



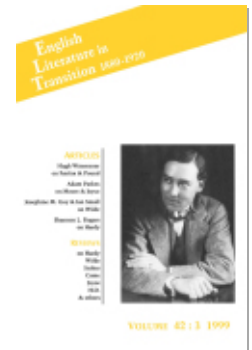
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Dracula, Tradition, Modernism

Rosemary Jann

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remains an important area of modern scholarship, and some readers might be disappointed that the *Encyclopedia* is of little help in furthering research into it.

All of this is to say that this is not quite the encyclopedia which I would have written. Nonetheless it is a work which I, and I'm sure many other readers, will find extraordinarily useful.

Ian Small

University of Birmingham

Dracula, Tradition, Modernism

Carol Senf. *Dracula: Between Tradition and Modernism*. New York: Twayne, 1998. xv + 132 pp. \$25.95

AFTER A HUNDRED YEARS, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) still retains its hold on our cultural imagination, at once turn-of-the-century period piece and classic vampire story. In this recent addition to the Twayne Masterworks series, Carol Senf places the novel clearly in its historical context, situating it at the intersection of contemporary concerns about gender, race, science, and technology. After the brief overview chapters required by the Masterworks formula (on historical context, critical reception, and "the importance of the work"), Senf's reading of the novel begins with a consideration of its narrative structure. She positions the major characters in terms of the social types they represent and celebrates the ability of the composite manuscript that they produce to defeat the vampire by its figuratively conjoined forces of "law, science, scholarship, religion, technology, and capital." She also endorses those views that read the ending as silencing Mina Harker, who, as chief organizer and collator of the varied documents that make up the account, might otherwise exercise a threatening degree of authorial control over it.

The chapters that follow take a topical approach to the novel's contemporary significance. Drawing upon a variety of commentators, Senf demonstrates the ways in which *Dracula* tapped into *fin-de-siècle* fears about imperialism, race, and atavism by positioning Dracula as racial other. She surveys the wide variety of assumptions and fantasies about gender that shape the portrayal of both the vampires and the English women in the novel, as well as possible links to the anxieties about homosexuality that surfaced in the Wilde trials. Here she makes good use of Elaine Showalter's insight that cultural instability in times of change often registers itself in anxieties over conventional gender roles.

A chapter that focuses on the novel's interest in extra-rational beliefs suggests links between insanity, religion, and gothic form, all means of challenging conventional definitions of normality. Her discussions of both science and technology stress their somewhat ambiguous status in the novel, as powerful but not invincible tools in the hands of the vampire hunters, who must also resort to more traditional methods to insure Dracula's defeat.

In her most innovative chapter, she considers the neglected significance of class differences in the novel, particularly the way in which the superiority of the middle-class characters is defined against the decadence of the aristocratic Dracula and the derelictions of the working classes. At times the discussion seems to strain too hard to make the novel representative of the times; digressions into Victorians' attitudes toward animals and their fascination with history, for instance, do not seem central enough to the novel to justify their inclusion. On balance, though, this account makes a substantial case for *Dracula's* topicality. It also makes tactful and relevant use of details from Stoker's biography, like the ways his personal connections with the scientific and medical community contribute to his portrayal of these in the novel.

Senf is generous and thorough in her inclusion of the work of other scholars; indeed, the study constitutes a veritable compendium of critical views of the novel, one that is careful to represent opposing positions. Her overriding concern with balance is signaled by her subtitle. While it is certainly true, however, that the novel combines a tantalizing mix of conventional Victorian prejudice and state-of-the-art innovation, Senf's determination to make Stoker both traditional and progressive may achieve compromise at the cost of incisiveness. This approach certainly works for characterizing the novel's mix of science and superstition. It also offers a plausible approach to Stoker's views of women, although the evidence for his fear of female sexuality seems rather to overwhelm his hedged admiration for the New Woman, especially given that he makes the New Woman in question, Mina Harker, so safely maternal and sexually reticent.

The argument seems more strained on the issue of race. Notwithstanding Stoker's sensitivity to anti-Irish prejudice, there is little evidence that it tempered his assumptions about "lesser races." Senf tries to make Stoker seem progressive on this issue by arguing for similarities between Jonathan Harker and Dracula, similarities that seem more inadvertent than real. Surely the passage in which Harker looks into his

shaving mirror and cannot see the reflection of Dracula, who is standing behind him, owes more to conventional vampire lore (which Stoker extensively researched) than to what Senf describes as Stoker's conscious intention to critique the polarities of nineteenth-century racial attitudes by showing the reader that Harker and Dracula resemble each other. Here as elsewhere, the discussion blurs the distinction between meanings available to Stoker's contemporaries and those available to a relativistic twentieth-century reader primed to deconstruct the superficial coherences of the story he offers. Similarly blurred are differences between claiming that the novel embodies ideological contradictions that destabilize conventional categories—which is certainly true of *Dracula* and, one might argue, true of most novels, insofar as they inevitably attempt to present ideology as being transparent and consistent in ways that it can never be—and implying that Stoker somehow intended this destabilization, or that his views are simply hard to reconcile because he lived in a transitional time, when people were caught between traditional and modern ideas.

It is important for student readers, the main target audience for this series, to appreciate the links between texts and the historical periods that produce them. Senf's thorough survey of contextual issues does an important service in this regard, even if the theoretical relationships between author, text, and context could profit from more consistent analysis. Ultimately, though, what keeps readers coming back to *Dracula* is not its relevance for contemporaries, but its relentless suspense, its eerie otherness, its uncanny grip on our unconscious fears—effects that cannot be captured by the tame compromises between progress and tradition into which this study repeatedly dissolves the novel's mysteries.

Rosemary Jann

George Mason University

Hall Caine Biography

Vivien Allen. *Hall Caine: Portrait of a Romancer*. Sheffield: Academic Press, 1997. 449 pp. Cloth £37.50 \$55.00 Paper £16.95 \$24.95

AS VIVIEN ALLEN asserts in the preface to her biography of Thomas Hall Caine (1853–1931), “Mention Hall Caine now and the likely response is ‘Hall *who*?’ Yet, in his day he was so famous he was recognised on the streets of London and New York. . . . Like some other popular writers of his time he was accorded the adulation reserved now for pop stars or footballers. . . . He was more widely read than most other