"To Believe in Things That You Cannot": Dracula and the Unthinkable

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Among the many challenges produced by the Anthropocene, the proposed geological epoch that places humans as the central agent impacting the ecological structure of the earth, none is perhaps more pertinent than the epistemological and ontological crisis that has arisen since the term’s formulation. How do we comprehend a new humanness that is theoretically inseparable from nature? Amitav Ghosh argues that this crisis, along with anthropogenic climate change, is culturally unimaginable because modern novelists have failed to incorporate it into their fictions. When it is present, it is either bound to non-fiction or belittled to the “non-serious” genres of gothic or science fiction. This paper challenges Ghosh’s conceptualization of “serious” fiction by reading Bram Stoker’s gothic text Dracula as a novel that grapples with crises that are indistinguishable from those of the Anthropocene. While Ghosh argues that the modern novel must incorporate themes related to the Anthropocene for the epoch to culturally exist, the “non-serious” works in which these concerns are already present should not be excluded; rather, they should be the focus of examination. Approaching Dracula in this way not only demonstrates the interconnectedness of past and present cultural concerns, but further provides a praxis for reconsidering Dracula and other works of “non-serious” fiction as valuable components

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of contemporary Anthropocenic and ecocritical discourse. Doing so allows for a reconceptualization of what “serious” literary work may be.

In the opening pages of *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, Amitav Ghosh proposes that the systems of anthropogenic climate change and human culture are inseparably bound—that the crisis experienced during one necessarily produces a crisis for the other—and that this relationship is, consequently, related to a crisis of the imagination (2016, 9). Ghosh’s statements are similar to other ideas formulated within the evolving discourse surrounding the topic of the Anthropocene, the recently proposed geological epoch where human agents have made a significant impact on the Earth’s ecological structure. According to Dipesh Chakrabarty, acknowledging and understanding this period, including the consequences that humans will suffer as a result, is difficult because the very definition of the epoch challenges the “fundamental assumption of Western (and now universal) political thought”—that humans and nature are distinctly separate spheres (2017, 39). More specifically, what Ghosh, Chakrabarty, and other scholars illustrate is that the Anthropocene disrupts and dissolves the boundaries between the human and the natural, challenging established binaries and leading to a cultural crisis formulated through epistemological doubt. The erosion of the once assumed division between culture and nature thus problematizes the ontological status of the human or, in the words of Ian Baucom and Matthew Omelsky, “affects how we make meaning of ourselves and our world” (2017, 2).

Popularized by Paul Crutzen, the Anthropocene is believed to have begun during the late eighteenth century, largely due to the Industrial Revolution. As the name suggests, the Anthropocene marks humans as the primary contributors to modern climate change and it follows that “mankind will remain a major environmental force for many millennia” (Crutzen 2002, 23). Indeed, during this epoch, the “human” as a discursive paradigm takes on both new meanings and new roles as an environmental agent. Not only has the human subject become a geological force capable of altering the earth’s ecological structure—thereby dissolving the seemingly “natural” distinction between human and nature—but the “human” itself is no longer assumed to be a singular concept, instead becoming part of a wider ecological matrix in which it is intimately connected to various other forces. This process is labeled as the “human turn” by Sverre Raffnsoe, defined as a “turn within the human, and also a turn of the human, [which] involves the human factor altering its character and turning in a new direction, integrating into a landscape of relationships that are abundant and diverse” (2016, 30). As Raffnsoe aptly states, “within this landscape [of the Anthropocene], issues concerning the human—its finitude, responsiveness, responsibility, maturity, and relationship to itself—appear rephrased and re-accentuated as decisive probing questions, not only for humans but for the earth at large” (2016, xii).

Ghosh’s main quibble, as he illustrates throughout *The Great Derangement*, is the inability of writers to successfully incorporate themes and issues surrounding the Anthropocene into the modern novel or what he calls “serious fiction.” Ghosh frames this dilemma as both an imaginative and epistemological failure. Because the modern novel necessarily focuses on “realistic” events and was “midwifed into existence ... through the banishing of the improbable
and the insertion of the everyday” (Ghosh 2016, 17), its failure to include the problems brought on by the Anthropocene demonstrates that this new epoch is itself entirely unimaginable. This is in spite of the scientific community’s widespread support of the epoch’s existence and, as Ghosh illustrates, its effects on humanity’s everyday experiences. Within modern fiction, to write about the Anthropocene is to reduce the novel’s status, to “risk banishment to the humbler dwellings that surround the manor house” where genres such as “the gothic” and “horror” reside (ibid., 24). Ghosh’s argument is thus not only concerned with the frequency in which the Anthropocene appears in the fictions of today, but also the cultural status of novels that choose to discuss these concerns. What significance do emerging Anthropocenic discussions hold if they are simultaneously dismissed as the products of an inconsequential genre?

Challenging Ghosh’s categorical definition of “serious fiction,” Bram Stoker’s 1897 gothic novel, Dracula, addresses issues indistinguishable from those that arise during the Anthropocene and the era of anthropogenic climate change. Dracula has been subject to various forms of critical insights since its publication, but the novel remains relatively unexamined by ecocritical approaches and, perhaps unsurprisingly, rarely discussed in terms of the Anthropocene. While Robert Azzarello’s 2016 article “Unnatural Predators: Queer Theory Meets Environmental Studies in Bram Stoker’s Dracula” brings ecological concerns into conversation with the fields of criticism that have historically been used to understand the novel, it does not address the wider implications of the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene encompasses environmental studies and the questions posed within that field, but environmental studies does not necessarily extend to the broader cultural and philosophical challenges of the Anthropocene. In his 2016 book chapter entitled “The Death Is the Life: Dracula, Fossil Fuels, and the Ecology of Undeath,” Jesse Oak Taylor acknowledges the lack of Anthropocenic studies of Dracula by discussing the relationship between fossil fuels and the Victorian fear of evolutionary demise. Taylor’s analysis thus adds to the nascent yet growing conversation between Dracula and the Anthropocene as a humanistic mode of inquiry.

This work builds upon Taylor’s research, addressing the wider and larger epistemological and ontological crises that are necessitated by and through the Anthropocene: what does it mean to be human in a time of ubiquitous change? What happens when the boundaries between human and nature, or the cultural and the natural, are blurred? And what are the consequences of failing to adapt to—or, in Ghosh’s terms, failing to imagine—these dissolutions (Ghosh 2016)? Thus, in many ways, this argument aligns with Azarello’s understanding of the novel not “as a literary text to which theory can be applied, but rather as a theoretical text itself, fictionally crafted, but teaching theoretical issues” (ibid, 139). While Ghosh argues that the modern novel must incorporate themes related to the Anthropocene for the epoch to exist in our cultural imagination, the “non-serious” works in which these concerns already exist should not be excluded; rather, they should be the focus of examination. Approaching Dracula in this way not only demonstrates the interconnectedness of past and present cultural crises, but also allows for a praxis for reconsidering Dracula and other works of “non-serious” fiction as valuable components of contemporary Anthropocenic and ecocritical discourse. Doing so, in turn, allows for a reconceptualization of what “serious” literary work may be.
It is perhaps surprising that Victorian-era texts have received little attention from critics interested in ecological concerns. Taylor states that “the most striking thing about reviewing the field of Victorian ecocriticism is that there is so little of it” (2015, 877). Yet, if the beginning of the Anthropocene is, as frequently cited, the late eighteenth century, and if it intensified during the Industrial Revolution, “then the Victorians were its first inhabitants” (ibid.). As Taylor contends, “the Victorians were the first people to dwell [on the] condition of their existence, witnessing the radical transformation of the world and of the conditions of possibility within it. In this regard, … many of the imaginative challenges of the Anthropocene are eerily familiar from the Victorian era” (ibid.). These radical transformations were often depicted in gothic texts, a genre that similarly gained popularity during the nineteenth century. Kathleen Spencer notes how the genre highlighted the eroding divisions “between male and female, natural and unnatural, civilized and degenerate, and human and unhuman” (1992, 203). Although Ghosh states that the gothic is banished from the mansion that is “serious fiction” because of its unrealistic events, the genre—produced during a time of severe and consequential change—nonetheless raises similar concerns and articulates similar anxieties encompassed by Anthropocenic discourse. This positions Dracula as a text that provides critical insights into many of the challenges individuals of the twenty-first century face today.

At the core of Dracula’s horror narrative is the battle between a culture constructed through bourgeois industrial progress and a figure whose vampirism threatens this teleological development. Thus, the novel positions the protagonists: Harker, Van Helsing, and the other male members of the “Crew of Light,” as products of a modern capitalistic system who must protect their establishment from the ancient, animalistic Count Dracula who exists outside of culture in the natural world. The narrative begins by framing this conflict accordingly; Harker’s journey from the Westernized London into the “barbaric” (Stoker [1897] 2006, 5) east of Transylvania forecasts a dissolution of the technological progress that he holds dear. By venturing into “one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe,” Harker discovers that there are “no maps of [the] country as yet to compare with [London’s] own Ordnance Survey Maps” and that the “further east you go the more unpunctual are the trains” (ibid., 3-4). Harker’s comments not only establish the apparent binary between culture and nature that pervades the text, but demonstrate an epistemological failure that will ultimately prove to be one of the characters’ greatest assumptions: culture exists here (London) and nature exists out there somewhere in an unimaginable place.

However, similar to the Anthropocene and the era of climate change, “nothing is really far away; there is no place where the orderly expectations of bourgeois life hold unchallenged sway” (Ghosh 2016, 26). Dracula, then, blurs the constructed division between culture and nature, consequently forcing the novel’s characters to reimagine the once stable ontology of “human.” Dracula’s own hybrid morphology—his mixture between unhuman, animal, and the natural environment, as well as his ability to seamlessly alternate between these forms—is indeed what causes Harker’s original discomfort. Seeing Dracula as a “whole man slowly emerge from the window and begin to crawl down the castle wall … face down, with his cloak spreading out around him like wings” causes Harker to feel “repulsion and terror” (Stoker [1897] 2006, 33). The uncanny appearance of what Harker describes as a “creature … in the
semblance of a man” causes a crisis in which the ideas of knowing and being come under attack. Harker ultimately concludes that he “dare not think of” the unimaginable terror that Dracula represents. What Harker does know, however, is that he must stop this hybrid entity from entering the cultural epicenter of London. Harker’s “terrible desire … to rid the world of such a monster” results from the fear that this “filthy leech,” a being that blurs the boundary between human and animal, may further erode the division between culture and nature by infecting his urban capital (ibid., 49).

Harker’s inability to accept what he has witnessed introduces the main epistemological challenge plaguing the characters throughout the text. In Ghosh’s terms, Dracula and his vampirism more broadly—including the eventual effects that it will have on his primary targets Mina and Lucy—represent the unthinkable or unimaginable and are thus pushed to the periphery of thought. The fact that the current incident is indeed witnessed by Harker, yet is nevertheless excluded—voluntarily—from his imagination causes Harker to be characterized as “deranged.” A similar incident of witnessing and unbelief occurs during Dracula’s later voyage to England. Described as one of the “greatest and suddenest storms on record,” Dracula causes a storm that is described as unimaginable:

With a rapidity which, at the time, seemed incredible, and even afterwards is impossible to realise, the whole aspect of nature at once became convulsed. The waves rose in a growing fury … till in a very few minutes the lately glassy sea was like a roaring and devouring monster. (Stoker [1897] 2006, 73, emphasis added)

This incident bears remarkable similarities to modern portrayals of anthropogenic climate change—indeed, Ghosh describes a similar event that transpired in Delhi in which the storm was “so unfamiliar … that the papers literally did not know what to call it” (2016, 14)—and its description of being impossible to realize after witnessing similarly aligns with Ghosh’s own inability to fully comprehend the storm himself. While the similarities between these two instances might suggest that Ghosh is right in his assertion that the storm detailed in Dracula is “improbable” (ibid., 16) and consequently banished to the genre of gothic fiction, the insistence on the un-imaginability of these occurrences in both spaces—Dracula and Ghosh’s text—implies a cross-cultural and cross-temporal connection between the two in regards to the epistemological crises the Anthropocene and anthropogenic climate change inevitably cause.

Dracula’s eventual assault on bourgeois London life is catastrophic because his vampiric consumption directly attacks the established cultural systems that seek to define the nature of human identity. That this assault primarily targets Mina and Lucy is significant, as it is their deified female bodies, their domestic space of the home, and their relation to masculinity that holds the cultural system in place. Whereas the Anthropocene disrupts the category of the human by dissolving the assumed binary between humanity and nature, this conflict as represented in Dracula is necessitated through a disruption of assumed gender performances. In his 1865 text Sesame and Lilies, John Ruskin expounds on the relationship between the genders by claiming that woman must be “enduringly, incorruptibly good” and that man “guards the woman from all [dangers]” by keeping her protected within the domestic sphere. The “true nature of home,” Ruskin claims,
is a “place of Peace; the shelter … from all terror, doubt, and division” (2000, 77). Thus, Dracula’s invasion of this sacred space, which allows the “anxieties of the outer life [to] penetrate into it,” (ibid.) creates a cultural crisis by polluting a once allegedly untainted environment.

The penetration of Mina and Lucy’s flesh via Dracula’s bloodsucking acts as the catalyst for Dracula’s main ontological dilemma, as it disrupts the once established gender binary by transforming the women into lustful consumers of male bodies. Viewed from this angle, Harker’s thoughts become more significant after his encounter with the Weird Sisters, female vampires who reside in Dracula’s castle and figures who represent that which the women back in London could be potentially turned into. Having just witnessed Dracula as a being who blurs the lines between culture, nature, human, and animal by climbing down the castle wall, Harker finds pleasure in imagining the gender relations that Ruskin describes, as they represent a stable concept that he takes as true in an otherwise epistemologically contingent environment. By being in “the portion of the castle occupied by ladies of bygone days,” Harker is able to momentarily experience an “air of comfort” by imagining women who “sat and sung and lived sweet lives whilst their gentle breasts were sad for their menfolk away in the midst of remorseless war” (Stoker [1897] 2006, 34-5). Yet Harker’s idealized knowing is attacked by the vampiric women, figures who illustrate the constructed nature of his gendered culture by taking the role of active agents and placing him in a passive position where his body is penetrable:

I was afraid to raise my eyelids, but looked out and saw perfectly under the lashes. The girl went on her knees, and bent over me, simply gloating. There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white sharp teeth. Lower and lower went her head as the lips went below the range of my mouth and chin and seemed about to fasten on my throat. Then she paused, and I could hear the churning sound of her tongue as it licked her teeth and lips, and could feel the hot breath on my neck. (ibid., 37)

By disrupting the gender binary that Ruskin describes, the now masculinized females—sexual forces who sexually penetrate flesh—are removed from a human position altogether, consequently turning into predatory animals who seek to use Harker’s body for sustenance. Harker’s failure to imagine females who refuse to perform culturally constructed “femaleness” thus results in an ontological crisis similar to the one experienced during the Anthropocene, wherein the idea of what constitutes a human is destabilized.

This imaginative collapse experienced by the men reaches its apex when Dracula succeeds in transgressing the sacred space of the home, penetrating Lucy’s flesh and turning her into an undead vampire. Yet the crisis of Lucy’s transformation is not framed as one of safety—the men show a surprisingly small amount of worry over the fact that Lucy could physically harm them—but rather as one concerned with identity, femaleness, and ultimately humanness. By turning her “sweetness” into “adamantine, heartless cruelty, and [her] purity to voluptuous wantonness”
Lucy’s transformation signals a broader failure of cultural ideals; no longer is the home protected from outside anxieties, and no longer is the female incorruptibly good. Through Dracula’s vampiric bite, an act which “stained the purity” of Lucy and made her “unclean,” the culturally-constructed version of femaleness fades away. Simultaneously, the human and animal distinction is blurred as in Harker’s encounter with the Weird Sisters. Lucy’s actions are thus appropriately likened to a cat’s “angry snarl” and how a “dog growls over a bone” (ibid.).

Harker’s interaction with the female vampires is an important scene not only because it challenges the ontological definition of human, but also because it demonstrates another significant problem brought forth by the Anthropocene. Indeed, what this encounter suggests is that the destabilization of a culturally constructed human identity is not restricted to a transformation from one singular category to another. In other words, “human” as a stable concept is not only challenged by the women as vampires becoming masculinized and thus becoming men, but further because these women are masculinized while retaining their female bodies. Vampirism blurs the lines between what were once distinct categories—male and female, human and animal—consequently allowing entities to take on multiple categories concurrently. Dracula’s brides are at once male and female, human and animal; they have female bodies but take on a masculinized performance, they look human but pierce flesh with their canine teeth. In this way, human as a singular identity becomes transformed and is incorporated into a wider assemblage of beings, intimately connected to an entanglement of systems, which similarly occurs during the Anthropocene, in which humans begin “integrating into a landscape of relationships that are abundant and diverse” (Raffnsoe 2016, 30).

The role of the human as assemblage rather than singular is also demonstrated through the blood transfusions between multiple bodies that are necessitated as a result of and through Dracula’s vampiric bite. This is perhaps nowhere more accurately demonstrated than through the scene of Mina’s blood baptism:

With his left hand he held both Mrs. Harker’s hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man’s bare breast which was shown by his torn-open dress. The attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten’s nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink. (Stoker [1897] 2006, 267)

That from Mina’s throat “trickled a thin stream of blood” (ibid., 268) suggests that this blood drinking is in fact reciprocal; Dracula bites and drinks the blood from Mina’s neck, who then drinks the same blood from Dracula’s body. Thus, the human as a singular entity fades away within this bedroom scene—Mina becomes connected to another “human” through which her blood circularly flows, becomes masculinized through an eroticized encounter with a feminized Dracula, and becomes animalized through her carnal blood drinking, assembling and operating within all of these categories at once. Furthermore, these scenes of human entanglement, including the aforementioned scene with Harker and the Weird Sisters, are laced with concerns involving human reproduction and the futurity of the species. Disruptions
of human categories consequently spur depictions of women consuming children, sexualized encounters where reproduction results in transforming those already existing rather than introducing new members, and perverted reenactments of maternal breastfeeding. Similar to the anthropogenic climate change that occurs during the Anthropocene, these cataclysmic events forecast humanity’s extinction.

That Harker’s first reaction to seeing Lucy in her vampiric form is to kill her with “savage delight” (ibid., 200) illustrates his inability to successfully reimagine the once stable but now changing identities of “female” and “human.” Because Lucy’s voluptuous body signifies a meaning that exists outside of the epistemological limits established through culture, her very presence threatens what Harker and his fellow men hold to be true about being. By not performing her correct bodily script as determined by her culture, Lucy’s new “carnal” (ibid., 202) existence consequently must be removed from imagination. The decision to re-penetrate her flesh with a “round wooden stake, some two and a half or three inches thick and about three feet long” (ibid., 203) symbolically casts Lucy’s physical body as a locus on which the battle between Dracula and the Crew of Light is fought. Although the group ultimately succeeds in returning Lucy to a state of “unequalled sweetness and purity” (ibid., 205), the fact that this accomplishment is only achieved through the violent mutilation of her body and her subsequent death—the opposite form of being—demonstrates that cultural ideals about femaleness and humanness hold no ontological value. Indeed, what the men gain in return from killing Lucy and consequently returning her to a “feminized” and “pure” state is a momentary verification of an abstract, ideal truth that they consider real. Even though Lucy is deceased, her apparent regaining of female purity “marked her truth to what [they] knew,” reinstating the culture/human and nature dichotomy that Dracula has threatened by transforming her dead, yet now unstained, body into a “symbol of the calm that was to reign for ever” (ibid.).

Although the Crew of Light assume the “sunshine” (ibid.) at the end of Dracula’s story represents Lucy’s purified corpse, the Crew of Light’s victory is, in reality, only the storm’s passing eye. Their inability to obtain epistemological growth from this experience—their resistance to adapt during a moment of tumultuous change, in particular—results in further physical and ideological consequences. Thus, assuming as they did with Lucy that Mina will be safer as a woman in the sacred domestic space simultaneously brings her bodily harm and further destabilizes the instituted cultural ideals by subjecting her to Dracula’s “vampire baptism.” In this regard, the transformation of Dracula’s female characters into undead, lustful vampires bears a striking resemblance to present day battles with anthropogenic climate change. As Ghosh explains, “the freakish weather events of today, despite their radically nonhuman nature, are nonetheless animated by cumulative human action” (2016, 32). Contemporary fears of a cataclysmic climate that takes on “unthinkable shapes and forms” (ibid.) parallels the fears held by Harker and Van Helsing towards female and human forms that defy their current understanding of being. The Crew of Light must comprehend the paradoxical relationship between battling a force that must be defeated, one that threatens mankind as a whole, while simultaneously acknowledging that they themselves are at fault because of their inaction and a lack of understanding.
While The Crew of Light does eventually defeat Dracula, the men of *Dracula* nevertheless allow Mina to be subjected to the vampire’s bite, signifying an inability to expand their imaginative understanding to include possible alternate definitions of what constitutes human, or in the words of Van Helsing, a failure to “believe in things that [they] cannot” (Stoker [1897] 2006, 182). Despite Van Helsing’s attempts to bring belief to Harker’s imagination, to make him understand “nature’s eccentricities and possible impossibilities” (ibid.), the events transpiring remain unthinkable for Harker. Even after witnessing Mina’s traumatic assault, Harker is left wondering “[i]n God’s name what does this mean? … What has happened? … What does that blood mean?” (ibid., 269). Once again, a sense of knowing despite witnessing the event becomes unimaginable. Dracula as a figure represents a threat to the London bourgeois culture by embodying natural properties that should, by cultural definition, exist forever outside of its parameters; he is a representation of “all the forces of nature … full of strangeness of the geologic and chemical world” (ibid., 303). Dracula’s attack on London and, especially, his assault on the female bodies who inhabit it consequently erodes the once stable boundaries between culture and nature, as well as human and nature, creating an unthinkable assemblage. Although Dracula is indeed defeated, Mina’s polluted body, containing Dracula’s fluids transferred through bite, stands as a physical representation of this new hybrid ontology that continues to threaten the epistemological structures in place.

Yet the narrative of *Dracula* is not only concerned with detailing the ontological and epistemological crises that vampirism causes, but, as detailed on the novel’s final page, also very much with how to present these crises in a way that will be believable to the wider nineteenth century population, to make others “accept these proofs of so wild a story” (ibid., 359). Similar to how the characters in the text traverse between discourse regimes and knowledge structures—from oral to written, telegraphic code to stenographic code—during their fight to defeat Dracula, Harker as editor makes it clear that the primary goal of the edited manuscript is to convince readers that the events within the pages hold some semblance of truth, so that “belief may stand forth as simple fact” (Stoker [1897] 2006, 2).

Accuracy, then, is essential in the novel’s quest for knowledge production. As Leah Richards states in her discussion of *Dracula* and the mass production of text during the nineteenth century, “because each narrative in *Dracula* is presenting a collection of facts about an unknown enemy that will bring about his defeat, each participant is dependent on the accuracy of his or her own observations and one another’s accounts, human rather than mechanical input” (2009, 444). For the fictional writers of the *Dracula* manuscript, the main concern is authenticity and how truth and/or knowledge is gained through different discursive methods, with handwritten documents holding more value than stenographic type. Thus, the larger concern is how best to present these otherwise unthinkable accounts in a way that will make them imaginable.

How to best represent crises that directly affect the human as a stable concept is of significant importance not only in Ghosh’s argument but also in wider Anthropocenic discourse. What mode or form best illustrates the issues that the Anthropocene and anthropogenic climate change bring, thus raising awareness and allowing this discourse to be available to the wider cultural imagination? As Bill McKibben
asks, “Where are the books? The poems? The plays?” about the Anthropocene, and continues by stating that “art is one of the ways we digest what is happening to us, make the sense out of it that proceeds to action” (quoted in Baucom & Omelsky 2017, 5). The characters battling Dracula are indeed concerned with what forms are best to make sense out of their information, and it is only through the dissemination of their chosen form that knowledge of Dracula becomes more widespread and he is consequently defeated. However, Ghosh’s argument is oriented towards asking why these crises have not been incorporated into fiction, and the fact that Harker as editor of the Dracula manuscript is determined to make the story appear as non-fiction arguably gives credence to Ghosh’s claim that the fictitious novel cannot contain the unthinkable or improbable. Nevertheless, Dracula is a work of fiction. By concerning itself with how modes of knowledge should be authentically and efficiently represented, the novel aligns itself with modern dilemmas by asking through which epistemological paradigms should the very conflict of imagining and understanding humanness and its status in a period of ubiquitous change be presented, and, in that sense, is quite serious.

Ghosh claims that to represent the non-human in the novel form is to “risk banishment to the humbler dwellings that surround the manor house” that he calls serious fiction (2016, 24). Yet Dracula presents a challenge to this argument. Despite being a gothic novel that does include nonhuman entities in the form of vampires, it nonetheless illuminates similar anxieties that influence Anthropocenic discourse; concerns involving crises of culture, knowing, being, and, especially, the possibility of the changing definition of “human.” Is climate change the vampire baptism of the twenty-first century, given that it “saturate[s] the air we breathe, the water we drink, [and] the food we eat” (Baucom & Omsleky 2017, 1), polluting us like Dracula’s bite? Perhaps novels like Dracula, which might otherwise be seen as too “unreal,” could offer a productive framework for understanding the epistemological problems that the Anthropocene brings with it. This would allow readers to reconsider and indeed reimagine Ghosh’s claim about what constitutes “serious” fiction, given that these novels grapple with these serious dilemmas. Considering genres that have been excluded from the manor house of serious fiction grants wider access for exploring the methods of acknowledging, comprehending, and confronting the contemporary challenges of the Anthropocene, and a better understanding of the consequences that result from not doing so.
Bibliography


