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October 18th 2018
English 333

Mid-term Article Review Essay
Deconstruction

John Paul Riquelme argues his perspective of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* through a deconstructive lens. Riquelme first opens up his argument by stating a quote from the novel itself stating "truly there is no such thing as finality (Stoker 199)." I believe Riquelme started his argument off with his quote based on his belief that *Dracula* "is an antirealistic work filled with doubling and repetition (Riquelme 559)". Thus, nothing in this world is stable, everything must change in some way, shape or form. Riquelme argues that the doublings displayed in *Dracula* tend to undermine the "putative differences that help maintain social hierarchies (Riquelme 560)." By taking a closer look at the contrasting characters/groups they each seem to resemble each other more and more. By the end of the novel each group which "seems" to display opposing societal ideologies becomes the same, thus proving Riquelme's argument and the theory of deconstruction itself to be true.

The theory of deconstruction is broken down in Lois Tysons "Critical Theory Today". Tyson argues that deconstruction breaks down the social norms and ideologies in which we are unconsciously aware of and programmed by. Our perception is based on a social construct. The social construct in which we see the world "consist of the numerous conflicting dynamic ideologies; or system of beliefs and values (Tyson 239)." The overall structure of these beliefs maintains a hierarchy itself. This hierarchy is formed by binary oppositions in which one is always privileged over the other, such as good and evil. With this example good would be considered the privileged one and evil it's opposite. In Stoker's *Dracula* the story line becomes

intriguing when opposing binaries seem to merge together or even reflect one another to display the same. Riquelme sheds light in his argument by breaking down the novel's "pervasive doubling" and bringing forth clarity to "passages that undermine the impression of clarity" (Riquelme 560). His argument suggests that the characters themselves resemble their opposite, not on the external appearance but within. This creates an "alternative for self-understanding" and a reflection of what we deem as good and bad which ultimately leads to the question of, who are we as individuals? (Riquelme 560).

Riquelme argues that there are continuing connections between contrasting characters, such as Harker vs Dracula. In the beginning of the novel we are exposed to the fact that Jonathan Harker is both Dracula's instrument as well as his double. The relationship between Dracula and Harker is mirrored by Jonathan's boss, Mr. Hawkins, and Harker himself seeing that he is the protégé of his employer; As well as the beneficiary to his inheritance when Mr. Hawkins dies. After his death Harker replaces Mr. Hawkins and essentially becomes him. During the first week or two with Dracula Harker realizes that he has become "a prisoner" and has "no choice" in the hands of Dracula and his evil. Thus, as Mr. Hawkins agent he must carry out any request ordered by Dracula for the sake of Mr. Hawkins business and his own life. Throughout Harker's stay with Dracula he seems to lose himself and his rights as a human being. His free will is stripped from him and by force he becomes Dracula's agent. By being the link for both Mr. Hawkins and Dracula he essentially becomes the key to merge the two "apparently antithetical worlds" together (Riquelme 561).

Seeing that Harker is locked up and encaged he begins to pick up on some of the questionable attributes in which Dracula displays. One of the first most daunting points is when Harker is able

to imitate Dracula by climbing like a lizard on the outside of the castle. When Harker first sees Dracula in action he states “what manner of man is this, or what manner of creature is it in the semblance of a man?” (Stoker 58). By continuously watching Dracula climb down the wall Harker somehow ironically builds up enough courage to try it himself. Furthermore, as their differences become even more similar things become even stranger when Harker catches Dracula in his own clothing climbing down the wall. Riquelme argues “Harker begins to resemble Dracula in his ability to climb down the walls [and vice versa], the question then becomes what manner of man is this?” becomes pertinent for them both (Riquelme 562). It is here one can conclude that the structural hierarchy has been crossed when the superhuman turns out to be something less than human such as a lizard or a bug and the human itself turns out to display superhuman qualities. Tyson further discusses this concept with his argument on deconstruction.

Through the lens of deconstruction Tyson argues that humans who use language that is unstable itself are unstable and fragmented (all language, all humans). Tyson described this as “ambiguous forcefields of competing ideologies” (Tyson 243). He goes on to further discuss how the self-image of a stable and “real” identity is just a “comforting delusion, which we produce in collision with our culture” (Tyson 243). As humans we often get that feeling that we don’t really know who we are. Essentially, we feel as if we are just keeping up with the social construct set by society. We even suggest that someone else may have it all together, more so than we do. In reality our identities are constantly shifting and we are continuously re-inventing ourselves as humans. Just as Stoker displayed in *Dracula*. Harker came to the count’s castle “good” and ready to take on a new business endeavor. Over the course of time he became “mad” (Stoker 53). In

chapter three Harker states “when I found out I was prisoner a sort of wild feeling came over me. I rushed up and down the stairs, trying every door and peering out of every window” it seemed that his behavior mirrored “a rat...in a trap” (Stoker 53). By the time he left Dracula his whole being had changed. He went into a dramatic switch in which, he seemed to be more like Dracula than anything. This example makes it evident that humans are constantly changing and re-inventing themselves, whether that be for “good” or “evil”. Thus, our construct of what society has defined as one thing has been proven that two opposing forces can truly become the same.

In addition to looking at this from a deconstructive lens, one can also see aspects of the psychoanalytic perspective. Tyson discusses the psychoanalytic as ...

“The unconscious comes into being when we are very young through the repression, the expunging from consciousness, of these unhappy psychological events. However, repression doesn’t eliminate our painful experiences and emotions. Rather, it gives them force by making them the organizers of our current experience: we unconsciously behave in ways that will allow us to “play out” without admitting it to ourselves, our conflicted feelings about the painful experiences and emotions we repress” (Tyson 12-13).

Throughout the novel the psychoanalytic can be shown through characters such as Dracula himself and Dr. Seward. In the beginning of the novel Dracula has an in-depth conversation with Harker regarding his family. He opens up and tells Harker that him and his family were freedom fighters who were on a mission to resist any foreign power which planned to overthrow them. He then goes on to state how he has fought to maintain his “freedom of choice” Riquelme goes on to state “...But the vampire is a creature who appears to have no choice in its need for blood as

nourishment...and its victims lose their agency” (Riquelme 561). This becomes ironic because any person that he encounters he decides to take their freedom from them, leaving them no choice at all. This can be seen as a form of repression due to the fact that he has stored the painful memories of him and his family’s struggle to keep their freedom in the land of his unconscious. Essentially, his unconscious desires are coming out. Although him and his family were able to maintain their freedom he might not be over the process of that struggle to maintain. Now that he is older he relives it by successfully taking the freedom of others and giving them no power to choose.

Furthermore, Riquelme argues that Dr. Steward’s drive to “work! Work! Work!” is due to his unfortunate proposal with Lucy (Stoker 95). Seeing that Dr. Stewards relationship with Lucy did not work out, his attempt at fixing his failed relationship is shown through the energy that his puts towards his work. Although he can no longer fix his relationship with Lucy, he decides to puts all of his energy into his patients trying to fix them instead. He spends all of his time trying to study the brain and figure out the best solution for his patient Renfield. Though from the surface they seem as if they are on opposite spectrums, they both have a drive to succeed which is fueled by painful memories from the past. Their work/actions that they partake in now reflect the fall of an accomplishment in the past.

Overall the argument that Riquelme has produced touches on *Dracula* from a great deconstructive perspective. This author goes into great detail regarding the similarities of opposing characters which in turn prove that nothing ever stays that same. More specifically, a person’s identity can shift and even reflect one that is subject to be a polar opposite and in turn be more similar than different. One interesting takeaway that was not touched on enough was

the theme of freedom vs choice. Riquelme argued that choice was taken away from Dracula and in opposition he decided to take away others freedom and choice. The irony in this is that the choices that were made in order to obtain the good can be deemed as bad. This article is very useful when understanding *Dracula*, it takes the readers preconceived perspectives based on what society has already ingrained in us as right and flips it. In order for good to come about in the story something bad had to have taken place (the way Lucy was killed; How Mina's mind was able to link with Dracula). Essentially there is no middle ground, a choice has to be made in order for the progression of the story. Someone could build on this argument to make a prediction about the child of Mina and Jonathan. Will the cycle continue, or has it been put to the end?

Work Cited

Riquelme , John Paul. *Deconstruction and Dracula* .

Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. second ed., Oxford University Press, 2008.

Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: a User-Friendly Guide*. Routledge, 2015.