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ACADEMY OF RELIGION AND PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

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Philosophical Discussion

Dracula as Metaphor for Human Evil

by Steven G. Herbert

Abstract: The monsters we create in print and film are often projections arising from our collective unconscious. Mummies, werewolves, vampires and such are archetypal forces, which, although frightening, help us to look at our own shadow in a less threatening way. They aid us in examining those unintegrated aspects of ourselves, which seek to be brought back into balance. For that is just what evil is; good out of balance. If the personal imbalance is left too long ignored, those archetypes tend to embody themselves collectively in monsters of historic import: Hitler, Stalin, Idi Amin, Nicolae Ceausescu, Saddam Hussein. Of the plethora of fictional monsters, it is Dracula who most concisely presents to us a metaphor of human evil distilled to its most insidiously perfect form.

Dracula can help us understand the monsters we meet in everyday life disguised as everyday people. The above explanations of shadow, projection, and unintegrated aspects often, but don't always apply in explaining the appearances of these more subtle evil forces in our lives. One may be reaping karma generated in another lifetime, for example. Sometimes we confront evil, not because of any culpability, but in order to transmute it into good for the betterment of all mankind. Evil may be a divine gift that tests our goodness and spurs us on to develop greater dimensions of self. Finally, we may be targeted for attack by the evil exactly because we are most anathema to the forces of Darkness.

At times we may be victimized by evil for which, by all present life evidence, we are undeserving. At other times, the evil we confront may be a reflection of a darker aspect within. In either case, the monsters of myth and literature can help us recognize the evil in our everyday lives, and teach us how to deal with it. And of all the monsters inhabiting the literary world, Count Dracula is the quintessence of the evil creatures we meet in everyday life, the Darkness embodied in our fellowmen and in our own hearts. The vampire's symbology can help us recognize the monsters without even as we confront their reflection within.

Count Dracula embodies the aversion to Wholeness, and antipathy against the Light. In this lies his primary symbolism in the rebellion of self-will toward Divine Will. According to the Kabbalah, man alone of all God's creations was given free will, and thus the potential for evil came into being at the same time. There are three levels of evil. The highest of these is self will, the Kabbalists maintain. In the second, Lucifer and his legions function in the role of Tempter and Tester, within God's plan, to test and temper all the manifestations of His Creation. The lowest level is more innocuous, though macabre but necessary; the death and

dissolution on the destructive side of what is so beautifully illustrated by the Hindu God Shiva's dance of creation and destruction. Similarly, in Buddhism the wrathful deities are merely the peaceful deities in changed aspect.

Dracula is truly the Prince of Darkness. As a shape shifter, he often assumes the form of a bat, a nocturnal creature like himself. Jonathan Harker, while held prisoner in Dracula's castle, described the Count as "clad in black from head to foot, without a speck of color anywhere." A vampire throws no shadow, as the Light knows him not. His supernatural powers are gained by tapping into the lower magic of the amoral psychic forces of the subconscious, and subjugating them to his own will and evil purposes.

Being of the Dark Side, Dracula shuns the Light that represents the higher aspects of Self. In so doing, he represents the defiant ego, refusing to recognize a higher authority than itself. He struggles, as does the ego, to maintain dominance and sovereignty over his domain and to impose it upon all else. But in enforcing this private autocracy, he also forfeits the Wholeness that can be with ego's surrender to Spirit. The vampire has become the UnDead, having successfully achieved a quasi-immortality of the ego, but has also doomed himself to a vile existence.

The Moon, which dominates the vampire's nocturnal realm, shines not by its own light, but by the reflected Light of the Sun. Similarly, the ego can only shine by the reflected Light of Spirit. Yet the recalcitrant ego wishes to convince us it is the totality of the psyche itself. The way the ego's illusory reality hypnotizes us is much like the mesmerizing effect the Count has on his victims, causing them to bare their necks to him willingly and even with titillating anticipation.

In Dracula's castle, Harker one day is shocked to discover that the Count shows no reflection in his shaving mirror. Thus the evil one is recognized by his refusal to self-reflect, or confront anything which he does not wish to confront about himself. Since the persona Dracula wants to present to the world is a facade and a lie, it does not reflect in the mirror of Truth. The vampire abhors the mirror, for the lack of reflection confronts him with the fact that his self-image has no reality.

Evil ones must believe in their own pretense, for they cannot tolerate the pain of self-reproach. In their refusal to confront, they barricade themselves with lies and in their lying the evil exhibit a kind of perverse genius. M. Scott Peck in his classic study of human evil, *The People of the Lie*, says evil is best described as the spirit of unreality. The evil one creates a subjective and personal reality of his own, which he is unable or unwilling to distinguish from objective consensus reality. Conversely, Peck defines mental health as a steadfast dedication to reality. "In a lie," says Martin Buber, "the spirit practices treason against itself." And evil represents "an existential lie against being."

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It was imperative that the Count create a flawless cover, the perfect façade. To achieve this, he drew upon powers far beyond mere shape-shifting. Indeed, one of the vampire's abilities is to achieve literal invisibility. Similarly, "the people of the lie" maintain their presence so perfectly that they pass for the most ordinary of people in everyday life. One can find them in church under the disguise of piety and moral purity, in business professing incorruptibility, and in the home concealed under appearances of love and concern.

And that disguise is as much for the vampire's benefit as others. It is a game of self-deceit as much as the deception of others. The Count does have a conscience, and this is why he expends so much energy in eluding it. Dracula could only rest in hallowed ground, and this is why consecrated earth was spread in the bottom of each of his coffins. After each night's horrific deeds, he can only find peace in resting in beliefs about absolution which appease his ever-pursuing conscience.

Several instances in Stoker's novel allude to the power of garlic to repel the vampire. Garlic is recognized as the world's most powerful natural curative agent. In folklore, its medicinal potency was naturally extended to the spiritual realm and attributed with the ability to repel demonic forces. Both literally and symbolically, garlic exudes impurities. In his narcissism, and his refusal to self-reflect, the evil one admits no imperfections and has no intentions of letting himself be purged.

Rather than accept any evidence which might shatter his self-image of perfection, the evil one will try to destroy that same evidence. It is this extreme self-protectiveness which makes the highly narcissistic individual dangerous, for he will invariably sacrifice others in defense of his narcissistic self-image before he will endure the pain of self-confrontation. In the words of Scott Peck, "The evil hate the light – the light of goodness that shows them up, the light of truth that penetrates their deception."

Throughout the story, the Count exhibited a keen intellect in averting all the efforts of those who would thwart his evil designs, an intelligence that aided him in his denial. The intensely subjective nature of such intelligence, however, tended to distort thought processes and memory patterns. This is what caused Dracula's main antagonist and nemesis, Professor Van Helsing to remark "it is this very obliquity of thought and memory which makes mental disease such a fascinating study." In spite of the vampire's high intelligence, the Professor further observed a quality of emotional arrestment in it. "This criminal has not full man-brain," he says. "He is clever and cunning and resourceful; but he is not of man-stature as to brain." And therein he saw the means to defeat the Count. "Ah, there I have hope," he continued, "that our man-brains, that have been of man so long and that have not lost their grace of God, will come higher than his child-brain that lie in his tomb for centuries, that grow not yet to our stature, and that do only work selfish and therefore small."

Among the arsenal of weapons the Professor and his accomplices used against Dracula was the crucifix. To the vampire, the crucifix is anathema, because it symbolizes the surrender of ego to Spirit so necessary to achieve Wholeness. This powerful archetype embodies the message that the lower nature of man must die first before the Higher nature can be resurrected. No wonder the evil one in his idolatry, worshipping his own ego above all else, cannot stand the sight of it.

The Host had similar power against the vampire for what it represents. In the Christian religion, the Host represents the Body of Christ. As in many rituals around the world, by eating the flesh of the god one partakes of the nature of the god. The vampiristic ego, which is a god unto itself, recognizes no transcendent aspect higher than the ego.

Dracula exemplifies not only ego's abnegation of the transformative Spirit, but also the masculine divorced from the feminine. He is the quintessence of the male active aspects of Intellect and Will, completely devoid of the feminine receptive principle. Without that balance, both the Intellect and the Will become pathologized, producing a cold, calculating, and thoroughly self-serving creature. The vampire is truly inhuman in its heartlessness, and inability to empathize.

According to Martin Buber, "the 'wicked' are those who deliberately persist in impurity of heart," hearts driven by pride and cruelty, and recognized by arrogance, cunning, and craftiness. "Evil," he says, "is...the grasping, seizing, devouring, compelling, seducing, exploiting, humiliating, torturing and destroying of what offers itself." Extrapolating from this, we can define evil as undermining the spiritual integrity or growth of another in the avoidance of spiritual growth and Wholeness in oneself, growth which requires self-confrontation, surrender, and transformation.

The Count needed victims. The trait which most characterizes the vampire is its compulsive desire and need to drink the blood of living victims, and thereby sustain itself. In the story, Dracula's objective was also to increase the ranks of vampires in Western Europe. But a vampire is not created at the first bite. In fact, the story exemplifies the resiliency of the human spirit. Lucy Westenra, Dracula's first English victim, rebounds after each attack. Just one night without an attack sees her color and spirit return. Even Mina, his later victim, in the very late stages of the disease, recovers completely upon the true death of Dracula. It took many attacks and the dogged persistence of the vampire before they languished. As the women began to succumb, the Professor observed in them a dual nature as the good and evil struggled within their souls. Finally, Lucy is completely overcome, and becomes vampire entirely, crossing the line between evil in behavior and evil in being.

As the women languish, whenever the evil nature dominates, they are most drawn to attack their fiancées. So too does the real-life vampire seem to be drawn

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to attacking first those they love most. In this we see the principle that evil can be compartmentalized, selective of situation and relationship, sucking the vitality and life force symbolized by blood through insidious abuse. More than symbol, the blood is life, according to the Bible (Lev. 17:14), and forbidden to eat. Likewise, does the victim become victimizer, inch by inch, by repeated attacks to esteem and worthiness. With each attack, the victim has the choice to respond with compassion and forgiveness, or with hate and anger. If he choose the latter repeatedly, he does not defeat the aggressor, but becomes him.

The struggle against evil is by no means an easy one. Professor Van Helsing said, "...it is a long task, and a difficult, and there is danger in it, and pain...and once our feet are on the plough share we must not draw back" (mirroring the words of Jesus in Luke 9:62). "It is a terrible task that we undertake, and there may be consequences to make the brave shudder. For if we fail in this our fight he must surely win; and then where end we?...to fail here is not mere life or death. It is that we become as him, that we henceforward become foul things of the night like him – without heart or conscience, preying on the bodies and the souls of those we love best...To us forever the gates of heaven shut, for who shall open them to us again?"

The wise professor tells the others that the work of redemption is one of love, not hate. And Mina, even in her victimhood reminds her saviors that the vampire is one to be pitied, not reviled. Even this creature is ultimately redeemable agrees the Professor, as evidenced by the look of profound peace that came over the face of the Count after the death blows were delivered. "So, my friend," the Professor says to Lucy's fiancée Arthur, as he hands him the hammer and stake, "it will be a blessed hand for her that strike the blow that sets her free." So must it be the duty of the loved one to endure and persevere until the time is right to deliver the figurative blow that sets the true self free. This is too, the true message of Jesus' mission on earth and in the passion of his last hours; that we should endure evil without responding in kind. This is a message still lost on our society, which alternatively repeats and reinforces the message in media that might is right and revenge is sweet.

Though the vampire wreaks much havoc with its evil deeds, however, its freedom to do so is mitigated by certain natural limitations. Throughout the story, it is evident that the Count's life and movements are bound by the course of the Sun. And just as the vampire is bound by certain natural laws, so is it obligated to obey certain spiritual laws. The first divine law governing the demonic forces dictates that they cannot intrude without invitation. As the Professor says of Dracula, "He may not enter anywhere at the first, unless there be someone of the household who bid him to come; though afterwards he can come as he please." This he did in England by deceiving the zoophagous asylum inmate Renfield, to gain access to

Mina. It follows from this that neither can he entice one to enter his own evil domain except by their own free will, though thereafter he has them firmly in his grip. When Dracula greeted Jonathan Harker at his castle door, he said "Enter freely and of your own free will," thus beginning Harker's imprisonment there.

The constraints imposed by divine authority also present us with certain implications about the nature of the relationship between good and evil. Since evil is not out of God's control, He must therefore allow it to exist, governing its actions by certain laws. Dracula is bound by the Light, both literally and figuratively, and ultimately must "yield to the powers that come from, and are symbolic of good," to quote Professor Van Helsing. Everywhere his actions and movements are restricted, as the Professor further observes. "He can do all these things, yet he is not free. Nay; he is even more prisoner than the slave of the galley, than the madman in his cell."

It does not necessarily follow from this that God created evil. He created good, but by creating free will He also created the potential for imbalance. And this is just how evil is best understood, as good out of balance. "For it is not the least of its terrors that this evil thing is rooted deep in all good," says the Professor. "Evil is the inevitable concomitant of free will," agree the theologians.

Martin Buber further elucidates the relationship between good and evil with the Talmudic doctrine of the two urges. The urge which corresponds to good is called "pure direction" (towards God), or right guidance. The second is termed "passion", and is the drive or will which brings what is conceived in thought into manifestation. If we may also call these two urges the receptive and the active, we see Buber is correct in saying that the masculine active urge is not evil in and of itself, but only becomes so when "man separates it from its companion," the feminine receptiveness to divine guidance.

"Man must begin by harnessing both urges together in the service of God," Buber continues. "Hence, this (active) urge is called 'the yeast in the dough', the ferment placed in the soul by God without which the human dough does not rise...Man's task, therefore, is not to extirpate the evil urge, but to reunite it with the good."

This is in fact the spiritual path, this redemption of evil, which is difficult, dangerous, and painful, and requires commitment. It will not be won by tanks, or bombs, or armies, for the battle between good and evil is ultimately fought by each individual against him or herself. When we can look in the mirror and see reflected the vampire within, then we can redeem him. Until then, evil must perform its other function to guide us. The monsters on the outside must lead us to the monsters on the inside. And may we discover, as Professor Van Helsing did in *Dracula*, that "Perhaps I may gain more knowledge out of the folly of the madman than I shall from the teaching of the most wise."

Addendum

The purpose here has been to build a case for the vampire as a metaphorical truth, as a quintessential and archetypal representation of the nature of human evil. From this we can elucidate a predictable pattern, as follows:

Personality Profile of the Vampire

Ego-Centrism: The ego of the evil one is a tyrant and will go to any means to maintain its illusion of intra-psychic sovereignty or autocracy. It refuses to acknowledge Spirit as a political contender, least of all surrender to it. In shunning the Light, the ego resists balance, integration, transcendence, and Wholeness in general.

Self-Centeredness: The personality assumes itself the center and zenith of the social universe, interpersonal relationships are characterized by vanity, narcissism and selfishness. Interactive styles are typified by self-righteousness, judgementalness, patronization, polarization, pomposity and arrogance. The personality assumes its viewpoint is infallible and absolute, and sets itself up as the suite of criteria by which to judge the world.

Control: The evil one is characterized by an obsessive need for power, and to impose on it order as he defines it, often by an authoritarian Machiavellianism. He has a strict code of ethics, which he presumes the divine right to enforce. Assuming the universality of these ethics, he assumes an ends-justifies-the-means attitude in imposing them. The psychic criminal is the master of manipulation and intimidation, and needs to disempower, emasculate, and subjugate all those around him. He hates spontaneity and imperfection in others. Since he does not recognize Spirit, he cannot have faith that Spirit is working its Will for good in any person.

Denial: The ego-centrism, self-centeredness, and massive control problems dictate a proud and ambitious self-image wholly out of touch with reality. The evil one must invest massive amounts of energy into preserving this self-concept and eliminating all that would belie it. He refuses to self-reflect or confront himself, but rather demands that the world reflect back to him only what he wants to see. Having become identified with his neuroses, he must see these as virtues in spite of all contravening evidence. He hates criticism above all. His whole life is a lie, devoted to maintaining a facade and pretense. The evil one refuses to acknowledge the existence of faults and imperfections, let alone purge himself of them. Nothing can make him change. He prefers instead to cover-up his liabilities, deny his true motivations and rationalize his acts. It is not that he doesn't have a conscience, though it would seem so. It is because he is so good at rationalization that his conscience rarely becomes a major threat. Still, he is eternally pursued by it and must continually appease it.

Victimizer: The evil one must have victims. He needs to suck the life-force of the bodies and souls of those around him, and it is usually loved ones who are most vulnerable that are attacked first. Because he refuses genuine spiritual sustenance he must sustain himself artificially through the life-force of others, who feel drained and suffocated in his presence. His self-esteem can be built only by undermining the self-esteem of any who happen to be convenient targets. His insatiable cruelty and insidious abusiveness builds his own self-esteem always at the expense of others. But we must not forget, the victimizer begins as a victim himself. As a victimizer, he is compelled to multiply his evil by creating future victimizers.

Hardened Heart: A complete inability to empathize characterizes the evil one. Related to this is his inability to see the intrinsic worth and value of a human being or any other living thing. This is what enables him to indulge in such heartless cruelty. Being opposed to wholeness, he has also abnegated the feminine aspects of intuition and feeling from his own psyche. He at some point makes a decision to wall off his heart and thereby switches from victim to victimizer, by classic identification with the aggressor.

Superior Intellect and Will: By abnegation of the feminine aspects, the masculine aspects become overdeveloped and pathologized. Intuition is suppressed because it comes from Spirit and is incompatible with the evil one's denial. Feeling is repressed because by it he feels too acutely the pain of his own abuse. Due to an overdeveloped intellect, his "mighty brain" makes him extremely cunning and clever in deceit. His powerful will gives him persistence and endurance, and makes him remorseless in purpose.

Intolerance: Narrowness of viewpoint, self-righteousness, judgementalness, and need to control combine to produce an extreme intolerance to differing points of view, customs, values or behavior. This inability to accept diversity combined with lack of compassion also makes the evil one extremely unforgiving.

Hate and Rage: The hardened heart not only precludes the evil one's capability of truly loving someone in an unselfish, giving and nurturing way. It also means that he easily despises those who do not fit into his idea of order. He feels hate for and falls into paroxysms of rage at anyone who does not conform to that order, submit to his control, become obsequious to his will, cater to his demands, collude in his denial, affirm and reinforce his narcissistic self-image, praise his judgment, recognize his power or blindly accept the righteousness of his actions.

Obliquity of Thought and Memory: The "child-brain" of the evil one may be highly intelligent and operate in an extremely logical and rational manner yet be full of faulty reasoning at the same time. No matter how extraordinary the intelligence, he cannot be called "wise" by any stretch of the imagination. This is due to a hypothesized emotional arrestment in very early childhood and his abnegation of the feminine aspects. He cannot distinguish relative from absolute, general from

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specific, right from wrong, outer reality from inner projection, or subjective from objective. His thinking is very dualistic and tends to form very simple and broad categories. His memory is as subjective as his thinking and perception, being very creative and revisionistic, and tending to reflect whatever the evil one is thinking or feeling in the present moment. Yet he himself is absolutely convinced of the infallibility of his own perception, judgment and memory.

Double-Standards: The evil one does not hold himself accountable to the same standards by which he judges, controls and punishes others, or at least is somehow able to rationalize his justifications for deviance from those standards. This results in a plethora of double-standards that govern his relationship with others, listed as follows:

1 – It is his presumed right to criticize others freely without restriction, but he will not tolerate the criticism of others directed at himself. In other words, the evil one will not confront his own faults but reserves the right to point out the faults of others, faults which are very likely his own projected outward. And it is as hard for him to look at or affirm the virtues of others as it is for him to look at his own faults, perhaps because they reflect badly on him. Therefore, he will tend to turn his own faults into virtues and the virtues of others into faults.

2 – The evil one demands total acceptance of his behavior by others no matter how destructive it may be to them. At the same time, he cannot tolerate or forgive any fault, imperfection, or deviation from any standard of thought and behavior as he defines it. Alternatively, he does not recognize his own obligation to self-discipline, yet demands perfect discipline from others.

3 – Incapable of empathizing himself, the evil one yet demands others empathize completely with him and know intuitively his wants and needs at any given moment, and cater to them promptly. Feeling no obligation to reciprocate, he characteristically neglects or denies the needs of others.

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Reprint requests to:
Steve Herbert
P.O. Box 824, Colchester, VT 05446,
E-mail: waterdowser@hotmail.com