

 <p>ISSN NO. 2320-5407</p>	<p>Journal Homepage: -www.journalijar.com</p> <h2>INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)</h2> <p>Article DOI:10.21474/IJAR01/12300 DOI URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/12300</p>	 <p>INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR) ISSN 2320-5407 Journal Homepage: http://www.journalijar.com Journal DOI:10.21474/IJAR01</p>
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE IDEA OF OTHERING IN THE NOVELS, JANE EYRE AND DRACULA

Rashmi Naik

Manuscript Info

Manuscript History

Received: 05 November 2020

Final Accepted: 10 December 2020

Published: January 2021

Abstract

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Introduction:-

The term 'Other' is an interesting concept. It incorporates prejudice on the basis of identifying people into groups. It becomes a processes where the marginals are the ones who are endangered. The othering seems to follow a set of basic fundamentals. One of it is the 'have' and the 'have nots'. But othering is no limited to this. It included one's gender, race, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status (class) and more. The othering is intensely contextual and have a set of similar underlying undercurrents.

By the word 'othering', it means any action by which an individual or group becomes mentally classified in one's mind as "Not one of us". By 'Othering' a person, we deny that person the qualities of human. One tends to forget that the 'other' has emotions, ideas, priorities and instead it becomes easier to dismiss them as being less humane in some way or the other, less worthy of respect and deny the human dignity. The politics of othering can be seen in various levels in the novel, 'Jane Eyre', written by Charlotte Bronte and 'Dracula' written by Bram Stoker.

Jane Eyre in the novel, was 'othered' at an early stage in life, i.e. in Gateshead. At Thornfield, Bertha Mason becomes "The Other". Whereas, Count Dracula becomes the other due to the fact that he comes from Far East, i.e., Transylvania. He is also 'othered' by making him the feminine self of the masculine race. Hence, in both the novels, othering exists not only on gender but on race, class and sexuality.

Jane Eyre is kept at a distance from the opening scene, where she is made to sit at different table, then that of Mrs Reed and her children. Here Jane as an orphan is in the position of subordination. It is her versus the family of Mrs Reed. The second place, she arrives at the school of Brocklehursts, it is Jane who is 'othered' from the school. Helen Burns becomes the anti to the existence of Jane at Lowood.

In Thornfield, the figure of Jane Eyre is seen as a Victorian produce. Which is othered by Bertha Mason, a figure produced by axiomatic of imperialism. When Jane meets Rivers, Jane is othered again. Throughout the novel, we see the othering of Jane Eyre and Berth Mason.

Jane Eyre is compared to a slave at Gateshead as she resists John Reeds tyranny and as well as at Lowood, where she argues the need to resist unjust domination. Bronte uses metaphysical races such as Turks, Indians and Persians to identify with Jane. Similarly, Bertha Mason, though a white woman, a creole she is given the characteristic one associates with savages. The text others her by constructing her as associated with the Blacks.

But as the text proceeds, Jane Eyre is constructed as a Victorian white woman whereas Bertha Mason is described by Rochester as “Tall, dark and majestic”. Further her colour is emphatically not pale but discoloured, Purple, blackened along with references to rolling eyes and full swelled dark and bloodshot eyes. This othering is constructed in narrativization of the novel. The narrative privileges Jane Eyre over Bertha Mason, due to the place of their origin. For instance, Bertha Mason was daughter of a wealthy English man born in the West Indies, though being a white, she is seen as inferior to the whites of England like that of Jane Eyre of the novel, who starts off as a governess.

Through the course of the novel, Jane Eyre is constructed as a new female stereotype. She is highly principled, though unattractive, she is the type of female perfectly suited to the imperialistic, militaristic temper of the period. Despite her wilfulness as a young child, Jane grows out of it and becomes a model character to the Victorian England. But, in the novel, Bertha is denied an identity itself apart from her being of a creole origin. She is portrayed as the ghost from the past to Rochester. Gradually, Bertha Mason becomes the ‘Mad woman in the Attic’ and Jane Eyre, ‘The Pillar of the Nation’ as said by Jina Politi.

Elaine Showalter in her essay engages on the female inner space. Bertha Mason is seen as the flesh of female sexuality and made into an irredeemable beast and needs to be caged. She becomes the ‘devil in the flesh’ a woman with female sexual passion and fiery emotions. Jane on the other hand is constructed on the lines of the ‘Angel in the house’.

Jane Eyre, throughout the novel is seen as a subaltern being. She is gendered when compared to Helene Burns who seems to be more feminine than Jane Eyre. In the novel Rochester, is the masculine Male and Jane is othered to be the feminine side. But at the end of the novel, when Rochester is disfigured and loses limbs, he becomes less masculine and Jane Eyre asserts herself to be in a powerful position here, by being the protector of Rochester by agreeing to marry him. In this instance, Jane Eyre becomes the masculine self of female and Rochester the lesser male.

In *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, Count Dracula is seen as a person who breaks down traditional gender roles, confuses the roles of masculine and feminine gender and threatens to morally degenerate the society. Count Dracula is firstly othered by the fact or on the basis of his Race. He is considered an outsider as he comes from the East, i.e., Transylvania. He cannot blend in to the society due to his pale coloured skin and bloodshot eyes, which is similar in description to Bertha Mason. He is constructed as a monster that humans, men of England must defeat. He is constructed as both an ‘alien’ and ‘the inferior’. He becomes an inferior being when he is defeated by the humans, though having superior quality, he cannot defend himself from the anger of England’s men.

The text fails to identify the gender of Dracula as a definitive male or the female. He is othered by having the qualities of both the gender. Dracula becomes the male self when he bites into Lucy Westenra and the mother with feminine qualities when he is seen nursing Wilhelmina ‘Mina’ Murray Harker.

The otherness can further be seen in the class the people come from. Count Dracula is a count and an aristocrat in Transylvania. But, when he migrates to England, he seems to lose the power and the status associated with the word Count. Though being a count, an aristocrat and having wealth rivalling the mercantile class of England, he becomes the other, an inferior. Inferior against the working class people of the England such as Jonathan Harker, Dr. John Seward, Quincy Morris, Lord Arthur Godalming and Van Helsing also known as the ‘Crew of Light’. Dracula is considered as the other to this ‘crew of light’. He is seen as the darkness that is threatening the nation of England and the crew of light is seen the opposing force to that darkness and as the names indicate the light to fight the dark.

In the novel, *Dracula* we see the othering of Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker. Both are good friends. But when Lucy Westenra is infected by the count Dracula, Lucy becomes more alluring, luscious and sultry when being the “undead” than when she was alive. She becomes the Horrid flirt to the Dutiful wife. She from the seemingly angel in the house becomes the devil in flesh. She is transformed and begins to pursue her sexual passion. Lucy is countered with Mina Harker, though Mina is infected, she does not give in to her passion and remains within the boundary, the angel in the house specifies. She doesn’t digress like Lucy. Hence at the end of the novel, Mina is saved and Lucy must be killed. And is killed by her fiancé, Lord Arthur Holmwood Godalming.

As Philip Martin notes in *Dracula*, we see that the male strength of Lord Arthur Godalming is set against usurping female power of Lucy Westenra. The vampire Lucy is scandalously carnal, sexually aggressive, voluptuous and seductive. And so, the act of killing Lucy rests on her fiancé, who in front of ‘vampired’ Lucy becomes less powerful

and he must overcome her, by usurping, or rather killing her/ subdue her for her transgression. The power play is clearly seen here and so is the gendered roles.

The female vampires in the novel seem to have a control over the men. For example, Jonathan Harker states that he nearly gave in to the three vampires at Dracula's castle in Transylvania. And this comes in the concept of the other as the Victorian women are seen to be the typical 'Angel in the house' characters. But the female vampires contravene this ideology. Hence, this otherness is returned to the conventional passivity by staking the three female vampires, who serve Dracula, by the men to show their male strength and the transgression of Dracula, itself is stopped by symbolic castration of him through his followers.

In the novel, Dracula is othered by giving him the qualities which the people of England feared. Halbestram says that the othering works by consolidation of all fears of race, class, gender and sexuality, the people of England in 19th century had, into Count Dracula himself. Hence Dracula is othered right at the primary level. The fear of the civilised world being colonised by primitive force such as Dracula himself who is constructed as savage, bestial and trans-humanoid animal.

This concept of othering, is nothing new to this world. These texts may seem just as normal stories to be with. But, the second reading or the third reveals the various level that these texts hide. Othering is found not only in these two texts, but a lot other texts of the Victorian era. For instance, the othering of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* and Frankenstein's Monster in *Frankenstein*.

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