classically educated readers. But significantly, Victor is not a god; he is a scientist, a new type of protagonist in literature. Moreover the retribution Victor faces in the novel is not directed by the gods; it is the Creature who takes revenge on his creator. And what is the Creature but the symbol of scientific technology out of control and wreaking havoc? Thus we have the essential formula for subsequent writers of dystopian SF: a brilliant scientist invokes the powers of science, but fails to control the forces he has unleashed with dire consequences for himself and mankind, what Aldiss describes neatly as “Hubris clobbered by nemesis” (30). Victor is “the Modern Prometheus,” not because he breaks the laws of the gods and suffers divine retribution (a pious misreading of the novel which does not stand up to close scrutiny) but because he is presumptuous enough to think he can wield the god-like forces of science to conquer death and produce a new utopia. Of course the results lead to a tragic denouement with both the Creature and Victor facing destruction.

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Let us turn now to a closer examination of Victor's character as a scientist. Victor approaches science rather indirectly by way of alchemy and black magic. His intellectual curiosity is aroused by reading the works of Paracelsus, Cornelius Agrippa and Albertus Magnus. His father tells him these works are "sad trash" (38) but such is the influence of Victor's liberal education, he is free to choose his own interests. He carries on reading these works in secret and, at the same time, becomes intrigued by Nature and its hidden laws. His fascination with the unknown is described in sexually charged language: "The most learned philosopher ... had partially unveiled the face of Nature, but her immortal lineaments were still a wonder and a mystery" (39).

Had Victor not been living during the Eighteenth Century Enlightenment he would have run the risk of serious charges for reading these banned books. The practice of witchcraft was punishable by hanging and burning at the stake. Two points emerge out of this. First of all, he is unable to share his interests with anyone; his studies take a direction of esoteric and secret inquiry. Secondly, the pursuit of knowledge is, in some ways, characterized by taboos and prohibitions.

When Victor witnesses an electrical storm and sees an oak blasted by lightning, his interests take a new direction towards empirical observation. He starts to investigate the subjects of electricity and galvanism. All this eclipses Agrippa and the others. At this point Shelley seems to be emphasizing the importance of inspiration as well as reading and mental discipline. Victor could become a crank sorcerer or a serious scientist. But is the dichotomy really that clear-cut? In its way the sudden flash of "dazzling light" (40) which reduces the oak to a blasted stump is just as dangerous and ominous as the path of forbidden sorcery. The disturbing aspect to the lightning is that, far from being wielded by the hand of a vengeful Jupiter, it is a completely arbitrary manifestation of enormous destructive potential.

Victor goes to the University of Ingolstadt to study Natural Philosophy, a catch-all term for the newly emerging branches of science including Physics, Biology and Chemistry. But on meeting his charismatic tutor, Waldman, the alchemists and sorcerers once again become the topic of conversation. Victor has at last discovered somebody sympathetic towards his esoteric interests. Waldman has no faith in the transmutation of base metals into gold nor the elixir of life per se; yet he respects those who did this as the early fathers of the modern techniques. He sounds what is a familiarly contemporary note of scientific caution when it comes to making claims about what science is capable of; however, as he warms to his theme he seems to get carried away with the "ardour" that fires Walton, Victor and Clerval elsewhere in the book. Waldman's panegyric about "real" scientists depicts them as *deus ex machina*: "They ascend into the heavens: they have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe" (47).

Victor now begins to attend lectures and embark on an arduous and methodical course of private research which leads, by slow degrees, to the discovery of the spark of life. He acquires an attic laboratory segregated from the rest of the house by stairs and a gallery, and locks himself away from human contact. He calls it "a cell" and he is, in some ways, imprisoned in it (53). His gregarious human instincts and love of Nature are stifled. The requirement for privacy is underlined by the very practical and prudent criterion that much of this research involves grave robbing and the desecration and mutilation of corpses. His need to work outside the law and suppress natural instinctive fears shows that science, to most people at that time, still was a black art. Working against the current of popular prejudice and ignorance, Victor can still identify with science as a heroic individual enterprise casting himself in the role of Prometheus pouring "a torrent of light into our dark world" (52). But it is in fact Victor who is forced to work in the dead of night by the light of a candle. This obsessive work takes a physical toll on him and, as his conception of the Creature magnifies in his mind to a giant of eight foot stature, his body shrinks and dwindles as if he is suffering from a wasting illness (55).

While he embraces science, Victor never completely escapes from the supernatural. On the surface he shows the signs of belonging to a materialistic creed of science. So he boasts that he has no fear of the dark and that the desecration of graves holds no terrors for him because he regards churchyards merely as the "receptacles" for dead bodies (50). On the other hand, he employs a

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rhetoric throughout the novel which constantly infers a supernatural order within the scheme of things. His antagonism towards the Creature is always expressed within a Miltonic frame of reference. Thus the Creature who desires to be called Adam is dismissed by Victor as devil, daemon and diabolical fiend. Victor also invokes guardian angels and summons spirits to his aid (41). And yet the rhetoric is misleading because different characters take it up and apply it in different ways to suit their purposes. The epigraph to the novel, Adam's complaint to God from *Paradise Lost*, seems to support the Creature's case that he deserves the same care and attention from Victor, his god-like creator (97). Ironically, during Victor's pursuit of the Creature at the end of the novel through the frozen wastes of the Arctic, it is the scientist who, like Milton's Satan, carries hell around inside him (197). Far from resolving the moral issues involved in the conflicts of the characters, the rhetoric of damnation and redemption seems designed to heighten our ambivalence towards them.

The inconsistency of Victor's rhetoric and its sense of awkwardness when it does not seem to quite suit his unique circumstances, come out strongly in the churchyard scene where he swears vengeance under the moonlight before Elizabeth's tomb:

To execute this dear revenge will I again behold the sun, and tread the green herbage of the earth, which otherwise should vanish from my eyes forever. And I call on you, spirits of the dead; and on you, wandering ministers of vengeance, to aid and conduct me in my work. Let the cursed and hellish monster drink deep of agony; let him feel the despair that now torments me. (196)

The language has the rhythm of incantation. What does he know about furies and the spirits of the dead? "The green herbage of the earth" (presumably grass) is a particularly clumsy euphemism. In his grief-stricken and temporarily deranged state of mind Victor seems to have forgotten about skepticism. Now the churchyard receptacle of bones is full of listening ghosts.

Shelley glosses over the actual moment of the Creature's creation, never taking us into Victor's laboratory, to focus on the crucial moment of rejection instead. In keeping with the taboos surrounding science, Walton, the auditor of Victor's narrative, must not be let into its secrets. At the heart of the novel's presentation of science is what might be described as a crisis of seeing, an error of perception which highlights a crucial cultural and philosophical debate between Enlightenment Science and Romanticism. We need to put this in its historical context.

The Romantics approved of science insofar as it supported their agenda for reform and radical social change. The Romantic vision of man, partially derived from Rousseau, insisted that man was a free being of unlimited potential who found himself enchained within a repressive and corrupt social order. But if science had a role to play in assisting man to throw off Blake's mind-forged manacles, it also came to challenge Romanticism in certain ways. Crucial to the Romantic view was the beauty of the natural world and how we learn to perceive it. Wordsworth expresses the crucial dialectic between feeling observer and observed object in his poem "The Rainbow":

My heart leaps up when I behold  
A rainbow in the sky:  
So was it when my life began;  
So it is now I am a man;  
So be it when I shall grow old,  
Or let me die!

The poet is subject to the ravages of time, but the rainbow cannot change, will always be beautiful. In his experiments with prisms and the refractive properties of light, Isaac Newton approaches the rainbow through his scientific intellect. The key question for the Romantics was not whether

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Newton was suffering from chroma-stigmatism; it was the issue of the primacy of perception: how to maintain the primacy of feeling over the detached scientific gaze? Did beauty exist or not?

In *Frankenstein*, we find a repeated dramatization of these crises of perception. The most drastic of them is the shift from Victor's telling of the story to the Creature's account. We suddenly find ourselves plunged into an alien universe of Lockean phenomenology where nothing is called by its right name and all objects are reduced to sensory data. Another example occurs when the Creature, who has been hiding in the hovel next to the De Lacey's cottage, reveals himself to the old blind man. Everything goes well at first until the other members of the family arrive and with their unimpaired vision, immediately jump to the wrong conclusion that De Lacey is in danger from a monster. In a moral sense a blind man sees better than they do.

Victor's character is that of a Romantic scientist. This is demonstrated by his love for Elizabeth to whose beauty he is susceptible. It is also made apparent in the way he responds to Nature. His heart leaps up with Wordsworth's when, after Justine's death, he retreats to the lakes and mountains of the Alps. When he hears the cracking and groaning of the ice his scientific instincts are reminded of "the silent working of immutable laws" (93) which it was the practical job of science to discover, but he is no detached Newtonian observer recording data because his soul is moved. Again after the death of William, the first victim of the Creature, he finds some relief in the electrical storm over Mont Blanc (73).

The two words "artisan" and "artist" have their roots in the same Latin noun, *ars/artis*, meaning "skill." While today we think of these as two distinctive appellations (the artisan is a workman skilled in any trade, while the artist is specifically an individual gifted in the fine arts), during the Romantic era the terms were more fluid. Scientists such as Erasmus Darwin (Charles Darwin's grandfather) wrote poetry and Isaac Newton wrote theological tracts, while Victor Frankenstein, in the middle of his scientific investigations, expects to feel like "an artist occupied by his favourite employment" (56). The characterization of Victor as Romantic scientist would have been much less incongruous to Shelley than to a modern reader.

At the heart of the novel then is Victor's rejection of the Creature founded on a fatal error of perception which is highlighted by the polarization of Romanticism and science. Often in the cinema the Creature has been depicted as malformed, brain damaged or morally stigmatized in some other way. (One recalls the infamous "criminal brain" in James Whale's 1931 Hollywood version, for example.) But the truth is that Victor's rejection of the Creature is not founded on any perceived moral defect; he rejects the Creature because he is a disillusioned Romantic who cannot see beyond the ugliness of his creation. In some ways his reaction could be compared with Pygmalion in the myth of the artistic sculptor who falls in love with the statue he has carved, though in this case it is hate, not love, at first sight.

The conclusion of the novel forces the reader to confront a moral dilemma. Victor has pursued the Creature to the Arctic, bent on undoing his work by destroying it. But the chase has exhausted him and he is now dying in Walton's cabin. He admonishes Walton to shun ambition, advice which Walton heeds by eventually abandoning his mission to reach the North Pole. Yet Victor appears to vacillate, as seen in his dying words: "Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed" (210). This he directs at Walton, the sympathetic listener, to whom he has not divulged the secret of his scientific techniques to kindle the spark of life. How do we respond to it? Is it a profession of faith in the ultimate progress of scientific discovery? Or is it an ominous forecast for the future about the fatal blindness of human aspiration? Victor may after all have thrown his life away for nothing.

Let us now turn to that other great horror novel of the nineteenth century, *Dracula*, and note how some of these motifs, to be later more fully developed in SF, resonate in Stoker's classic tale of the vampire. Published in 1897, almost eighty years after *Frankenstein*, it was inevitable that comparisons between the two would be made. Stoker's mother, Charlotte, was the first to make the connection in a letter to her son, but ever since then the creaky black hearse of the gothic band wagon has been lumbering down hill, picking up speed.

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Readers of *Dracula* first encounter the Count through the eyes of Jonathan Harker. On a business trip to Transylvania to settle Dracula's purchase of property in England, Harker keeps a journal of his strange, often surreal, experiences as the Count's guest. One of these distinctively echoes an image from *Frankenstein*. Three days after his arrival at the Castle, Harker is shaving in his room when Dracula pays him an unexpected visit. Harker can see the whole of the room behind him reflected in the mirror, but not Dracula. He is so startled he cuts himself with his razor. Suddenly Dracula is transformed:

When the Count saw my face, his eyes blazed with demoniac fury, and he suddenly made a grab at my throat. I drew away, and his hand touched the string of beads which held the crucifix. It made an instant change in him for the fury passed so quickly that I could hardly believe it was ever there. (38)

Harker is saved in the nick of time. But instead of being terrified he becomes annoyed because the mirror has been broken when Dracula hurls it out of the window. How is he going to shave now? Harker's concern about the trivialities of personal grooming after such a figurative close shave is comical. So too is Dracula's sardonic retort: "take care how you cut yourself. It is more dangerous than you think in this country" (38).

The magical detail of Dracula's invisible face in the mirror has no realistic explanation. The point serves to illustrate the difference between Shelley's Creature and the vampire. As I have argued, *Frankenstein* tends to displace magic in favor of a Romantic mythologized version of science whereas in *Dracula* magic tends to exist side-by-side with science in an uneasy relationship.

Of note here is the short but moving scene when Shelley's Creature goes out into the forest and gazes at his own reflection in a pool of water. He sees himself as others see him and the Creature shares in the world's condemnation of his ugliness (110). But it is not so much the Creature's ugliness which reveals a hidden moral deformity as in the case of Stoker's vampire; Shelley locates the roots of evil in the relationship between the scientist and his creation characterized by hatred and loathing. In other words, the breakdown of Rousseau's social contract between Victor and the Creature is what produces the evil consequences of alienation. The ugliness is only the catalyst.

An interesting use of reflective properties can be found in Wells's *The War of The Worlds*, published just one year after *Dracula*. Shortly after the first Martian cylinder lands on Horsell Common, a thin rod rises from the pit of the impact crater and on top of it is a spinning circular disc which wobbles as it revolves. When a small group of people approach the cylinder waving a white flag "the ghost of a beam of light" (23) is directed from the disc and the delegation of peace is suddenly incinerated. The Martians have unleashed their first weapon in their invasion of the earth – the heat ray. Wells too is fascinated by the properties of mirrors in keeping with the literary tradition of the fin de siècle. Here a polished parabolic mirror is used by the Martians, to project not light but intense heat radiation in the manner of a mirror in a lighthouse. The soul-less Martians have no use for mirrors as symbols of individual human identity; nevertheless in the glittering, reflective carapaces of their war machines armed with heat rays they ruthlessly set about exterminating terrestrial life. The ugliness of the individual Martians recorded by Wells's anonymous narrator is as nothing compared to the cool detachment with which they perpetrate genocide. Wells's innovation is that he takes the Romantic theme of the isolated individual alienated by scientific technology (see Shelley's Creature) and he generalizes it to apply to the human species. The egotism of the individual and the vanity of human pride is exposed by the team effort and overwhelming superiority of Martian technology.

Let us extend the discussion to include Van Helsing's science in relation to Dracula's black magic. Consider the scene in which Harker looks out of a castle window and sees Dracula

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climbing down the sheer face of a wall. He hangs “*face down*” over an abyss with his cloak billowing (italics Stoker’s).<sup>1</sup> This is certainly bizarre, but why is it so horrifying to Harker? Because Dracula scrambles on all fours “just as a lizard moves along a wall” (49). Harker’s unusual simile telegraphs the idea that Dracula is at once more than human and less than human, related to the lower reptiles.

The reader is reminded of this incident later when Harker again looks out of the window and sees Dracula making the vertical descent this time wearing Jonathan’s traveling clothes (62). In effect, the Vampire has forced Harker to change places with him and stolen his soul-image.

Such doubling continues when the scene shifts to England and we meet the two heroines, Lucy Westenra and Mina Murray, Harker’s fiancée. Lucy’s name reminds us that she is a child both of light and of the occident. This pair of females soon become the successive prey of the Vampire when he makes the crossing to England. The main plot of *Dracula* is in fact one story repeated twice as the hunters struggle to save Lucy from the predation of the Vampire and, failing, then fight to protect Mina.

In the midst of all these pairings the strangest of them is Stoker’s doubling of Dracula and Van Helsing, his arch-enemy. Van Helsing plays the role of white magician to counter the black magic of Dracula, but Stoker insists on presenting Van Helsing as a scientist, a specialist in Neurology with so many impressive credentials they won’t even fit on the letterhead: “M.D., D.PH, D.LIT etc etc.” Now being qualified is one thing, but the reader learns with a feeling of discomfort that the friendship between Seward and the Dutchman is based on a parody of vampiric bonding. Apparently, when Van Helsing poisoned himself with a gangrenous knife during a surgical operation, medical student Seward was the only one courageous enough to suck the poison from the wound thus saving his teacher’s life (148). Clive Leatherdale draws this comparison:

By his use of garlic with Host and crucifix Van Helsing takes science across the frontiers of witchcraft. Whereas Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, eighty years earlier, had been a “magician-turned-scientist” Van Helsing becomes a “scientist-turned-magician.” (123)

Mina Harker’s description of Van Helsing is surely meant to echo Jonathan’s earlier account of Dracula in its evocation of physiognomy:

[He is] a man of medium height, strongly built, with his shoulders set back over a broad, deep chest and a neck well balanced on the trunk as the head is on the neck. The poise of the head strikes one at once as indicative of thought and power; the head is noble, well sized broad and large behind the ears. The face, clean shaven, shows a hard square chin, a large resolute, mobile mouth, a good-sized nose, rather straight, but with quick sensitive nostrils, that seem to broaden as the big bushy brows come down and the mouth tightens.” (235)

Though Harker describes Dracula as being tall and thin, Dracula shares many features with Van Helsing. They both have bushy eyebrows, exaggerated nostrils, hard clean shaven chins and high domed foreheads from which the hair falls away. Van Helsing’s blue eyes can change rapidly from tender to stern just as Dracula’s piercing red eyes can shift in an instant from crafty courtesy to homicidal malevolence. The key word in each characterization is “strong,” partly physical strength, but more importantly the power of influence over others for good or for evil. In addition to this

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<sup>1</sup> In the Francis Ford Coppola film, *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992), we have a vertiginous shot of Dracula (Gary Oldman) crawling on all fours in an enormous trailing scarlet cape lit up by the stark flashes of an electrical storm. He hangs over an abyss.



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Dracula has feral traits. His sharp white fangs are the most obvious; however, he also has pointed nails and hair growing out of his palms. His ears are pale and pointed too.

Physiognomy is not something we accept today so the modern reader, conditioned by *Star Trek* repeats and *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*, may be skeptical. But from the perspective of the Harkers, Dracula and Van Helsing are uncomfortably matched. When in *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving*, Stoker describes contemporary Victorian celebrities such as Lord Tennyson and Sir Richard Burton, he refers to their prominent canine teeth indicating that they were fighters, not in the pugilistic sense, but in the sense of their proud indomitable spirits. Tennyson comes across to Stoker as “a great Newfoundland dog” (198), meant as a compliment. So Van Helsing and Dracula too are covered with the same mantle of nobility and iron resolution.

But is the moral integrity of Van Helsing’s shamanic-science compromised by the close links with Dracula’s black magic? In posing this question we now approach the heart of the novel. Underlying Stoker’s belief in physiognomy is the novel’s fundamental idea that we can generalize about individual physical traits and use them to classify human beings into psychological types. Dracula himself belongs to the same class as Van Helsing. For Stoker, Dracula is not simply threatening because he is an individual predator, a loner like Shelley’s Creature. The real curse of the undead is the way they can infiltrate Victorian society and subvert its ordered hierarchy. Vampires can interbreed with humans and contaminate the species like a syphilitic infection. This is why Van Helsing’s struggle with Dracula is an indirect struggle for control over the bodies of Lucy and Mina. Vampires reproduce asexually of course and yet Dracula’s attentions inevitably gravitate towards women. Why? Because if he can control the women then he can seed chaos and degeneracy by controlling the biological destiny of the race. Cornered by Van Helsing and his band, the Count turns to taunt them: “Your girls that you all love are mine already; and through them you and others shall yet be mine - my creatures to do my bidding and to be my jackals when I want to feed” (395).

The image of the jackal recalls Stoker’s earlier reference to Dracula’s cold stare of lion-like disdain (393), his lizard like scrambling along a vertical wall and many other images from “tiger” (412) to “fox” (376). These images, no doubt, all help to reinforce the idea of Dracula’s savagery, but they also seem to be used by Stoker to characterize the female vampires as well: they lick their chops (54) and snarl like cats (271).

One way of making sense of these images is to interpret them as the Freudian symbols of repressed desires. The psychoanalytic perspective on *Dracula* insists that our fascination with vampires rests on the way they embody our unconscious impulses to feed, to suck, to possess utterly. But I want to take a different line of inquiry. The extended canines of vampires are the most obvious way in which they come to represent animals. Nevertheless, seen from the unsound scientific perspective of physiognomy, the threat of vampires is that they blur the basic categories that separate rational human beings from the irrational instincts of beasts. To a physiognomist like Stoker this was an especially appalling prospect because if human beings could revert to animals then the categories themselves could become confused and the most cherished beliefs of Victorian society in progress and the sanctity of marriage were vulnerable.

It is here that we find a major intersection between the Gothic modernism of *Dracula* and fin-de-siècle Science Fiction. Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859) had a profound impact on the Victorians because it challenged the Biblical account of Creation and placed the emphasis instead on the common origins and development of all life on earth. In this respect, it tended to erode the perceived differences between humans and animals and emphasized their similarities. Thus the small bone extending from the base of the human vertebrae, the coccyx, was an illustration that humans and apes shared a common ape-like ancestor. The social consequences of this were enormous and unpredictable, but basically what happened was that Religion lost its hegemony and faith went into decline.

Science Fiction as a literary form also gained momentum from the advent of Darwin, since the influence of science was greatly extended into every sphere of life and it became feasible to

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speculate in new and imaginative ways about the future destiny of man, themes which before tended to be inhibited by censorship and orthodoxy. But freedom breeds anxiety and uneasy soul-searching and so much of fin-de-siècle SF projects a world of doubt, monsters, grim dystopias, identity crises and moral anxieties.

Darwin had a fortuitous encounter with a real vampire bat while he was on expedition in South America. It happened when he was camping with a servant in Coquimbo, Chile, and one of their horses became restless. They went to investigate and Darwin's servant put his hand on the horse's withers to remove the small vampire – Desmodus Rufus. It is interesting to observe that the person who first refers in any detail to vampires in *Dracula* is not the expert Van Helsing, but Stoker's answer to Indiana Jones, the Texan adventurer and explorer, Quincey Morris. Quincey's anecdote is similar to Darwin's (196).<sup>2</sup>

As a scientist Darwin was interested in seeing the vampire's feeding habits as an example of specialized adaptation. As a writer Stoker was interested in adapting Darwinist science to bolster his myth of Dracula. Count Dracula is able to cross the species barriers by transforming himself into a wolf or a bat; we also see him using his magic powers to influence the lower animals such as rats. When the hunters enter his Carfax lair, he uses a whole pack of rats to menace them. But as well as being a type of evolutionary throwback, a creature of animal appetites and dangerous spontaneous impulses, Dracula is sophisticated, calculating, cunning and has an evolving brain to rival the rational faculties of human beings.

It is possible to read the struggle between vampires and human beings in evolutionary terms as a competition between rival species on the food chain. "You think to baffle me, you – with your pale faces all in a row, like sheep in a butcher's" (394), says Dracula in what is essentially an inversion of the order we all tend to take for granted. From the dispassionate viewpoint of Darwinism there are no special guarantees that human beings cannot be relegated to mutton by a superior predator.

Stoker's use of Renfield fits into this larger pattern. Renfield is diagnosed by Dr Seward as a zoophagous madman, but actually his condition represents natural selection gone mad. His madness ultimately implies cannibalism.<sup>3</sup> Darkly comic as the Renfield subplot is, it serves to illustrate the competitive Darwinism underlying Stoker's theory of vampires. The degeneration of Victorian society, the most advanced form of industrial capitalism, appears to mark the ascendancy of vampires as the potential dominant species of the planet. The theory of evolution attempts to do justice to the infinite multiplicity and complex variations of life and yet it also emphasizes the harshness of the implacable laws which pit species against one another. The swiftest runners, the fiercest killers, the most prolific breeders are the ones which get to pass on their genes whereas the losers become extinct. Therefore Dracula's red teeth and claws reprise the famous image of Tennyson's Nature. He embraces Darwinism; Van Helsing's science and parapsychology seeks to promote human values in the face of Darwinian theory.

Cannibalism, blood drinking and social degeneration then are interrelated themes in *Dracula*. But the feeding habits of vampires on sheep-like humans also points towards *The War of The Worlds*. Wells's Martians have more than a passing resemblance to Darwin's vampire bats. Desmodus Rufus has a very narrow oesophagus opening at right angles into its stomach and thus it dispenses with the extended intestinal system familiar in other mammals. The anonymous narrator of Wells's novel tells us the Martians "were heads – merely heads" (119). Without entrails or a digestive tract the Martians have evolved into vampires and they therefore derive their nourishment

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<sup>2</sup> Stoker certainly knew of such traveler's tales of real vampires and adapted them to his novel. Darwin's account was readily accessible in the 1888 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Furthermore there was a reference to vampire bats in "Vampires in New England," an article Stoker read while in New York in 1896. Real vampires are not large, however; the head and body of the vampire is only about three inches long.

<sup>3</sup> Van Helsing in the Coppola film was played by Anthony Hopkins, who had already gained fame for playing the cannibal Hannibal Lecter, in *The Silence of the Lambs*.

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from injecting the blood of other creatures directly into their bodies. They do this by means of a straw or a “little pipette” like the hypodermic fang of the vampire.

This information, cut out of some early editions of *The War of The Worlds* as too horrible for many readers, actually helps to promote a dual interpretation of the aliens. On the one hand, Wells offers a painstakingly realistic account of an invasion of Earth from another planet, focusing on South East England but essentially implying the collapse of human civilization; on the other hand, the parasitic Martians are distorted images of ourselves, pointing to one possible path for human evolution. The super-intelligent Martians, totally reliant on their technology in an Earth environment, with atrophied bodies and emotions, illustrate what we may become in the distant future.

One final comment on this may be offered and that is the way Wells, drawing on Darwin, invokes animal images to promote this dualistic aspect of *The War of The Worlds*. So we have references to the Dodo (7, 31), native of the Mauritius islands and proverbial example of an extinct species, frogs (61), caterpillars (29) and even microscopic organisms as the Martians observe Earth through their telescopes in the great opening sequence of the novel, which foretells its surprising and yet inevitable outcome (5). The sterile Martians are defeated by micro-organisms finally. But these images serve not only to diminish the scale of human pretensions – to the Martians we are of no more significance than insect larvae – they are a constant reminder to the reader of how we ourselves have a history of disregarding the life of other organisms on this planet: “Like sheep in a butcher’s.”

The basic SF paradigm traceable to Shelley’s *Frankenstein* draws on various forms of pre-Darwinian Romantic myth and archetype to raise moral questions about future technology and human progress. Victor’s dying words in the novel are, “I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed” (210). By the time *Dracula* appears in 1897 the shaping forces of science and the philosophy of Darwin questioning the fundamentals of faith and salvation have permeated Victorian society. We are in the age of the fin-de-siècle.

Van Helsing is a new kind of scientific hero, not seeking to create a monster but to destroy one. Moreover, Van Helsing’s mission is not simply to eradicate the representative of evil. In order to achieve his goal he has to act as a type of shaman to counteract the skepticism and the modern forces of materialism which are corrupting England. As well as combating Dracula’s influence through hypnosis and blood transfusions, Van Helsing has to fight for the hearts and minds of Seward, Mina and the others to consolidate their league against the vampire in whom they do not believe at first. Victor Frankenstein is a study in alienation; however, Van Helsing’s job is to create a new type of human society in miniature, a community of the faithful, which will be capable of collectively resisting evil. He is not a loner like Victor.

The discussion of *The War of The Worlds* helps to suggest a parallel with Stoker in the way two different contemporary writers respond to Darwin. The Martians have no individualized identity as Count Dracula and the Creature do, but they have the feeding habits of vampires. Blood drinking, along with cannibalism, is at once a symbol of atavistic savagery, a regression to the primitive animal inside all of us and also a Science Fiction metaphor for the ruthless detachment and unfeeling sophistication of “superior” alien minds. The Byronic individualism of Dracula invests him with all the allure of Romantic myth whereas the irredeemable Martians assume collective action and act as an amoral force of nature. Their actions may have “evil” consequences for mankind and yet they hardly seem to have a moral dimension. Is Dracula redeemed at the end of the novel as the final “look of peace” on his face as he lies in his coffin may suggest (484)? It is hard to be confident. The Creature passes judgment on himself saying he is going to commit his body to the Promethean flames, but he is still very much alive at the end of *Frankenstein*, leaving open questions about the justice of the gods. Arguably, alongside the blood of the Huns and the Szekelys which the Count boasts to Harker is running through his aristocratic veins, there may well have been the odd trace of Martian.

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