Darryan Miller

10/20/18

Critical Theory 333

Midterm

The thesis in *Dracula* as Totemic Monster: Lacan, Freud, Oedipus and History focuses on the narrative and development of literary characters as an analysis. Astle uses Lacan, Freud, the Oedipus complex and history to depict what Stoker was trying to convey with how each character interact with each other. The theoretical lens that Astle focuses on is the psychoanalytic lens which centers around subconscious archetypes and the meanings of them. With psychoanalytic criticism, Astle looks at the connection of each character and how they move the plot forward, he’s also looking at what defines Dracula as a monster, solely based on his separation from a very different society than his own. Astle draws on the power dynamic in *Dracula,* this character is mysterious and secluded and an overall outsider with mystical elements to the people in their town. This seclusion and these mystical elements which make Dracula different give him the upper-hand and the unknown of his motives and his lack of civilization is what makes him powerful.

Astle draws on psychoanalytic theory by picking apart the text using Freud and the underlying familial concepts and Lacan’s depiction of the use of language. A familial/Oedipus concept that Astle brings up is the Father v. Son trope. Astle writes; “The relations of the various hunters to their fathers and father figures are significant here. Arthur Holmwood's father's death removes Arthur from the scene while Dracula drains Lucy, his fiancée and Dracula's first female victim in England, but at the same time he inherits his father's title and fortune, both of which, but particularly the latter, are invaluable in the pursuit of the vampire. Arthur's part, however, is mainly confined to the preliminary adventure. Symbolically far more important in terms of the main adventure is Jonathan Harker, father of the child (Quincey Harker) who represents the future of the group and the one who decapitates] Dracula in the climactic scene. At the other end of the story, while Jonathan waits to be admitted to Dracula's Transylvanian castle in the first chapter, he thinks of the fact that "just before leaving London I got word that my examination was successful' and I am now a full-blown solicitor!" Conjoined here are Harker's assumption of a position in society and the first appearance of the totemic father. But for Jonathan, his employer, Mr. Hawkins, is also a father figure. Hawkins suggests this himself when, in his letter to Dracula, he writes that Jonathan "'is discreet and silent and has grown to manhood in my service"' (p. 25).

The totemic father idea that Astle focuses on is another depiction of how power is used in *Dracula.* Astle depicts that the characters’ societal placement, their hierarchy, or any other system of power they might hold, doesn’t matter compared to the type of power that Dracula contains. This deems to be a problem because during this time period class was a very big deal in terms of how well off you were in society. To focus on the psychoanalytic portion of this, the societal hierarchy delineates the subconscious/unconscious archetypes in the text. There are two types of power that play off each other, one being systematic and the other being otherworldly. The idea of failing or not being able to defeat this being that is Dracula, plays off what's been ingrained into these young men within their hierarchal society. This idea supports the notion of being powerless not only to an entity but also to their fathers in terms of class. This argument works rhetorically because it depicts how Dracula is a totemic monster, in the sense that he starts out as this entity with more power than the townspeople possess. Dracula is exempt from the Oedipal complex but not the familial ties, as he clings to Harker becoming this figure.

The totemic father idea eventually disappears as both Dracula and Van Helsing, the main father figures are killed. To touch on Lacan’s use of language, Astle uses the word “castration” to talk about the end of the totemic father. The term castration holds a lot of merit for this text as it means being less than, for example with the hierarchy roles or with father v son narrative. Astle delineates the argument of power structure and how it moves through the plot of Dracula, by breaking it down. The language of the text ties into the themes, which ties into underlying concepts. Dracula as a totemic monster is interesting because even though he is of greater power than the other male characters, he still ends up decapitated. The term decapitated also plays into the use of language. By using terms such as “decapitation” and “castration,” Astle is making note that while manhood is supposed to be this powerful, impenetrable, higher honor, there’s still the idea that one could be knocked down a peg or two or could be reduced to nothing. The language really depicts the fear of reduction in society. What might be useful to another scholar with this argument is taking the pieces that Astle gives and going more in depth with them. It might help another scholar to incorporate more of the history of how men are viewed in society, piggybacking off Astle and by providing their own closed reading of the text. What also might be useful in this argument is reading more in depth about masculinity and how the totemic father figure impacted the progression of the story and in what way it did so.

The article itself, *Dracula as Totemic Monster* provides a psychoanalytic view of what Stoker was trying to accomplish in the text. It is a closed reading of Dracula and provides a profound outlook of character development. The article sort of shows the reasoning behind each character and how the psychological aspects due to systematic pressure from society ignites problem solving as well as communal issues. Astle expands psychoanalytic theory by breaking down the differences in each character, assessing the “monster” in all of them, and by depicting Dracula’s narrative as the outcast as well as focusing on what makes him so. The power dynamic in the text is interesting because there is power being depicted as a force, and power being depicted as a structure. The two dynamics collide and Astle does an excellent job at using Lacan, Freud and Oedipus to convey the psychoanalytic break down of power and how it pertains to *Dracula.*

Something that might also be useful to another scholar when looking at an in-depth view of power structure, would be to discuss how toxic masculinity in a hierarchal society effects women and their roles in the text. The women in the text kind of just follow along, or are used to move the plot forward, they are also used as a symbol of sex. In the beginning when Harker is Dracula’s victim, the three-vampire women sort of play with him. Dracula exerts his dominance over Harker forcing the three vampires to back off. Even though they are vampires and they too possess supernatural powers, they are still considered less than Dracula. With Lucy, she becomes this unfortunate character as she is turned undead and is then killed, she’s considered weak. Another scholar could look at the roles in which women play, how their influence in the text references the oedipal complex as well as Freud’s theories, and how representation of these female characters could impact and transgress the psychoanalytic analysis of this text. Furthermore, with each type of power structure, and the subdivisions within that structure, the larger project on Dracula would focus on exactly how everything connects, how these women impact the male figures, or how they don’t, how society impacts them and in what was. The article could provide and more closer reading if it took the power structure and branched off of it focusing on points in the plot that alludes power, who has it and why, how Dracula came to be, how Dracula is so different from the rest of society that has isolated him. The scholar could even look at how isolation can be used as a power dynamic and what each character supernatural or human, gains from it. The archetypes of power are worth being explored; how the townspeople interact with one another, how they interact with supernatural elements, how supernatural elements interact with one another, and how societal norms are placed on both the townspeople and the supernatural entities separately yet intertwine. The article accurately portrays a literary analysis that focuses on the connectivity of characters, their roles in society, how those roles influence behaviors and choices, and how the roles and behaviors separate them from each other. Astle takes specific elements to make a larger picture when discussing the representation in Dracula and how the archetypes of representation effect the plot. This psychoanalytic closed reading has provided a sense of overall understanding of Dracula and how it is much deeper than monster v people. The text is essentially about the monster in all, and how many different factors play certain roles in development.