

## Passions and Pain: Lucy's Punitive Death in *Dracula*

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**Abstract**

This paper argues that the portrayal of a woman's body in pain can be seen as an intense form of passion that transcends conventional boundaries. This ineffable passion may encompass not only the physical experience of pain but also the release of repressed desires. In Gothic texts, such as *Dracula*, the depiction of female suffering often serves to highlight the liberation of female eroticism from societal constraints. Lucy's transformation into a vampire, and the subsequent pain she endures, can be interpreted as a metaphor for the liberation of her suppressed desires. Her suffering thus becomes a space where her passions, previously constrained by Victorian norms, are expressed and made manifest. *Dracula* exemplifies how Gothic texts can intertwine themes of passion, pain, and punishment to address larger social and cultural issues. The novel's portrayal of Lucy's suffering serves both as a dramatic narrative device and as a commentary on the persistent challenges of patriarchal control and female subjugation. The ongoing relevance of these themes underscores the enduring struggle for gender equality and the need to critically engage with representations of female suffering in literature.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Elisabeth Bronfen's influential work, *Over Her Dead Body*, is instrumental in exploring the relationship between femininity and death. Bronfen (1992) addresses the Western fascination with depicting the dead female body as an exotic spectacle, examining the intersections of femininity, death, and representation. She argues that visual and narrative portrayals of femininity and death share a mutual status as images and can be understood through the lens of fetishism, wherein the female body is reduced to a passive object of observation, the patriarchal "other." While Bronfen's analysis offers a deep insight into the connection between femininity and death, it notably omits consideration of the concept of "passions," which relates to suffering and death. Punter (2001), in *Writing the Passions*, asserts that "dealing with death" is inherently tied to "dealing with the passions," as he views death and the passions as inseparable (p. 19). The boundaries between passions and death are indeed blurred; to gain new insights into the connection between femininity and death, it is crucial to revisit the concept of "passions," which will be the focus of this paper.

The term "passion" is often associated with suffering, partly due to the Western interpretations of the word, or the historical influence of the Passion narratives of Jesus Christ.

The term “passion” has its roots in the concept of suffering, which might lead to the view that an intense expression of passion is closely related to a painful impulse. This connection highlights the important link between passion and pain. It can be argued that passions inherently involve a structure tied to the notion of pain, derived from the Latin word *poena*, signifies “penalty” and consequently “suffering.” However, there are complexities and varied meanings within the discourse on “passions.” Punter (2001) emphasizes the need to distinguish between “passion” and “passions,” as the latter encompasses a range of emotions such as lust, anger, and pain, which can be analyzed separately (p. 21). This paper aims to examine the concept of pain within the context of woman’s “passions,” which will be narrowly defined as related to the erotic or strong emotions connected to female sexuality and desires. The goal is to explore how woman’s desires shape passions and how these passions are expressed in relation to death, focusing on how female suffering and death are represented in *fin-de-siècle* literature. My following example involves Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (2003), a *fin-de-siècle* novel originally published in 1897.

## 2. THE LANGUAGE OF SENSATION

In the mid-nineteenth century, a form of writing emerged that critics refer to as “sensation;” the term was borrowed from contemporary theater’s “sensation drama,” characterized by its ability to evoke shock through the text (Rance, 1991, p. 2). Cvetkovich (1992) notes that although the nineteenth-century Gothic novel differs from the sensation novel, both aim to intensify emotional engagement between the text and the reader. Sensation novels generally captivate their audience with vivid imagery, creating sensational effects through a focus on visual spectacle. Cvetkovich explains that the emotional impact of these sensational elements comes from “the satisfaction or thrill of seeing” (p. 24), underscoring the significance of visual spectacle in eliciting strong emotional reactions from readers.

Beyond the importance of visual spectacle in the construction of sensational texts, Pykett (1994) highlights another striking aspect of the genre – its portrayal of women and femininity, observes that “female characters are absolutely central to virtually all sensation novels” (p. 6). She emphasizes the significant role they play within the genre:

[O]ne of the genre’s most distinctive features was the way in which it displayed women and made a spectacle of femininity, whether of the passive, angelic variety, or in the form of the *femme fatale*. Whether she is the heroine or the villainess (and sometimes the distinction between these two roles is fascinatingly blurred), at least one of the female

protagonists in a sensation novel is likely to be assertive, transgressive and a creature of passion, in other words bad, mad, or otherwise dangerous to know (Pykett, 1994, pp. 6-7).

To reference Pykett's perspective, Stoker's *Dracula* is particularly significant in this context. The Gothic text generates one of its sensational effects through the portrayal of a mad and dangerous figure—the female vampire, characterized by abnormal sexual passion. By utilizing the body of the vampire woman to evoke sensational responses, *Dracula* enacts a fantasy of female rebellion and transgression through the figure of the vampire. *Dracula* makes one of the most impactful contributions to nineteenth-century sensation fiction, sharing key elements with the genre, particularly in its focus on the language of bodily sensation.

### **3. LUCY'S DEATH IN DRACULA**

A notable sensational effect in *Dracula* can be examined by analyzing Chapter XVI of the novel. In this chapter, Stoker presents a complex and unsettling portrayal of Lucy Westenra's staking, which exemplifies how the text generates vivid and emotionally intense imagery. The depiction of pain becomes more pronounced through the narrative's focus on sexual violence. The detailed account of the female vampire's dismemberment and death conveys a phallic and destructive imagery. This passage creates a profound sense of violence and raises important questions about how the representation of passions is realized through the violent and almost traumatic violation of the female body:

“Take this stake in your left hand, ready to place the point over the heart, and the hammer in your right.”...

Arthur took the stake and the hammer, and when once his mind was set on action his hands never trembled nor even quivered... Arthur placed the point over the heart, and as I looked I could see its dint in the white flesh. Then he struck with all his mind.

The Thing in the coffin writhed; and a hideous, blood-curdling screech came from the opened red lips. The body shook and quivered and twisted in wild contortions; the sharp white teeth champed together till the lips were cut, and the mouth was smeared with a crimson foam. But Arthur never faltered. He looked like a figure of *Thor* as his

untrembling arm rose and fell, driving deeper and deeper the mercy-bearing stake, whilst the blood from the pierced heart welled and spurted up around it. His face was set, and high duty seemed to shine through it; the sight of it gave us courage, so that our voices seemed to ring through the little vault.

And then the writhing and quivering of the body became less, and the teeth ceased to champ, and the face to quiver. Finally it lay still. The terrible task was over.

The hammer fell from Arthur's hand. He reeled and would have fallen had we not caught him. The great drops of sweat sprang out on his forehead, and his breath came in broken gasps...

Arthur bent and kissed her, and then we sent him and Quincey out of the tomb; the Professor and I sawed the top off the stake, leaving the point of it in the body. Then we cut off the head and filled the mouth with garlic (Stoker, 2003, pp. 230-232).

This passage is particularly disturbing, with the staking scene depicted as both horrific and thrilling. Lucy's death by staking is portrayed as intensely violent and excruciating. Her body writhes in such a grotesque manner that it appears ghastly, with the violent convulsions emphasizing the brutality of the act. Stoker clearly presents Lucy's staking as a moment of sensational spectacle, reducing her body to an object of scorn. She is dehumanized, referred to as "The Thing," and her body becomes the focal point of contempt for the male characters who eagerly engage in and witness the staking. The scene resembles a sacrificial ritual, performed on a stage with Van Helsing, Quincey Morris, and Dr. Seward as both active participants and observers, deriving voyeuristic pleasure from the act. They function as a united group of killers as well as participant-observers. In the most brutal sense, the "hammer" is not just a symbol of phallic power but a literal weapon that violently destroys Lucy's body, embodying sadistic violence. This "hammer" intensifies the horror of the scene and contributes to the gruesome and spectacular nature of the staking.

According to Jeffrey L. Spear (1993), many critics concur that *Dracula* reflects a deep-seated male anxiety about uncontrollable women, with Lucy being violently punished for her sexual desires through the phallic symbolism of the stake (p. 186). The novel's portrayal of male dominance over the female body is profoundly phallicentric, presenting female suffering in a manner that appears punitive. This suffering serves to suppress the heroine's desire for freedom, suggesting that the act of staking is necessary to punish her for her transgressions, a

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theme central to interpretations of the novel. Thus, Lucy is portrayed as both a transgressive woman and a victim of her suffering.

Importantly, Stoker does not depict Lucy as entirely innocent, implying a rebellious undercurrent in her repressed sexuality. Despite acknowledging her flirtatious behavior and fantasizing about marrying multiple suitors, Lucy recognizes that her thoughts are considered sinful: “Why can’t they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble? But this is heresy, and I must not say it” (Stoker, 2003, p. 67). As a young Victorian woman, Lucy is expected to adhere to the era’s strict moral codes regarding female behavior. William Patrick Day (1993) suggests that Lucy’s sleepwalking betrays an “erotic restlessness” that Dracula exploits, transforming her from an innocent virgin into a sensual vampire whom men are eager to destroy (p. 70). Lucy’s sleepwalking hints at a dual consciousness, revealing her repressed sexuality and her longing for both freedom and forbidden pleasures at night. In other words, Lucy’s transformation symbolically represents the fulfillment of her suppressed will to indulge in forbidden desires. Her latent desires are fully realized once she becomes a female vampire, a figure imbued with the power of erotic passion:

Lucy’s eyes unclean and full of hell-fire, instead of the pure, gentle orbs we knew...As she looked, her eyes blazed with unholy light, and the face became wreathed with a voluptuous smile. Oh, God, how it made me shudder to see it!...There was something diabolically sweet in her tones... (Stoker, 2003, pp. 225-226).

According to Regina Barreca (1990), “the need to indicate sexuality without being able to name it caused the repressed sexuality in a text to be reflected in speech patterns and rhetorical structures” (p. 2). In other words, the narrative portrays female sexuality through the lens of vampirism. As a vampiric *femme fatale*, Lucy, according to Franco Moretti (1983), faces a violent death as a consequence of being a “New Woman” who expresses “some kind of desire” (p. 98). Her death is interpreted as punishment for her transgressions, and Stoker symbolically reveals a significant anxiety of the Victorian 1890s: the fear of female sexuality. Thus, Lucy’s tormented body mirrors the troubled psyche of her era.

As Punter (2001) observes, “love and punishment, we are frequently told, are twinned ‘gifts’” (p. 87). In *Dracula*, although the narrative adheres to Gothic conventions where the heroine is destroyed by a male villain, it is significant that here, the villain is Lucy’s fiancé, Arthur. Arthur drives a stake through Lucy’s heart, using violence purportedly in the name of love—to restore Lucy’s soul and transform her into a “holy memory” (Stoker, 2003, p. 230).

Arthur, now Lucy's tormentor, exercises his male privilege and social power from a position of complete control. His actions embody a blend of dominance and threat. The stakes represent the reassertion of Arthur's marital authority, aimed at controlling and eliminating Lucy's deviant sexuality, and sacrificing her body to preserve her pure soul. In death, Lucy is compelled to relinquish her rebellious soul. Thus, once Lucy's body is staked and subdued, it symbolizes the triumph of patriarchal power. Ultimately, Lucy transitions from being "the devil's Un-Dead" to "God's true dead, whose soul is with Him!" (Stoker, 2003, p. 231), reflecting the ultimate victory of patriarchal control.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In exploring the themes of women's passions, pain, and death, particularly in Gothic literature like Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, we can conceptualize the experience of a woman's body in pain as both a profound expression of ineffable passion and a manifestation of liberation from repressed amorous desires. This duality underscores the complexity of depicting female suffering in literature, where pain can be intertwined with a form of liberation, yet also associated with punishment and sacrificial violence.

*Dracula*, the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic novel, appears to deliberately engage with "the very whiff of the past," which, as Sage (1994) observes, is not seen as a living heritage but rather as something "undead"—material to be animated, energized, and replayed (p. 4). At the turn of the twentieth century, when Stoker adapted Gothic conventions in *Dracula*, this sense of the "undead" was closely tied to contemporary life rather than being limited to a Victorian context. Cvetkovich (1992) suggests that what may appear as sensational representations might actually reflect a reality that dominant culture fails to acknowledge (p. 7). The suffering of the female vampire in *Dracula* functions not merely as fictional drama but as a means to address broader social and cultural issues. Lucy's death, while embedded in Victorian fiction, prompts contemporary readers to consider wider political and social concerns.

Angela Carter, in *The Sadeian Woman* (1979), addresses the representation of women's pain and its connection to patriarchal violence. She argues that the mechanisms of patriarchal violence are socio-culturally ingrained, deeply embedded in Western culture and mythology:

Violence has consistently served as a method for institutions to assert their superiority. It often becomes a brutal reminder of the societal mutilations inflicted upon women. The erotic violence depicted revives the social fiction of the female wound—the bleeding scar

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from castration—which is as central to Western culture as the myth of Oedipus, intricately linked through the complex interplay of imagination and reality that shapes culture (Carter, 1979, p. 23).

Carter's analysis of the link between violence and women's victimization within a patriarchal society provides insight into the broader cultural context of women's suffering and their ongoing struggle for power. Overall, *Dracula* is significant in its portrayal of violence and sexuality because it enables an understanding of female sexuality as a political reality, particularly through the depiction of female suffering and its connection to patriarchal violence. Symbolically, Lucy's staking and her subsequent suffering reflect the harsh reality of violence against women, a phenomenon not confined to the specific social conditions of Victorian England. Modern women's struggles for freedom often revert to traditional constraints, illustrating the persistent challenge and haunting reality of patriarchal power in contemporary society.

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### **AUTHOR'S BIO**

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