

Dracula

Full Book Summary

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[Jonathan Harker](#), a young English lawyer, travels to Castle Dracula in the Eastern European country of Transylvania to conclude a real estate transaction with a nobleman named [Count Dracula](#). As Harker wends his way through the picturesque countryside, the local peasants warn him about his destination, giving him crucifixes and other charms against evil and uttering strange words that Harker later translates into “vampire.”

Frightened but no less determined, Harker meets the count’s carriage as planned. The journey to the castle is harrowing, and the carriage is nearly attacked by angry wolves along the way. Upon arriving at the crumbling old castle, Harker finds that the elderly Dracula is a well educated and hospitable gentleman. After only a few days, however, Harker realizes that he is effectively a prisoner in the castle.

The more Harker investigates the nature of his confinement, the more uneasy he becomes. He realizes that the count possesses supernatural powers and diabolical ambitions. One evening, Harker is nearly attacked by three beautiful and seductive female vampires, but the count staves them off, telling the vampires that Harker belongs to him. Fearing for his life, Harker attempts to escape from the castle by climbing down the walls.

Meanwhile, in England, Harker’s fiancée, [Mina Murray](#), corresponds with her friend [Lucy Westenra](#). Lucy has received marriage proposals from three men—Dr. John Seward, [Arthur Holmwood](#), and an American named Quincey Morris. Though saddened by the fact that she must reject two of these suitors, Lucy accepts Holmwood’s proposal.

Mina visits Lucy at the seaside town of Whitby. A Russian ship is wrecked on the shore near the town with all its crew missing and its captain dead. The only sign of life aboard is a large dog that bounds ashore and disappears into the countryside; the only cargo is a set of fifty boxes of earth shipped from Castle Dracula. Not long after, Lucy suddenly begins sleepwalking. One night, Mina finds Lucy in the town cemetery and believes she sees a dark form with glowing red eyes bending over Lucy. Lucy becomes pale and ill, and she bears two tiny red marks at her throat, for which neither Dr. Seward nor Mina can account. Unable to arrive at a satisfactory diagnosis, Dr. Seward sends for his old mentor, [Professor Van Helsing](#).

Suffering from brain fever, Harker reappears in the city of Buda-Pest. Mina goes to join him. Van Helsing arrives in Whitby, and, after his initial examination of Lucy, orders that her chambers be covered with garlic—a

traditional charm against vampires. For a time, this effort seems to stave off Lucy's illness. She begins to recover, but her mother, unaware of the garlic's power, unwittingly removes the odiferous plants from the room, leaving Lucy vulnerable to further attack.

Seward and Van Helsing spend several days trying to revive Lucy, performing four blood transfusions. Their efforts ultimately come to nothing. One night, the men momentarily let down their guard, and a wolf breaks into the Westenra house. The shock gives Lucy's mother a fatal heart attack, and the wolf attacks Lucy, killing her.

After Lucy's death, Van Helsing leads Holmwood, Seward, and Quincey Morris to her tomb. Van Helsing convinces the other men that Lucy belongs to the "Un-Dead"—in other words, she has been transformed into a vampire like Dracula. The men remain unconvinced until they see Lucy preying on a defenseless child, which convinces them that she must be destroyed. They agree to follow the ritual of vampire slaying to ensure that Lucy's soul will return to eternal rest. While the undead Lucy sleeps, Holmwood plunges a stake through her heart. The men then cut off her head and stuff her mouth with garlic. After this deed is done, they pledge to destroy Dracula himself.

Now married, Mina and Jonathan return to England and join forces with the others. Mina helps Van Helsing collect the various diary and journal entries that Harker, Seward, and the others have written, attempting to piece together a narrative that will lead them to the count. Learning all they can of Dracula's affairs, Van Helsing and his band track down the boxes of earth that the count uses as a sanctuary during the night from Dracula's castle. Their efforts seem to be going well, but then one of Dr. Seward's mental patients, Renfield, lets Dracula into the asylum where the others are staying, allowing the count to prey upon Mina.

As Mina begins the slow change into a vampire, the men sterilize the boxes of earth, forcing Dracula to flee to the safety of his native Transylvania. The men pursue the count, dividing their forces and tracking him across land and sea. Van Helsing takes Mina with him, and they cleanse Castle Dracula by killing the three female vampires and sealing the entrances with sacred objects. The others catch up with the count just as he is about to reach his castle, and Jonathan and Quincey use knives to destroy him.

Count Dracula

Count Dracula

Late in the novel, when Dracula escapes from Van Helsing and company at his Piccadilly house, the count declares, “My revenge is just begun!” It is not immediately clear for what offense Dracula must obtain revenge, but the most convincing answer comes in the opening chapters, when Dracula relates the proud but disappointing history of his family. In Chapter III, he speaks of the “brave races who fought as the lion fights, for lordship.” The count notes the power his people once held, but laments the fact that the “warlike days are over.”

Although he retains his lordship in Transylvania, the world around him has changed and grown significantly—the “glories” of days gone by now belong to other families and other races. Indeed, when the count discusses “the crowded streets of your mighty London,” we sense that he lusts for power and conquest: “I long . . . to be in the midst of the whirl and rush of humanity, to share its life, its change, its death, and all that makes it what it is. But alas!” In this light, Dracula becomes not simply a creature of fathomless evil. Rather, he is a somewhat sympathetic and more human creation, determined to regain his family’s lost power and subject the world to his own dark, brutal vision.

Van Helsing

Van Helsing

Old Professor Van Helsing is an experienced, competent man, but due to the unfortunately unskilled manner in which Stoker renders Van Helsing’s speech, he often comes across as somewhat bumbling. Nevertheless, Van Helsing emerges as a well-matched adversary to the count, and he is initially the only character who possesses a mind open enough to contemplate and address Dracula’s particular brand of evil.

A doctor, philosopher, and metaphysician, Van Helsing arrives on the scene versed not only in the modern methods of Western medicine, but with an unparalleled knowledge of superstitions and folk remedies. He straddles two distinct worlds, the old and the new: the first marked by fearful respect for tradition, the second by ever-progressing modernity. Unlike his former pupil, Dr. Seward, whose obsession with modern techniques blinds him to the real nature of Lucy’s sickness, Van Helsing not only diagnoses the young girl’s affliction correctly, but offers her the only opportunity for a cure.

Like many of the other characters, Van Helsing is relatively static, as he undergoes no great change or development throughout the course of the novel. Having helped rid the Earth of the count’s evil, he departs as he arrived: morally

righteous and religiously committed. Van Helsing views his pursuit of Dracula with an air of grandiosity. He envisions his band as “ministers of God’s own wish,” and assures his comrades that “we go out as the old knights of the Cross to redeem more.” Hyperbole aside, Stoker portrays Van Helsing as the embodiment of unswerving good, the hero he recruits “to set the world free.”

Mina Murray

Mina Murray

Mina Murray is the ultimate Victorian woman. Van Helsing’s praise of Mina testifies to the fact that she is indeed the embodiment of the virtues of the age. She is “one of God’s women, fashioned by His own hand to show us men and other women that there is a heaven where we can enter, and that its light can be here on earth. So true, so sweet, so noble. . . .” Mina stands as the model of domestic propriety, an assistant schoolmistress who dutifully studies newfangled machines like the typewriter so as to be useful to her husband. Unlike Lucy, she is not most noteworthy for her physical beauty, which spares Mina her friend’s fate of being transformed into a voluptuous she-devil.

Mina’s sexuality remains enigmatic throughout the whole of *Dracula*. Though she marries, she never gives voice to anything resembling a sexual desire or impulse, which enables her to retain her purity. Indeed, the entire second half of the novel concerns the issue of Mina’s purity. Stoker creates suspense about whether Mina, like Lucy, will be lost. Given that *Dracula* means to use women to access the men of England, Mina’s loss could have terrifying repercussions.

We might expect that Mina, who sympathizes with the boldly progressive “New Women” of England, would be doomed to suffer Lucy’s fate as punishment for her progressiveness. But Stoker instead fashions Mina into a goddess of conservative male fantasy. Though resourceful and intelligent enough to conduct the research that leads Van Helsing’s crew to the count, Mina is far from a “New Woman” herself. Rather, she is a dutiful wife and mother, and her successes are always in the service of men. Mina’s moral perfection remains as stainless, in the end, as her forehead.

Lucy Westenra

Characters Lucy Westenra

In many ways, Lucy is much like her dear friend Mina. She is a paragon of virtue and innocence, qualities that draw not one but three suitors to her. Lucy differs from her friend in one crucial aspect, however—she is sexualized. Lucy’s physical beauty captivates each of her suitors, and she displays a comfort or playfulness about her desirability that Mina never feels. In an early

letter to Mina, Lucy laments, “Why can’t they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?”

Although she chastises herself for this “heresy,” her statement indicates that she has desires that cannot be met. Stoker amplifies this faint whisper of Lucy’s insatiability to a monstrous volume when he describes the undead Lucy as a wanton creature of ravenous sexual appetite. In this demonic state, Lucy stands as a dangerous threat to men and their tenuous self-control, and therefore, she must be destroyed. Lucy’s death returns her to a more harmless state, fixing a look of purity on her face that assures men that the world and its women are exactly as they should be.

Jonathan Harker

Characters Jonathan Harker

At the start of the novel, Jonathan Harker is a conscientious and hard-working young lawyer; he feels very proud knowing that his employer describes him as “full of energy and talent in his own way, and of a very faithful disposition.”

Along with his keen sense of professional responsibility, Harker is devoted to his fiancée Mina, and hopeful about the happy life they will lead together.

Harker is a keen observer who is interested in noting all kinds of details about life in Transylvania, and he tries to be rational and objective as he journeys to conclude a real estate transaction with Count Dracula. As he witnesses bizarre and disturbing occurrences in Dracula’s Castle, Harker’s reliance on facts and reason becomes a weakness as he takes too long to realize he is in a dangerous situation. Despite his deep integrity, Harker still experiences the temptations of seduction. When faced with the three female vampires, Harker admits that he “felt in [his] heart a wicked, burning desire.” Harker functions in the novel as a representation of a modern, intelligent man who always tries to do the right thing, but who finds himself confronting lust and evil nonetheless.

Arthur Holmwood

Characters Arthur Holmwood

Arthur Holmwood is Lucy’s fiancé, and after Lucy’s death, Holmwood becomes a faithful participant in the fight against Dracula. He is also an English aristocrat who inherits his father’s title as Lord Godalming. Holmwood’s aristocratic heritage is important because it positions him in direct contrast to Count Dracula and shows that not everyone with a title and hereditary position is evil. Since Lucy chooses Holmwood over the other men who also woo her, Holmwood seems to be a devoted lover, and he later shows his courage and integrity by carrying out the awful task of driving a stake through the evil-possessed Lucy’s heart in order to save her soul. In addition to this traditionally heroic type of bravery, Holmwood shows vulnerability when he mourns Lucy, “cr[ying] like a wearied child, whilst he [shakes] with emotion.” At the end

of *Dracula*, Holmwood is described as “happily married,” implying that he ultimately recovers from the trauma of losing Lucy.

What role does Mina play in the plot to defeat Dracula?

Mina plays a pivotal role in the plot to defeat Dracula, contributing skills and insights that complement those of her male counterparts. Not only does she express an earnest desire to be “useful” to her companions, but Mina repeatedly advances their cause through her foresight, ingenuity, and resourcefulness. While the novel ends with a battle scene in which four men (Morris, Holmwood, Dr. Seward, and Harker) overpower the caravan that bears Dracula to his castle, this display of physical strength would not have been possible without several equally important instances of Mina’s ingenuity and resourcefulness. Mina intuitively understands the importance of documenting her experiences, and she realizes early on that such information will be valuable to Van Helsing. Transcribing both her diary and her husband’s journal, she enables the others to become “master of all the facts.” Mina’s documentary instincts even influence other characters, as Van Helsing reveals that Lucy also began a diary “in imitation of” Mina. Lucy’s diary, in turn, provides the group with crucial information about the nature of her death.

Mina’s care for the facts ultimately leads her to arrange all the available materials (including newspaper clippings) in chronological order. It would not be too far to say that Mina becomes the leading “editor” of this narrative. She is responsible for the survival of their written records, and Harker credits her in such terms: “[I]t is due to her energy and brains and foresight that the whole story is put together in such a way that every point tells.” Van Helsing and Dracula also highlight the importance of these documents. The former returns to them repeatedly in search of clues, while the latter destroys all the copies he can find. Mina’s cleverness and foresight extend into other realms as well. Her knowledge of the train schedules, which she first developed in order to support Harker’s work, becomes crucial to the pursuit of Dracula. She readily supplies details about train departures during the final chase. Her analytical skills also prove key in the chase to Castle Dracula—working logically through the the written evidence, including transcripts of her own speech under hypnosis, she figures out Dracula’s most probable path forward.

Mina’s reserves of ingenuity and resourcefulness continually impress her companions, who tend to see these as masculine qualities. Van Helsing, for instance, says that Mina has “a man’s brain” alongside “a woman’s heart.”

While this description reflects a traditional Victorian sensibility about gender roles, it also frames Mina as uniquely endowed with a range of necessary skills that no one else in the group fully represents. Indeed, Mina does have a sympathetic and compassionate nature that balances out her companions. She becomes a sort of mother-figure to the men, providing emotional support to both Holmwood and Morris after the death of (vampire) Lucy. Likewise, she cares tenderly for a weakened Harker after he escapes his captivity in Castle Dracula. Perhaps most importantly, Mina expresses sympathy for Dracula himself. She reminds the men that their mission is one of Christian salvation, not vengeance, and encourages them to feel compassion for Dracula. True to her word, Mina later expresses gladness to see a peaceful look spread over Dracula's face in the moment of his death. In this way, Mina is the moral bedrock of the group: her message of Christian sympathy tempers other perspectives, including her husband's passionate hatred for the vampire.

Given Mina's obvious skills and insights, it is ironic that her companions continually underestimate her importance to their mission. In their desire to protect her from harm, the men initially attempt to shut her out after she transcribes all the documents. When she later develops a mental connection with Dracula, they try to shut her out again, this time in fear Dracula will learn their plans through her. In fact, the opposite proves true: her connection to Dracula is crucial to their quest, and Mina (of course) is the first to realize this fact. She encourages Van Helsing to hypnotize her and inquire into Dracula's location, providing information they need to follow and destroy him. Mina's role is essential to the novel, which frames her as a blend of essential traits: resourcefulness, ingenuity, sympathy, and compassion. These traits make her essential not only to the mission, but to the roles of Christian wife and mother that she will fulfill by the novel's end.