Both H. Rider Haggard’s *She* and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* focus on a powerful supernatural figure. These figures – Ayesha and Dracula, respectively – are both vampires of a sort, though one is more of a literal representation than the other. One is also presented in a more sympathetic light than the other. Both beings are immortal entities capable of tremendous acts of supernatural power. They exist outside of humanity and are both feared and revered in turns. Both Dracula and Ayesha commit terrible acts, chief among which are murder and torture. Both characters contain a level of complexity which must be explored, however, in order to understand the theme of both novels. Though both vampiric in nature, Ayesha differs from Dracula in the way she is regarded. Her more human-like traits allow others (readers and the characters within Haggard’s novel) to bestow upon her a modicum of sympathy and pity, whereas Dracula inspires nothing but awe and terror. Both Ayesha and Dracula are inhuman, evil creatures, but the way in which Ayesha is presented allows readers to sympathize with her while viewing Dracula as an unrepentant monster.

Stoker’s Dracula is one of the first of his kind – an unambiguously evil vampire. In fact, the pervading theme throughout the novel is the very nature of the evil which he unleashes. His story is one of horror rather than romance, and he epitomizes darkness. Steven Herbert suggests that Dracula serves as “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” (62). Dracula acts as a symbol of living darkness; he is the terror that lurks in the shadows and the danger that lies in wait for unsuspecting victims. The character of Dracula also serves as a cautionary tale of sorts: “Dracula can help us understand the monsters we meet in everyday life disguised as everyday people” (Herbert 62). From the moment Jonathan Harker arrives in Count Dracula’s domain, he can feel that something is not quite right with the land and its master. At multiple times throughout the early portion of the novel, Harker has moments of clarity wherein he marvels at the strangeness of the people and his surroundings while traveling to Count Dracula’s residence. “I feel the dread of this horrible place overpowering me,” he remarks at one point, after realizing that he is a prisoner in Dracula’s domain. “I am in fear – in awful fear – and there is no escape for me” (37). Harker’s instincts are practically screaming at him to remove himself from the Count’s presence – and indeed, his influence – and yet he does not heed their call until it is too late and he has no means of escape. Count Dracula is dangerous not only because he is otherworldly and supernaturally endowed, but because he is charismatic. He knows how to blind a person to his more unseemly or extraordinary traits. Like a cat biding its time with a mouse, Dracula lulls his victim into a false sense of security before striking, and this only adds to the horror of his character.

In terms of his appearance, Dracula is described as more beast than human. When Jonathan Harker lists the Count’s various physical traits, he mentions the Count’s “firm but thin” cheeks and the man’s “extraordinary pallor” (20). This image – thinness and an unhealthy paleness – brings to mind a corpse, and this appearance, coupled with the Count’s apparent age (Jonathan describes him as an old man) serves to illustrate the Count’s closeness to death. In addition, Jonathan also observes the Count’s hands, remarking that “there were hairs in the
centre of the palm,” and the Count’s nails “were long and fine, and cut to a sharp point” (20). The Count’s appearance is strangely beast-like, the hairy palms and pointed nails denoting his connection to the wolves which roam the countryside beyond his castle walls. Even after the Count feeds on blood and adopts a younger, healthier countenance, his appearance is still terror-inducing and too strange to be entirely human. This beast-like physicality removes any trace of pity or sympathy one could possibly hold for the creature.

Haggard’s titular She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed, the beautiful Ayesha, is not a vampire by conventional standards, but she still retains some vampiric characteristics. This, coupled with the same theme which runs rampant through Stoker’s Dracula – the nature of evil – serves to illustrate just how similar the two immortal beings truly are. Ayesha is immortal and supernaturally endowed like Dracula. Their methods of taking life differ, but the end result is the same. While Dracula drains the life from his victim’s through their blood, Ayesha merely raises her hand and kills without having to touch her victims at all (such as in the case of poor Ustane). Ayesha differs greatly from Dracula in terms of appearance, however. When the main character Holly first comes across Ayesha, she is wrapped in material which hides her face and body from his view. He remarks that the ensemble causes Ayesha to “at first sight… remind [Holly] most forcibly of a corpse in its grave-clothes” (138). In this way both Ayesha and Dracula at one point adopt a ghostly or corpse-like appearance, denoting their connection to death and dying despite the fact that both characters are immortal. Both characters are clad head to foot in some sort of cloaking garment, though Dracula is clad all in black and Ayesha is clad entirely in white. When Holly asks to gaze upon her face, Ayesha coyly tells him, “Never may the man to whom my beauty has been unveiled put it from his mind” (150). Ayesha’s beauty is a weapon all its own, a far cry from Count Dracula’s own beastly countenance. When Ayesha unveils, Holly recoils in
both awe and terror. He remarks that, “I have heard of the beauty of celestial beings, now I saw it; only this beauty, with all its awful loveliness and purity, was evil” (151). It is strange that Holly mentions the “purity” of Ayesha’s beauty, only to label it as evil in the same breath. This juxtaposition of beauty and death – as well as purity and evil – serves only to illustrate how dangerous Ayesha truly is. It is only because of her human-like traits (her deep-rooted love for Kalikrates, mostly) that readers can feel a modicum of sympathy for her.

Both Ayesha and Dracula perish by fire – by light – and this illustrates their connection to darkness. Dracula’s connection is much less subtle than Ayesha’s. When Jonathan Harker first sees him, the Count is “clad in black from head to foot, without a single speck of color about him anywhere” (18). The Count is a veritable black hole; no light or color can reach him. Michael Osborn discusses the differing concepts of light and darkness in his paper “Archetypal Metaphor in Rhetoric: The Light-Dark Family.” He explains the methods in which darkness terrorizes a man by “bringing fear of the unknown, discouraging sight, making one ignorant of his environment – vulnerable to its dangers and blind to its rewards… reduced to a helpless state, no longer able to control the world about him” (3). Those who are caught in the Count’s orbit – whether by choice or through no one’s will but the Count’s, as is often the case – are unable to find their way out. Fear of the unknown cripples Jonathan during his stay in the Count’s castle. He knows there is danger and evil within the walls of Dracula’s abode, but he does not know what that evil actually is. Poor Mina and Lucy are vulnerable to the Count’s charismatic powers and are indeed helpless against his might.

Ayesha herself shares many similarities with the Count. She is charismatic, charming, and knows from experience how to get men to do her bidding. Her beauty serves as the reel to lure those around her into her web, and indeed her beauty is a weapon honed to perfection.
However, it is interesting that Ayesha appears to Holly clad all in white. In opposition to darkness, Osborn remarks that “light (and the day) relates to the fundamental struggle for survival” and equates to “the warmth and engendering power of the sun” (3). Ayesha herself is immortal; she does not need to struggle for survival as her continuous existence is a well-known fact. Shrouding her in white allows Haggard to promote a sense of purity to her character. Readers will have an easier time sympathizing with Ayesha due to her beauty and apparent purity. Still, Haggard injects enough dark influences into Ayesha’s figure and surroundings to illustrate that her purity is nothing but a guise: “Accordingly, because darkness arouses dread, Haggard has made Ayesha to dwell in a gloomy realm” (Nelson 114). Ayesha entombs herself in a dark and desolate lair just as Dracula hides away in his crumbling ruin of a castle. Their surroundings serve as a warning to those who would seek them out. Ayesha’s beauty, however, holds a darkness all its own. Holly remarks on multiple occasions that Ayesha’s beauty fills him with both longing and dread. “Never before had I guessed what beauty made sublime could be,” he says, “and yet, the sublimity was a dark one – the glory was not all of heaven – though none the less was it glorious” (151). Ayesha’s danger – the nature of her evil – lies in her beauty. Her darkness is wrapped up and concealed in the guise of light and purity, and it is this fact that makes her even more dangerous than Dracula.

The major difference between Dracula and Ayesha is that Dracula comes across as an unrepentant monster. Ayesha, on the other hand, comes across as sympathetic. Of Dracula, Mina Harker remarks in her journal that, “I suppose one ought to pity any thing so hunted as is the Count. That is just it: this thing is not human – not even beast. To read Dr. Seward’s account of poor Lucy’s death, and what followed, is enough to dry up the springs of pity in one’s heart” (224). Dracula’s actions destroy any chance he ever had of gaining pity from his compatriots.
Even with his charisma and charm, the Count is never capable of garnering sympathy from the other characters in the novel nor from readers. In her paper “Repulsive to Romantic: The Evolution of Bram Stoker’s Dracula,” Sarah Peters remarks that Dracula is “a monster that is inhuman and undeserving of human sympathy” (1). Because he has the beast-like traits previously addressed, Dracula can never truly pass as human. There will always be something about his countenance that unnerves people.

Ayesha, on the other hand, garners true sympathy from Holly and company because of her appearance and what they can infer from her expressions. There are moments in the novel wherein Holly becomes privy to the grief and loss – and underlying darkness – which permeates Ayesha’s entire being. As he gazes at her uncovered face, Holly describes her expression as one which conveys that “‘memory haunts me from age to age, and passion leads me by the hand – evil have I done, and from age to age evil I shall do, and sorrow shall I know til my redemption comes’” (151). Holly sees the duality of humanity and immortality in Ayesha’s face, and thus cannot help but to be drawn to the woman despite his instincts telling him she is evil. In his study of the sympathetic vampires within Anne Rice’s Interview with a Vampire, Qassim Sarhan remarks that, “Unlike Bram Stoker’s monstrous vampires… Rice’s immortals reinvent the vampire as glamorous, seductive, philosophical… endowed with supernatural powers and abilities” (38). This description could also apply quite readily to Ayesha. Though she is obviously an otherworldly being and instills terror in those that look upon her, she also has qualities which draw people to her. Ayesha is glamorous (her beauty is praised multiple times throughout the novel), seductive (due to centuries of knowledge Ayesha knows exactly how to tempt others to do her bidding), and also philosophical (as evidenced by her conversations with Holly).
Granted, Dracula is also seductive and philosophical. The terror of Dracula stems from the fact that he “works on us from the inside, taking over our bodies, “infecting” our deepest desires with the lust of sexuality and iniquity” (Kershner 26). Ayesha works in much the same way. The two immortal beings know how to work their victims from the inside out. The span of their numerous years have allowed them to gain a deep, intricate understanding of the inner workings of man and the knowledge of how to use that understanding to their advantage. Nothing can be hidden from Dracula or Ayesha; they can determine a person’s innermost desires and fears without effort. Their power – god-like and overwhelming – assures that no one can stand against them.

Bram Stoker’s Dracula and H. Rider Haggard’s She both present a powerful immortal being shrouded in darkness and death. Both creatures may once have been human, but after centuries upon centuries of “life,” their humanity has been stripped away. Ayesha’s beauty and apparent purity, as well as her agony over her beloved Kalikrates allows readers to sympathize with her. Her human traits overshadow her otherworldly influence and afford her the guise of humanity. Dracula, on the other hand, casts off all shreds of his former humanity. He is an unrepentant monster who appears more beast than man. At their core, the two beings are the same. Their power lies in their ability to strike at the heart of their victims. The true terror of their strange, supernatural forms lies in the myriad of ways in which they can control others, whether through sexual allure, charismatic charm, or supernaturally inflicted mind control. They are monsters who hide in plain sight. Once the guise of allure and sentiment has been discarded, however, both Ayesha and Dracula are revealed for what they truly are – immortal, inhuman, and monstrous.
Works Cited


