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## 'Dracula: Bloodlines' and the Role of Women

Audrey Binzer  
*University of Dayton*

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## 'Dracula: Bloodlines' and the Role of Women

### **Writing Process**

The writing process began after attending the *Dracula Bloodlines* ballet. While watching the performance, the integral role of women stood out to me and I decided it would be a good topic to write about. From there, it was a pretty easy process. I used the program to help support my ideas and make the essay complete.

**Editor's note:** This paper received first prize (\$100).

### **Semester**

Fall

### **Instructor**

Molly Keane-Sexton

### **Year**

2018

# 'Dracula: Bloodlines' and the Role of Women

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*Audrey Binzer*

*This essay received first-place honors and a prize of \$100 in the Dracula: Bloodlines First-Year Arts Immersion essay contest sponsored by the Humanities Commons and the Dean's Office of the College of Arts and Sciences.*

For many societies throughout history, males have been the predominant figures over females. In these societies, men had all the power and freedom, while women had to wait in the shadows. The life of a woman was dependent upon the men in her life. Many popular pieces in literature today are controversial in regards to how they characterize gender roles, including Bram Stoker's *Dracula*; however, the modern ballet interpretation clearly empowers women. The Dayton Ballet created an artistic translation of the classic vampire novel through dance in their production of *Dracula: Bloodlines*. They combined the elements of music, song, and dance to illustrate the story. The performance displayed Dracula's journey from a human fighting in a war into his transformation and the aftermath of turning in a vampire. The first act focused on Vlad (Dracula) saying goodbye to his lover and leaving to fight. He almost dies, and a strange woman saves him, but at a price. Vlad turns into a savage vampire. The second act spotlights Lucy and her relationship with Dracula. Though Dracula is an integral part of the storyline, the ballet put more emphasis on the feminine characters and their impact within the

story. *Dracula: Bloodlines* depicts women as powerful through the choreography, the men, and the character of Lilith.

### **Choreography**

*Dracula: Bloodlines* depicts women as powerful through the choreography of the ballet.

Though the male characters dominate the first half of the ballet, some of the main figures introduced are Katerina, Dracula's lover, and Lilith. In the scene where Katerina and Vlad say goodbye, the majority of the action surrounds Katerina. The movements and whole focus of the dance is about her and what she means to Vlad. Her character is spotlighted in this duet. Vlad is simply there as a supporting role that helps spotlight Katerina. In the first act, Lilith has a solo dance which clearly shows her independence and power. This draws the emphasis toward the feminine side. When she does not have a solo, Lilith is dancing with the men, who seems to follow her every move. She is the focus and they are simply following her lead. Once the second act starts, there are many more women involved in the dances. In these scenes, it is clear that the focus is on the women. Through solos, partner, and group numbers, the women are being showcased. The costumes in these moments also help bring attention to the women. They wear dresses that twirl and flow in a way to catch the eye of the audience and bring the focus to them. The choreography of the dance allows for the women to have a more significant impact on the storyline, as well as on the audience. In fact, the men seem to take the back burner throughout most of the show. While they are still important to the storyline, most of their movements are about supporting or lifting the women. The men work hard to make sure the women are the focal point.

### **Masculine Characters**

*Dracula: Bloodlines* depicts women as powerful through the masculine characters. It is very easy to see that the women have some sort of power or influence over the men. While wounded in the forest, Vlad encounters Lilith. Even though he senses danger, "try as he might, Vlad cannot escape her force" (Jaquith p. 31). In this way, it portrays women as strong and men as weak when matched against them. Likewise, when Vlad sees Lucy he is overcome by desire for her. He cannot resist or

control himself around her. Though the men are characterized as very strong and capable, they become powerless around women. Men will “give anything for his vain little wants, he’ll sacrifice it all for desire” (Jaquith p. 34). The men always give in to the women, despite how tough they are supposed to be. They cannot help it. Besides Dracula, the rest of the men focus on women as well. They are very protective of the women, rushing to their aid when crisis calls. When Dracula attacks Lucy, she has three men worrying over her and trying to make sure she is all right. In this way, the women have great influence over the men. It is very subtle, but very effective. The women of the story have men waiting at beck and call, ready to do anything to help them.

### **The Character of Lilith**

*Dracula: Bloodlines* depicts women as powerful through the character of Lilith, who is a great representation of women empowerment. Her origin comes from Jewish tradition and she is known as the woman who was completely equal to Adam and would not submit to him. Instead, she cuts ties and goes off on her own. In the ballet, Lilith is seen as a strong, independent character. She has incredible power that could be used over all people, but she is only seen to use it against men. Throughout the ballet, Lilith dominates the men and takes their blood. She seductively draws them in and then overpowers them. In the first act, Lilith encounters various men, all who are intrigued by her. Though they sense something off about her, they cannot help but follow her. Vlad (Dracula) devotes himself to Lilith after she gives him the power to cheat death. In the first and second act, he is seen following her around and letting her influence his life. Once Dracula betrays Lilith, she turns against him and “his demise was Lilith’s doing” (Jaquith p. 32). In these ways, Lilith is the most powerful of them all. She is in control for most of the ballet and proves to be a very autonomous character.

Regardless of these aspects of the ballet, there are those who believe *Dracula: Bloodlines* does not depict women as being powerful in a positive way. The whole storyline of Lilith focuses on her as a demonized character. Though she is a prominent example of powerful feminism as someone who would not submit, the ballet shows her as evil. She is dressed in dark clothing, with her spine showing in the back. She is

created to look villainous with a supernatural element. Ultimately, Lilith is killing people and stealing their blood to keep herself alive, which is a very unpleasant quality. She traps Vlad into becoming a vampire without any consideration for what he wanted. In this way, *Dracula: Bloodlines* portrays her as destructive and bad. Lilith is also a vampire, which is a being that is often seen as diabolical. In folklore, as well as in this performance, vampire do not respond well to the crucifix. Since the crucifix is a very religious symbol, the fact that Lilith cannot bear to look at it supports the idea that she is a demon. In this way, the fact that Lilith is seen as satanic while being an independent woman is not a positive celebration of feminism.

### Conclusion

The ballet *Dracula: Bloodlines* effectively portrays the women as powerful through the choreography, the men, and the character of Lilith. The movements of the choreography had the women leading the men. The men were there to support the women and help draw the focus toward the women through tricks and lifts. Though Lilith is seen as the villain in the storyline, it in no way affects her influence and power as an independent woman. She helps make the idea of strong, independent women legitimate. She also helps make this representation the focal point of the performance. Overall, the ballet leaves no question about the gender of role of women anymore.

### Works Cited

- Dracula: Bloodlines*. Ballet choreographed and directed by Austin Jaquith. Perf. Olivia Yokers. Victoria Theater, Dayton, Ohio. 28 Oct. 2018. Performance.
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