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## **Perception, Rationality and Corruption in Bram Stoker's *Dracula***

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### **Abstract**

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* utilizes ocular imagery as a potent symbolic device, exploring the complex intersections of good and evil, perception and reality, and the seductive yet destructive nature of power. This paper aims to analyze the function of the eye motif within the novel, arguing that it serves not only to delineate character transformations and moral states but also to expose a profound epistemological anxiety prevalent in Victorian society. Specifically, this study will investigate how Stoker employs the visual realm to interrogate the reliability of perception, the boundaries between the self and the other, and the very nature of truth in the face of the uncanny. By examining the recurring motif of the gaze, this paper seeks to demonstrate how *Dracula* constructs a world where the act of seeing, and being seen, becomes a site of struggle, control, and potential corruption. Furthermore, we will consider how the visual language of *Dracula* reflects and reinforces Victorian cultural anxieties surrounding female sexuality, particularly in relation to the perceived threat of female agency and the blurring of boundaries between purity and corruption. Ultimately, this study aims to demonstrate that the pervasive use of ocular imagery in *Dracula* is not merely decorative but rather a crucial element in the novel's exploration of epistemological uncertainty and the precarious nature of human understanding in a world grappling with the liminal and the monstrous.

**Keywords:** red eyes; evil eye; good and evil; perception; attraction; corruption; the self.

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## 1. Introduction

In the nineteenth-century literature, the symbolism of eyes serves as a profound motif, reflecting the era's exploration of perception, morality, and social dynamics. For the Romantics, the eye embodies the connection between the inner self and the external world, often symbolizing insight, intuition, and the sublime. In [5] the Mariner's eyes are described as "glittering," a term that conveys both the supernatural allure and the moral consequences of his actions. This description underscores the Romantic fascination with the gaze as a window into the soul and a conduit for deeper understanding. Transitioning to the Victorian era, the symbolism of eyes evolves to reflect societal concerns and the complexities of human nature. In [2], visual perception serves as a conduit for both sexual and social dominance, highlighting the social hierarchies of the time as noted in [3]. On explaining the possible reason for the prevalence of visual perception over other senses in the literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century [6: 60] states, "The eye is *primus inter pares* and has a tendency to tyrannize over the other senses and over other eyes". Several scholars have analyzed themes of power and the gaze in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. In his influential essay [1] discusses how the novel reflects Victorian fears of reverse colonization, with Dracula's invasion of England symbolizing the colonized striking back at the colonizers. Reference [1] argues that Dracula embodies the "racial Other" and his hypnotic influence represents a threat to British identity and purity. Several other scholars have analyzed Bram Stoker's *Dracula* through a postcolonial lens, focusing on themes of foreignness and the Count's hypnotic gaze as manifestations of imperial anxieties and the concept of the "other." Reference [8] discuss Dracula's gaze, noting descriptions of his hard cold look and red eyes, and explore the visual connection between Dracula and other fictional representations. Reference [24] discusses how Dracula's sexual power subverts traditional norms, highlighting the dynamics of the gaze within the narrative. Reference [3] examines how the novel portrays the exotic and dangerous East, integrating vampiric tropes into imperialist rhetoric. Reference [4: 63] attributes the novel's lasting appeal to its depiction of Dracula as a figure that is "largely human while simultaneously a fantastical incarnation of evil". Reference [9]'s analysis presents Dracula as a novel that does not merely reinforce Victorian anxieties but actively reveals the tensions between the ruling and oppressed classes, the modern and the archaic, and the dominant and the repressed. His work highlights the return of suppressed fears—both psychological and social—through the figure of the vampire. Additionally, Psychoanalytic criticism examining ocular imagery in Bram Stoker's "Dracula" includes works such as [24] which analyzes the novel's imagery through Gilbert Durand's framework, focusing on visual symbols and their psychological implications. Overall, the study of *Dracula's* ocular imagery reveals its complex engagement with power, sexuality, otherness, and the precarious nature of human understanding and invites for more criticism and insight.

Furthermore, scholarship has begun to explore the ocular motif in relation to modern technologies of observation, such as photography and surveillance, drawing parallels between Victorian fears of the unseen and contemporary concerns about privacy and control. Critics like [16] have linked Dracula's manipulation of sight and invisibility to early cinematic and photographic anxieties, positioning the vampire as a figure that both resists and exploits technological visibility. As technology advances, the fear of being observed—along with the loss of control over one's own image—becomes a central concern in both Victorian and modern literature, with *Dracula* acting as a precursor to contemporary fears of surveillance and invasion of privacy [16]. Others, such as [12], have expanded the conversation by analyzing the interplay between vision and gender, arguing that

female characters' experiences of being seen are tied to structures of patriarchal surveillance and control. Reference [12]'s seminal work on the "male gaze" provides a lens through which to explore the ways in which the gaze in *Dracula* is not only a source of power but also a mechanism of subjugation, particularly regarding the female characters in the text. This theory of the gaze resonates with the novel's treatment of Mina and Lucy, whose transitions from innocence to victimhood are marked by the objectification and sexualization of their gazes.

Recent studies in eco-Gothic criticism have suggested a deeper connection between sight and nature in *Dracula*, which reflects Victorian anxieties about the loss of control over the environment and the inability to truly "see" the natural world in a rapidly industrializing society. Reference [15] argues that *Dracula* represents a cultural confrontation between human sight and the limits of nature, as the Count's supernatural abilities blur the boundaries between the natural and the unnatural. Dracula's resistance to reflection—his inability to appear in mirrors—symbolizes the friction between the visible and the hidden, the known and the unknown, echoing Victorian fears about the potential dangers of scientific knowledge that cannot be fully seen or understood. Reference [15] also links these fears to contemporary ecological concerns, suggesting that the Gothic form anticipates modern environmental anxieties. In this way, the novel's ocular imagery serves not only as a metaphor for personal and moral surveillance but also as an exploration of humanity's fraught relationship with the natural world and its inability to fully "see" or control it.

Recent critical works on *Dracula* offer fresh perspectives that delve into its complex cultural and historical contexts. Reference [18] explores the intersection of medicine, psychiatry, and Gothic literature, highlighting how Victorian medical knowledge and cultural anxieties about mental health influenced Stoker's portrayal of vampirism. The book discusses themes like the representation of doctors in Gothic fiction, asylums, and diseases resembling vampirism, offering new insights into the medical undercurrents of the novel. Similarly, Reference [11] examines the transformation of Dracula's character from literature to film, emphasizing how 1930s cinema and real-life crime influenced the portrayal of vampires and serial killers. Their analysis situates *Dracula* within a broader transmedial framework, exploring how the novel's iconic figure was reinterpreted across various media forms, from literature to film, reshaping its cultural significance. These works provide innovative angles on Stoker's *Dracula*, shedding light on the novel's lasting impact in both medical and cinematic discourse.

Overall, the study of *Dracula*'s ocular imagery reveals its complex engagement with power, sexuality, otherness, psychological instability, technological change, and the precarious nature of human understanding. As these critics have shown, the eye in *Dracula* is not simply a passive organ of perception but an active participant in the construction of reality, identity, and social order. The novel's use of ocular imagery invites ongoing critical discussion, linking Victorian fears to broader cultural and psychological concerns, and offering rich opportunities for further exploration in both literary and theoretical contexts.

## **2. Ocular Submission: "the red eye" and "the evil eye"**

Ocular imagery pervades *Dracula*, serving as a crucial vehicle for exploring themes of power, perception, and

identity. The fact that the word "eyes" appears 187 times underscores the novel's thematic preoccupation with vision, perception, and the eyes as a conduit for supernatural influence. Eyes function as more than mere instruments of sight; they become sites of control, vulnerability, and transformation. The novel's fixation on vision—whether through Dracula's piercing gaze, Mina's telepathic sight, or the hypnotic trances that blur autonomy—underlines the instability of selfhood and the porous boundaries between observer and observed. By embedding such imagery throughout the text, Stoker not only heightens the novel's gothic tension but also interrogates the ways in which vision shapes identity and the struggle between dominance and submission.

It primarily functions as a profound symbol reflecting the dichotomy between good and evil. Jonathan Harker, during his journey to the Carpathians, observes fellow travelers making the sign of the cross to ward off the "evil eye," a gesture underscoring the pervasive fear of malevolent ocular influence. Stoker employs the "evil eye" motif to foreshadow Dracula's formidable power and insatiable thirst for human blood. Folkloric traditions often associate glowing red eyes with demonic flames and eternal damnation, symbolizing the vampire's cursed existence between life and death [20]. Mina, the central female protagonist, becomes the focal point where the opposing forces converge: the virtuous, represented by the cohort of vampire hunters, and the malevolent, embodied by Dracula and the female vampires of Transylvania. While ocular imagery permeates the narrative, it is Mina's gaze that illuminates the ultimate triumph of good over evil. Dracula's eyes are frequently depicted as blazing red, signifying a sinister desire for domination. Stoker assigns this characteristic to his antagonists, drawing a parallel between their fiery eyes and their yearning for both blood and corporeal possession, but also to point to the damned position of the vampire figure to ramble between the two states: "dead" and "undead." During Dracula's initial assault on Mina, as her husband lies unconscious, his eyes shine with demonic passion. Similarly, after Lucy's first encounter with Dracula, Mina recalls his pale face with blazing eyes, an image indelibly etched in her memory. She later perceives these red eyes reflected in the sunlight on the windows of the Whitby church. Following the incident with the wolf at the zoo, a keeper describes a man with a cruel, cold gaze and red eyes, further emphasizing Dracula's predatory nature. Even in her dreams, Mina envisions Dracula as a morning mist, within which she discerns a light resembling a "red eye." This red hue carries sexual connotations, transforming into a grotesque distortion of the biblical "pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night" [13: 348], directly alluding to [13: 13:21]. Here, the sexual undertones are secondary to the overarching theme of usurping divine omnipresence. Stoker's nuanced use of ocular imagery not only delineates the boundaries between good and evil but also delves into themes of control, desire, and the subversion of religious symbolism. The recurring emphasis on eyes throughout the novel serves as a testament to their symbolic potency, reflecting the complex interplay between light and darkness, purity and corruption, and ultimately, the human struggle against malevolent forces.

*Dracula* frequently emphasizes the demonic power ascribed to the male vampire, symbolically represented by the color red, which signifies both peril and implicit sexual undertones. His "fiery eyes" radiate a dual essence—both a seductive warmth and a malevolent, hate-filled power. This duality is vividly encapsulated in his declaration: "My revenge is just begun! I spread it through the centuries, and time is on my side. Your girls, whom you all love, are already mine, and through them, you and the others will be mine" [13: 413]. The recurring emphasis on his eyes functions as a visual marker of his predatory nature and the existential threat he poses to his victims but also his sexual appetite which Stoker conflates with hunger. When Harker accidentally

cuts himself while shaving, the vampire's eyes glint with what can only be described as demonic lust, revealing his barely concealed hunger. Similarly, the eyes of the female vampires exhibit a parallel gleam when they hungrily approach Harker's exposed neck, reinforcing the consistent association between the predatory gaze and the underlying themes of seduction, danger, and transgression.

The novel intertwines themes of sexuality and hunger in another scene where Jonathan Harker encounters the three female vampires in Dracula's castle. Their predatory seduction is both terrifying and deeply sensual, as Harker finds himself unable to resist their allure despite his fear. The passage vividly conveys the vampires' dual nature as both erotic and deadly creatures:

There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips. It is not good to note this down, lest some day it should meet Mina's eyes and cause her pain; but it is the truth" [13: 38]

Here, Stoker masterfully depicts Harker's simultaneous desire and dread, highlighting how the female vampires blur the line between sensual pleasure and predatory hunger. The sexual longing that Harker experiences is sinful as then he thinks about Mina and betraying her with his yearning for these alluring females, and illustrates how these vampires represent forbidden sexuality, challenging Victorian ideals of female purity. At the same time, their hunger for blood underscores their lethal nature, reinforcing the novel's theme that unchecked female sexuality is both enticing and dangerous. Their hypnotic presence overwhelms him, reducing him to a passive, almost childlike state. His desire to "be kissed by those red lips" [13: 38] reveals his complete surrender to their seduction, while his conflicted submission is further emphasized when he states, "I lay quiet, looking out from under my eyelashes in an agony of delightful anticipation" [13: 38]. Fear and desire intertwine, and Harker's inability to maintain control is reflected in his repeated closing of his eyes, an unconscious attempt to shut out his own temptation. However, when Dracula intervenes, Harker's eyes "involuntarily open", yet even this action is driven by the Count's commanding and enslaving presence [13: 39]. The visual hierarchy is clear—Harker's gaze is no match for the vampires' intoxicating allure or the Count's absolute dominion, reinforcing the novel's broader themes of submission, power, and the dangers of unrestrained desire.

### **3. Emotional and Rational Weakness**

The character of Jonathan Harker is intricately connected to recurring images of visual activity, which function as markers of his shifting psychological state. Unlike the supernatural power of Dracula's gaze, Harker's visual experience is characterized by uncertainty and vulnerability. On his journey to the Count's castle, Harker's initial reaction is one of disbelief and doubt. His encounter with the legendary blue flame causes him to question the reliability of his perception, prompting him to rub his eyes in an effort to reconcile the visible with the real. The castle itself appears to him as an otherworldly apparition, blurring the boundaries between reality and illusion. This destabilization of perceptual certainty aligns with epistemological anxieties of the period, reflecting a broader Victorian preoccupation with the limits of human knowledge and the fragility of empirical truth. Despite these unsettling experiences, Harker resolves "to keep the knowledge and the fear to himself, with his eyes open" [13: 40], symbolizing a conscious decision to remain vigilant in the face of danger. However, this

determination quickly falters as he succumbs to Dracula's superior visual and psychological power.

This motif of visual domination continues upon Harker's second encounter with Dracula in London. The intensity of his reaction underscores his lingering trauma from the Transylvanian ordeal. "His eyes seemed bulging out as, half in terror and half in amazement, he gazed at a tall, thin man, with a beaky nose and black moustache and pointed beard" [17: 172] upon seeing the Count, an indication of the profound psychological impact of their previous encounter. Mina's observation that, shortly thereafter, a vacant look overtakes Harker, and his eyes close, signals his increasing inability to trust his perception or process reality. Harker's wavering between doubt and resolve reflects his fragile state of mind, illustrating how the visual realm in *Dracula* is more than a tool of perception—it becomes a battleground for power, control, and survival. During the final pursuit of Dracula, Harker nearly falls under the influence of the female vampires, reflecting the persistent threat of visual domination. As Harker begins to fall asleep, a sleep with open eyes, like one who surrenders to sensual obsession, the distinction between wakefulness and submission collapses. This state of "sleep with open eyes" epitomizes the seductive and invasive nature of Dracula's power, where his victims become complicit in their own downfall, surrendering consciously yet helplessly to his will. Reference [24] focuses on the epistemological conflict between reason and faith within the novel. Reference [24] examines how characters, particularly Jonathan Harker, transition from a reliance on empirical knowledge to an acceptance of supernatural realities, challenging their initial perceptions of the world.

Van Helsing functions as the epistemic and ethical authority in the novel's overarching dichotomy between good and evil. Unlike many of the other characters, he is rarely portrayed as a victim of Dracula's visual dominance. His resistance to the vampire's gaze sets him apart and emphasizes his role as a figure of strength and reason. While tear-filled eyes are a recurring motif in *Dracula*, symbolizing emotional vulnerability, blurred perception, and susceptibility to Dracula's influence, Van Helsing's eyes remain notably dry. After Lucy's death, Dr. Seward rationalizes this lack of tears by suggesting that Van Helsing's emotional detachment stemmed from a lesser degree of personal affection for Lucy. This absence of tears signals Van Helsing's ability to maintain clarity and composure, reinforcing his role as the most clear-sighted and objective character. Some critical interpretations such as [22] emphasizes the symbolic implications of the blood transfusions, equating them to acts of sexual intimacy and binding Van Helsing to Lucy as one of her metaphorical suitors through the exchange of bodily fluids. Nevertheless, Van Helsing does not succumb to emotional or physical weakness during or after these acts. Even when visibly shaken by Lucy's suffering and ultimate transformation, his response is markedly different from the tearful reactions of Seward, Arthur, and Quincey. Stoker reinforces Van Helsing's role as the rational protector by consistently describing his unwavering gaze during moments of crisis. Whether overseeing Lucy's transfusions or conducting hypnosis sessions with Mina, Van Helsing's fixed gaze reflects his resolute focus on his mission to defeat the vampire. However, even Van Helsing is not entirely immune to the seductive power of the vampire's gaze. Stoker subtly hints at the limits of human willpower when describing moments of near-surrender. The female vampires attempt to seduce Van Helsing as they did with Jonathan Harker earlier in the novel: "Then, alas! I knew. Did I not, I would soon have learned, for the wheeling figures of mist and snow came closer, but keeping ever without the Holy circle. Then they began to materialise, till—if God have not take away my reason, for I saw it through my eyes —there were before me in actual flesh the same three women that Jonathan saw in the room. . ." [17: 367] Van Helsing experiences a

moment of cognitive dissonance and self-doubt when confronted by the three female vampires. Their sudden and alluring presence causes him to question the reliability of his own perception and the stability of his rational judgment. Despite his extensive knowledge of vampiric entities, he momentarily struggles to reconcile his scientific reasoning with the supernatural reality before him, creating an internal conflict regarding the authenticity of his experience. Van Helsing's steadfastness ultimately distinguishes him from the other male characters, yet his experience highlights that even the most disciplined and determined figures in *Dracula* are not entirely immune to the overwhelming visual and psychological power of the vampire. His clear vision and resistance may offer a temporary advantage, but Stoker's use of visual motifs underscores the ever-present danger of succumbing to Dracula's influence, a danger from which no character is fully exempt. As the narrative progresses towards its climax in Transylvania, Jonathan Harker resolves there must be no more tears, emphasizing the necessity for resolute clarity in the face of pervasive evil. When the vampire hunters come back, Dr. Seward writes in his diary: "We men were all in tears now. There was no resisting them, and we wept openly." Throughout the novel, the vampire hunters have been relentless and logical, driven by duty and necessity. Their tears represent a release of the emotional burdens they have carried—fear, grief, and exhaustion. Throughout the novel, the men have been expected to be rational, strong, and emotionally controlled. This breaking down of barriers at the climax suggests that their humanity has triumphed over their rigid sense of duty. The open weeping of the male characters challenges the Victorian ideal of stoic masculinity. *Dracula* is rich in subversion, challenging traditional Victorian norms and expectations in multiple areas. Beyond the subversion of masculinity seen in the vampire hunters' open weeping, the novel also disrupts conventional gender roles, morality, and societal structures, particularly through the subversion of female motherhood, and sexuality. One of the most grotesque and chilling moments in *Dracula* occurs when the three vampire women, often described as Dracula's brides, receive a sack of babies from the Count to feast upon. This moment directly perverts the Victorian ideal of the nurturing, protective mother. Instead of caring for infants, these women consume them. The novel presents vampirism as a corruption of motherhood, where instead of giving life, these women take it violently.

#### **4. Visual Distinction: Mortal and Vampiric Female Characters**

Among the various representations of the gaze, the eyes of the female characters—Lucy and Mina—become the most evocative, functioning as both literal and metaphorical reflections of their transformation. Stoker contrasts their pure, mortal states with their later, lascivious vampiric appearances, presenting visual perception as an essential battleground between light and darkness, morality and corruption. The overt sexual undertones in the descriptions of their eyes further serve to underscore Victorian anxieties surrounding female sexuality and moral decay.

Dracula's influence on Lucy is apparent from her earliest moments of affliction. One of the clearest signs of her demonic possession is her sleepwalking—a well-known Victorian symptom of spiritual vulnerability. Victorian texts including somnambulism, according to [21: 7] affirm its connection to spiritual and psychological fragility and "are powerful examples of a cultural expression of the possibilities and anxieties associated with what was seen, on the one hand, as a doubling of consciousness, and, on the other, as a fracturing of individuality." When Mina discovers her leaning out of the window in her sleep, Lucy's unconscious state is marked by her closed

eyes. Her awakening signifies a brief return to mortal consciousness, but as Dracula's hold on her tightens, her gaze becomes increasingly suggestive of her spiritual and physical decline. During Dr. Seward's first examination, Lucy hides her eyes, as if concealing some deeper shame—a foreshadowing of her eventual transformation into a vampire. Stoker carefully illustrates Lucy's moral degradation through this change in her eyes: initially described as having a gentle gaze, her eyes acquire a dull, fixed stare as her transformation begins. By the time she fully succumbs to vampirism, her eyes burn with hellish fire, symbolizing her complete fall from grace.

The visual contrast between the mortal and the vampiric female characters is central to the novel's exploration of the duality between good and evil. Reference [7] highlights the critical role of visual imagery in Stoker's portrayal of Victorian ideals of femininity, noting that "good" women are never depicted with a fixed, penetrating stare. In contrast, the female vampires Harker encounters in Dracula's castle are characterized by their intense and seductive gaze. Their large, dark, penetrating eyes seem almost supernatural, described as almost red against the pale yellow moon. The opposition between the "gentle and sensitive" eyes of mortal women and the "fixed, lascivious" stare of the vampires underscores the moral dichotomy between purity and corruption, salvation and damnation. Lucy's transformation into a vampire is deeply connected to the progression of vampiric evil, which is reflected in the gradual change in her eyes. However, as striking as Lucy's visual transformation is, she remains secondary to Mina, who occupies a central role in the narrative. Stoker's depiction of Mina's visual perception is more complex and varied, reflecting her pivotal significance. While seated on the Eastern Ridge with Lucy, Mina notices a dark figure with glowing red eyes. Lucy exclaims, "His red eyes again! They are the same" [17: 96], but Mina silently follows her friend's gaze. But then admits, "I was a little startled myself, for it seemed for an instant as if the stranger had great eyes like burning flames; but a second look dispelled the illusion. The red sunlight was shining on the windows of St. Mary's Church behind our seat, and as the sun dipped there was just sufficient change in the refraction and reflection to make it appear as if the light moved." [17: 97] This symbolizes the fragility of her perception, as she oscillates between her human identity and Dracula's impending influence. This moment foreshadows Mina's own tragic trajectory, as she eventually follows the same perilous path as Lucy. However, unlike Lucy, who succumbs to the vampire's influence, Mina finds the strength to resist. The divergence in their fates can be attributed, as [16] suggests, to the differing symbolic roles of marriage in their lives. Lucy, unmarried at the time of her attack, represents a vulnerable figure in Victorian culture—one unprotected by the sacred bond of marriage. Mina, in contrast, is safeguarded by her status as a married woman, with her marriage vows serving as a kind of spiritual shield against vampiric corruption. This religious and moral framework ultimately enables Mina to endure and resist Dracula's power, unlike Lucy, whose tragic fate is sealed from the moment of her first encounter with the vampire. This reflects the rigid gender expectations and the perceived role of marriage as a form of protection for women in Victorian society. Lucy's vulnerability as an unmarried woman suggests that women outside the institution of marriage were seen as particularly susceptible to moral and physical dangers. Her fate reinforces the Victorian notion that female purity and virtue required the safeguarding influence of a husband. In contrast, Mina's resilience is attributed to her marital status, implying that marriage provided not only social respectability but also a kind of spiritual and moral fortification. This distinction emphasizes the broader Victorian belief that women's security and virtue were contingent upon their roles as wives, reinforcing the era's



patriarchal structures and the idealization of the domesticated, obedient woman.

Furthermore, despite her own affliction by Dracula's vampiric influence, Mina exhibits profound empathy towards her tormentor, articulating, "The poor soul who has wrought all this misery is the saddest case of all" [17: 309]. This expression of compassion highlights her intrinsic benevolence and serves as a pivotal reflection of Stoker's thematic emphasis on the redemptive power of empathy. Additionally, Mina's capacity to inspire affection among the male protagonists positions her as a central, unifying figure within the narrative. She functions as a "surrogate mother-bride" for the group, providing emotional support and embodying the virtues of Victorian womanhood. Prior to her victimization by Dracula, Mina is depicted in various roles—cheerful companion, attentive friend, concerned fiancée, and loving wife—yet notably, she is never portrayed with tear-filled eyes. Her initial display of tears occurs upon learning of Lucy's demise, a natural response to the loss of a close friend, but also a harbinger of the sorrow that ensues. This mirrors the emotional trajectory of Laura in [10], where tears symbolize a prelude to impending tragedy. Following her initial encounter with Dracula, Mina experiences uncontrollable weeping, remarking, "Oh, why did I ever go to Whitby? There now, crying again! I wonder what has come over me today." [17: 257]. This involuntary emotional response indicates the burgeoning internal conflict between her inherent purity and the encroaching darkness.

Mina's ability to "see" even with closed eyes destabilizes the boundaries of perception and selfhood, reinforcing Dracula's broader thematic concern with the permeability of identity. Her telepathic connection with the vampire challenges the notion of an autonomous, inviolable self, as her consciousness becomes intertwined with his. This dissolution of individual boundaries is particularly evident during her hypnotic trances, where she simultaneously accesses and is influenced by Dracula's mind. The "inner eye" thus functions as a liminal space between autonomy and submission, underscoring Victorian anxieties about the fragility of self-identity in the face of external control. In this sense, Mina embodies the era's broader fears regarding the dissolution of personal agency, particularly for women, within patriarchal and supernatural structures of power. In the denouement, Mina's ocular imagery starkly contrasts with that of Dracula. While his eyes are described as "red with devilish passion" [17: 282], hers are depicted as shining "like pole stars" [13: 325]. Even when her vision is obscured by tears or fixed under the vampire's thrall, her eyes retain a brightness that symbolizes hope and the conviction that virtue will ultimately triumph. In a poignant exchange with Van Helsing, it is observed that "Mina's eyes shone with the devotion of a martyr" [13: 290] reinforcing her role as the moral compass of the narrative.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study is limited by its focused scope on ocular imagery within *Dracula*, without addressing other equally significant symbolic systems such as blood, technology, correspondence, and religious artifacts, which also play critical roles in the novel's construction of meaning. Although this analysis situates the motif of vision within broader Victorian cultural anxieties, it does not provide a comprehensive historical investigation into contemporary scientific, medical, or philosophical discourses on optics, perception, and psychological theories of the unconscious, which would further contextualize the novel's treatment of sight. Furthermore, the interpretation remains anchored in symbolic and epistemological analysis, with only tangential engagement with

psychoanalytic, feminist, or postcolonial critical frameworks that could offer alternative or complementary readings of the ocular motifs. As with any literary interpretation focused on symbolism, this study acknowledges its subjective nature: different theoretical approaches may yield divergent insights into the function of vision and perception within the text. Nevertheless, by concentrating on the persistent use of eye imagery, this study argues that *Dracula* constructs a sophisticated visual economy that reveals profound anxieties about knowledge, identity, and moral integrity in a rapidly changing world.

Within the novel, ocular imagery operates as a potent symbolic device, mediating central tensions between good and evil, purity and corruption, reason and irrationality. Stoker's deliberate deployment of visual motifs not only delineates individual character transformations but also underscores the fragile boundaries between self and other, civilization and monstrosity. The act of seeing—or being seen—emerges as a crucial mechanism of both empowerment and subjugation, with vision itself often portrayed as unstable, deceptive, or compromised. The vampire's penetrating stare, Mina's telepathic visions facilitated by hypnotism, and the trance-like states induced by Dracula's gaze all illustrate the vulnerability of individual autonomy when subjected to external visual domination. In these moments, identity becomes disturbingly fluid, with characters losing control over their bodies, their wills, and even their memories. Stoker thereby dramatizes the fragility of human selfhood, suggesting that perception is not only fallible but susceptible to profound distortion by malign forces.

The description of Count Dracula's eyes as "blazing with a sort of demoniac fury" epitomizes his malevolent essence and his capacity to exert a hypnotic, near-supernatural control over others. This portrayal aligns with Victorian notions of the eyes as windows to the soul, implying that Dracula's corrupted gaze functions both as a revelation of his inner depravity and as an active agent of his predatory power. Moreover, the vampire's immunity to reflective surfaces—most notably his absence in mirrors—signifies a profound metaphysical disruption: the inability of the human eye to apprehend evil when it assumes seductive or deceptive forms. Such imagery reinforces the novel's exploration of hidden monstrosity and the limits of empirical observation, key concerns of the Gothic tradition and Victorian epistemology alike.

Female characters, particularly Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker, are deeply implicated in this visual economy. Lucy's physical transformation—from a woman with a pure, gentle gaze to a creature whose eyes radiate "voluptuous wantonness" and "hellish fire"—mirrors her descent from Victorian ideals of chastity into monstrous otherness. Her gaze becomes a site where purity is corrupted, and her transformation reflects cultural fears regarding female sexuality, agency, and the destabilization of patriarchal structures. Mina's experience, by contrast, involves a subtler tension: she is both subjected to and resists visual domination, ultimately embodying a complex interplay between victimhood and moral resilience. Stoker's strategic use of ocular imagery extends to Professor Van Helsing as well: his clear, steadfast gaze and his ability to "see" the truth beyond surface appearances position him as a paragon of scientific rationality and moral clarity. His character embodies Victorian ideals of disciplined observation and resistance to emotional susceptibility, suggesting that clear-sightedness is essential for combating the forces of chaos and evil.

In conclusion, the pervasive imagery of eyes and vision in *Dracula* serves as a multifaceted symbol through which Stoker interrogates themes of moral ambiguity, epistemological instability, and the threat of unseen or

unseeable forces. Sight in *Dracula* is not merely a physical act but a contested site of power, control, vulnerability, and revelation. Stoker's representation of vision reflects Victorian society's growing discomfort with the reliability of sensory perception in an era marked by scientific revolutions, technological advancements, and psychological exploration. Despite their faith in empirical observation and rational inquiry, Stoker's protagonists struggle to perceive and understand the supernatural, illustrating the persistent gaps and fissures within human knowledge. The vampire's lack of reflection, the hypnotic loss of agency, and the repeated failures of characters to see *Dracula* until it is too late all reflect anxieties about the limitations of human perception, the hidden recesses of the mind, and the threat posed by unseen dangers lurking beneath everyday reality.

Moreover, these anxieties resonate with larger Victorian concerns about the fragility of identity, the dangers of surveillance, and the fear that traditional markers of truth and morality could no longer be trusted in a rapidly modernizing world. Vision in *Dracula* thus becomes a double-edged sword: a potential source of knowledge and revelation but equally a mechanism of deception, corruption, and loss of self. Ultimately, through the sustained motif of ocular imagery, Stoker offers a profound meditation on the precariousness of human understanding in a world where the seen and the unseen are in constant, unstable interplay. In doing so, *Dracula* captures the essential Gothic tension between knowledge and mystery, visibility and obscurity, reason and the terrifying unknown.

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