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Animals and the Predator Motif in *Dracula*

In Bram Stoker's classic horror novel, *Dracula*, the most ominous powers that Dracula displays are his ability to manipulate animals as well as transform into them. These abilities add to the savagery and suspense of the novel and Dracula's position as the ultimate predator. Stoker repeatedly references animals in strange ways through their service to Dracula, Dracula's transformative ability, and Dracula's own name. Dracula is compared to animals through his name and Harker's journaling before the revelation comes that he can transform into two kinds of animals, a bat and a dog. He also has the ability to command animals, evidenced by his interactions with wolves. Another inclusion of animals comes from Renfield, a patient in an insane asylum, who has an unnatural predilection to collect and eat insects and animals in larger and larger degrees. The recurring theme of animals serves to nail the growing suspense characters experience during the events of *Dracula* through a hierarchy of various predators with Dracula at the top as the ultimate predator.

The suspense begins to build at the first instance of savage animals, occurring when wild wolves pursue the carriage that Jonathan Harker travels to Dracula's castle in. Harker has just arrived in Transylvania, and he and his driver are attacked by several wolves in the forest. They force the carriage to a stop and form a circle around it. Harker writes "I saw all around us a ring of wolves...They were a hundred times more terrible in the grim silence which held them than even when they howled" (11). This behavior is eerie given the setting and gloom but taking into account that this is highly unnatural behaviour of wolves adds to the chilling fear that this scene inspires. The first chapter mirrors the novel in the element of escalation. Before the wolves make their physical appearance, they are harbingered by a dog's barking. And the very presence of the wolves builds suspense which is heightened by their behavior. This suspense is a foreshadowing

of the further horror follows throughout the plot. Keridiana Chez, a writer for *Victorian Review*, states that "[a] dog's barking repeatedly precedes the appearance of wolves" (79). Chez is specifically referring to the scene in the first chapter when the wolves form a ring around the carriage. The dog barking is a somewhat normal occurrence, but it is just the beginning, as the sinister nature of the scene unfolds and escalates. The wolves' savagery is held in check by the driver of the carriage but they provide suspense and fear which Stoker builds upon through other experiences with animals as the novel continues.

The interaction with the wolves is also the first point of crisis by representing the beginning of fear and the start of the predator motif. It is through the encounter that Dracula is first introduced, although it is not clear at the beginning that he is also the driver of the carriage. However, as the scene unfolds, there is clearly something supernatural occurring. The wolves' behaviour and the ability of the unknown driver to make them cease their prowling shows that something here in Transylvania is wrong. Guessing just *what* is wrong grows suspense. After the encounter with the wolves, Harker recounts "This was all so strange and uncanny that a dreadful fear came upon me, and I was afraid to speak or move" (11). Harker is unable to make sense of what has happened and he experiences a fear of this bizarre occurrence which cannot be explained. This first point of crisis is merely the beginning, however, and there is worse to come. David Seed, writer for *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, states that "The four chapters of Harker's journal all end on a point of crisis: the attack by the wolves, his realization that he is a prisoner, his near seduction, and his vision of Dracula in his box. The progression of events is remorselessly toward confronting Dracula's own vampirism" (64). Seed's list of Harker's journal entries is important because it lays out how the novel becomes more and more sinister, moving towards a final confrontation – and it all begins with the appearance of the wolves. Dracula is

able to control them, which points to his own savage nature and hints that he is not a mere mortal.

Harker's first instance of seeing Dracula act in a manner similar to an animal occurs at the castle in chapter two when Dracula scales down the castle walls. Harker is aware by now that something is wrong and that he is a prisoner but he is still realizing the full nature of the horror that is coming. Harker looks out his window and reports in his journal "I saw the whole man slowly emerge from the window and begin to crawl down the castle wall over that dreadful abyss, *face down* with his cloak spreading around him like great wings" (29). This is a feat that no normal man could do and it chills Harker as he makes notes about what he has seen. The next day, Harker writes that he has once again seen this occurrence and this time he uses the adjective "lizard fashion" to describe the manner in which the Count leaves his castle. While Dracula does not actually physically transform into an animal during these particular scenes, he still displays characteristics of one and is compared to a lizard by the hapless Harker; these characteristics are foreshadowing of how he eventually reveals himself as the ultimate predator.

Dracula uses his ability to transform into animals to fulfill his nefarious purposes; this ability is first revealed by the account of the ship whose crew all died. Stoker's revelation of the surviving dog is not just routinely revealed, it is drawn out through a captain's account of what he and his men went through in chapter seven of the novel. The captain's log gradually grows in intensity of horror as it recounts how the crew was lost, day by day, man by man, until he is the only one left standing. As the ship finally docks, a large black dog leaps from the ship and runs away, not to be seen again. While this is a strange occurrence, none of the townspeople are fully aware of what it means. In fact, they even search for the animal to care for it: "No trace has ever been found of the great dog; at which there is much mourning, for, with public opinion in its

present state, he would, I believe, be adopted by the town" (74). The dog who jumps off the ship is assumed by the townspeople to be a normal dog. The account is written in a detached manner which imparts danger in a roundabout way without a word on Dracula's arrival in England. Stoker wraps his meanings in shadow, allowing the audience to discern the truth of the dog's arrival. Dracula is able to make his way to England by means of disguising himself as a dog, using the guise of an animal to come to a new country for feeding.

This account seems out of place originally, not fitting into the usual patterns or mentions in the novel because Stoker does not make explicit what this means. Its purpose is not immediately clear, and even when the chapter ends with the dog embarking on England's soil, there is more of an ominous feeling than a concrete knowledge that Dracula is now here and on the prowl. The account from the captain, brimming with sinister details, gives the appearance of non-fiction. And indeed, a real occurrence inspires this section. When researching for his novel, Stoker came across a story that undoubtedly gave him the inspiration for this; J.D. Barker and Dacre Stoker, writers for *Time*, recount: Stoker spoke to several members of the Royal Coast Guard who provided details about a ship named Dmitri which ran aground with only a few members of the crew alive. When the ship stopped moving, a large black dog ran from the hull up the hill to disappear in the graveyard of the local church. This article confirms that Stoker knew about a real instance incredibly similar to the one he featured in his novel. While the story of a dog escaping from a ship with few survivors was a real account, Stoker takes it and shapes it into an intense reveal of Dracula's powers of animal transformation.

Dracula transforms himself into a bat in order to make his way into Lucy's bedroom and drain her of her blood without raising suspicion. *Dracula* features the existence and use of many animals but the explanation of how Dracula transforms into a bat to gain entry into Lucy and

Mina's bedrooms is especially sinister. He accosts the young women at night and bats are known to be nighttime creatures which causes his presence to be ignored. On the occasions when his presence as a bat is noted, Lucy dismisses it. Lucy writes in her diary that she is sleeping despite "[the] bats or something flapp[ing] almost angrily against the window-panes" (116). The novel earlier states that Dracula cannot enter a dwelling unless he is welcomed in, however, as a bat, the same rule does not apply. He uses his powers of transformation to gain entry into a place where he could not venture in his human-like form. Dracula deliberately chooses to disguise himself as a bat in order to divert suspicion while gaining entry to the house with subterfuge.

Dracula establishes the association of bats with vampires and since Stoker writes with inspiration for his novel from real life instances, he uses a bat as a creature for Dracula to transform into. The general public is aware of the existence of vampire bats at this time and due to the unusual nature of the creature, it captures the interest and imagination of the Victorians. The article, "The Word Vampires," covers this in its abstract: "Bram Stoker...would have been well aware of the vampire bat when he invented his Transylvanian villain" (49). Stoker's gloomy tale of horror comes from a nightmare and he looks to inspire the feelings of fear and unease in his readers. By using animals to do so, he gives a secret ominous nature to Dracula. Stoker uses a real animal that is frightening and similar to his titular villain to heighten the eerie effect of his story.

The only type of animal who enjoys a recurring role through multiple features is a wolf, the most savage of all the animals Stoker includes. While wolves are the first animals who are mentioned in the novel, their role is not limited to this one fearsome introduction. Later on, when Dracula lands in England, he needs an animal to serve him so he approaches the zoo. After Dracula visits the zoo and calms the wolves in their enclosure, he has a talk with the zookeeper

which the zookeeper recounts to a journalist. Later, a wolf mysteriously escapes from the zoo. The zookeeper states "when I kem opposite to old Bersicker's cage I see the rails broken and twisted about" (119). This side plot seems strange at first, different from the narrative of the main plot but there is no doubt that Dracula is involved. He waits and uses the wolf to break into Lucy's house. Lucy's diary tells the account, "There was a crash at the window, and a lot of broken glass was hurled on the floor...in the aperture of the broken panes there was the head of a great, gaunt grey wolf" (123). In the first encounter with wolves, Dracula drives them away, but in this instance in the novel he uses a wolf for his advantage. The savagery of the animal is put to good use serving its more savage master.

It is because of a wolf's ferocious manner that Dracula can will it to his purposes because he needs a predatory animal. Dracula is a calm collected villain and he plans ahead. By freeing the wolf from the zoo, he is preparing to use it later. This particular animal is useful because of its controllability and fierce nature. Shumpei Fukuhara, author of "Otherness and Animality in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: Zoos, Hunting, and Rabies," wrote that "it is important to note that Dracula's influence on animals is limited to wild or violent ones" (2). Dracula relates to wolves because of their savage nature. Wolves are the first animals that are introduced in the novel and it is through a wolf breaking the window of Lucy's house that Dracula is able to gain entry. All the animals that *Dracula* has any association with, especially wolves, are of a violent and savage nature which reflects Dracula's own monstrosity.

The character of Renfield, the patient in Dr. Seward's insane asylum, has an abnormal predilection with animals and his role to Dracula presents him as a mystery within the larger puzzle of the book's plot. When Renfield is first introduced, it is unclear what his presence indicates. Dr. Seward is even more oblivious than the audience. He views Renfield as an

interesting and dangerous study but he realizes the connection to Dracula later than the audience does. This is by design as it follows the rest of the novel's pattern of allowing the audience to connect plot points and make realizations before characters do. Renfield's strange nature is eventually explained through his service to Dracula.

Renfield is an unusual creature whose odd nature develops from his own relationship with animals. Renfield begins to collect flies, a disturbing habit as it is, but it becomes worse with the revelation that he is collecting the flies in order to feed and plump up spiders. However, the disturbing plan does not stop there. In turn, he wants to feed the spiders to birds and to feed the birds to cats. Dr. Seward is accommodating at first, but when Renfield asks for cats to feed the birds to, Seward denies him. Renfield is unable to let his plot go, and so without the cats, he begins to eat the birds himself. Seward mentions this in his journal: "The attendant has just been to me to say that Renfield has been very sick and disgorged a whole lot of feathers. 'My belief is, doctor,' he said, 'that he has eaten his birds, and that he just took and ate them raw!'" (61). This progression that Renfield displays in a subplot mirrors the main plot's developments in a chain of supply manner. The smaller weaker insects are eaten by the larger animals. Animals are used in *Dracula* to demonstrate the main plot of Dracula hunting weaker animals than himself.

Dracula's own name is a reflection of animals. Stoker bases the character of Dracula off of a real Romanian prince who was known for his cruelty. Just as Stoker looks to find real inspiration for the story about the dog on the ship that had suffered casualties, he also finds inspiration for his main villain in a real instance. Erik Baker explains the origin of the name in his book chapter "*Dracula: Vampiric Contagion in the Late Nineteenth Century*": "On one hand, 'Dracula' is the diminutive form of the Latin *draco*, 'serpent' or 'dragon'...on the other hand, in medieval Christian iconography, the dragon symbolizes the Devil" (108). Baker explains the

origins of the name which was given to the Romanian prince as a nickname and eventually used by Stoker for his novel. 'Dracula' finds its translation in the name of two very predatory lethal animals. Dracula's name is reminiscent of fearsome animals, carrying on Stoker's use of animals to convey terror.

Dracula is the ultimate threat, more so than any of the animals that he employs to do his will. While wolves, bats, and even Renfield are fearsome, Dracula is the clear main enemy to defeat because of his displayed prowess and never-ending ability to enact evil. He is seen as the ultimate predator for the novel. The authors of "The New Naturalism: Primal Screams in Abraham Stoker's *Dracula*," Carrol Fry and Carla Edwards, write that texts that portray the predator-prey relationship stir the shiver of fear, and Dracula is such a predator (45). Fry and Edwards place Dracula under the label of a predator and as such, he is the villain who must be defeated for the protagonists to live in peace. While Dracula uses a variety of animals to fulfill his nefarious purposes, he remains the ultimate predator.

Stoker uses animals in *Dracula* to evoke feelings of unease and the sinister presence of the titular foe. Animals are natural and everywhere, and by subverting them, Stoker further fuels the feeling that something is wrong and nature has been twisted. Dracula can control animals and transform into them to serve his purposes. Not only this, but Renfield also has a grotesque fascination with animals. Renfield is human and his service to Dracula is a reflection of Renfield forcing smaller animals to serve larger ones. The animal motif throughout the novel divulges that Dracula is the ultimate predator, a fearsome monster who is worse than an animal and who must be defeated before any semblance of peace can be attained.

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