Dracula vs. the Beetle

How Science is Used as a Rhetorical Tool to Bring the Monsters to Life

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Abstract

This essay is a cultural/historical analysis of the role of science in the books *Dracula* by Bram Stoker and *The Beetle* by Richard Marsh. The aim is to investigate how science is used to lessen the amount of critical judgment the reader has to suspend while reading these two Gothic stories, as well as identifying what contexts science is part of. Initially, there is an introduction of the late nineteenth century Britain and the social and scientific events of that era, focusing on Darwinian ideologies, imperialism, and fear of degeneration. The conclusion reached is that science is used to inspire realism by increasing the feeling of authenticity, by erasing the boundaries of facts and beliefs with a juxtaposition of science and superstition, and by creating and upholding an uncanny effect.
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Science in the Gothic

The Gothic is a genre in literature whose impression can be found throughout popular culture in movies, books, and television series. One could claim that the Gothic elements are part of modern culture. What makes a good Gothic story is its ability to frighten the readers or make them wonder “what if”. The purpose of this essay is to determine the role of science as a rhetorical tool to help readers suspend their critical judgment in order to allow themselves to be frightened, or rather, what role science takes in the text and how this creates an impression of realism in a genre whose main contents revolve around superstition, imagination, and myth.

The primary sources used in this essay will be Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle*, and the structure of the essay will begin with a presentation of themes and cultural settings that could be expected in the nineteenth century Britain. Also, there will be some examples of what science had achieved and what ideologies it inspired at the time. Alongside this is a brief survey of what previous critics have found. This essay takes a cultural/historical perspective which leads up to the reading and analysis of the novels this essay focuses on, and ends with a short discussion of this particular reading’s meaning.
Britain at the fin-de-siècle

A term widely used to describe the period in which Dracula and The Beetle were written is the *fin-de-siècle*. This is French and a literal translation means at the end of the century. In this essay, whenever the term fin-de-siècle is used it refers to the end of the nineteenth century. Max Nordau, the author of Degeneration, wrote that the term was also a word of fashion describing what was popular in the upper classes of society at the end of the nineteenth century, and that it came to be a term used to describe upper class culture, which Nordau despised. He went as far as to state that the term really meant the end of race, referring to the idea of nobility as racially coded. As he saw it the noble race was quickly degenerating (2). Thus, degeneration is another important term one must grasp in order to understand the context of the late nineteenth century Gothic. Nordau describes degeneration as a setback in the evolutionary chain of living organism, which instead of transmitting elements fit for survival transmits a “morbid deviation from an original type” ultimately ending with sterility and extinction (16). This idea of the declining European race served as inspiration in many Victorian Gothic stories.

Patrick Brantlinger, author of Rule of Darkness – British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914, refers to Gothic novels at the end of the nineteenth century as imperial Gothic, whose main feature is Darwinian ideology imperialism with interests in the occult (227). This means that the imperial Gothic juxtaposes two diametrical opposites, science and rationalism on the one hand, represented in the genre as Darwinian ideological imperialism, and superstition on the other, represented by the occult. According to Brantlinger, “the three principal themes of imperial Gothic are individual regression or going native; an invasion of civilization by the
forces of barbarism or demonism; and the diminution of opportunities for adventure and heroism in the modern world” (230). We will delve deeper into the meaning of these themes, but initially we note that they include Nordau’s fears about the declining race, but also that they introduce the Other as a threat to Western civilization.

The Other is a term used to describe how language is used to define one’s identity in relation to other groups of people, or other cultures. This is done by projecting hypothetical attributes between one’s own group of people, the Self, while contrasting them to another with attributes of opposite meaning. That other group would then serve as the Other. Ania Loomba, author of *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, claims that Europeans used this as a way to cement colonial attitudes toward the rest of the world (45). An example of Self and Other applied would be Edward Said’s work *Orientalism*. In it Said writes that binary opposition, the same relationship shared between the Self and the Other, was used to describe the Oriental as “irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, ‘different’” (880). That meant that the Europeans by default became the opposite: “rational, virtuous, mature, ‘normal’” (880). During the nineteenth century the importance of Orientalism grew since Europeans were colonizing more and more of the globe. At a certain point Eastern culture was imported into Western institutions of education, which in turn lead Europeans to use literary passages that were hundreds of years old to represent the modern Orient, effectively keeping it static and unchangeable with time (884). The Orient and the people who lived there were thought to be stuck in the past and not at all progressive and industrial. Said claims that Orientalism expresses “entities that coexist in a state of tension produced by imagined radical differences”, such as the Orient being savage whereas Europe is civilized. This is the perspective through which the British knew their world, and because of this the Other and the
Orient were believed to be further on the path of individual regression than the Europeans and the British, if we were to borrow the term from Brantlinger.

There is a paradox to this view of the Other and everything foreign. The ancient civilizations of Rome and Egypt were not only considered primitive and savage, but also role models for the British Empire. The ancient Egyptians were magnificent architects and left monolithic structures which impressed the British. Aviva Briefel analyzes the meaning of the Egyptian hand, or the mummified hand, in literature and art in her article “Hands of Beauty, Hands of Horror: Fear and Egyptian Art at the Fin de Siècle.” She finds that the hand is a symbol for craftsmanship and the ability to manufacture goods, and in the case of the Egyptian hand she notes that it also creates an uncanny effect “as it combines beauty with horror” (264). Briefel reaches the conclusion that Egyptian craftsmanship outperforms English to such an extent that the English feared to become “sterile products, not producers, of a technological age (270). This view agrees with Nordau’s claim that the English race must strive to be the best or face extinction. Compared to the Egyptian craftsmanship, the English could not compete on an evolutionary level. At least, that is the supposed meaning the Egyptian hand in literature is meant to inspire. The Romans on the other hand were seen as the supreme conquering race, having conquered most of Europe and parts of Africa and minor Asia. Duncan Bell, author of “From Ancient to Modern in Victorian Imperial Thought”, writes that Europeans had since the Renaissance relied on classic Greek and Roman ideas to justify empire (736). In the late nineteenth century, it was not uncommon for the English to identify themselves with the classical Romans (736).
The fin-de-siècle also saw considerable belief in the supernatural. Many people, intrigued by the new scientific discoveries, began investigating telepathy, séances, and psychic research (Brantlinger 228). This “new” faith was proof of “waning religious orthodoxy” which is yet another theme of the imperial Gothic, expressing anxiety over civilization’s and British society’s degeneration with time, and Brantlinger further sees the fear of civilized men reverting into savagery as part of this anxiety (229). In other words, there was an uncertainty of what was possible in this new modern world and people were striving to expand and explain all possibilities, and at the same time change would seem as something threatening to the British Empire and its citizens. Kelly Hurley, author of *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism and Degeneration at the Fin-de-siècle*, calls this a blend of the natural and supernatural phenomena which is common in the fin-de-siècle Gothic (16). What is supernatural is roughly figured to be a natural phenomenon which science is yet to uncover and explain. Thus the possibilities of supernatural phenomena are rationalized in the Gothic.

A term used to describe the uncertainty of what are known and unknown is the uncanny. Sigmund Freud writes of its meaning in “The Uncanny”, and derives from the term’s German translation *unheimlich* which is the opposite of what is familiar and “belonging to the home” (154). Freud does furthermore claim that this is not the only meaning of the word “heimlich” which is rather an ambiguous term that describes both what we know but also what we don’t know (156). The term uncanny is used to refer to the opposite of the first meaning of heimlich, therefore meaning something concealed or hidden, suggesting that the uncanny really refers to something that is known and repressed, but has resurfaced in the conscious mind (166). In other words, things that scare us are not only the strange and the foreign, but a combination of those and what we associate to those characteristics which we rather not like.
to think about or experience. It is when pieces of the Other challenge the Self by crossing over the line between them that the uncanny materializes itself.

Brantlinger’s three features of imperial Gothic were said to be based on Darwinian ideology imperialism. The reason ideas such as fear of degeneration could be established can be tracked down to Charles Darwin and his *The Origin of Species*. In his theory of evolution, Darwin presents the idea that the species were not perfected when created, but had evolved by inheriting attributes that ensured the individual organism’s survival and ability to mate and have offspring of its own (Darwin *The Origin of Species*). First published in 1859, *The Origin of Species* evoked religious doubt by claiming that man was a descendent of the apes, and Hurley notes that the theory of evolution put a strain on the barrier between what was human and what was animal since biologists at the time could trace the animal heritage in man through similarities in bone and muscle tissue (55). This caused further social turmoil by increasing racial discourse and challenging orthodox Christianity. What were supposed to be boundaries between the identity of man and that of a beast became unstable and directly affected the binary opposite of man and animal by making it illegitimate (Hurley 56). It was the theory of evolution that spurred the idea of degeneration which concerned Nordau and which Brantlinger refers to as individual regression or going native.

Native people, colonial subjects, were thought to be more animalistic and less civilized because the Europeans believed they were lesser evolved and thus more beast than the Europeans were (Loomba 57). Such Darwinian ideology was used to legitimate colonization and ensure the British right to rule. Furthermore, race became tied to class as well as origin which lead to the belief that nobility was biologically inherited. This was a fact that became
questioned by society, not the least by Nordau who argued about racial decline in the upper classes. Stephen Arata writes in his article “The Occidental Tourist: ‘Dracula’ and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization” that there was a fear of reverse colonization were the civilized world risked being colonized by primitive forces (623). Arata claims that late nineteenth century Gothic stories often focus on the primitive and atavistic (624).

Another idea that flourished during the nineteenth century was the idea that criminality showed in the physiognomy of a person. An authority on criminal behavior at the time, Cesare Lombroso, wrote in his book Criminal Man that criminals are atavistic since they “strongly resemble primitive races” (5). Lombroso acknowledges that it is only one third of the criminals who are of atavistic origin, but they are the most violent and heinous, and that is because Lombroso could trace their behavior to a what he believed was a savage appearance such as large canine teeth, a strong jaw, and abundant body hair (7). Other claims of importance from Lombroso is that biological determined criminals often show to have traits associated to the opposite sex (18). Finally, Lombroso associates criminals with passion driven behavior such as desire for revenge, impulsiveness and vanity (28). To be a biological determined criminal was in other words the same as being foreign, working class or non-Victorian.

The nineteenth century also saw large changes to Western societies. In England the working class gained the right to vote and industrial laborers were awarded shorter regulated working hours. This was a threat to the upper class and meant that the middle class suddenly were established and became the norm. In 1891 elementary education became free which in turn ensured that the earlier illiterate masses now had the possibility to take part of arenas
traditionally reserved for the upper classes of society. The poor, however, was not the only participants who were newly introduced to education during the nineteenth century. In 1871 the first women’s college was founded, and in 1882 the married women’s property act was established, further increasing women’s right in society. However, during the late nineteenth century, women were seen as biological beings that served as the carriers of race, symbolized by blood, and that they were to be protected to avert racial decline (Arata 630).

Overall, British society during the nineteenth century was in commotion due to the earlier mentioned conflict between science and religion, but also due to social conflict. In the colonies, the subjects showed resistance to British rule and an example of such an event would be the Indian Mutiny. The fear of invasion Brantlinger mentions increased with this mutiny in 1857, when the Bengal army of the British East India Company rebelled. The rebellion spread and became an uprising with bloody acts made by the Indian rebels and answered by likewise bloody reprisals from the British (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia “Indian Mutiny”). This, however, was not the only setback for the British Empire which also had to abandon Sudan after the death of General Gordon in 1885 according to Paul Auchterlonie, “From the Eastern Question to the Death of General Gordon: Representations of the Middle East in the Victorian Periodical Press, 1876-1885” (15). Events such as these struck hard against British prestige and to redeem themselves in their own eyes they organized the The Great Exhibition of Crystal Palace. John Davis, “The Great Exhibition”, says that the Exhibition displayed “Victorian obsessions with scientific arrangement and design” (“The Great Exhibition”). According to Davis, the British feared that other nations would outperform them and challenge their superiority, and therefore they arranged it to showcase their own international inventions and ability as producers (“The Great Exhibition).
The Exhibition was a huge success even though moralizers at the time were concerned that foreigners would bring immorality and deceases with them (Davis “The Great Exhibition). This increased interest in science and innovation which are typical characteristics of the Victorian era. An event such as this also suited the growing middle class since people finally had the financial ability to participate.

The reasons that the nineteenth century appeared chaotic are many. Above there are examples from a multitude of different authorities whose view of the world often were in conflict. There is religion and the church, noblemen and the upper class, the bourgeois and the working class, science and progress, men and women, and not the least nationality and race. It was not at all certain what was true and what was false, and people turned to what they deemed suited them best. In a world where everybody chooses what they want to believe in, the one who is able to convince people is king. Therefore, rhetoric was used to appeal to people’s common sense or rationality. Philip Holden, author of ”Castle, Coffin, Stomach: Dracula and the Banality of the Occult”, writes that Gothic stories because of this were written so that readers had to acknowledge their superstitions instead of denying them (474). A key component of this is to strive to achieve realism, so that the amount of critical judgment the reader had to suspend was reduced to a bare minimum (474).
When reading *Dracula* and *The Beetle* it is important to keep in mind that rationality and superstition are not only each other’s diametrical opposite, but are combined to create the narratives. Holden claims that the occult is not something which must be understood and explained, but rather juxtaposed to science in order to relate to one’s secondary superstition, which can be explained as a suspension of the readers critical judgment (471); therefore the superstitious and the scientific are placed in the same context. *Dracula* and *The Beetle* are both structured in ways that juxtapose science and superstition. The former consists of journal and diary extracts, letters, phonograph recordings, and newspaper articles; the latter consist of first person narratives of different characters and their points of view. This may not be completely scientific, but the assembling of each storyline leaves it to the readers to make their mind up about the repeated witness statements, which, in a way, have a slight empirical claim to them. Furthermore it creates an illusion of authenticity in both books.

The books share themes of Brantlinger’s imperial Gothic. In *Dracula*, there is the invasion of London itself by the vampire Dracula, who threatens to turn the good people in the heart of the British Empire into undead abominations. Lucy Westenra was not only killed by Dracula, but turned into “what seemed like a nightmare of Lucy as she lay there; the pointed teeth, the bloodstained, voluptuous mouth – which it made one shudder to see – the whole carnal and unspiritual appearance, seeming like a devilish mockery of Lucy’s sweet purity” (256). This clearly resides in the fear of transformation from civilized to savage, or the decay of the Victorian man or, as in this case, the very sweet and well loved woman Lucy.
In *The Beetle* the invasion consists of the oriental and slightly diabolic, through a Christian perspective, Beetle-figure, whose mesmeric powers also threaten to make savages of civilized men, and however, in a slight less morbid way as Robert Holt in *The Beetle* is forced to experience. “For you are my slave – at my beck and call” the Beetle tells him, and then she orders him to “go through his window like a thief” which reduces Holt to a criminal, a common burglar, against his will (Marsh 62-63). It is quite intriguing that the British bourgeois cannot resist the demand and becomes a criminal, or goes native if you will. Robert Holt is not a man of science and he is not a nobleman. Therefore, he is easily corrupted by the Beetle and turned into something even more despicable than an unemployed clerk. This is the individual regression Brantlinger discusses as part of the imperial Gothic as well as a sign of how effortlessly degeneration is spreading through the English populace. A former reliable and working man transformed into a criminal. Had he been a man of greater character, like Sydney Atherton, he might have been able to resist the mesmeric powers of the Beetle. This reveals a slight fear of the growing influence the middle class was starting to gain. If a commoner becomes a politician, say as Paul Lessingham in *The Beetle*, he might be influenced by immoral ways from the Orient and thus becoming less British and more savage. Because of his position of power, such an event would influence British society and spread the corruption. Foreign culture was not admired in England during the nineteenth century as seen in the Great Exhibition. The British focused the theme on showing their superiority, not embracing what others had accomplished.

The invasion of barbaric forces in both books consists of monsters which are foreign to the British Isles. For some reason it was believed that foreigners had the will to insinuate themselves into English society. This can only be described as a guilty conscience which
According to Arata revealed itself in fears of reverse colonization (623). Both Dracula and the Beetle represent a threat to English society as one were a remnant from the past, a medieval horror that haunted the modern society, and the other an Oriental mystic of unknown biological origin. Stoker marks the following physical traits of Dracula:

I had now an opportunity of observing him, and found him of a very marked physiology. His face was strong – a very strong – aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils; with lofty dome forehead, and hair growing scantily round the temples, but profusely elsewhere. His eyebrows were very massive, almost meeting over the nose, and with bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion… Strange to say, there were hairs in the centre of the palm. (28)

This is a summary of Dracula’s features which are atavistic. In the late nineteenth century racial sciences were acknowledged as true and their effect on the beliefs of the European fin-de-siècle society can be seen in novels such as Dracula and the Beetle. According to a well renowned researcher of the time, Lombroso, being degenerate meant a person had devolved backwards in evolution, hence becoming more like an animal (5). Lombroso used the very same word that Stoker used to describe the physical features of Dracula’s nose, aquiline, and claimed that that very feature belonged to a certain kind of criminal, none other than the murderer (15). The nose resembling the beak of a bird of prey was indeed believed to be the feature of the natural born murderer, and it is a quite fitting appearance for our bloodthirsty Count. In the very same way, Dracula shares another feature with the biologically determined criminal according to Lombroso, and that is the bushy eyebrows which are joined together
over the nose (18). The foreign nobleman who invaded the heart of the British Empire surely must have been a terrifying example of a degenerate being to Stoker’s readers back in the end of the nineteenth century. However, hailing from Romania and having the noble Roman nose, Dracula seems to be a reference to the old Roman Empire. Not only does he threaten to colonize England by turning the people into undead, he certainly has what it takes to succeed since he is the heir of the old Roman Empire. With the English race on the decline, one can see that Dracula was more than a worthy adversary because of this.

Marsh, in his book, relied on the same technique when describing his monster the Beetle:

The cranium, and, indeed, the whole skull, was so small as to be disagreeably suggestive of something animal. The nose, on the other hand, was abnormally large; so extravagant were its dimensions, and so peculiar its shape, it resembled the beak of some bird of prey. A characteristic of the face – and an uncomfortable one! – was that, practically, it stopped short at the mouth. The mouth, with its blubber lips, came immediately underneath the nose, and chin, to all intents and purposes, there was none. (53)

When looking at the shape of the Beetle’s skull, one sees that it too has features of the born criminal. Lombroso suggests that a smaller cranium was an anomaly typical for the criminal, and once again that aquiline nose appears (10). Another feature of the Beetle which is deemed belonging to that of the criminal is the lips. Swollen and fleshy lips are the feature of the desecrator of women and yet again of the murderer (Lombroso 16). Naturally, the small chin or absence of chin as in the Beetle’s case was once again part of the criminal physiology (Lombroso 17). One could claim that both Dracula and the Beetle match the expected
appearance of the fin-de-siècle criminal. The Beetle, however, comes not as a revered nobleman but as a mystic since she acted beyond the rational mind and used unnatural powers and subconscious energies (Arata 624). Holden claims that the occult often reflected scientific achievements in the late Victorian Gothic (471). Because of this, the Beetle’s powers are to be seen as entirely possible but not yet uncovered and explained by science.

Those who did track the world and broadening man’s understanding of it were the doctors, the scientists and the voice of reason. These are important characters that readers become familiar with in Dracula and The Beetle. The doctor was a well educated and much respected person at the fin-de-siècle and in the European academic tradition a title that is associated with authority hundreds of years back. Not only was he, because female doctors were unheard of, an authority, but also a man of science. It was the doctors and the scientists that had brought the world the industrial revolution, medicine, and control over primal forces such as electricity, and because of this they are regarded to be very trustworthy both in knowledge and in character. This is a convention that both Stoker and Marsh rely on to make their narratives seem more authentic. Dr. Seward for example proves that he is a man of science in Dracula using the following phrase: “If I don’t sleep at once, chloral, the modern Morpheus – C₂HCl₃O.H₂O” (Stoker 125). He means that he will use a chemical compound to help him fall asleep. In other words, he is boasting of his knowledge of the marvelous achievements of science and what modern man is capable of. By mentioning the Greek God of dreams, Morpheus, he claims superiority over superstition, since the old fabled God’s powers now are in the hands of man (Farlex “Definition of Morpheus”). This is not critique against religious belief, since Christianity was the official religion, and still considered equally good at describing reality as science. The chemical formula itself shows how modern science is used
to manipulate the components of reality by dividing and classifying the otherwise invisible contents of a gas. In other words, science is flexing its muscles gaining ground on superstition, and the juxtaposition of the two recurs.

In *Dracula*, Dr. Seward’s medical knowledge helps him recognize his limitations when confronted with the medical enigma of Lucy. Accordingly, he metaphorically brings in the cavalry to fight the powers of the supernatural. “Van Helsing, the great specialist” is introduced and not only is Van Helsing a doctor (Stoker 144), he teaches doctors and he truly is a renaissance man as proven by himself: “I know; I know. You forget that I am a lawyer as well as a doctor” (Stoker 197). On yet other occasions he is a professor, a scientist, and well read in the occult; he is, as mentioned, a universal specialist. He is the hero of the story, the warrior who stands against the evils of a foreign and terrible threat, and his weapon of choice is knowledge itself. This knowledge, however, when closely studied proves not to be purely scientific but rather a mixture of reason and superstition. As soon as he reaches Lucy he immediately gives his verdict: “there is no time to be lost. She will die for sheer want of blood to keep the heart’s action as it should be. There must be a transfusion of blood at once” (Stoker 147).

This scene demonstrates Van Helsing’s medical expertise as he immediately recognizes that a blood-drained Lucy needs a transfusion of blood. Yet again modern science, this time in the role of medicine, must fight against Dracula, the vampire who represents superstition. One drains blood, the other refills it. The ability to perform a blood transfusion was surely considered one of the marvels of modern science at that time, and in *Dracula* this act was a way to combat degeneration. Arata writes that blood is what carries race, and Dracula in
transforming his victims into versions of his own degenerate being, is effectively changing their race (630). By becoming a vampire, one goes native per definition and the refilling of nobler Westerner blood helps resisting this transformation. Lucy, however, is not saved and when she dies she transforms into vampire. As a vampire, Lucy becomes atavistic as proven by her teeth which changed into those of a beast. Her bloodstained mouth recalls that she feeds off the race of the pure English children. Lucy is no longer regarded as pure.

If we trace the meaning of Lucy’s transformation further, we find that she is a victim of symbolic rape. First she is a victim of Dracula who penetrates her with his teeth. Later, after she transforms, she is penetrated by the stake in the hands of Arthur, encouraged by Van Helsing. At first, she is a victim and then she is being punished for being one. The responsibility is being shifted from perpetrator to victim, suggesting that it is the woman’s fault that she has been raped. This is concealed critique on women and their ability to inspire lust in otherwise perfectly reasonable men. If we look at the meaning of the name Lucy Westernra, we find that Lucy means light bringer, and that the male equivalent is Lucifer. The pure Lucy, in other words, is not the first bringer of light to become fallen, and both Lucy and Lucifer, the Devil, have the ability to corrupt men. Her last name Westernra, on the other hand, clearly refers to her Western race, and her transformation from a Madonna into a whore is further proof of individual and racial regression.

Van Helsing did however not only rely on medical science; to combat the possibility of a vampire attack, he utilized widespread superstition taken from folklore with the use of garlic as a repellant against vampires. Van Helsing says: “Ah, it is the fault of our science that it wants to explain all; and if it explain [sic] not, then it says there is nothing to explain” (Stoker
229). With those words Van Helsing critiques how science is being used to conceive reality. This is proof of the mysteries of our world that are yet to be unraveled. Science has not yet found a way to explain and categorize everything, so one cannot automatically classify what is not yet disproven as non-existent.

In The Beetle, there is also man of science and reason, and that is the inventor Sydney Atherton. Much like Dr. Seward, Sydney knows his share of chemistry as seen in this passage: “I had in front of me some of the finest destructive agents you could wish to light upon – carbon-monoxide, chlorine-trioxide, mercuric-oxide, conine, potassimide, potassium-carboxide, cyanogens” (Marsh 102). What Sydney and Dr. Seward do is boasting about their knowledge of how to handle chemicals. They are proving that they are men of science and doing so makes their narrations seem more authentic. All of Sydney’s mentioned substances are poisonous, and Sydney’s plan on making a biological weapon so terrible it would frighten nations into peace actually came true in the First World War. The biological warfare, however, did not decide the outcome of the First World War but has instead been used to maim and murder in conflicts all around the world, proving Sydney wrong in his plans of legitimizes murder. As written, however, Sydney’s intentions if they were to become reality would diminish the chances for heroism in the world by ensuring peace, which bizarrely enough was seen as something bad since it would mean a less strained way of life and thus putting the English race further on the path of degeneration. Therefore, science is not only to be regarded as something helpful, but at times equally evil as superstition.

Another thought that comes to mind with Sydney’s dream of legitimizes murder is Arata’s theory of reverse colonization in the late nineteenth century Gothic, which describes the
civilized world as a victim of colonization by primitive forces (623). This in turn has many similarities with Brantlinger’s invasion theory, and ending the conflicts of the world would ensure the continued global British domination and avert colonized subjects to migrate to, or invade, the heart of the British Empire. In case of *The Beetle*, Sydney is unknowingly preparing a weapon against foreign nations when the threat is already right at his doorstep, or more accurately right inside his home. Freud’s uncanny comes to mind when what is not from home literally enters one’s home. Sydney, thankfully is a clear-sighted man, being both a scientist and an inventor, which means he is a man of progress. He proves that good English men still exist and uses his marvelous constructions of modern science to intimidate his unwelcomed guest, the Oriental being who is the Beetle. He narrates: “Behind me was an electrical machine, giving an eighteen inch spark. It was set in motion by a lever fitted into the table, which I could easily reach from where I sat. As I spoke the visitor was treated to a little exhibition of electricity” (Marsh 145). This had a peculiar effect on the Beetle who became very obedient when confronted by the tools of science. Sydney uses reason to gain stature against the superstitious powers of the Orient, and once again science is not proving superstition to be faulty; it rather treats it like an adversary. This time reason prevails since a man like Sydney can resist the mesmeric powers of the Beetle. A man of character cannot be influenced by the powers of the occult. This suggests that a person of lesser character would be vulnerable to corruption and because of this the blame is displaced to the victim on similar occasions. If you show strong morale, you will not degenerate, but since you do, it suits you because of your lack of character.

Holden writes that it is common for a late Victorian novel to contain elements of the supernatural (471). Interest in the occult grew paradoxically as science could give a more
rational explanation of the world and hypnotism was one of paranormal activities people took part in. “It was certainly odd that whenever she got into lethargic state, with the stertorous breathing; she put the flowers from her; but that when she waked she clutched them close” (Stoker 193). This is a reference to Dracula’s mesmeric powers, a concept used by Marsh in The Beetle as well. “I was immediately conscious that in his eyes, there was, in an especial degree, what, for want of a better term, one may call the mesmeric quality” (Marsh 105).

Hypnotism is one of the unholy powers the Beetle and the Count share. Hurley notes that hypnotism in Dracula is the pseudoscience Van Helsing relies on to convince Dr. Seward and in the extension the reader as well of the possibility that every strange phenomena in the world is not yet uncovered and explained by science (19). Since Dr. Seward knew that hypnotism had been scientifically investigated and found to be true to some extent, Hurley reinforces her statement that science is playing catch up with the occult and supernatural phenomena which have always existed (19). Hurley also notes signs of this in The Beetle when Sydney Atherton witnessed the Beetle’s metamorphosis into scarab and back; in both books the supernatural is represented as available to investigation by science and therefore under human control (17). If this would fail, the primitive forces would prevail and plunge Britain into subordination. Therefore, everything must be controlled and what cannot be controlled must be destroyed. This is why Sydney’s is constructing a miracle weapon, to destroy what cannot be controlled as Lucy was when she went out of control in Dracula.

Both Dracula and The Beetle have references to the industrial revolution. Trains and railroads play a minor but not unimportant role in the setting of the books. Jonathan Harker goes by train through Europe and the railroad is then exchanged for carriage when he comes to Transylvania. Hurley sees this as a metaphor of leaving the modern world and travel back
to the medieval times of folklore and superstition (190). Even more frighteningly, Arata notes that the medieval horror which is the Count reveals that he is the most Western character by being the most rational, the most punctual, and the most intelligent (637). Count Dracula has made careful planning and proves to be a very cunning degenerated force. One could think of Dracula as a symbol of Western regression and thus a threat from within. This creates an uncanny effect by bringing forth what is repressed within the civilized man. By having these Western characteristics, Dracula also shows that he is indeed capable of perverting modern English society, which is already weak due to degeneration.

Another subtle part played by the railroad is the end of the Beetle’s escape across England that ends in a train wreck. The only traces of the creature that could be found at the site “were pieces of what looked like partially burnt rags, and fragments of silk and linen”, and the last narrator of *The Beetle*, the confidential agent Mr. Champnell continues: “I have those fragments now. Experts have assured me that they are actually neither linen nor silk! but of some material – animal rather than vegetable – with which they are wholly unacquainted” (Marsh 318). This is another mystery of which science is yet to catch up with. Here Marsh is playing with the idea that there are unknown species left to be discovered, and thus there might be some room for adventure still in the world.

Hurley also notes that both *Dracula* and *The Beetle* are abominations which she defines as “a border entity, existing at the interstices of oppositional categories” (24). Dracula is both living and dead. The Beetle is both man and woman, as well as human and animal. Hurley argues that this is something that infringes on the boundaries of opposite binaries of which the human mind orders experiences such as living – dead, male – female, and human – animal
In other words, abominations challenge the foundations we rely on to understand the world. It is when what we know to be true is found to be false that fear starts to seep into our minds. Or as former haunted man Paul Lessingham’s phobia of beetles is described by Mr. Champnell: “Paul Lessingham has not since been troubled by his old tormentor. He has ceased to be a haunted man. None the less he continues to have what seems to be a constitutional disrelish for the subject of beetles, nor can he himself be induced to speak of them” (Marsh 320). Hurley claims that this is a reference to Freud’s uncanny which is supposed to be known as well as unknown and thus creating a terrifying experience (40). The theory is that the cause for fear is repressed and that it resurfaces from the unconsciousness and is forced to be repressed again. Remembering that Freud’s original German term *unheimlich* actually means “scary” and breaks down into the morphemes meaning “not as home” suggest that what is foreign to us causes our fear. Not only does this build upon realistic explanations of psychoanalytical condition it also recalls the invasion of barbaric and demonic forces. To further stress the implications of this in both books, Hurley notes that the theory of evolution puts a strain on the barrier between what was human and what was animal since biologists at the time could trace the animal heritage in man through similarities in bone and muscle tissue (55). This meant that man no longer could be viewed as the pinnacle of the Creation which challenged orthodox Christianity. What were supposed to be boundaries between the identity of man and that of a beast became unstable and directly affected the binary opposite of man and animal by making it illegitimate (Hurley 56). To use the theories of the uncanny and opposite binaries, man became an abomination and it is what lurks within which scare us the most. Keep this in mind while thinking about the shape-shifting abilities of
both Dracula and the Beetle. They are beasts in human bodies, and if truth be told, are not we all?
The meaning of scientific discourse

When analyzing Dracula and The Beetle one finds many similarities. This is not at all that strange since both books were published the same year and at the same location all while sharing genre as Gothic stories. The interesting part of this is how both books utilize science rhetorically to inspire realism. Both books are set in the nineteenth century and rely on scientific discourse. There are the doctors, inventors and specialists who serve as trustworthy authorities, while at the same time adding their knowledge and their expertise to the texts. This scientific discourse is used to make whatever subject seem scientific by applying it to the discourse. This is Holden’s juxtaposition of reason and superstition. Throughout the texts, there are passages of the supernatural being examined by men of reason. Sydney Atherton challenges the Beetle’s powers with his inventions. Van Helsing convinces the readers that vampirism might be an undocumented case of medical state that superstition has known to be true for centuries.

Keeping Branlinger’s imperial Gothic features in mind, one finds that ideas such as evolution, race, and the survival of the English are carefully woven into the stories. In both Dracula and The Beetle, Britain is being invaded by a singular entity which represents something greater. In Dracula it is the past which suggests a connection to individual regression and succumbing to savagery and atavism. In The Beetle it is the foreign which comes with vengeance in its mind. This is where the books are different. Dracula is a Western male character, with a slight connection to the old Roman Empire and therefore a suitable invader who is clear-sighted and bold. The Beetle is an ambiguous female character, driven
by passion and with a connection to the Ancient Egyptian Empire. Although there is a
difference, it is not all too clear, since Dracula also shares passion as his degenerate flaw.

One cannot, however, miss out on the fact that the nineteenth century was marked by
changes to society, changes that were connected to the industrial revolution and scientific
progress. Representing this are the railroads, electricity, chemistry and the telegraph to name a
few. Science is both part of the setting and the discourse that takes place. My conclusion is
that science is used, not to create realism directly, but to erase the boundaries between known
facts and believed facts. Therefore, uncertainty is created by arguing that it is wise or
necessary to doubt much of what we believe is true. The aim is to create the uncanny effect, to
make the foreign become a part of what is home, and to allow repressed experiences to
resurface. In these two Gothic stories the uncanny is the monsters Dracula and the Beetle. One
is the foreign threat, the other the repressed. Both are degenerate in their passions and both are
occult adversaries of reason, ensuring that the juxtaposition of science and superstition lives
on.
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Primary Sources


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