ForeWord Reviews

YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Dracula
Bram Stoker
Nicky Raven
Anne Yvonne Gilbert, illustrator
Candlewick Press
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Dracula is not the first story about a vampire, but it is arguably the most famous and it is certainly the foundation for the popularity of vampires today. Adaptations and re-imaginings of the story are numerous, but most do not capture the power and mystique of Bram Stoker's original masterpiece, published in 1897. This abridged edition of *Dracula*, adapted by Nicky Raven and illustrated by Anne Yvonne Gilbert, succeeds brilliantly in bringing the story of Jonathan Harker and Mina Murray to a new generation.

Though this version is greatly abbreviated, Raven has stayed true to the spirit of the original story, bringing Dracula's world to vivid life once more. He touches on all of the major plot points of the original, includes all the major characters, and presents a story that is graceful and potent. His descriptions are particularly rich. For example, here is how Raven first describes Count Dracula: "Within the cloak all was leanness and angular bones, from the strangely sunken, almost concave chest down to the long, pale fingers and black-trousered legs. Above, a gaunt death-mask of a face stared fixedly down at Jonathan."

There are some notable differences in this retelling, however. Raven has chosen to tell this story primarily as a narrative, rather than as a series of journal entries and letters as Stoker originally did. In this version, Dr. John Seward is never one of Lucy Holmwood's suitors. When Seward sends for Professor Van Helsing, it is because he already believes Lucy's mysterious illness to have supernatural origins. Lucy's deaths, first as a human and then as a vampire, are swift, with minimal embellishment. More significantly, there is very little interaction between Mina and Dracula, and the gypsies fight against Dracula rather than for him. These changes might be upsetting to some purists, but they keep the narrative moving quickly forward without sacrificing the quality or overall impact of the story.

Nicky Raven, who also adapted *Beowulf* for young adults, has written a book that is truly a pleasure to read. Not only has he done a superb job with the retelling, but illustrator Anne

Yvonne Gilbert and graphic designer Danny Nanos, who have both won numerous awards for their work, have turned this book into an object of art. Starkly beautiful illustrations ranging from shadowy sketches to full-page drawings dance with the text in compelling layouts. A careful use of white space makes every image, both drawn and written, feel fresh and new. The reader will be drawn further and further into Dracula's dark world with every page.

Catherine Thureson