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Amanda Gardner

Dr. Austin Riede

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What About The Women?: The Heroines of Gothic Horror

With a focus on the feminine figure in gothic horror, this paper uses the feminist theoretical work of Gayle Rubin to offer a comparison and analysis of two women from well-known tales: Elizabeth Lavenza of *Frankenstein* (1818) and Mina Harker of *Dracula* (1897). The comparison begins with an in-depth look at Elizabeth Lavenza. It is useful to look not only at the nature of this character, the position in which she is placed and the absence of any real participation on the events of the novel, but also what she means in relation to the titular character and how she serves the plot through her passivity. Elizabeth having been granted our attention, Mina Harker takes the stage. A character whose participation in the events of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is incontestable and vital, Mina is a very different being from Elizabeth. I consider not only Mina's active part but also the views which are held of her by the male characters she joins in the effort against Dracula. In the case of both Elizabeth and Mina, I address their roles from the perspective of Rubin's ideas of the exchange of women, looking at the ways in which they are both utilized as currency in their respective novels. Having looked at these characters separately from each other and from their respective authors, I then explore them through a contemplation of both Shelley and Stoker in the effort to ask why these monumentally different women were written in the particular manner they were created and whether history and experience of these two authors shape the way they approached women's roles in the society in which they lived. Answering these questions allows us to better understand our heroines, since the author's work is inevitably impacted to some degree by their experiences.