

WORLDVIEW GUIDE

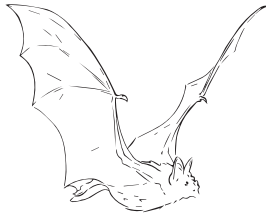
DRACULA



Grant Horner

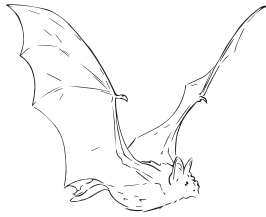


*For my daughter Rachel,
who hates scary things,
loves wonderful things, and
recognizes that some things are . . . both.*



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INTRODUCTION

“Denn die Todten reiten Schnell.”

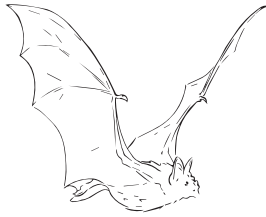
For the dead travel fast.

Bram Stoker’s 1897 Gothic novel, *Dracula*, features many of the most powerful tropes in fictional narrative: suspense, love, seduction, heroism, sacrifice, and the burning desire for some form of immortality.

Deeply contrasting settings—East and West, London and Transylvania, the sophisticated city and the wild mountains, aristocratic mansions and dank vaults, a happy home and a lunatic asylum—present a binary world that finds its ultimate formulation in the eternal conflict between good and evil.

The long train journey of young English solicitor Jonathan Harker as he enters Transylvania clarifies this bifurcation in the opening paragraph: “The impression I had was that we were leaving the West and entering the East.”

The undead vampire Dracula's plan is to abandon the East and invade the West, leaving his crumbling mountain castle for the vitality of central London in search of fresh blood and new life.



WORLDVIEW ANALYSIS

The opening and closing of the nineteenth century saw the production of two of modern literature's greatest mythic works of fear and dread: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). The former was written by a teenage lady; the latter by a middle-aged man. Mary, writing in Switzerland, was an essentially exiled young woman in a highly unorthodox and scandalous relationship with an older man, while Bram was a successful and married member of the London cultured classes. Stoker in many ways exemplified the circumspect Victorian era, while Shelley was a classic Romantic rebel like her poet husband, Percy. *Frankenstein* tells the story of a creator and his tortured creature, made by science but formed as a monster unfit for society; *Dracula* features a nobleman accursed with an eternal life that must be purchased by drinking the blood of an endless train of innocent victims. Both tales deal with universal themes of life

and death, morality and immortality, and good and evil. Both novelists use the device of multiple narrative perspectives to add depth, complexity, and richness to their stories. Each story is deeply unsettling in its own way, and part of what makes them so simultaneously disturbing and fascinating is the way the authors manage to force us to wrestle with important spiritual questions. While Shelley clearly rejected orthodox Christianity, Stoker's position is more ambiguous. Yet both writers deal with some of the very questions that the Bible is concerned with. What is good? What is evil? What is life, and where does it come from? And is life eternal—or somehow limited? The ultimate question being, of course, *what is man?*

What both novels share is an undeniable mythmaking power. Cultural production is filled with various kinds of myths, which are stories we tell ourselves to explain ourselves to ourselves—our origin, purpose, and end. Myths are not necessarily fictional in the loosest sense of the word; they are true in a larger manner, like the parables of Jesus, which speak truth as fictional representations of eternal realities.

Myths that are forgotten have lost their power over us. Even rank pagans can recite many of Jesus' most famous parables, and the fables of Aesop, and the plotline of *Oedipus Rex*.³ Things that frighten us remain impressed on our later thoughts. Horror and fantasy narratives are

3. Please note that I am not equating these stories but, rather, comparing how they work in human culture.