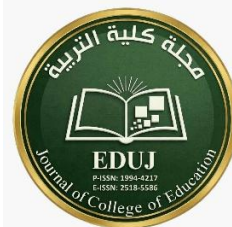




ISSN: 1994-4217 (Print) 2518-5586(online)

Journal of College of Education

Available online at: <https://eduj.uowasit.edu.iq>

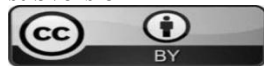
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Keywords:

Victorian Gothic,
gender roles, feminism,
Dracula, Jane Eyre,
subversion



Article info

Article history:

Received 10. Jul.2025

Accepted 4. Aug.2025

Published 10. Aug.2026



“Subversion of Gender Roles in Victorian Gothic Literature: A Feminist Reading of Bram Stoker's ,Dracula and Charlotte Brontë's ,Jane Eyre”

A B S T R A C T

Through a feminist perspective, this paper analyses the subversion of gender roles in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (CB-JE) (1847). By examining the characters, narrative structures, and social and cultural contexts in both Victorian Gothic texts, this study shows how these texts destabilise patriarchal norms and paint a different picture of certain anomalies in patriarchal patriarchy. *Jane Eyre* critiques gender oppression through Jane's independence and Bertha Mason's iconic defiance, while *Dracula* destabilises Victorian norms through Mina Harker's intellectual agency and female vampires who embody domineering and overbearing femininity with violence. This paper uses textual analysis and feminist theory to argue that one of the novel, *Jane Eyre*, reinforces hegemonic gender role while the second one, *Dracula*, undermine it. Recommendations call for intersectional research and further study of Gothic adaptations.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31185/eduj.Vol64.Iss1.4597>

فتنة ادوار التنوع البشري (ذكر - انثى) في الأدب القوطي الفكتوري : قراءة نسوية لرواية
برام ستوكر دراكولا ورواية شارلوت برونتي جون اير

م.م جميل ابراهيم حسن

مديرية تربية البصرة / الكلية التربوية المفتوحة / قرنة

الخلاصة

من خلال وجهة نظر نسوية، تحلل هذه الدراسة تخريب ادوار الجنس في رواية برام ستوكر دراكولا (١٨٩٧) ورواية شارلوت برونتي جون اير (١٨٤٧). من خلال التمعن في الشخصيات والتركيب السردية والسياق الاجتماعي والثقافي في كلا نصوص الروايتين القوطيتين، هذه الدراسة توضح كيف هذه النصوص زعزعة المفاهيم ابوية النظام الابوي. انتقدت جين اير ظلم اختلاف الجنس خلال استقلالية جين والمواجهة الأيقونية لبرثا ميسن، بينما دراكولا زعزعة المفاهيم الفكتورية

خلال عامل الثقافة لشخصية مينا هاركر ومصاصي الدماء النساء الذين جسدوا التسلط وإذلال الانوثة بالعنف. هذه الورقة تستخدم التحليل النصي والنظرية الانثوية لتجادل بأنه إحدى الروايتين، جين إير، عززت دور الجنس المهيمن بينما الآخر، دراكولا، قوضته.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الفكتوري القوطي، ادوار اختلاف الجنس، النسوية، دراكولا، جين إير، الفتنة.

1. Introduction

Victorian mores defined masculinity and femininity in sharply-bounded oppositions whereby men were expected to be rational, financially independent, and public figures, whereas women were relegated to the private sphere, emotional labor, and passivity (Tosh, 2007). Though men's social standing allowed recreation at gentlemen's places (Tosh, 2017), women were relegated to childbearing and house upkeep (Francis, 2002). But these ideals charred against lived realities, and Victorian literature frequently exposes tensions between prescriptive norms and transgressive performances.

Gothic literature's interest in the macabre and transgressive allowed a space to interrogate these contradictions. This essay interrogates the subversion of Victorian gender roles in Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Stoker's *Dracula*, specifically focusing on characters who resist patriarchal paradigm. Brontë interrogates gendered and class oppression through Jane's intellectual challenge and Bertha Mason's racialized rebellion while Stoker undermines dominant norms through Mina Harker's leadership and the vampiric *femmes fatale*. By examining these texts through feminist theory and close reading, this study reveals their dual role in reinforcing and challenging hegemonic norm.

Fictional places this role is often dichotomous in theory, but Victorian lived realities frequently muddled, as evident in literature of that time. In most novels, the characters are either reflecting within one and through both spheres. This work will explore how *Dracula* (Stoker et al., 1897), *Charlotte* (1847), *Eliot* (1872) conformed to or subverted Victorian gender roles.

2. Subverting Gender Roles in "*Jane Eyre*"

CB-JE centres on a protagonist who resists Victorian femininity through intellectual independence and moral defiance. Although this was a significant challenge to the conventions of the time and era, in her journey from orphan governess to Rochester's equal, Jane criticises class and gender hierarchies. Although Rochester initially embodies patriarchal authority-exercising control over Thornfield Hall and engaging in traditional masculine pursuits (Brontë et al., 2008)-Brontë reveals the contours of his character through his moral hypocrisy and his unconventional relationship with Jane.

Jane's refusal to marry Rochester until equality is achieved emphasises her refusal to submit and succumb to the traps that Rochester has tried to ensnare her in. Her declaration, 'I am not a bird; no net traps me' (Prunty, 1978) summarises her resistance to gender fatalism. Bertha Mason, Rochester's imprisoned wife, further destabilises the norms. As Jane's 'dark double'

(Gilbert & Gubar, 1979), Bertha's madness and violence symbolise the pent-up female rage against patriarchal confinement. However, her racialisation as a colonial 'other' (Spivak, 2014) complicates this reading, revealing intersections of gender, race and imperialism in a complex interweaving of characterisation.

The novel's Gothic elements - haunted estates and forbidden rooms - parallel the folktale Bluebeard, with Rochester as a patriarchal tyrant and Jane as a Scheherazade-like survivor (Ingham, 2003). Later, Jean Rhys's novel *The Wide Sargasso Sea* (JR) (1966) reclaims Bertha's voice and recasts her as a victim of colonial and gendered violence, extending Jane Eyre's feminist critical legacy.

However, Edward Rochester's character initially appears to reinforce traditional Victorian gender roles. As a man of noble birth, Rochester engages in masculine pursuits - horse-riding and social drinking - exercises patriarchal authority at Thornfield Hall, and prides himself on his unencumbered financial independence (Brontë et al., 2008). His frequent absences on business affairs and his reputation as a hardworking and socially prominent host make him more in line with the ideal 'self-made man' of the era. His intention to

But Brontë complicates Rochester's commitment to gender norms. While Jane, despite her infatuation with him, challenges his moral hypocrisy: His 'temperamental and arrogant' nature and his unfair treatment of others undermine his image as an idealised gentleman (Brontë et al., 2008). More subversively, Rochester breaks class boundaries by grooming Jane, his governess, as an intellectual peer. He exchanges secrets with her in a way that is not appropriate for slaves, but for his peers, subverting hierarchical propriety. Jane notes that he 'never seems to get in her way' and welcomes their encounters with

However, Jane is painfully aware of Rochester's rough edges, even as she describes him as 'a true gentleman'. She acknowledges his fickleness and pride, then highlights how his rare kindness towards her testifies to the unfairness of his treatment of others (Brontë et al., 2008). She is troubled by his moral ambiguity, but it is his unconventional interest in her - a humble governess - that most unsettles her. Rochester strives to foster an intimate relationship with Jane, using her as a voice to share her personal history and the memories he keeps with the other domestic staff.

Rochester focuses on Jane in ways that go against societal expectations: When he sees Jane unexpectedly, he greets her with a courtship that transcends professional lines, exchanging 'a word and sometimes a smile' (Brontë et al., 2008). The insistence on the evening chat - described as mutually beneficial - hides an interest in conversation that goes beyond employer-servant relationships. Jane, on the other hand, finds it impossible to reconcile his advances with her governess status, and flatly rejects the prospect of marriage, despite Rochester's unequivocally stated intentions (160). Her scepticism highlights the inflexibility of Victorian class structures - even when shaken by Rochester's actions, Jane internalises the gendered fatalism of her time, not allowing herself to imagine that she could ever be a legitimate subject.

The development of female archetypes in later Gothic literature demonstrates Jane Eyre's enduring influence on the Gothic feminist tradition. In *Gothic Feminism: Professionalising Sex* from Charlotte Smith to Brontës, Diane Long Hoeffler interprets the development of

female characters in the genre as a downward spiral, with early Gothic works presenting women as victims, while twentieth-century texts produce 'savage feminine' characters. This trajectory is punctuated by JR (1966), which performs an important narrative turn by giving voice and subjectivity to the marginalised figure in the Gothic canon - the putty, psychopathic and silently manufactured or demonised 'other' such as Bertha Mason. Gina (2020).

Despite this, Jane is not blind to his mistakes, although she seems to consider Rochester a true gentleman. "He is selfish and capricious, living a duality of character by his kindness to me and injustice to others." It is obvious that he is not perfect but almost the contrary due to his turbulence regarding her. He pays special attention to trying to speak with her or getting to know her., even though she is

even though she is just a nanny. He is willing to trust her and give her information about his life. Life that he might not give to other servants in his job. She 'never seemed to be in his way; he never had bouts of chilling arrogance: Seemingly just such one encounter, the welcome touch of opportunity when he unexpectedly meets her; he always and sometimes speaks with her, though it comes most often in invitations to the evening conferences that kept seeking to please her as much as bringing himself into them (147). The fact that his behavior is so unusual between a governess and her employer causes Jane to try to convince herself that he is friendly to her, that there is no wish to marry her (160). It is plain that this behavior and intention had as real a motive: its concealing Jane from being so silly as to believe in marriage at all. Even when a lot of time, interest and attention is devoted to her by Rochester.

Even after all these years, her aunt is not fully satisfied with the fact that she is a part of their family. Her cousins also don't like her, this is evident in the first chapter of the novel. Jane's cousin, John, bullies her, saying that she cannot use things- in this case, books- which he considers part of his inheritance, after all, she is a mere dependent without a penny of her own. After having thrown a book at her, she mouthed off to deaf ears by attacking him vocally. John's response was physical violence, so she had to defend herself against him (12-13). This kind of conduct does not make her a perfect example of a submissive lady that the Victorians had idealized, and he can see everything she does and think, and so can mum and dad; they know how you silence her all day, how you wish her dead' (30). Her readiness to unleash verbal attacks comes again later in life, even by the time she had reached Thornfield Hall. Most prominent among them is her attack upon Mr Rochester during their engagement, because she feels safe in openly addressing his dominant behaviour. He forces her to follow his wishes, but she does not quietly go along with them (267-269). She does not portray herself as the perfect lady, sweet and submissive; she is willing to fight.

The neglect, maltreatment, and refusal to let the child grow under such circumstances speak of Mrs. Reed's being a bad mother with no maternal love-the very kind of love that finds its brightest expression in womanhood-whereas she flouts even her husband's last wish because of her hatred for the girl: also, a sign of an unsuitable wife. Bertha, the really bad wife, exhibits hen-like behavior with her fits of rage and insanity, making herself and all residents of Thornfield Hall-well a burden on those who have to live with her there. Thornfield Hall. Trying to kill her husband and blinding him took away his dependance from that moment

onwards. She is described with semi-masculine attributes as she enters where women attack men. All of this goes with her terribly savage demeanor.

3. Subverting Gender Roles in "*Dracula*"

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (Stoker et al., 1897) employs Gothic tropes to interrogate Victorian anxieties about female sexuality, autonomy, and the tyranny of individualism. Mina Harker, a combination of maternal virtue and intellectual prowess, subverts the 'angel in the house' model by leading the male heroes in defeating Dracula (Senf, 1999). Her use of shorthand and typewriting positions her as the 'new woman', but her eventual domestication reflects the ongoing ambivalence towards female agency (Bick & Showalter, 1986). It signifies the possibility of a return to the natural state of the female.

Lucy Westenra's transformation into a vampire illustrates patriarchal fears of female sexual liberation. Her vampire status - characterised by aggressive desire - necessitates her violent destruction, reinforcing disciplinary control over women's bodies (Curtin & Halberstam, 1998). Conversely, Dracula's brides, who seduce Jonathan Harker, embody unbridled femininity that directly challenges male authority (Kraft 1984, 107). This represents a complete unleashing of instincts in a state of feminine tyranny that borders on horror.

The novel's written structure, which blends masculine and feminine perspectives, reflects the thematic tension between tradition and modernity. While Mina's collaboration with Van Helsing points to progressive gender dynamics, her marginalisation in the final battle underscores the period's conflicting attitudes towards women's roles and the possibility that all things may return to their most natural form in a cycle that represents female dominance and the sense of inferiority towards the opposite sex.

Although Bram Stoker's *Dracula* begins with a lawyer named Jonathan Harker's harrowing journey to Count Dracula's castle, where he will help the Count with his real estate deals in England, the first few chapters, told through Harker's diary entries, help define Harker's character and his sinister aura. The early chapters, told through Harker's diary entries, help establish Harker's character and Dracula's sinister aura. Harker's journey is characterised by confusion: His train to Vienna is an hour late (Stoker 1,) foreshadowing Harker's abandonment of his agency. This fragility is compounded when Dracula himself arranges Harker's transport, robbing him of his agency even before he meets Dracula. Although Harker's profession places him between the classes as a middle-class professional, his role is undermined by dependency - read Chapter 1 and you will see that Harker is dependent on Dracula's local knowledge as he hangs out with him, and his employer only authorises him on the case because he is ill (Stoker 9).

Harker's subordination epitomises the Victorian anxiety about finances

Jonathan Harker's captivity at Dracula proceeds in two stages, both dominated by powerlessness and gendered subversion. Imprisoned within Dracula's castle to prevent interference in the Count's grand schemes, Harker's autonomy is dismantled: He is stripped of his travelling clothes (Stoker 50) and confined to the walls of his room during the day. His futile efforts to escape culminate in a near-fatal encounter with Dracula's vampire puppets,

and it is only when the Count travels to England that he finds freedom. Reflecting this physical captivity.

Dracula is generally seen from two perspectives: the strangeness that goes against the common sense of humans and the danger he represents in terms of his bloodlust; a gang of ferocious and treacherous intruders slaughtered the crew when the ship set sail. The captain's diary mentions a ghostly presence on board that took the lives of his crew. Upon touching the shores of England, a large dog sprang from the ship with unusual fury and disappeared.. The reader later discovers that the dog was Dracula in disguise, because as a vampire he is able to shape-shift at will. This animalistic element of this vampire was also mentioned by Jonathan, Saw the Count creeping on the outer wall of his own castle head down. (40). Also mention of some bat' hovering around Lucy's bedroom, which also turns out to be Dracula. Also, as part of the animal imagery, red eyes enter, which makes its appearance any time during the novel as Dracula feels highly emoted. Jonathan first notices them when the Count is angry: 'His eyes were positively inflamed. The red light in them was bright, like the flames of the blazing fires of hell behind them' (45). He also observes on yet another occasion that he sees the "red light of victory in his eyes" (58). This tells us that these violent features do not only occur when the Count is letting go of his emotions. These features only enhance the oddness and weirdness.

Onathan Harker's journal, documenting his harrowing experiences in Transylvania, becomes a critical text within the male vampire-hunting cohort, symbolizing both his vulnerability and his eventual redemption within Victorian frameworks of masculinity. Dr. Seward's admiration for Harker—lauding him as a "man of great nerve" and a "quiet, business-like gentleman" (Stoker 263)—underscores the Victorian valorization of stoic rationality and self-possession as hallmarks of ideal manhood. Harker's initial investigation of Dracula's castle, despite mounting suspicions of danger, aligns with Victorian ideals of masculine courage and duty. His subsequent resolve to combat the Count and protect Mina further cements his adherence to patriarchal norms of male protectorship, positioning him as a defender of domestic stability against a foreign, corrupting force (Craft, 1984; Curtin & Halberstam, 1998).

However, Harker's journey to this "manly" identity is fraught with gendered anxieties. His captivity in Transylvania—marked by physical confinement, dependence on Dracula's hospitality, and psychological breakdown—subverts Victorian expectations of male autonomy and emotional fortitude. His mental collapse, framed as a form of "unmanly" weakness, temporarily excludes him from the heroic narrative, relegating him to the margins of the vampire-hunting mission until his recovery. This arc reflects Victorian preoccupations with mental health as a measure of masculine reliability (Tosh, 2007). Harker's redemption is contingent on his restoration to rationality and financial independence: inheriting his employer's firm not only secures his economic agency but also symbolically completes his transition from infantilized victim to patriarchal provider.

Critics like (Senf, 1999) interpret Harker's trajectory as a Bildungsroman of masculinity, wherein his trials—physical, psychological, and moral—forge him into a "proper" Victorian man. His initial passivity and vulnerability (notably coded as feminine traits in Gothic literature) are purged through his participation in Dracula's defeat, a ritual of masculine

reaffirmation. Yet this narrative of growth remains ambivalent. As Craft (Craft, 1984) argues, Harker's heroism is inextricable from his complicity in the novel's patriarchal order: his protector ship over Mina ultimately reinforces gendered hierarchies, even as his partnership with her hints at egalitarian possibilities.

4. Conclusions and recommendations:

- **Conclusions:**

Gender roles were very strict in Victorian society, where females confined to domestic and nonatomic responsibilities in the home. On the other hand, Gothic literature provided a space for some taboo concerns such as feminist rebellion in a subversive way. This study examines the ways in which Brontë and Stoker disrupted gender norms in **Jane Eyre** (1847) and **Dracula** (1897), two of the most popular Anglophone Gothic texts. Brontë's resistance figure clashes with gender and class structures; Stoker challenges the narrative in his own way through the agency of female sexuality. The actual research is to highlight the complexities of these two works' critique of Victorian patriarchy through feminist theory and a close reading of the characters and themes...

Both novels subvert gender roles through characters who defy passivity (Jane, Mina) and embody transgression (Bertha, Lucy).

Ambivalence persists: Jane's marriage and Mina's domestication reflect residual conformity to patriarchal norms.

Intersectional critiques (e.g., Bertha's racialization) reveal the limits of feminist subversion in colonial contexts.

- **Recommendations:**

1. Intersectional Analyses: Future studies should examine how race, class, and colonialism intersect with gender in these texts.
2. Adaptation Studies: Investigate modern reinterpretations (e.g., *Carmilla*) to trace evolving gender dynamics in Gothic literature.
3. Male Gender Anxieties: Explore how male characters (e.g., Rochester's disability, Harker's vulnerability) reflect patriarchal insecurities.

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