

## “DRACULA IN LOVE” (Book Review)

Written by Theresa Dillon

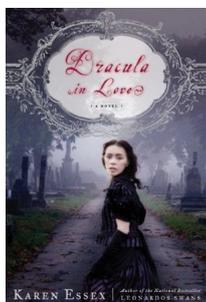
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“If the spirits of the dead call out to you, swaddle yourself tight with your shawl, make the sign of the cross for protection, and walk away.” Like the spirit of the dead, DRACULA IN LOVE (coming August 10 from Doubleday) calls out to the reader—but instead of walking away, you should run to this fresh perspective on Bram Stoker’s classic novel.

Author Karen Essex (pictured left) has taken the original DRACULA and turned it inside out, “exposing the subconscious mind by illuminating the cultural fears, as well as the rich brew of myths and lore, that went into Stoker’s creation.” Narrated by Mina Harker, DRACULA IN LOVE reveals the “the true story” that has remained Mina’s secret up until now. It’s a haunting, feminist portrayal of eternal love, forbidden desires and Victorian virtues, with all of Stoker’s original characters (with the exception of Renfield) present and a new light turned on some of his famous, unforgettable scenes.



Although DRACULA IN LOVE utilizes Stoker’s storyline, there are two major differences between the novels. First, the men come off here as chauvinistic pigs who think little of women, as opposed to the caring and sympathetic portrayals in the original. We learn that Lord Godalming only married Lucy for her money, and Van Helsing (or Vol Helsing in this version) is a mad, Frankenstein-style scientist who believes women are the root of all evil. Quincey Morris (Quince Morris) is a promiscuous American painter and Dr. Seward has an unhealthy obsession with Mina, constantly trying to sway her fidelity for her husband, Jonathan Harker. This new twist on the beloved male characters may upset a few readers, but overall, this distinct approach helps support Essex’s Victorian-era themes.

The second difference is Dr. Seward’s asylum. Essex chooses to populate it with women who have been incarcerated due to sexual activities that society has deemed immoral. Today, the

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activities described would be considered normal and healthy for women to engage in. Essex even uses original late-19th-century physicians’ notes from the archives of Bethlem Royal Hospital in order to make DRACULA IN LOVE as realistic as possible.

If there is one thing that really stands out in Essex’s take on DRACULA, it’s her use of characterization. It’s easy to fall in love with (or loathe) the characters. Stoker’s portrayal of the women in DRACULA comes up a bit stale at times, but Essex has breathed new life into them without destroying Stoker’s masterpiece. Even the men, as appalling as they are, still manage to come out beautifully in this variation.

With so many different variations and perspectives on DRACULA available, one has to wonder if DRACULA IN LOVE will just get lost among the crowd. The answer to that question is hopefully no. It’s a refreshing take on a classic that is sure to mesmerize readers—especially female readers, around the globe.



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