Dracula and Amnesia: Character Identities and Constant Subjectivism under Ideological State Apparatuses

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

DRACULA AND AMNESIA: CHARACTER IDENTITIES AND CONSTANT SUBJECTIVISM UNDER IDEOLOGICAL STATE APPARATUSES

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

ENGLISH

by

Anais Rosales

2020
To: Dean Michael Heithaus  
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

This thesis, written by Anais Rosales, and entitled Dracula and Amnesia: Character Identities and Constant Subjectivism under Ideological State Apparatuses, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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The thesis of Anais Rosales is approved.

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Florida International University, 2020
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, a huge thank you to my committee for their endless support and dedication to my success. I’d like to express my gratitude toward Dr. Michael Patrick Gillespie for his brilliant mentoring through this thesis-writing process. It started with a simple conversation on a video game and expanded into a fifty-page thesis that I am proud to call my own. I am forever grateful for his rapid responses to my emails and for providing the resources that made my argument shine. In addition, I’d like to thank Dr. James Sutton for being my professor/mentor/friend/key-to-awesomeness since my undergraduate courses. Professor Sutton guided me through the entire English program at FIU with a smile, laugh, and unforgettable independent study sessions. Finally, I’d like to thank Dr. Maneck Daruwala for her kindness in our conversations, her patience when it came to my writing and ideas, and expertise in horror and video gaming. She always kept me up to date on when the next Amnesia game was due to release.

I must also express my gratitude to my mother, whose knowledge when it comes to literature, movies, and motifs knows no bounds. Thesis-writing would not have been the same without her input. Thank you, Mom, for always knowing what to say and making me laugh. I’d also like to thank my father for always believing I could do anything. Thank you, Papa, for your reassuring conversations and being my number-one cheerleader in life.

Finally, I’d like to show appreciation to all of my professors and classmates at FIU. I couldn’t have done this without you.
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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by
Anais Rosales
Florida International University, 2020
Miami, Florida

Professor Michael Patrick Gillespie, Major Professor

This thesis explores how the identities of protagonists and antagonists are constructed in Bram Stoker’s Dracula and Frictional Games’ Amnesia: The Dark Descent. Through analyzing the Gothic genre, racial constructs, and Ideological State Apparatuses, a system that uses social and cultural institutions to control populations of people, this thesis concludes that the protagonists’ identities are more pronounced than those of the antagonists’. The Gothic genre requires protagonists to overcome a supernatural force, so they are already given the limelight in the narrative, the most exposure to a reader. Additionally, both media use racial constructs to pit the protagonists against the antagonists, rosy-coloring the former and othering the latter. Lastly, Dracula and Amnesia: The Dark Descent are ISAs that control the characters and what they do. As a result, all characters are subjects to their world without a say-so in their fates and destinies in the narrative.
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INTRODUCTION

For many centuries, literature has explored the roles of protagonists and antagonists. Clashes between these two are meant to tell a story or teach a lesson. This trend continues in contemporary media, such as rock operas, film, and even video games. In my thesis, I will explore how protagonists and antagonists are constructed in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and Frictional Games’ *Amnesia: The Dark Descent*, and why they are given certain roles and objectives in their respective stories. Both media feature protagonists who are trapped in a castle and must combat a supernatural force in order to escape with their lives; although the stories were written in different time periods (1897 vs. 2010), their narratives share many of the same traits. They are useful in constructing an analysis of what it means to be a character, how identity is constructed, the particular rules of their worlds, and the restraints the Gothic genre dictates.

First, in this thesis, characters and identity are used as two different terms: characters, at their very basis, are elements or tools of a certain work, what the author uses to tell their story. In “What is a Character?,” Stephen Orgel explores to what extent characters are bound to their world and concludes their lives extend beyond what the reader sees on the page.1 This is useful in determining the purpose of a character’s role in the narrative. Orgel states characters are puppets created by the author to tell a story, are fixed to follow lines and behave in certain ways, but have lives before and after the narrative takes place. This increases the likability of the character, whom the reader can relate to at a higher level, because now they are more than just lines in a book—now they

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have lives with a beginning, middle, and end. As Orgel states: “there was a time when supplying Shakespeare’s heroines with girlhoods was not only a reasonable undertaking, but a recipe for a bestseller” (p. 108). Knowing there is more to the character than what the narrative offers contributes to the construction of that character’s identity.

The term identity is defined by what the character is, what makes him or her unique from other characters, and that includes ambitions, goals, morals, beliefs, religion, nationality, etc. Identity can change within a character—a character who associated with a gang at the beginning of the narrative can “see the light” and join the opposing force at the end. While the character itself didn’t change, his/her identity did. Jean-Luc Nancy claims that identity is never purely stable, that it is always changing and transforming. This is helpful in determining a character’s identity and how it is constructed throughout the narrative. For the same reason, a reader’s perception of a character’s identity can change and no two readers’ perceptions will be the same. If a character decides to steal for the sake of his family, one reader can claim it was a brave and noble action to take, while another can say it's a sin.

The main characters of a novel can be protagonists or antagonists. The term protagonist is of Greek origin, from the Greek word agon, which means struggle or debate. In these exchanges, the character that elicits the most sympathy from a reader would be the protagonist. Typically, protagonists struggle to achieve what they believe is right whereas the antagonist acts as an opposing force. While protagonists and antagonists can have understandable goals, the former draws the reader’s support in

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2 Jean-Luc Nancy. “Identity is not a Figure.” Identity: Fragments, Frankness. Fordham University Press. 2015.
various ways. One of them is point of view, or which character the story follows. Readers are expected to follow said protagonist from beginning to end, whether they agree with the protagonist's goals or not. Generally speaking, however, successful novels find it best to make a protagonist’s goal as sympathetic as possible, for the sake of keeping the reader interested in putting forth time and effort to read the narrative.³

The Gothic genre is defined using two distinct characteristics: the uncanny, which disrupts what the reader knows about the normal world, heightening disorientation, and the menace, which is the physical or psychological threat to the protagonists.⁴ The Gothic genre, typically, combines fiction with elements of horror and death that extend beyond what the reader considers as “normal.” For example: Dracula is a vampire, a creature that doesn’t exist in the real world; Alexander is from another realm, not meant to roam the Earth. The genre applies to literature and video games, where the narratives follow the same patterns: protagonists are on a quest to overcome an antagonist that represents a negative supernatural force; the differences lie in how the story is told—novels are limited to words on a page, while video games can explore environments and visual cues that set the tone in a more life-like way. While video games allow players to control an avatar, a representation of the player in a virtual world, there is a limit to the amount of freedom the player is granted. I.e., in order to advance in a level, the player must follow a linear course of action (either he/she presses the button or doesn’t). This constraint,


therefore, exemplifies the gothic mechanics of the game. As a result, the Gothic genre will be applied to both literature and video games equally.

This thesis will also compare how identities are built in the two media. Dracula is a novel published in 1896, whereas Amnesia: The Dark Descent is a video game from 2004; the media vary greatly, in which the readers and players are interacting with the narratives in very different ways. Visually, the novel is limited to pages and words whereas the game includes visuals, sounds, and interactive play, i.e., the player experiences the narrative through control of an avatar, which would be Daniel, the main character. Despite differing platforms, however, both Dracula and Amnesia: The Dark Descent abide by the gothic genre’s rules: both are told from the point of views of the protagonists without any personal insight into the antagonists’ goals. Naturally, this pits the reader on the side with the protagonist, to follow Van Helsing and Daniel in their quests to get rid of Dracula and Alexander, which represent the unknown, the supernatural, and the uncanny, fulfilling what the Gothic genre entails. However, in terms of identity, the protagonists and antagonists are not treated equally because they don’t get the same amount of attention: all of the journal entries in Dracula are from the protagonists, whereas Daniel is the only playable character in Amnesia. As defined earlier in this introduction, a character’s identity is constructed from what the reader/player perceives, so if Dracula and Alexander are kept in the shadows, their identities are not as fleshed out as they should be.

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Furthermore, the two media build on identities using social constructs. In its basic form, a social construct is how people perceive others and the world around them, the values, beliefs, norms, and attitudes that would apply (pp. 41-42). Race as a social construct refers to cultural heritage, ancestry, and race relations; gender encompasses the roles and relationships expected from women, men, boys, and girls; and social defines the relationship between classes, employer and employee. In this thesis, the social construct in question would be race, how one group benefits or dominates the other, including or excluding certain groups of people depending on said people’s origins.

Sarah Ahmed touches on “otherness” in her essay, “Affective Economies,” and it’s defined as the alienation of certain peoples in the eyes of a collective group. The feeling of otherness is littered throughout the very beginning of Dracula, where Jonathan Harker describes Dracula as living in an “imaginative whirlpool” (p. 10), as well as Amnesia: The Dark Descent, when Daniel comes into contact with an otherworldly artifact that gives birth to a relentless Shadow out to kill him. Ahmed outlines the effects of labeling other peoples as an “other,” serving to support my thesis in that otherness creates distance between characters and molds them into certain roles, so to speak, undesirables.

In addition to social constructs, Dracula and Amnesia: The Dark Descent also use ideology to construct identities. At its root, an ideology is a system of ideas that tie a society or a set of beliefs together, the imaginary laws that influence people to behave in

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certain ways. For example: a person who knows that it’s wrong to steal because the laws said so won’t do it, or at the very least will be discouraged from doing so in fear of the consequences that follow. I will use Louis Althusser’s concept of ideology, called the Ideological State Apparatus\(^7\), to explain how both *Dracula* and *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* are, by definition, an ISA that influences the way their characters behave.

Althusser states that ISAs use schools, media, churches, clubs, and families to control populations of people. The two media use their genres to dictate the roles protagonists and antagonists take in their respective narratives, thus affecting the identities of the characters within the world.

The overall goal of this project is to analyze two distinct pieces of media—a Victorian novel and a contemporary video game in two separate chapters—and how the identities of their main characters are constructed. Characters are built for readers to sympathize with, to spend endless hours with throughout a narrative, to learn a lesson from, but some are thrown into the unknown, unexplored, and just meant to be hated. This is possible through the decisions and constraints the author uses in presenting them, such as POV, otherness, and genre. My goal is to bring awareness to such constructs, to allow readers to interact with novels or games with a broader view on how characters are manipulated into certain roles and what that means in terms of their identities in said work. These identities are what push characters into the protagonist or antagonist zones, but if a reader or player can move beyond those constraints, and recognize the unmentioned in the identities that authors present, they can see that these characters are

incomplete, which can change their views. In all, *Dracula* and *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* create similar environments inside a castle, with protagonists who confront the uncanny and menace, and fulfill the parts their authors built for them as subjects. In doing so, we can become more aware of our own lives, our personal identities, our interactions with everyday people, and our roles in society.
In the 1897 novel, *Dracula*, the protagonists, Jonathan Harker and Van Helsing, face off against a monstrous being, Dracula, who feeds off the blood of humans. This is a classic scenario in a lot of literature, a fight between opposing forces, ending with the protagonists’ triumph. It’s the protagonists whom readers tend to root for in that struggle, not only because they are paragons, but because they stay true to themselves and their beliefs despite opposition. By definition, according to Doug Paterson in “Putting the ‘Pro’ in Protagonist: Paulo Freire's Contribution to Our Understanding of Forum Theatre,” the term protagonist is of Greek origin. He says:

Protagonist derives from the Greek word *agon*, which meant, in the theatre, a struggle or debate. The *agon* of a Greek comedy was the intense exchange of views between two choruses or characters. Such a debate would sympathize with the ‘pro’ side, making this sympathetic character the pro-*agon*-ist, or protagonist. The less sympathetic side, those who obstructed the understandable goals of the protagonist, were ‘anti-*agon*-ists,’ or antagonists (p. 10).

In addition to understandable goals, there are other ways to make the protagonist more sympathetic. Point of view plays a great part in that—readers root for the protagonists because protagonists take center stage in the novel; typically, they are the
stars of the show, which elicit more sympathy since it is their journey the readers follow. From the beginning, readers are already forced to take a position and experience the narrative from the point of view of the protagonist. Authors do this on purpose, manipulating characters into certain roles to tell a story, whether it be the protagonist or antagonist. However, the purpose of this chapter is not to determine the origins of those roles, but rather, how the characters earn those roles within the confines of the novel, *Dracula*, through the analysis of Abraham Van Helsing and Dracula.

Additionally, it is important to analyze how the genre of the novel affects the characters. In an essay titled “Gothic Forms in Irish Cinema,” Michael Gillespie separates the gothic form into two distinct characteristics: the uncanny, which disrupts the reader’s sense of “normalcy” and heightens disorientation, and the menace, the “incipient threat of physical or psychological violence” (p. 1), both of which describe Dracula’s role in the novel pretty accurately. In following the rules of the genre, Bram Stoker doomed the characters from the start. It certainly implies that as the uncanny and menacing force in the novel, Dracula’s character is already pre-determined by an out-of-world force, adhering to French Philosopher Louis Althusser’s claims of “always a subject.” In other words, characters are always manipulated by a higher power, both in and outside the novel. One can argue that Dracula doesn’t act of his own accord—he acts in accordance to the rules of the genre, which serves as Van Helsing’s call to action and prompts him to take measures against the force disrupting their world.

Hence, this chapter will serve to explore what constitutes Van Helsing’s and Dracula’s identity in the novel, and will argue that identity comes not from being “born
that way,” but from the perspectives that are given by supporting characters, the world the novel takes place in, and conflict that arises throughout the plot. Interestingly, it is those components that elevate Van Helsing as a protagonist and damn Dracula as an antagonist, not because one is inherently superior to the other, but because that’s the picture the novel paints. As a result, Van Helsing and Dracula are both subjects which, Louis Althusser claims, is the constant submission to a higher power, like State or Religion.

Point of View

To begin, it’s important to analyze the main characters and how they are introduced to the readers, what the author deems important enough to unveil right away. *Dracula* is a series of letters, telegrams, and journal entries written between Jonathan and Mina Harker, John Seward, and Van Helsing. Because of this, the reader gains a lot of insight into each of the character’s thoughts and points of view concerning certain events; at interest here, however, is Van Helsing whose first description is cited by John Seward: “the kindliest and truest heart that beats—these form his equipment for the noble work that he is doing for mankind—work both in theory and practice, for his views are as wide as his all-embracing sympathy” (p. 106). Considering that this comes from the mouth of a witness or one who knows Van Helsing, the reader takes these words to heart and is inclined to believe the man is virtuous. This isn’t the author or the elusive narrator telling us this—John Seward lives in that world and interacts with the character in question. Furthermore, Van Helsing has titles of “M.D., D.PH., D.LIT., Etc., Etc.,” (p. 106), which attest he is highly educated. John Seward describes him as a man who knows what he’s talking about because he’s a philosopher and a scientist, so all the characters look to him
for a solution to ending Dracula. Because of Van Helsing’s various forms of expertise, he is able to combat Dracula through spiritual tactics: the garlic necklace, the stake through the heart, and others, which elevates him in the scale of importance and capability as a character.

The question becomes: was it necessary for Bram Stoker to attach all of these titles and qualities to a single character? It’s not a coincidence; authors will use such characters as plot devices because without Van Helsing, the other characters would not have been able to defeat Dracula, a being that is not human. Without someone as capable as Dracula, the struggle would have been one-sided and there wouldn’t have been a book. Or, at the very least, it wouldn’t have been believable if ignorant characters had been able to defeat Dracula on their own without help. It certainly highlights Van Helsing as a savior for both the characters and readers.

Additionally, Helsing’s manner of speaking is dramatic and full of analogies, demonstrating his intelligence and the fact he is not a run-of-the-mill man among the protagonists. Before revealing Lucy has come back to life as a vampire, he gives a long speech to Seward, starting with, “Can you tell me why the tortoise lives more long than generations of men; why the elephant goes on and on till he have seen dynasties…” (p. 172). This drags out the revelation considerably—it even has Seward all anxious: “In God’s name, Professor Van Helsing, what do you mean?”—until Van Helsing finally says it. To ordinary men like Seward, this can be frustrating because it’s clear Van Helsing is at another intellectual/spiritual level, a man who has all the answers: “Do you not think that there are things which you cannot understand, and yet which are; that some
people see things that others cannot?” (p. 171), a man who can do no wrong, and who comes to the aid of his friends when they call for him, all the way from Amsterdam.

As readers, we construct the identities of characters by how they’re described. Van Helsing has “a temper of the ice-brook, an indomitable resolution, self-command and toleration exalted from virtues to blessings” (p. 106), and Dracula is a “terrible monster” (p. 197). We see Van Helsing’s dedication to others, the lengths he goes to save Lucy and ward off Dracula, recite parables from the gospel, and exclaim his never-ending defiance against evil, so readers are inclined to believe the protagonists when they describe his holiness. Van Helsing says in reference to Dracula: “For if we fail in this fight…we become as him; that we henceforward become foul things of the night like him…” Stoker gives Van Helsing the limelight in this battle, to elevate his character near to that of sainthood, to generate sympathy among readers, and to throw Dracula into the antagonist box.

Dracula is called “selfish” with a “small intellect” by Van Helsing who goes on to state, “[t]he Draculas were a great and noble race, though now and again were scions who were held by their coevals to have had dealings with the Evil One” (p. 212), suggesting that the current Count Dracula, at one point in his life, was not anywhere near the monster he has become. It opens a can of worms that is not addressed in the story, leaving a lot to be desired. The reader doesn’t know the extent of Van Helsing’s knowledge on the Draculas, and neither do the other characters who never mention him in their entries. Because we don’t get a lot of information when it comes to Dracula’s past life and why he did what he did, we can’t affirm that Van Helsing’s statements about Draculas’
dealings with the Evil One are true or accurate. Furthermore, the readers don’t get any insight from Dracula himself either, nor do they read any of his letters like they do the other characters’. At this point, readers can choose to believe Van Helsing or they can speculate there is more to Dracula than what the characters reveal.

When first meeting Dracula, Jonathan Harker describes his physical characteristic as “one of extraordinary pallor” (p. 24). He notes the strange details like the bushy brows, sharp teeth, and hair in the center of the palms, which don’t undermine Dracula in any way; they are just observations that do raise some questions, but keep Dracula in a relatively high regard. Jonathan Harker compliments Dracula’s ability to speak English well, and is impressed by Dracula’s status among the Romanians. As the story goes on, however, that viewpoint slowly changes into one of terror: “But my very feelings changed to repulsion and terror when I saw the whole man slowly emerge from the window and begin to crawl down the castle wall over that dreadful abyss, facedown,” (p. 39). From there, descriptions of Dracula become much more monstrous: “Even the deep, burning eyes seemed set amongst swollen flesh, for the lids and punches underneath were bloated…he lay like a filthy leech, exhausted with his repletion…” (p. 53). Now that Jonathan has seen Dracula’s true nature, it’s only natural for his views to change. He returns to Britain and joins forces with Van Helsing to stop him. Seemingly, all of the intellect and sophistication that Dracula represents throughout the first fifty pages of the book dissipates and becomes a force that the main characters need to stop. Interestingly, it is not Dracula who changes though—it is Jonathan who changes, who no longer thinks the same of Dracula. Dracula’s character remains the same, but his identity in the eyes of
the protagonists has turned sour. Mina Harker sounds pretty desperate, describing his
power which is not of earth, greater than that of humans:

This vampire which is amongst us is of himself so strong in
person as twenty men; he is of cunning more than mortal,
for his cunning be the growth of ages; he have still the aids
of necromancy, which is, as his etymology imply, the
divination by the dead, and all the dead that he can come
nigh to are for him at command; he is brute, and more than
brute: he is devil in callous, and the heart of him is not…

(p. 209).

Once again, it’s important to note that the reader learns all of this from her, and
not Dracula himself—they’re seeing one side of the picture, which leads to a more biased
interpretation of Dracula’s identity. But the “sophistication” and “intelligence” noted by
Jonathan Harker doesn’t change—it’s Jonathan Harker’s thoughts and feelings that
change. Dracula remains the same cunning, high-class man on a mission to spread his
vampirism to Britain because it’s a part of his nature, bestowed on him by the author,
pigeon-holed into a role that was necessary to the novel. For that reason, the reader,
restricted to Jonathan’s observations, goes from impressed/skeptical to horrified, and
feels the urgency of Jonathan’s goals to stop this evil from spreading into his land.
However, readers must keep an open mind when it comes to building a character’s
identity. Van Helsing and Jonathan’s thoughts are critical to seeing and understanding
Dracula, but readers have to recognize there is more to Dracula than what’s written on the
page. Unfortunately, that leads to a lot of speculation and differentiation among readers, but it keeps the possibility of there being something more to Dracula open. Readers are then at liberty to come to their own conclusions regarding identity.

In terms of identity, both Van Helsing and Dracula are a product of their environments. In Chapter 8 of *Literary Theory - A Very Short Introduction*, Jonathan Culler states that, “The domination of modern tradition in the study of literature has treated the individuality of the individual as something given, a core which is expressed in word and deed and which can therefore be used to explain action: I did what I did because of who I am” (pp. 108-9). These are trends seen in epic poems and novels like the *Odyssey* or *Madame Bovary*. It becomes a personal/mental matter, not one that deals with the outside world or societal issues. That, however, is cause for argument, for one can say, “Yes, the character had it in them all along, but what prompted them to realize that?” It had to be some sort of outside force, a confrontation, a fight, another character, that triggered that self-realization. It’s those outside forces that hold a lot of power, and they can manifest as characters themselves. It can be through an antagonist’s or other character’s action that the protagonist finally realizes who he is or achieves their goal in the story. In fact, if it wasn’t for Dracula, the reader would not have known of Van Helsing’s near-perfect virtues. And if it wasn’t for Van Helsing, there’d be no function to Dracula’s character. Culler states that, “The fundamental identity of characters emerges as the result of actions, of struggles with the world…” (p. 111). This is evident when Jonathan discovers more about Dracula’s nature and Dracula becomes more evil in the eyes of the characters, which calls Van Helsing to action, bringing to light his near perfect
virtues. This calls to question the legitimacy of these “protagonist” and “antagonist” labels in the novel—if characters are responding to their environments, and they are staying true to their nature, how can they be either? Characters only shine when they are called to do so, as is the argument of this paper, but once everyone’s true colors are out, labels become a natural part of categorizing them. That’s why labels are not an accurate representation of the characters. Readers see Van Helsing as the protagonist, the one who struggles, and Dracula as the antagonist, the one who provides the problem, hence why the book is structured the way it is: through the points of view of the protagonists who are up against an evil force whose history, motives, and reasons for being remain unclear. Sympathy would make Dracula too likable to the reader and characters, so revealing more about his past and the tragedies that might have outlined his life wouldn’t coincide with the constructs of the novel.

**Otherness**

Now that we’ve discussed how character points of view have contributed to Van Helsing’s and Dracula’s identities, we’ll move on to “otherness.” Sarah Ahmed touches on otherness in her essay, “Affective Economies,” and it’s defined as the alienation of certain peoples in the eyes of a collective group. The feeling of otherness is littered throughout the very beginning of *Dracula*, with descriptions from Jonathan Harker who is traveling to Eastern Europe and makes statements like, “I read that every known superstition in the world is gathered into the horseshoe of the Carpathians, as if it were the centre of some sort of imaginative whirlpool” (p. 10); “It seems to me that the further East you go the more unpunctual the trains” (p. 11); and, “The strangest figures we saw
were the Slovaks, who are more barbarian than the rest” (p. 11). Ironically, Dracula lives in the very heart of the Carpathians where people seem overly superstitious, have a hard time speaking clearly, and are thrown together in an ethnic melting pot. Jonathan describes Transylvania as “wolf country,” a place for uncivilized, strange, and aggressive people. That sort of labeling or name-calling unifies Jonathan with the other characters from Britain, and creates an “otherness” within Dracula that Sarah Ahmed describes as essential to love: “It is the love of white, or those recognizable as white, that supposedly explains this shared ‘communal’ visceral response of hate” (p. 118). Geographically speaking, Dracula pits the country of Britain against that of Transylvania in Eastern Europe, bringing up the question of “how does being from certain places add to whom you are as a person?” Certainly there is merit to Ahmed’s claim; it creates friction between two groups of people, which is very palpable in the novel, and leads to another component of Dracula’s identity. Because the novel is told through the points of view of the characters from Britain, Dracula is going to get the short end of the stick when it comes to how he’s seen in the eyes of others: inferior and not worthy.

Later in the novel, Van Helsing identifies Dracula as an otherworldly being who needs to be stopped. While this is natural because of the kind of actions Dracula is expected to execute, especially when he turns Lucy into a vampire, it creates an example of otherness which can be applied to the way people think today. Sarah Ahmed starts with a great analogy to this alienation of others in her essay. She uses a quote from the Aryan Nations’ Website that states: “It is not hate that brings rage into the heart of a white Christian farmer when he reads of billions loaned or given away as ‘aid’ to foreigners
when he can’t get the smallest break from an unmerciful government to save his failing farm. No, it’s not hate. It is love” (p. 117). Aryans gather together and defend their feelings toward others. Van Helsing and the protagonists, essentially, do the same when combatting Dracula. It’s that collective feeling that binds them together and unites them against a common enemy, who becomes an imperial force throughout the book. While discrimination against the other evokes hatred and alienation, it is a form of survival, to keep a race of people pure or from mingling with other ethnic groups. It is a sad but true reality, and in Van Helsing’s case, it’s the only way to keep Dracula out of England.

Dracula’s plan was to migrate west into Britain; one of the reasons he invited Jonathan into his castle, actually, was to learn more about Britain and how he can take over, an imperialistic move on his part. He turns Lucy into a vampire who then infects children, jumpstarting a takeover of the country. According to Ahmed, this sort of “passing” into new land can categorize Dracula as a subject to that land, “one whose difference is unmarked and unremarkable” (p. 122). Dracula’s plans to populate England with vampires is similar to colonists populating a country; Van Helsing fights to keep his country free from invasion. It is that kind of invasion that strikes fear into the main characters, particularly Van Helsing, the virtuous professor who stops at nothing to foil Dracula’s plans. A reader can conclude that Van Helsing is a lot like the white farmer, doused with fear at the idea of an outsider or an other repopulating his country, which underscores the term protagonist. Generally, readers want to see camaraderie between groups of people, a reflection they long for in their own countries and/or societies. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, readers don’t have to sympathize with the
protagonist one hundred percent of the time. The author may force undesirable values into a protagonist to force the reader into a mode of thinking or see the situation from a different angle. In the case with *Dracula*, Stoker is alluding to unwanted integration of outside forces within Britain. With that said, it’s important to note that Dracula is no ordinary other either—as the Gothic Genre dictates, Dracula is a supernatural force whose goal is to transform humans into vampires. This reflection of xenophobia would be a topic for a separate thesis, but space does not allow further exploration here.

Subjectivity aside, Van Helsing and Dracula are an analogy for a much greater topic that Stoker might be trying to hint at: Britain doesn’t welcome foreigners, especially from the east, for look at what they do: they transform us into demons that suck the blood out of our people. The fact that Dracula is “othered” by the main characters from Britain instills fear as a component in his identity, a body who is clearly not wanted in this land, and that must be stopped. While the main characters have every right to defend their land from invading forces, it is that call to action that identifies Dracula as a foreign force that is clearly not wanted, deemed dangerous by the main characters, and ultimately expelled to his castle in Romania. Sarah Ahmed says, “These figures (others) come to embody the threat of loss: lost jobs, lost money, lost land. They signify the danger of impurity, or the mixing or taking of blood. They threaten to violate the pure bodies; such bodies can only be imagined as pure by the perpetual restaging of this fantasy of violation” (p. 118).

**Always a Subject**

In “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Louis Althusser states that, “an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices” (p. 770). Ideology is
defined as a system of ideas that tie a society or a set of beliefs together, what allows people to act or behave in certain ways; for example: a person who knows that it’s wrong to steal because the laws said so won’t do it, or at the very least will be discouraged from doing so in fear of the consequences that follow. People, then, must act accordingly within their societies in order to avoid trouble from the lawmakers; this is what Althusser would call a “state apparatus,” a society that is governed by a series of imaginary laws, backed up by a notion of “ideology,” i.e., what a person or group thinks is right and wrong. As a result of this, every person within said society is a subject to that ideology. Jonathan Culler explains that while the subject of a sentence is the dominant force, what the verb and object correspond to, the name itself—“subject”—means to submit. A “subject” can then be defined as a person or being that is under the control of a higher power, physical or not.

With this in mind, we can take a closer look at the world of *Dracula* and how the characters function within it. In fact, we can view the novel as a state apparatus in itself, a system set in place by the author, who has control over characters and their actions. As discussed in previous sections of this chapter, the author carefully crafted his characters and how they were going to be depicted, what they were going to say about the other, and how their actions were going to impact the story as a whole. Because of this, the protagonists tend to see Dracula as a dark, malevolent force that has to be stopped; he is mysterious because we know so very little about him; he is a seemingly immortal, all-powerful being from the protagonists’ point of view, an obstacle that has to be overcome.
I think the following is a fitting model of how Van Helsing, Jonathan, and Mina would see Dracula in the novel:

In this image, Dracula rests on the top, the looming, evil figure that has to be stopped by the main characters. But, if we take Althusser’s ideas of ideology and how subjects behave in correspondence to it, the diagram would be a lot different. This would be the reality:
In the above model, Dracula and Van Helsing are on the same plane because they are both subjects. Even if, in the novel, Dracula is depicted as a powerful being who can’t be defeated by normal means (guns, decapitation, etc.) and must be defeated because he is a supernatural being working on behalf of the devil, he is not as high up on the power scale as he is made out to be. Like the protagonists, Dracula is under the control of that “Higher Power,” which includes societal views, such as what Van Helsing and the other protagonists think of Dracula, the Gothic Genre, which requires the narrative to have an opposing supernatural force, and the author him/herself who decides the characters’ roles in the novel. Dracula acts in accordance to his needs and way of life, i.e., whatever he needs to do in order to survive. We can attribute this to two forces: one of them is whatever turned him into a vampire in the first place, which the novel gave no account of, and the other is the author himself, who chose these specific traits for Dracula.

His need for blood and turning other humans into vampires is evil in the eyes of the protagonists, but not in the eyes of Dracula, who must act this way because that is what his nature dictates. Dracula is hungry, and that creates conflict between him and the protagonists trying to stop him. Althusser states “…[W]e observe that the ideological representation of ideology is itself forced to recognize that every ‘subject’ endowed with a ‘consciousness’ and believing in the ‘ideas’ that his ‘consciousness’ inspires in him and freely accepts, must ‘act according to his ideas,’ must therefore inscribe his own ideas as a free subject in the actions of his material practice. If he does not do so, ‘that is wicked,’ ” (p. 771). In other words: if Dracula didn’t act the way he did in the book, he wouldn’t be true to himself. If the lion didn’t kill gazelles, it wouldn’t be a lion. It is that call to
nature that makes him a subject to the laws and rules society and religion have imposed
in the world of that novel. Interestingly, if Dracula did try to break those constraints
through his own free will, there’d be no story and there’d be a big question mark
regarding whether the novel fulfilled its duty to the gothic genre.

When it comes to the “Higher Power” that dictates the world of *Dracula*, readers
shouldn’t only look to the author and his decisions in constructing his characters and their
roles, but to the genre itself. The author, to some degree, is obligated to follow the rules
of the genre if he is going to label his book as such; when it comes to the gothic form,
Gillespie states that it “enforces a relentless, subversive power, manifest through jarring
and insistent contradiction of conceptions of tradition and convention” (p. 2). Someone
has to fit the bill, and Dracula is it or else there wouldn’t be a story. Gillespie even
accounts for Van Helsing’s actions, claiming that “These disruptive forces cause
individuals to experience an escalating sense of disenchantment and disorientation…” (p.
2) and that “Once this realization takes hold, characters…experience the confusion,
disorientation, and terror that are definitive features of Gothic works” (p. 2). This is
evident in the way Van Helsing and the other protagonists handle Lucy’s death and what
she becomes thanks to Dracula’s intervention—there is a scramble, desperation, in their
actions to stop Dracula before he takes over the entirety of Britain, heightened only by
the fact it is a foe they’ve never faced or confronted, even Van Helsing in his many years
as a paranormal researcher. Those attributes are what bind the *Dracula* novel to its genre,
making it a classic example of what the gothic form is all about: a malevolent force...
(Dracula) disrupts society and is confronted by Van Helsing who strives to bring normalcy and order back to society.

To reiterate the earlier argument of this chapter: identity stems not from the inner self alone—it requires a Higher Power to function. Van Helsing and Dracula’s identities are constructed by the world around them, by the descriptions given by the protagonists, the sense of “otherness” endowed by the protagonists, and the doom and gloom view that Althusser explains: We are all subjects, puppets of an apparatus that governs our everyday lives, what determines good and evil in a society. Isn’t it that Higher Power that sets the laws in the country or the rules a religion must follow? Isn’t it the genre that sets the rules of the novel, or else it wouldn’t fulfill the genre’s requirements? Therefore, one can argue that a person’s actions, beliefs, and status are manipulated by untouchable forces; in the case of Dracula and Van Helsing, it’s the author and the genre, and in the case of day-to-day life, it’s the Ideological State Apparatus.
“WHO AM I?—LITERALLY—IN AMNESIA: THE DARK DESCENT”

The gothic genre extends its characteristics of the menace and the uncanny to video games. Writers use the same rules of the gothic genre to construct the narrative of a video game much like an author would in a novel. Any campaign, or main story line, in a contemporary game will require the player to control the main character, or protagonist, that must navigate through a series of levels and uncover truths that will lead to the completion of his/her task. In a video game, the protagonist is the character controlled by the player, driven by a goal to complete in the game. Then there is the menace—whatever obstacles the protagonist has to overcome—and the uncanny, which is the unknown—what’s going to happen next? In this chapter, I will be analyzing Amnesia: The Dark Descent, published by Frictional Games, which holds many of the same structural elements as Dracula, not only in the gothic genre, but in the roles these characters fulfill (i.e., the protagonist sets out to defeat a supernatural force) and the way their identities are constructed.

In Amnesia: The Dark Descent, as a gamer you play as Daniel, the protagonist, who wakes up in an old abandoned castle without any memory of his prior life. As the game progresses, clues of his past are revealed through a series of letters and journal entries, and your objective becomes clear: defeat Alexander, the baron of the castle, and avoid the Shadow, who is out to consume you. The Shadow is a force throughout the game that
hunts the player through the castle; it is an invisible being that will stop at nothing until Daniel is dead. The Shadow is a result of Daniel’s contact with the Orb in the Tomb of Hinan in French-owned Algeria, an other-culture and other-worldly artifact, which defines contact with the other as deadly and exemplifies the consequences of post-colonial conquests. “Other” is a person who is not native to the country in question; in this case, it would be Daniel who is not native to Algeria. This drives Daniel to seek help from Alexander, who knows about the Shadow but manipulates Daniel into performing gruesome rituals in an effort to return to his home world. Alexander is not of earth—he is from a different dimension—and believes that human suffering will grant him a means to return. When Daniel realizes he was used, he drinks the amnesia potion to forget his past and start anew, although not entirely.

The game restricts the player to a one-way path; the player is not at liberty to make choices on Daniel’s behalf, unable to advance to the next level unless he/she completes the designated tasks such as solving puzzles or traversing through the castle. In doing so, Daniel fulfills the wishes of his former self, who guides him through the game with pre-written letters and journal entries. Like a protagonist in a novel where there are no what-if scenarios, Amnesia locks in Daniel’s fate, in essence taking control of the construction of his identity. In “Gothic and Video Games,” Michael Hancock states “video games may be simulacra, but not in the way we usually think: not just ‘virtual reality’, video games are the uncanny symptom of the neo-liberal subject’s recognition of its own lack of self” (p. 167). In other words, the protagonist’s “self” has very little power in determining the narrative’s outcome. Using the theoretical lens of Jonathan Culler and
Louis Althusser, I argue that Daniel’s identity is not a product of who he is as a person—an inherent personality, as some authors and theorists describe—it is molded strictly through his circumstances, of which he is always a subject to, and will always be a subject to. Like with Dracula, point of view, otherness, and the gothic genre all play a part in shaping a character’s identity.

**Point of View**

Jonathan Culler, in Chapter 8 of *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, contemplates the definition of identity and how it’s created: “Am I made what I am by circumstances? What is the relationship between the individuality of the individual and my identity as member of a group? And to what extent is the ‘I’ that I am…an agent who makes choices rather than has choices imposed on him or her?” (Culler, p. 109). The answer, according to *Amnesia*, is none. There is no “I” in identity, an inherently born trait, because even Daniel, who drinks the amnesia potion to forget his horrid crimes against Alexander’s victims, is still driven by the voice of his former self, which he must listen to if he wants to escape the castle and free himself of the Shadow. In drinking the amnesia potion, Daniel creates two separate identities: one of his former self and one of his present self. Even so, Daniel is not at liberty to change his circumstances or move forward, not unless he listens to his former self. Early in the game, this is revealed through a note that Daniel finds in the Old Archives:

9th of August, 1839

I wish I could ask you how much you remember. I don’t know if there will be anything left after I consume this drink. Don’t be afraid Daniel. I can’t tell you why, but
know this. I choose to forget…There is a purpose…Go to
the Inner Sanctum, find Alexander and kill him…

Your former self,
Daniel (Daniel’s Note to Self, Old Archives).

Culler also states “a subject is also subjected, determined…Theory is inclined to
argue that to be a subject at all is to be subjected to various regimes (psycho-social,
sexual, linguistic)” (p. 109). Grammatically speaking, the term subject describes the
content of a sentence but it is also synonymous with object. As a subject, one is oppressed
or under study, which can be applied to Daniel; he is not only manipulated by his former
self, but by the Shadow, which follows him regardless of how little of his prior identity he
remembers. Daniel’s contact with the Orb in Algiers prompted this aggressive entity to
pursue him as a means of restoring balance to the world. However, regardless of Daniel’s
new identity after drinking the amnesia potion, the Shadow has not lessened its attack.
This exemplifies that identity is constructed in the eyes of the beholder, not from the
character himself. If the latter were the case, Daniel would have been released from his
plight, but the very objective of the game is to continue trying to escape the Shadow.

The only way to do that, as is revealed to Daniel at the beginning of the game, is
to kill Alexander of Brenenburg. There is no choice in the matter, neither for Daniel nor
the player; a strict linearity must be followed if the game is to be won. This is part of the
gothic form in contemporary media, as Hancock states in his essay: “To varying degrees,
the game pushes the player to identify actions within the game world, making it a
candidate for the gothic double, or doppelgänger” (p. 167). In essence, the player and
Daniel are one and the same. Now a puppeteer to his own former voice and circumstance,
Daniel must navigate through the deadly castle to kill Alexander without knowing why. The reasons are slowly revealed throughout the game: Daniel turned to Alexander for help against the Shadow, only to be manipulated into conducting grotesque rituals; this is another one of Daniel’s letters picked up during the game:

I can’t stop sweating and shaking. The warding ritual was not something of a sane mind! … Alexander made all of the arrangements but he said I had to perform the ritual in order to have the right effect. The Shadow could be led astray by the blood of another. Killing the man would provide us precious time. What else could I do? Alexander said it had to be done. He is saving my life, I don’t have the luxury of argument.

Daniel didn’t know that Alexander of Brennenburg is an other-worldly being, an immortal who seeks to return to his own world, and to do so, must exploit and torture people in the worst way possible, collecting a certain “essence” that is his ticket out of the earthly plane he is trapped in. At least, not until it’s too late and Daniel has already tarnished his soul, which is the reason he drinks the amnesia potion.

As a result of this, identity can be defined as a construct that outside forces have put together in the eyes of the beholder. For that reason, identity is imposed by the observer, varying from person to person but equally valid among them. It’s what makes identity so complex. Just as Dracula and Van Helsing’s identities were both constructed from points of view and what the reader gets to learn about them, which may be limited and biased, Daniel’s identity is formed in a similar fashion. The player has no choice but to control Daniel, pick up the letters and journals that reveal more about Daniel’s past, and come to terms with Daniel’s previous identity and Daniel’s current identity which,
arguably, are different. The old Daniel helped Alexander in those gruesome experiments, killing and torturing people, whereas the new Daniel repents and extracts his revenge on Alexander. While the player has plenty to work with as far as Daniel’s identity is concerned, there is very little about Alexander. Like Dracula, the player knows very little about Alexander’s reasons and intentions, i.e., they never find out why Alexander is stuck in the human world or why he was kicked out of his own. As players, all we know that Alexander is brutal in his methods to return to his dimension and manipulative of Daniel who does most of the dirty work for him. This raises the question of otherness, another characteristic that the gothic genre adopts.

**Otherness**

As mentioned in the previous section, point of view has a lot to do with the way a character’s identity is built. Because players control Daniel, they have no choice but to solve the mysteries of his past as well as navigate through the castle for survival, whether they sympathize with Daniel or not. In addition to the Shadow, Alexander’s servants, known as Gatherers, pursue him and kill him when sighted. Because Daniel is an extension of the player, it’s up to the player to escape if they wish to advance to the next level. This, in turn, creates a bond between the player and avatar. Hancock states, “And indeed, the player’s relationship with the avatar invokes this visual blur between subject
and object, as the game prompts the player to think of the avatar as both an extension of self and an object to manage” (p. 168). Despite Daniel's misdeeds in helping along Alexander's gruesome rituals, the player develops a bond with the protagonist after a long and emotional run through the game.

On the other hand, Alexander is the antagonist, one of the main reasons for Daniel’s suffering. Because of point of view, the player doesn’t know why or how—early flashbacks depict Alexander showing Daniel around the castle to help him with the Shadow; this is a flashback the player hears when Daniel enters the Refinery:

Daniel: “It sure is dark in here.”
Alexander: “Yes, and there is a good reason for it. But you can light the lamp now if you wish.”
Daniel: “What’s the reason? For the darkness, that is”
Alexander: “Stay close – be careful not to stray.”
Daniel: “What’s the reason? Why is it so dark?”
Alexander: “Pay attention, Daniel. It’s important that you keep going straight and make sure not to stray.”

As a result, the reasons behind the orders to kill Alexander are unknown. Seemingly, Alexander was trying to help Daniel get rid of the Shadow, which is apparent throughout the game as well: the Shadow causes a lot of the castle to collapse and consumes everything in its wake. Eventually, the player realizes that Alexander manipulated Daniel and caused all of those horrific deaths because it was his only way home—Alexander was no human, he was from another world, the unknown and the uncanny in this gothic form. He manipulated Daniel who states:

It’s not fair! I’m not to blame. I’ve been manipulated by that demon. He played my guilty conscience and duped me into facing the shadow alone. That vile, conspiring man. He
expects me to meet my death as he steals power beyond imagination?

Alexander, I will kill you for what you have done. If only the shadow had caught me in London or Algeria, I wouldn’t have to suffer this humiliation. You made me a murderer, a monster! (Inner Sanctum)

In the castle, the Inner Sanctum is where Alexander builds the portal to return to his home world. This is where the former Daniel realizes that he was used, torturing victims on Alexander’s behalf, collecting their essence, or Vitae, for Alexander’s return home. Daniel didn’t know this of course—he is betrayed by Alexander who doesn’t care about helping him with the Shadow. In the above entry, Daniel indicates that Alexander contained knowledge about the Shadow, perhaps knew a means of stopping it, but there are no further details concerning this. In a journal written by Daniel titled “14th July 1839,” he states,

I've read every book I can find on the subject. While rich in legend and hearsay, my knowledge is lack for the insight I crave. I've sent letters to many in Herbert's address book, and received answers of varying importance.

Today I got one which differed greatly from the others---from a baron in Prussia. He said nothing about the quaint stories of priests in underground temples. He didn't even mention them. He simply wrote:

"I know. I can protect you. Come to Brennenburg castle." Signed Alexander.

What am I to make of this? Protect me from what? Is someone after me? I looked up Brennenburg and traced it to the Prussian woods near the Baltic Sea. While being the least informative letter I've received, it causes me greatest distress and interest.
There is also no indication that the Shadow stems from Alexander’s world, but it is clear that Alexander’s motives and intentions are cruel. Unfortunately, the player gets very little insight into Alexander’s past and origins with many mysteries (such as the ones mentioned above) unsolved. For example: why was Alexander on earth? Was he banished from his realm? If so, why was torturing humans the only way to get back? These questions leave a lot for the player to fill in, and, like in Dracula, not much is known about the antagonist.

This distances Alexander greatly, not only because there is very little information on his origins, but because he is a supernatural force, creating a feeling of otherness. In “Affective Economies,” Sarah Ahmed defines otherness as the alienation of certain peoples in the eyes of a collective group. Alexander fits under the description of otherness because he is not from earth. In fact, both he and the orb responsible for the Shadow are others in the narrative, alien to Daniel and the player. The lack of information adds to the separation and feelings of uneasiness, which tends to decrease sympathetic emotions. Players, as well as readers, root for the protagonists on the basis of sympathy, as stated by Doug Paterson and quoted in the previous chapter: “The agon of a Greek comedy was the intense exchange of views between two choruses or characters. Such a debate would sympathize with the ‘pro’ side, making this sympathetic character the protagonist” (p. 10). In terms of identity, Alexander and the Orb’s power don’t get a sufficient construction because of a lack of exposure. The only time the game mentions them are through letters and flashbacks, the majority of them Daniel’s. Like
with *Dracula*, there is much to be desired when it comes to Alexander and how he wound up on earth.

Overall, the identities of protagonists are built differently from those of the antagonists. Players and readers will be able to construct a much more accurate identity of protagonists just because there is more exposure to their lives, actions, and thoughts. Antagonists don’t get much of a limelight, so their identities don’t get the same amount of thought or detail. There are indications and reasons to this: one, both of these media follow the gothic genre which follows a protagonist against a supernatural force. Two, the supernatural force, or the uncanny, can represent a form of colonialism, unwanted invaders taking control of a country. For example, in *Dracula*, Dracula and his vampires are a symbol of outsiders, aiming to take over Britain. In *Amnesia*, Alexander and his supernatural forces can be seen as much of the same. When Daniel comes into contact with the orb, he has an out-of-body experience:

> My weakened body was heavy to carry, but I managed to push myself towards the enchanting light. It was waiting for me. Enclosed in dark nothingness, I felt myself drawn to the mystic light. I reached out closing it in my hands.

> The faint glow escaped my fingers and began to spark brightly and spirit me away. Unlocking alien memories of spiraling towers, endless deserts, and impossible geometry (Inside Chamber).

This encounter sparks the Shadow to start its pursuit of Daniel, prompting Daniel to contact Alexander, hence starting the game’s narrative. The game doesn’t offer any more insight or information regarding this supernatural force, only that Daniel’s contact instigated aggression. Conclusively, interaction with the other can be deadly. To take it a
step further, it becomes a part of Daniel’s identity, both the former and present, since both are running away from it. This is evident in Dracula too: Jonathan’s contact with Dracula sparked a conflict that helped shaped the protagonists’ identities because without said contact, there wouldn’t have been a narrative. According to Jean-Luc Nancy, in her essay “Identity is Not a Figure,” “Identities are never purely stable, nor simply plastic. They are always metastable” (p. 11). Trials and tribulations are tools that a reader or player uses to construct the identities of characters, and the more of them they are exposed to, the more fleshed out the identity. That doesn’t mean that a reader or player will construct the same identity—it will vary depending on the person.

**Always a Subject**

Louis Althusser describes the significance of manipulation in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” with an example of Priests and Despots and how “[T]hey ‘forged’ the Beautiful Lies so that, in the belief they were obeying God, men would in fact obey the Priests and Despots, who are usually in alliance in their imposture, the Priests acting in the interests of the Despots or vice versa…” (p. 769). Althusser goes on to explain that in creating this imaginary representation of men’s conditions, higher powers such as government and religion are then able to alienate themselves from the common man, which is exactly what Alexander does in regard to Daniel. This power play is necessary in order for the subject (Daniel) to act accordingly, or else he is “wicked.” It isn’t until Daniel recognizes the subjectivity of his being that he wishes to eliminate his identity and attachments to Alexander.
Unfortunately, Daniel wiping away his own fears and memories is not enough to unbind him from the shackles of being a subject. Althusser states that individuals are “always-already a subject…” (p. 775), and even though Daniel drinks the amnesia potion in order to forget his past and succeeds in killing Alexander at the end, he is still the subject of his prior self. This alludes to Culler’s essay that states there is no individuality, for a subject is always a subject. Daniel cannot erase the horrors he committed nor can he gain any semblance of superiority, for the notion of subjectivism seems to be an endless circle. In other words, there is no person or being that rules over all; even a person of high stature answers to a higher power. The following diagram illustrates this point:

Alexander > Past Daniel > Present Daniel.

This diagram shows that every character within the game is a subject. While it might seem like Alexander is on top, in control of everyone, his fate too lies within Daniel’s actions. In other words, protagonists and antagonists share similar goals and have equally reasonable motives for what they do throughout the narrative; the only reason the reader or player joins the protagonists’ side is because they don’t have a choice—they’re forced to through point of view. Characters receive more screen time, attention,
and detail are easier to sympathize with than characters who are mysterious or whose motives remain unclear, which is why Daniel and Van Helsing are more sympathetic.

These circumstances can also be attributed to the confines of the gothic genre itself; any media defined as “gothic” has rules to follow. Hancock mentions this in his essay as well: “…Traditional gothic tropes within the games destabilize the roles of the avatar…by granting players choices within a traditional gothic story…but such a choice is one already constrained by the gothic mechanics of the games” (p. 169). Players and characters have to act according to the genre—there is no deviation from the linearity of the narrative.

When it comes to identity, it’s important for the player or reader to keep this in mind: characters aren’t going to be treated or represented equally. Despite the time and media difference, Dracula and Amnesia: The Dark Descent follow many of the same tropes in the way characters are depicted and identities are constructed: not from within, but from the mechanics of the world they live in and from the confines of the gothic genre itself.
CONCLUSION

Characters are employed by the author to tell the tale in a narrative. Stephen Orgel explored the extent of this, of how much a character is truly bound to a page, and concluded that characters, like people, have lives that extend beyond the beginning and end of the novel. A character’s identity, however, includes ambitions, goals, morals, and beliefs, subjective to the reader and at the mercy of the role the character plays in the narrative. Jean Luc states: “An identity is not something one enters…and one cannot identify with one without at the same time modifying it, moralizing it, perhaps transforming it” (p. 11). In a narrative, there are multiple ways that a character’s identity can be modified or manipulated. For example, protagonists struggle to achieve what they believe is right while the antagonists serve as obstacles to that goal. For that reason, the reader spends the majority of the narrative from the protagonist’s point of view, not the antagonist’s, which leads to an unfair construction of identity.

Protagonists and antagonists play special roles in media, guiding the reader through their narratives and providing obstacles, respectively: Protagonists are meant to be sympathetic, are the characters that readers can relate to, while the antagonists provide an obstacle, a problem that has to be overcome. These two chapters addressed what constituted their roles and identities: genres, social constructs, and Ideological State Apparatuses, a system that uses schools, media, churches, clubs, and families to control populations of people.

The Gothic genre marries fiction with horror, requiring protagonists to overcome a supernatural force of sorts. It utilizes the uncanny, forcing the reader to question what
he/she knows about the normal world, and heightens confusion, the opposing side. In
terms of Dracula and Amnesia: The Dark Descent, the genre assigns the roles of
protagonist and antagonist to each of the characters: Van Helsing and Daniel have to
overcome the supernatural, Dracula and Alexander.

Racial constructs explore the relationship between a certain group of people, how
one benefits or dominates the other. In the case of Dracula, Van Helsing and the other
main characters automatically exclude Dracula not just because he is a vampire, but
because he lives in Eastern Europe. Jonathan Harker expresses his discomfort at the
beginning of the novel, calling Dracula an “imaginative whirlpool” (p. 10). Excluding a
person based on where they’re from is what Sarah Ahmed calls “otherness,” or an
alienation of certain peoples in the eyes of a collective group. The same applies to
Alexander whom the player knows very little about, who becomes an other because he is
not of this world, and is the subject of Daniel’s hate.

Lastly, Dracula and Amnesia: The Dark Descent use ideology to construct
identities. Ideology is defined as a system of ideas that tie a society or a set of beliefs
together, the reason why people behave or act a certain way. Louis Althusser states that
this is done through an Ideological State Apparatus, which uses social institutions to
control populations of people. In the case of Dracula and Amnesia: The Dark Descent, it
is the genre that controls the characters and what they do. As a result, all characters are
subjects, which, Althusser claims, is the constant submission to a higher power, like State
or Religion, or even the genre itself. Dracula doesn’t act of his own accord—he acts in
accordance to the rules of the genre, which serves as Van Helsing’s call to action, and
prompts him to take measures against the force disrupting their world. The same for Daniel, who has to destroy Alexander in order to escape the castle and the Shadow that is chasing him and would, ultimately, take his life.

For that reason, it’s important to remember that there is more to characters than meets the eye, goals, experiences, and past lives that the author may or may not choose to incorporate into the narrative; the author shows what he/she wants the reader to see, what then becomes an identity, or a role: Van Helsing has to defeat Dracula; Daniel has to defeat Alexander. Naturally, readers are more sympathetic with the protagonist because that’s what the role of the protagonist demands, how the novel is structured, i.e., readers know more about Van Helsing than Dracula, so they sympathize with him; Daniel is the only playable character in the game, so players have no choice but to confront danger and survive along with him. When creating these narratives, authors keep the reader’s feelings in mind because it’s the only way to fulfill what the gothic genre requires: the uncanny and the menace, roles that are taken up by the antagonists.


Nancy, Jean-Luc. “Identity is not a Figure.” Identity: Fragments, Frankness. Fordham University Press. 2015.

