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Ross G. Forman, "A Parasite For Sore Eyes: Rereading Infection Metaphors in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 44. 4 (2016): 925-47.

Dracula's bite ineluctably changes his victims, transforming them into vampires and also into the pale and wasted "Undead." So obviously at stake (in every sense) are ideas of contagion, infection, degeneration, and epidemic in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), that critics have identified diseases from rabies to cholera, tuberculosis to syphilis, cancer to leprosy, as symbolic presences within the novel. That *Dracula* "responds to anxieties of degeneration through metaphors of infection", has become, as Ross G. Forman notes in this impressive essay, "axiomatic" (925). Forman's intervention in this critical tradition is to argue that parasitic infection, and infection with malaria in particular, offers a particularly fertile way to understand the text.

Like the vampire, Forman observes, the mosquito leaves something in the blood of its victims, but also draws something away, infecting as it depletes. Like the vampire, the mosquito is difficult to detect visually, or to isolate. Malaria itself waxes and wanes in two cyclical fashions, both of which are echoed in the vampire: it appears at night, and infection is most common in the summer and autumn, subsiding in the winter. Malaria has an incubatory period, just as vampirism does; it also causes malaise, delusions, paroxysm, and anaemia. The amoeba, hosted without consent in the infected body, changes shape and appearance, as does Dracula, according to his need to infect. Even the garlic Van Helsing hangs about Lucy's body and at her door is accounted for in this reading, as an "insect prophylaxis" occasionally used as a defence against malaria (935). Malaria itself also occupies an appropriately complex position in relation to miasma and germ theories of disease, its fermentation associated with soil and a "heavy" atmosphere, as well as with direct bacterial infection.

The intuitively persuasive comparison between the mosquito's invasive proboscis and its penetration of the skin to inject amoeba which go on to cause degenerative decline in the victim is only the starting point here. A compelling set of interconnecting parallels between parasitism and *Dracula* follows, relating both to the novel's narrative structure, and its presentation of vampirism. Having explicitly situated the article as resistant to "depoliticizing" (925) or insufficiently historicized approaches, Forman goes on to point out that malaria was increasingly understood as the "leading cause of death in the tropics" (933) in the 1890s, bound up with imperial anxieties about threats which might breach the boundaries of British shores. Thus, critical discussions about "reverse colonization" and immigration in the novel can be developed through this reading both through vampirism's similarity to the tropical disease, and to the precise manner of the transmission of this disease as it breaks through the skin's membrane and integrates itself within its host.

Forman also draws attention to the ways in which considering the fertilization and injection of the parasite might "bolster queer readings of the text" (926). Dracula's own consistent desire to penetrate women with his fangs, his red-lipped, pale-skinned, transgressively sensual vampire women in Transylvania, as well as the obviously sexual dimension to the staking of Lucy Westenra, have legitimated the critical consensus that there is much that is sexual about *Dracula*'s vampirism. Forman's parasitic model not only engages the obvious parallels of penetration and

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insemination, but also argues on a more microcosmic level for an "inherently sexual" dimension to malaria, in which "the blood itself becomes a locus for perverse sexual congress" (936).

What marks Forman's parasitic model from other accounts of diseases and modes of contagion which might be symbolically present within the novel is its capacity to account for the novel's own hybridism and its "bricolage" (926). The reader of *Dracula* must piece together the narrative from a variety of sources and narratives; furthermore, Stoker is indebted, as Forman notes, to a range of genres from the travelogue to the sensation novel to detective fiction which inform the form and structure of the novel. As the novel drew from its antecedents, so too writers of all succeeding vampire fiction draw in some way on *Dracula*: at every level, the parasitic model offers a framework for thinking about this ongoing process of influence and exchange.

Forman's contribution to an already plentiful field of readings of infection, contagion, and degeneration in *Dracula* is remarkable for its capacity to engage with the queer and the postcolonial, and to align the structural with the thematic. Stoker's parasitic vampire is, appropriately, a plausible and an alarming figure, whose influence seems likely to continue to be significant.

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