The Horror, Mark One

Ⓒ Mark Mantho

Edger Allan Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado* is a classic example of the way atmosphere is used in horror fiction to both create mood and provide symbolic meaning. To begin with, Montresor hatches his plan to exact revenge upon Fortunato during "the supreme madness of the carnival season," (2) a time of celebration, inebriation and camaraderie. In one sense, Poe uses this framework to highlight the "unnatural" nature of Montresor's decidedly anti-social plan by placing it in the context of an event which is supposed to promote communal good will and fellowship. Yet the carnival season also suggests an interval of socially sanctioned "madness" -- a brief period when allowance is made for good, right-thinking Christians to get a little crazy while the usual state of affairs is turned on its head. In oblique fashion, then, Poe uses this culturally accepted inversion of normal behavior to foreshadow the genuinely mad and unnatural act that Montresor will ultimately perpetrate. The fact that it is "about dusk" when Montresor encounters Fortunato offers a clue that the main characters will soon leave the rational, objective world represented by day and enter into the more unstable, fear-inducing environment of night; and if we equate "dusk" with "death" in symbolic terms, then the time of Fortunato's "chance meeting" with Montresor foretells his eventual fate.

Montresor lures the unwitting Fortunato "down a long and winding staircase" toward the catacombs, where they "passed through a range of low arches, descended, passed on, and descended again, arriving at a deep crypt in which the foulness of the air caused our flambeaux rather to glow than flame." (5) The physical descent into the catacombs represents, literally, Fortunato's descent toward his own death (clad, appropriately, in a fool's costume) but also represents Montresor's symbolic descent into moral corruption. With each step downward, Montresor (wearing a "mask of black silk," symbolic of deception and dark motives) removes himself further from the world of light and reason above and ventures deeper into a subterranean realm beyond moral dictates. In response to Fortunato's skepticism, Montresor assures his victim that he is indeed a "mason" -- a wicked little pun on Poe's part, given Fortunato's ultimate end -- right after handing him a flagon of "De Grave." The catacombs themselves bespeak moral decay and disorder. The air, as noted, is "foul," while the maze-like passageways are dark, damp, and claustrophobic. As if this weren't enough, the walls at the far end of the crypt are"ornamented" with human remains -- a macabre touch which connotes a twisted sense of interior design (or humor) and presents the possibility that Fortunato is simply another in a long line of victims foolish enough to cross the house of Montresor.

Poe adds immeasurably to the atmospheric horror of *The Cask of Amontillado* by evoking the terrible *sounds* that emanate from the "interior recess" where Montresor has walled up Fortunato (e.g. the "low moaning cry," "furious vibrations of the chain," and "succession of loud and shrill screams"). As we "hear" them, we can only imagine *our own* wild panic if faced with the prospect of being buried alive, with no recourse to escape and absolutely no possibility of rescue. Montresor responds to Fortunato's howls with equally shrill screams, intensifying the horrific atmosphere; as readers, we can again imagine the bizarre nature of the scene as the two men rave at one another. "It was now midnight," -- the witching hour and traditional point of no return in horror fiction --reports Montresor as he finished sealing up Fortunato. Montresor attempts to get a rise out of him one last time: "I thrust a torch through the remaining aperture and let it fall within. There came forth only a jingling of bells." (6) Although this is a minor detail, to me it subtly adds to the story's atmosphere of horror. After all the terrified screams of the flabbergasted Fortunato (and the demented responses of Montresor), in the end there is only the pathetic jingling of bells, denoting defeat and helplessness.

In *The Tell-Tale Heart*, Poe creates an unsettling atmosphere by making the old man's oozing, unblinking eye -- "all a dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the marrow of my bones" (19) -- the central, disgusting image of *The Tell-Tale Heart*. The narrator sees it as The Evil Eye he must at all cost be rid of, and so decides to murder the old man in his sleep. Creeping stealthily into the man's bedroom with painstaking craftiness, the protagonist waits patiently for the right moment. The room is "black as pitch with the thick darkness," and it is now "the dead hour of night." These traditional "mood components" of horror fiction combine with the high-strung, gleeful arrogance of the narrator's descriptive tone to heighten the hold-your-breath atmosphere of the story. A slight noise arouses the old man's suspicions, but:

> "I kept quite still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle... Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was a groan of mortal terror... I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. His fears had been growing upon him. He had been trying to fancy them causeless, but could not. He had been saying to himself, 'It is nothing but the wind in the chimney -- it is only a mouse crossing the floor'... Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions, be he found all in vain. *All in vain*, because Death, in approaching him, had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim." (18-19)

As readers we are drawn into an atmosphere of terror (elements of horror fiction that arouse deep-seated human fears) because each of us, at one time or another, has felt the gripping, unreasonable fear in the dead of night that something -- *what?* -- may be in our room, watching us and ready to pounce. After the narrator suffocates the old man, Poe emphasizes the atmosphere of *horror* (which can be defined as moral revulsion) by having his protagonist cheerfully dismember the body and deposit the remains beneath the bed chamber's floorboards. What he doesn't count on, of course, is the moral retribution that an overactive imagination and guilty conscience (however malformed) will eventually wreak. When the cops pay a visit, our narrator is undone by the conviction that the old man's heart, beating loudly 'neath the floorboards, has given him away,

> "Oh, God, what *could* I do? I foamed -- I raved -- I swore! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting and grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder -- louder -- *louder!* And still the men chatted pleasantly and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God -- no, no! They heard! -- they suspected -- they *knew!* -- they were making a mockery of my horror! I felt that I must scream or die! -- and now -- again! -- hark! louder! louder! louder! *louder!* 'Villains,' I shrieked, 'dissemble no more! I admit the deed! -- tear up the planks! -- here, here! -- it is the beating of his hideous heart!' " (21)

The hysterical, frenetic phrasing of the protagonist is an excellent example of how Poe uses the character's own voice to create an atmosphere of horror rather than simply relying upon the details of his physical environment -- we are forced to identify with the narrator, and the madness revealed in his words increases the atmospheric tension of the story. We are left with the vivid portrait of a man disintegrating under the moral weight of what he's done -- painted in his own words.

The Roaches, by Thomas Disch, supplies a much more tactile atmosphere of *terror*. By exploiting the common fear and loathing most people possess toward roaches, Disch hits on a good trick; because of shared social experience and attitudes, the very word "roach" is exceptionally conducive to creating an instant, instinctive atmosphere of disgust and repulsion. Disch plays upon the universality of these feelings by setting the stage:

> "Since Marcia's sink and the Shchapalovs' were fed by the same pipe, and emptied into a common drain, a steady overflow of roaches was disgorged into her immaculate kitchen. She could spray and lay out more poisoned potatoes; she could scrub and dust and stuff Kleenex tissues into holes... it was all to no avail. The Shchapalov roaches could always lay another million eggs in the garbage bags rotting beneath the Shchapalov's sink. In a few days they would be swarming through the pipes and cracks and into Marcia's cupboards. She would lay in bed and watch them advancing across the floor and up the walls, trailing the Schapalov's filth and disease everywhere they went." (113)

This passage does two things. Symbolically, it pits Marcia's cleanliness (a human trait that, in the modern era, is associated with a "natural sense of order" and even moral rectitude) against the filth, disease and indiscriminate breeding habits of the roaches (which, by human standards, can be interpreted as indicative of an inferior, "unnatural" and even "immoral" order). On a more visceral level, the passage ignites (and exploits) our imaginative fears of roaches working their insidious way into our homes and bedrooms; we can imagine their ubiquitous presence, and our own fear ("Are they beneath my bed? Are they *on* [or *in!*] my bed?!")

To this Disch adds (on page 115) the lovely image of a roach climbing out of the Shchapalov woman's hair, prompting the horrified Marcia to half expect one of the little critters to pop out of a gap between the lady's teeth as well. In this instance, Disch increases the story's atmosphere of revulsion a notch by further exploiting our fears. For if anything is more disgusting than, say, crushing a big juicy roach underneath your bare feet while making the nightly journey to the bathroom (an experience this writer has intimate knowledge of), then surely it is the fear of having a roach entangled in your hair or *anywhere near* your mouth. Ah, but author Disch is not content to leave matters there. Instead, he has Marcia sic the roaches on the Schapalov's by dint of psychic communication, thereby carrying the atmosphere of terror to its logical, gross-out extreme:

> "The Shchapalov woman, standing up in her bed, screamed monotonously. Her pink rayon nightgown was speckled with brown-black dots. Her knobby fingers tried to brush bugs out of her hair, off her face. The man in the undershirt who a few minutes before had been stomping his feet to the music stomped now more urgently, one hand still holding onto the lightcord. Soon the floor was slimy with crushed roaches, and he slipped. The light went out. The woman's scream took on a rather choked quality, as though..." (117)

The fact that Marcia eventually becomes Queen of the Roaches is incidental to the real power of Disch's story, which lies less in arousing moral revulsion then in creating an atmosphere of overwhelming disgust and fear. Disch takes care to confront us with "the devil we know" -- a mundane but powerful symbol of potential terror that frightens us simply because it *is* so mundane and familiar to every day life.

In *Pickman's Model*, H.P. Lovecraft creates an atmosphere of horror which is strongly reminiscent of Poe's work. Again we have the concept of physical and moral descent; yet Lovecraft is primarily concerned with presenting readers with an apocalyptic vision of modern society, one in which malevolent creatures prowl beneath the streets of Boston, waiting to spring upon unsuspecting victims. To accomplish this, Lovecraft recreates elements of the classic horror atmosphere. The artist Pickman leads his friend Thurber toward his specially selected studio in the North End via a circuitous and mysterious route. Even before this, however, we receive a strong hint as to Pickman's moral state of being when he remarks that his "shack" is "almost tumbling down, so that nobody else would live there... (and) the windows are boarded up." (101)

It is "about twelve o'clock" -- again, the juncture in horror fiction when we leave "the old order" and confront a new, more bizarre one -- as he and Thurber "climb through the deserted length of the oldest and dirtiest alley I ever saw in my life, with crumbling-looking gables, broken small-paned windows, and archaic chimneys that stood out half-disintegrated against the moonlit sky." (102) True to the tenets of classic horror fiction, Lovecraft's descriptions of the environment in this passage evoke an atmosphere of physical decay, which in turn symbolizes Pickman's moral decay and the moral degeneracy of the creatures which live beneath the very streets he and Thurber presently walk -- metaphorically, things *are* falling apart. "From that alley, which had a dim light, we turned to the left into an equally silent and still narrower alley with no light at all," recalls

Thurber, and as readers we know we are leaving the world of light, and entering into a physical, psychological and moral darkness. Eventually the men enter Pickman's hideaway, and (as in Poe's *Cask of Amontillado*) make the physical and moral descent downward into a dark, damp cellar.

Pickman's perverse and strangely life-like paintings further contribute to the atmosphere of horror. Readers have only to use their imaginations to flesh out Thurber's creepy descriptions:

> "Gad, how that man could paint! There was a study called 'Subway Accident,' in which a flock of the vile creatures were clambering up from some unknown catacomb through a crack in the floor of the Boylston street subway station and attacking a crowd of people on the platform... another conception somehow shook me more than the rest -- a scene in an unknown vault, where scores of the beasts crowded about one who held a well-known Boston guidebook and was evidently reading aloud. All were pointing to a certain passage, and every face seemed so distorted with epileptic and reverberant laughter that I almost thought I heard the fiendish echoes. The title of the picture was, 'Holmes, Lowell, and Longfellow Lie Buried in Mount Auburn.' " (104)

Finally, the atmosphere of *terror* is also enhanced when Thurber thinks he hears "a faint scurrying sound somewhere... After that followed a sharp grating noise, a shouted gibberish from Pickman, and the deafening discharge of all six chambers of a revolver... A muffled squeal or squawk, and a thud." Since Lovecraft never actually shows us what's happening, we are again left, as Thurber is, to our imaginations, and the resultant uncertainty -- "what *was* that noise?!" -- succeeds in amplifying the overall atmosphere of terror in *Pickman's Model*.

In a sense, the "Ancient Enemy" of Dean Koontz's *Phantoms* is indeed "only a reflection of the savagery and brutality of our own kind... a Devil created in our own image," for it embodies the worst human beings have to offer; it is vengeful, blasphemous, cruel, deceptive, and -- most of all -- exceptionally egocentric.

After the Ancient Enemy first makes itself known in the form of a giant moth by attempting to smash through the windows of the police station, Deputy Stu Wargle pooh-poohs the others' speculations that they might be dealing with something out of the ordinary. "Hell, what's the matter with you people?" snorts Wargle. "It was only a bird. That's all it was out there. Just a goddamned bird." (134) When everyone else disagrees with this assertion, Wargle insists that "bad light and shadows" are merely playing tricks on their eyes (and, after a fashion, he is correct). As the group leaves the station house, however, Wargle learns that doubting the Ancient Enemy's existence is a no-no, and the retribution it exacts for this faux-pas is severe indeed. In fine, "AE" rips Wargle's face off (*That'll* teach you, Stu!). Afterward, Lisa makes the explicit connection between the unfortunate deputy's refusal to accept the reality of the Ancient Enemy and what it eventually does to him: "it wanted him," says Lisa, "him especially. To teach him a lesson. But mostly to teach *us* a lesson." (146) The obvious implication is that, like human beings at their worst, the Ancient Enemy does not brook disrespect, and is quite willing to strike out in revenge to drive home that point.

Having "digested" human religious myth, the Ancient Enemy, as predator-outsider, casts itself in the role of Lucifer. Hence it enacts a sacrilegious crucifixion of the town's priest by hanging him from the church's life-size cross. When Deputy Frank Autry asks his colleague Gordy Brogan (a practicing Catholic) what this tableaux means, Gordy responds, "it knew we would ask God for help. So this is its way of letting us know that God *can't* help us. At least that's what it would like us to believe. That's its way. To instill doubt about God. That's always been its way." (268) When Autry remarks that Gordy seems to know exactly what they're up against, Brogan replies, "Don't you know? Don't you really, Frank?" hinting that their nemesis is, in fact, the Devil himself. And, as we learn, The Ancient Enemy sees itself as the equal, if not the superior, of the Almighty -- just as Lucifer did.

Lucifer, of course, has often been cited as the symbolic embodiment of mankind's rejection of God and the laws of nature, and in crucifying the priest, the Ancient Enemy demonstrates that it understands this symbolism well. The blasphemous crucifixion is intended to present an object example of the Ancient Enemy's status as omnipotent, all-knowing Anti-Christ. Gaining intimate knowledge of Christian religious belief over the centuries, the Ancient Enemy uses that knowledge to subvert and defile perhaps the single most cherished tenet of Christianity -- that Christ died for the sins of man, and thereby gave the gift of salvation. Conversely, through this abominable act, the Ancient Enemy confirms that it offers only damnation, and more, is happy to sacrifice *human beings* to satisfy *its* ends. On top of all this, as Gordy notes, the Ancient Enemy uses the crucifixion to break the faith, and hence the will, of the Snowfield survivors. This too reminds of the man-made myth of Satan; like the snake in the Garden, the Ancient Enemy seeks to separate true believers from their God, having doubtless absorbed another, all-too human modus-operandi -- "divide and conquer."

Another human characteristic often projected onto the Devil is the ability to deceive. The shape-shifting Ancient Enemy is the epitome of this capability; its bag of tricks contains everything from a giant moth to the "reconstituted" Stu Wargle to a giant, tentacled beast-thing. It also possesses the ability to emulate animal sounds and human voices, as Bryce discovers early on. Yet the most direct illustration of deliberate, malicious deception (as opposed to simple changes in form) on the part of the Ancient Enemy comes at the expense of kind-hearted Gordy Brogan. When a Airedale dog suddenly appears before the Snowfield group, seemingly injured and "whining pitifully," Gordy the would-be veterinarian is the first to reach out to it in compassion: "The Airedale was a sign from God. Yes... Tears burned in Gordy's eyes... Tears of relief and happiness. He was overwhelmed by the mercy of God. There was no doubt about what he should do. He hurried toward the Airedale, which was about twenty feet away..." (318)

As we know, the dog changes form several times before finishing off the unlucky Brogan, but what is most interesting about this passage is that the Ancient Enemy discovered Gordy's greatest vulnerability and took advantage of it to deceive and ultimately destroy him. Needless to say, deception is one of the most potent forms of human evil. Koontz adds to the irony of the Ancient Enemy's murderous deception of Brogan by highlighting his initial belief that the Airedale was actually a sign of *mercy* from God. The inverse turns out to be true, and Gordy realizes too late that the "dog" is instead a "sign" of the Anti-Christ's cruelty. The fact that Brogan was prompted to reach out by his facility for human compassion -- a quality representative of all that is good within people and thus the polar opposite of negative human traits embraced by the Ancient Enemy -- further accentuates the irony of this passage.

The supreme arrogance of the Ancient Enemy is the central proof that it has, in fact, become a repository of the ugliest human attributes. In one way or another, each of the examples detailed above reveal this, and the Ancient Enemy itself eventually says as much. Trying desperately to find a chink in the armor of an implacable foe, the Snowfield survivors are startled when it "speaks" to them through a computer system. AE's initial contact comprises equal parts vulgarity ("YOU ARE A BORING, STUPID CUNT") blasphemy ("JESUS IS DEAD. GOD IS DEAD") and bravado ("I AM AFRAID OF NOTHING"). Inquiring as to the whereabouts of Timothy Flyte, the shape-shifter specifically equates itself with Christ, maintaining that Flyte, as the author of *The Ancient Enemy*, is "MY MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE AND JOHN... HE IS MY BIOGRAPHER." (306) Flyte himself makes a clear connection between human beings and the intelligence, memory, and inflated ego of The Ancient Enemy when he responds to its swaggering bluster by typing, "I BELIEVE YOU WERE NOT AN INTELLIGENT CREATURE UNTIL YOU BEGAN FEEDING UPON... MEN... YOU OWE US FOR YOUR OWN EVOLUTION." (367)

Then, in a classic display of self-destructive hubris, the shape-shifter supplies Dr. Sara Yamaguchi and her companions with a "tissue sample," and does a little bragging along the way ("BEHOLD MY FLESH. FOR IT IS ONLY IN ME THAT YOU CAN ACHIEVE IMMORTALITY... TAKE SAMPLES FOR YOUR TESTS... I WANT YOU TO KNOW ME. I WANT YOU TO KNOW THE WONDERS OF ME"). Not content to lord it over its inferiors by merely destroying them, the Ancient Enemy craves their awe and adulation as well. It therefore can't resist providing the sample -- and dooms itself in the process. There's a reason why they say "pride goeth before a fall:" overweening pride is probably the greatest of human sins, and finds symbolic representation, obviously, in the myth of Lucifer cum Satan. The Ancient Enemy's offer of the tissue sample -- which echoes, ironically, the sacrament of Communion -- serves as ample evidence that it has internalized self-destructive human pride and does indeed mirror "a Devil created in our own image."

The character of Abraham Van Helsing in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* represents the mid-point between the superstitious and the rational, straddling the worlds of belief and fact, East and West. He comes from Holland to aid in the healing of Lucy Westenra -- whose name, literally translated, means "light of the West" -- and on a more symbolic level, to "save the light of the West" (civilized society, reason, and religious faith) from the dark designs of Dracula. Having succumbed to the spell of the Count, Lucy falls into a state of periodic and mysterious illness. As a man of science, Van Helsing orders a maintenance plan of blood transfusions, but as someone equally steeped in the lore of vampires and the methods used to combat them, Van Helsing also insists on surrounding Lucy with a bountiful array of garlic flowers. "They are not for you to play with," Van Helsing admonishes a dubious Lucy, "they are medicines. They are medicinal, though you do not know how." (138-139)

Although from his earliest appearance in the story Van Helsing suspects that Lucy's illness and eventual "death" are the work of a vampire, as a man who occupies the middle ground between science and the supernatural he takes care to bring along the non-believers slowly, lest they think him mad. Hence Van Helsing divulges only bits and pieces of information throughout the first section of the book. Yet his response to Dr. Seward's doggedly rationalistic explanation for Lucy's demise nicely encapsulates a crucial part of the Van Helsing character's symbolic significance:

> "You are a clever man, friend John; you reason well, and your wit is bold; but you are too prejudiced. You do not let your eyes see nor your ears hear, and that which is outside your daily life is not of account to you. Do you not think that there are things which you cannot understand, and yet which are; that some people see things that other cannot? But there are things old and new which must not be contemplate by men's eyes, because they know -- or think they know -- some things which other men have told them. Ah, it is the fault of our science hat it wants to explain all; and if it explain not, then it says there is nothing to explain." (196-197)

Van Helsing then goes on, in the style of Socrates, to ask his former pupil Seward a series of rhetorical questions, each designed to deconstruct Seward's concept of what is possible and impossible within the laws of nature. Van Helsing cites various examples of unexplained but nevertheless factual evidence suggestive of an expanded notion what is "real" and what is "unreal," bewildering and unsettling Dr. Seward. The questions Van Helsing puts to Seward are representative of his half-rational, half-irrational status within the story -- he employs inductive reasoning and logic in service of helping his companions "believe in things you cannot."

Van Helsing, unlike Seward -- who represents the strictly rational, objective and scientific approach to life -- symbolizes a belief in God and the Devil, and the eternal struggle between them. At one point, Van Helsing actually breaks down and cries, "God! God! God! What have we done, what has this poor thing (Lucy) done, that we are so beset? Is there fate amongst us still, sent down from the pagan world of old, that such things must be, and in such way? Oh, how we are beset! How are all the powers of the devil against us!" (143) Van Helsing believes passionately that Good must be ever vigilant against the tyranny of Evil, and more, must triumph over it. To that end, he is willing to risk all to defeat the Count -- even his own life, and the lives of others, if necessary.

Van Helsing also symbolizes the Christian virtues of faith, perseverance, and self-sacrifice. As he informs "the good guys" of his plan to rid the world of evil Count Dracula, Van Helsing looks at each earnestly and says, "... We must bear our Cross, as His Son did in obedience to His Will. It may be that we are chosen instruments of His good pleasure, and that we ascend to His bidding as that other through stripes and shame; through tears and blood; through doubts and fears, and all that make the difference between God and man." (302-303) There is more than a hint of a martyr-complex here, but that's what makes Van Helsing such a worthy adversary for the Count; Dracula will stop at nothing to lay waste to humanity, suck his victims dry, and create a race of little vampires; Van Helsing, Drac's "photographic negative," is equally determined to hinder him.

Even in terms of their physical attributes, Van Helsing is in many ways a match for Dracula. The Count is thin, long, and very strong, wearing a silvery mustache beneath frequently blazing red eyes, and his face is

> "...strong, very strong -- aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils... lofty domed forehead, and hair growing scantily round the temples but profusely elsewhere. His eyebrows were very massive, almost meeting over the nose, and with bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion. The mouth... was fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiar sharp white teeth; these protruded over the lips, whose remarkable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality in a man of his years.... (27)

Van Helsing, on the other hand, is

> "... a man of medium weight, strongly built, with his shoulders set back over a broad, deep chest and a neck well balanced on the trunk as the head is on the neck. The poise of the head strikes one at once as indicative of thought and power; the head is noble, The face, clean-shaven, shows a hard, square chin, a large, resolute mobile mouth... (and) quick, sensitive nostrils... (with) reddish hair (and) big, dark blue eyes... (that) are quick and tender or stern with the man's moods." (188)

The Count's features stress angularity, bestiality, cunning and cruelty; Van Helsing's, by contrast, evince solidity, balance, human intelligence, and sincerity. These traits represent the higher attributes of human nature, and along with the equally important virtues of faith and a sense of divine mission, allow Van Helsing to eventually best Dracula.

If the Count is able to prevent the three succubi from having it off (as it were) with the supine Jonathan Harker (47), Van Helsing, in mirror fashion, is capable of restraining the soon-to-be Undead Lucy from giving erstwhile suitor Arthur a *very special* kiss (168). Dracula is variously described as a predatory animal or reptile ("leopard," "lizard"), while Van Helsing is described at least once as an equally fierce yet more majestic lion (168). It's true that Count Dracula is able to change form, becoming a bat one minute, and an amorphous mist the next, while Van Helsing possesses no similar power. Yet the wily Van Helsing successfully utilizes his own weapons to combat Dracula -- garlic, stakes, Holy circles, crucifixes, holy water, "the Holy Wafer," etc. -- all the paraphanalia of pagan and Christian lore at his disposal. These items are responsible for saving the lives of Van Helsing's companions on numerous occasions, such as when they "ambush" Dracula at his house, crucifixes at the ready, or when Van Helsing creates the Holy circle for Mina (shortly before he uses his stakes to do away with the "three weird sisters"). And if the Count has the preternatural ability to place victims under his spell, Van Helsing is able to use this very power against Drac, as he does by hypnotizing Mina to gain knowledge of the wicked fellow's whereabouts:

> "He has used your mind; and by it he has left us here in Varna, whilst the ship that carried him rushed through the enveloping fog up to Galatz, where, doubtless, he has made preparations for escaping us. But his child-mind only saw so far; and it may be that, as ever is in God's Providence, the very thing that the evil-doer most reckoned on for his selfish good, turns out to be his chiefest harm. The hunter is taken in his own snare... For now that he think he is free from every trace of us, and that he has escaped us with so many hours to him, then his selfish child-brain will whisper him to sleep. He think, too, that as he cut himself off from knowing (Mina's) mind, there can be no knowledge of him to you; there is where he fail!" (347)

The above passage is emblematic of the way Bram Stoker creates his symbolic battle of Good versus Evil, and how he ensures that Good will (as it must) win out, for if Dracula represents evil's capability to twist nature to its own ends, Van Helsing represents the human capacity for ingenuity and inventiveness in the face of exceedingly tough odds. "*We,* however, are not selfish," asserts the doctor, "and we believe that God is with us through all this blackness, and these many dark hours." (347) By adhering to the laws of God and rejecting the egotistical motives and methods of Dracula, Van Helsing is eventually able to restore the natural order. He realizes the Count's selfishness will be his undoing, and doesn't resort to manipulating nature or striking Scholomantic bargains, as Dracula does. Rather, Van Helsing trusts in his own wits and belief in God's grace. It is this mental acuity, faith in God, and reliance on the best qualities of human nature -- heroism, courage, selflessness -- that ultimately allows Van Helsing to triumph over the cruelty, destructiveness, and selfish arrogance symbolized by the evil Count Dracula.