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## THE (IM)PROPER NEW WOMAN OF BRAM STOKER'S *DRACULA*

### **Abstract**

This article analyses the ways in which the New Woman Movement of the 1890s is reflected in Bram Stoker's construction of his female characters in *Dracula*. It shows that the image of the New Woman is modified and redefined through already existing female tropes, including the Angel in the House, the Fallen Woman and the *femme fatale*. Thus, it is argued, two versions of the New Woman emerge: an acceptable, "proper", New Woman as an educated and competent worker, but also a submissive wifely or motherly figure, whose character traits correspond to conservative Victorian notions of female propriety. The other, unacceptable, variant is a sexual New Woman whose interests and aspirations are trivial, indulgence-seeking and, most importantly, whose critique of the Victorian double standard is dismissed and ultimately punished.

**Key words:** *Dracula*; New Woman; Angel in the House; Fallen Woman; *femme fatale*

### **Introduction**

Besides inspiring numerous analyses of its title character, Stoker's *Dracula* also contributed to the conversation on the representation of the New Woman phenomenon through its portrayal of female protagonists Mina

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Harker, nee Murray, and Lucy Westenra. The late Victorian period and its society was, among other issues, concerned with and defined by “The Woman Question”. This question engendered a host of labels for women of the period such as “Angel in the House”, “Fallen Woman”, “New Woman”, “Girl of the Period”, and “Dangerous Woman of the Period”. All of these represent answers to the query whether the woman in question fits or does not fit into socially acceptable roles according to Victorian standards. The term “Angel in the House” was coined by poet Coventry Patmore in his eponymous poem which celebrates a stereotypically conservative female ideal that the poet modelled after his first wife. Patmore’s Angel in the House is a motherly and wifely figure confined to the domestic sphere of society. In order to reach this status, a woman should display self-sacrificing and obedient behaviour towards her family, especially her husband. The poet expresses the necessity of such subservient and devoted behaviour in lines such as the following: “Man must be pleased; but him to please/ Is woman’s pleasure; down the gulf/ Of his condoled necessities/ She casts her best, she flings herself.” (75). Similarly to Patmore, the prominent Victorian thinker John Ruskin adopts and emphasises purity, grace and incorruptibility of character as important female traits in his lecture “Of Queen’s Gardens” (cf. 1865); he, however, enhances the trope by adding another dimension to it. His ideal woman is not only expected to follow her husband’s orders and cater to his every need, but she is also expected to possess the ability to stand in the face of evil and come out noble, wise and infallibly good. In contrast to the Angel in the House, the Fallen Woman is embodied either as an adulteress or a prostitute (see Lee, “Fallen Women” 1997). Accordingly, women who pursued sexual experimentation and experiences outside of marriage were faced with prejudice. The arrival of the New Woman challenged this prominent Madonna-whore dichotomy. The New Woman threatened these conservative values and expectations and was thus infamously referred to as “the Girl of the Period” or “Dangerous Woman of the Period”, terms which had apparent negative connotations in their time. Consequently, the issue of the New Woman influenced Stoker’s writing as well as many other literary works of the era which attempted to make sense of this new phenomenon in Victorian society in their own right.

A number of critics have argued in favour of interpreting Mina’s character as a representation of the New Woman due to her class, education, competence and active role in the public sphere (Giorgio and Prescott,

2005: 488–92; Schaffer, 2012: 732–40; Yu 2006: 146). Others have also identified these defining features with Mina's character, but still emphasised her status as the feminine ideal and reaction against the New Woman (Senf, 1982: 33–40; Glover, 1996: 75–7; Wicke 1992: 480–5). Cott's definition of the New Woman as the embodiment of self-development rather than self-sacrifice or submergence in the family (1987: 2) can only partially apply to Mina, while Lucy does not even come close to this description. Mitchell, on the other hand, offers a popular conservative perspective of the time that classifies New Women as ignorant sexual deviants (1999: 583). Lucy, due to her frivolous and sexual nature, corresponds to this view. Instead of categorising Mina as a New Woman and Lucy not a New Woman and vice versa, this paper will attempt to demonstrate that both characters share some of New Woman's distinct traits and ultimately represent two different versions of the same trope. Mina Harker represents the "proper" New Woman, acceptable to the more conservative Victorians, as she is altered using elements of the Angel in the House trope. Lucy Westenra, on the other hand, embodies the unacceptable or sexual New Woman redefined through the already existing images of women, such as the *femme fatale* and the Fallen Woman.

## 1. The duality of the New Woman

The representation of the New Woman in Victorian literature depends on the author's perspective on the phenomenon. Universal traits of the New Woman are difficult to identify due to the breadth and subjectivity of the label. For instance, some viewed the members of this category as advocates for rights to higher education, property, employment (cf. Diniejko, 2011), personal independence and marriage reform (Schaffer, 2012: 734). Others, however, considered them to be nothing more than empty-headed seductive temptresses (Mitchell, 1999: 561). Bram Stoker offers his perspective on the New Woman issue in his own way through his two female characters in *Dracula*, Mina Harker and Lucy Westenra, in two very specific ways. Thus, the two characters experience a different fate despite succumbing to the same attacker – Count Dracula.

Elements of the New Woman are found in both Mina and Lucy, but are presented through updated and remodelled images of the already existing tropes for Victorian women. These include the Angel in the House, the

*femme fatale* and the Fallen Woman. For instance, according to Schaffer, the New Woman was a financially independent middle-class woman who usually filled the positions of secretaries, teachers and nurses (cf. 2007). Mina fits into this description since she is an educated middle-class woman working as a school mistress before marriage. In addition to this, her paying job is replaced by an informal secretarial and nursing job after her marriage to Jonathan. On the other hand, her new-found “career” primarily provides service for others while her sense of personal independence and self-fulfilment comes second. Moreover, she is submissive to her husband’s authority and also passive, sympathetic, self-sacrificing, pious and chaste (cf. *The Angel in the House*, 2011) which indicates the existence of traditional notions of Victorian propriety in Mina’s character. Conversely, Lucy embodies the *femme fatale* and the Fallen Woman due to her explicit sexuality. Such a construction of Lucy’s character demonstrates favouritism directed towards sexually conservative characters in the novel, such as Mina. Sexual frankness and the need to equal female sexual desires to men’s are, however, also attributed to the New Woman Movement. For instance, the controversial late 19<sup>th</sup> century novelist Mona Caird expressed this exact need (Schaffer, 2012: 730). Furthermore, Lucy’s only interest in leisure is a common character trait of the New Woman as described and condemned in Eliza Lynn Linton’s *The Girl of the Period* (cf. 1868). In it, she juxtaposes the “fair young English girl”, who possesses all the qualities of the Angel in the House and “the (dangerous) Girl of the Period” who resembles the common stereotypical perception of the New Woman.

Because Mina represents the female Victorian ideal, Stoker also uses her character as a medium for satirising the New Woman Movement. When examining the representation of the New Woman in the novel, it is important to focus on the author’s subjective perception of New Women which is then voiced through Mina’s thoughts. Evidence of this can be found in Mina’s journal and letters as she reflects on the issue. In Chapter VIII, she writes about having tea with Lucy and concludes: “I believe we should have shocked the New Woman with our appetites. Men are more tolerant, bless them!” (110). This passage indicates that Stoker is concerned with the New Woman’s selfish need for immodest indulgence and unbounded luxury (cf. Linton, 1868). For example, the sole focus on fun and pleasure in Mina’s counterpart Lucy makes her the undesired variant of the New Woman. On the other hand, this passage indicates that even the slightly ascetic Mina enjoys the meal as well. Yet despite her benevolent tone, she

still distances herself from the New Woman label. Furthermore, Mina's second observation on the issue of gender propriety is as follows:

Some of the 'New Woman' writers will someday start an idea that men and women should be allowed to see each other asleep before proposing or accepting. But I suppose the New Woman won't condescend in future to accept; she will do the proposing herself. And a nice job she will make of it, too. (111)

Giorgio and Prescott argue that Mina's tone in both passages is actually more playful and witty than judgmental while also remarking that the second passage indicates feelings of empathy towards the endeavours of the New Woman (2005: 500). However, it can also be argued that Stoker pits his female characters against each other, influenced by the conservative views on femininity in Linton's *The Girl of the Period*. Dowling herself points out that many Victorians actually agreed with Linton's opinions (1979: 438). In fact, the tone of Mina's voice can also be interpreted as being sarcastic and scornful which suggests that the author himself finds certain aspects of the movement ridiculous and, thus, solidifies Mina's character as an acceptable and sexually muted variant of the New Woman. Lucy, on the other hand, is only a loud, selfish, materialistic and extravagant copy of the female ideal (cf. Linton, 1868).

## **2. Mina as the Angel in the House**

Mina's nature becomes promptly obvious as we follow her thoughts and actions in her letters and journal. In Chapter V, in Mina's first letter to Lucy, we learn that Mina is a very devoted fiancée. She practices shorthand and works hard to keep up with Jonathan's studies. This hard work is done with the aim of one day being useful to her husband as his secretary and assistant. Such desires fit perfectly into the passive and submissive tendencies of the Angel in the House. Mina does not seem to show any signs of wanting more and seems quite satisfied with fulfilling this role in a future marital setting. To illustrate this, in Chapter IX, upon finally eloping with Jonathan, she writes to Lucy excitedly: "Well, my dear, what could I say? I could only tell him that I was the happiest woman in all the wide world, and that I had nothing to give him except myself, my life, and my trust, and that with these went my love and duty for all the days of my

life” (130). In other words, she does not only wish to provide her future husband with assistance, but every aspect of her being. Such desires are conventional and expected of a woman.

Furthermore, the Angel in the House trope is to an extent rooted in the Christian faith. Mina’s character exemplifies the Christian ideal expressed through her acts of sympathy, self-sacrifice and piety. In Chapter X, Mina assumes a type of a nursing role as she watches over Lucy every night to prevent her from sleepwalking. Although she is more than anxious about Jonathan’s well-being, she is eager to keep her friend Lucy safe by sleeping close to her, locking the door and praying every night. Moreover, she neglects her own needs in order to care for her dear friend and husband. She prays for Jonathan’s safe return also, and wishes nothing more than to be with him in the hospital nursing him back to health. Rewarding female characters with marriage or property for their patient endurance (cf. Allingham, 2004) is commonplace in Victorian fiction. In Mina’s case, the care and remarkable strength she exhibits in difficult times is rewarded not only with marriage to Jonathan and the unexpected inheritance, but also with the greatest and most honourable gift of all for a woman – the gift of motherhood at the end of the novel. What is particularly interesting is that, as Giorgio and Prescott point out, Mina’s transformation into a mother coincides with her complete loss of narrative voice and agency (2005: 512), on which more later.

An important aspect of the Angel in the House trope is being a warm motherly figure. Even before becoming an actual mother, Mina plays a symbolic motherly role throughout the entire novel. Her care is not directed only towards people closest to her – Jonathan and Lucy– but also towards other members of the group. Her motherly instincts emerge upon seeing Arthur’s despair in Chapter XVII and she is fully aware and accepting of this aspect of her character: “I suppose there is something in woman’s nature that makes a man free to break down before her and express his feelings” (275). Moreover, she celebrates her natural talent as a mother by emphasising the importance of this womanly role in serious matters: “We women have something of the mother in us that makes us rise above smaller matters when the mother-spirit is invoked” (275). By formulating this somewhat idealised thought about a mother’s duty Mina indicates her own sense of self-importance and recognises the significant role mothers play in times of distress. Her true maternity is, finally, realised through the birth of her child and reaffirmed by Van Helsing’s final words in the novel:

“This boy will some day know what a brave and gallant woman his mother is. Already he knows her sweetness and loving care” (449). Surprisingly, the conservative foreigner associates the stereotypically masculine adjectives “brave” and “gallant” with Mina’s endeavours which might indicate some inconsistencies even in Van Helsing’s character. However, in the following sentence, this “masculinity” is quickly negated by the words “sweetness” and “loving care” in order to celebrate Mina’s highest achievement – motherhood.

After Lucy finally becomes “God’s true dead” (260), the novel’s focus shifts to Mina and her role in the holy mission of destroying Dracula. Her role of secretary and assistant is now more important than ever and her character seems to gain a certain sense of self-awareness and importance. This is crucial in Mina’s development since this aspect of her character did not appear in the previous chapters, before Lucy’s death. Her hard work and quick intelligence prove useful, but still serve only to assist the men around her. Although all of her impressive endeavours are made with the aim of helping the men capture and kill Dracula, Van Helsing appears to be threatened by Mina’s productive input in Chapter XVIII. “Ah,...Mina! She has man’s brain – a brain that a man should have were he much gifted... she must not have to do with this terrible affair. It is not good that she run a risk so great. We men are determined...to destroy this monster, but it is no part for a woman.” (281). It is the slight possibility of Mina becoming functional and successful within the public sphere that Van Helsing finds dangerous and threatening. This might suggest that Mina’s character, as a competent New Woman, represents a self-sufficient and modernised trope of the Angel in the House – as long as she does not pose a public challenge to men’s abilities. In order to regain control and stress his disapproval of such a role reversal, he decides to exclude Mina from the group by ordering her to retire earlier for the night. Although Mina accepts this ostracism and decides to comply, she still considers this sudden exclusion as unjust, calling it “a bitter pill...to swallow” (290). Another act of rebellion is present in the novel when she decides to break the promise of never opening Jonathan’s journal by doing it after seeing Dracula in London in Chapter XIII. Although Mina dismisses her husband’s authority in this instance, this act of disobedience proves to be helpful in capturing Dracula. In other words, Mina retains her propriety while also employing her “man’s intelligence” (Giorgio and Prescott, 2005: 502–3). However, Van Helsing is definitely more accepting of Mina’s more traditional

tendencies. For instance, in Chapter XVIII, he expresses this concern to Mina herself: “We are men, and are able to bear; but you must be our star and hope” (289). This proves that Van Helsing’s idea of true femininity is restricted to ideas of purity and incorruptibility secured by the woman’s limitation to the domestic sphere. Giorgio and Prescott also argue that Van Helsing’s insistence on silencing and domesticating Mina stems from her relationship to knowledge (2005: 506). Since Dracula craves power and knowledge even more than blood, the object of his desires is no longer safe in the hands of a woman. Although Van Helsing considers Mina to be an extraordinary woman, he still deems her helpless and weak under Dracula’s influence.

### **3. The coded female friendship of Lucy and Mina**

On surface level, the two women might seem to have an equal role and position in their friendship, but this seemingly sisterly relationship between them is deceptive. There appears to be an ever present and subtle air of moral superiority around Mina, in comparison to Lucy. She is also a dominant benefactor in their relationship. For instance, Mina becomes Lucy’s very own guardian angel in Lucy’s time of weakness, making her friend’s decisions for her in order to preserve her safety and well-being. Furthermore, she embodies the role of a mentor and teacher to Lucy (Giorgio and Prescott, 2005: 491). Lucy is very receptive to this power dynamic and looks up to her female hero. In Chapter IX she states that she “must imitate Mina” (133) and by imitation she expresses her admiration. For instance, Lucy admits that she was inspired to start writing her own journal after seeing Mina diligently “interviewing and writing descriptions and trying to remember conversations” (70).

The letters and journals of the two best friends reveal just how complex their relationship is since they contain suggestively lesbian encounters and passionate language, but also express a profound understanding of one another. Sahli suggests that the letters exchanged between Mina and Lucy contain implicit sensual and sexual content, a fact both friends have suppressed (1979: 22). Evidence of this can be found in Chapters V and VIII. Mina often writes about Lucy’s beauty and attractiveness in her journals, describing her as “sweeter and lovelier than ever” (80). Furthermore, she even admires Lucy’s alluring appearance while observing



her in her sleep: "She has more colour in her cheeks than usual, and looks, oh, so sweet. If Mr Holmwood fell in love with her only in the drawing-room, I wonder what he would say if he saw her now" (111). This affection is not only contained in Mina's journal, but she indirectly articulates it in one of her letters to Lucy, as well. For instance, while separated from her best friend, Mina writes to her: "I'm longing to be with you" (70). Lucy, conversely, uses less subtle language while expressing her love for Mina. In fact, Lucy expresses infantile emotions of affection with powerful sexual overtones directed towards Mina in her letters, while Mina reciprocates a more platonic and symbolic type of love (cf. Giorgio and Prescott, 2005). It is Lucy who openly fantasises about them "sitting by the fire undressing, as [they] used to sit" (72). Howes also points out that Lucy's attempts to suppress her homoerotic desire fail when she expresses her sexual fantasies about women from a man's perspective in Chapter V (1988: 117). Giorgio and Prescott also provide a historical and cultural context for the possibility of such a relationship. Lesbian friendships were actually considered benign and only started to be considered pathological and threatening in the wake of the New Woman debates (2005: 489), which coincides with the pathologisation of same-sex sexuality by scholars of the period such as Krafft-Ebing. It is Lucy's honest and open verbalisation of her bisexuality as a sexual New Woman that is dangerous to the heteronormative standard. Alternatively, Mina's sophisticated use of subtle language for expressing her desires remains within the domain of the socially acceptable and the benign. Taking into account Stoker's ideology of secrecy that valued the reticence and discretion of the closet (Schaffer, 1994: 413), Mina's coded homoerotic language is subtle enough to go unsanctioned. Lucy's indiscreet and childish frankness, however, earns condemnation and punishment.

Although they do share a simultaneously passionate and platonic relationship, Lucy and Mina still publicly adhere to the heteronormative standard. Their letters and journals primarily focus on discussing wifely duties, marriage proposals and husbands. In Mina's very first letter in Chapter V, she is curious about "rumours...of a tall, handsome, curly-haired man" (71) whom Lucy later identifies as her fiancé. Mina also wishes Lucy's marriage to be as blissful as hers: "I want you to see now, and with the eyes of a very happy wife, whither duty has led me; so that in your own married life you too may be all happy as I am" (130). In addition to being extremely motivated for marriage, the women impulsively accept male authority. Even Lucy the social rebel claims that "a woman ought to

tell her husband everything” (73). The verb “ought to” implies a sense of duty and obligation rather than intrinsically motivated honesty. In other words, their private passionate encounters are irrelevant compared to their public heterosexual marriages. Convention is preserved by the latter making lesbianism less menacing and transgressive to Victorian society. In fact, Marcus argues that such intimate female friendships served a number of conventional purposes. They promoted heterosexual marriage, cultivated the feminine virtues of sympathy and altruism, trained women for family and marriage, but most importantly, they taught women to be good wives and prepared them for future wifely duties (2007: 45). Such a description of female friendship is more than applicable to Mina and Lucy’s heterosexualised relationship since, as stated above, their correspondence primarily revolves around their husbands or fiancés.

#### **4. Lucy’s impropriety**

Before her monstrous transformation, Lucy is often described as being very attractive, while there is no mention of Mina’s physical appearance, let alone her sexuality, in the novel. This is because Mina’s character must maintain the appearance of chastity, innocence and even frigidity (cf. Lee, “Victorian Theories” 1997) in order not to be placed on the other end of the spectrum with Lucy. Moreover, Mina mentions Lucy’s beauty and loveliness many times in her journal stating also that not even old men could resist her good looks and attractiveness (in Chapter VI). In addition to this, Lucy experiences three proposals in one day by men absolutely infatuated with her. This serves to emphasise her sexuality and physicality, and to portray her as a New Woman because it was believed that such women were definitely less concerned with suppressing their sexuality (Senf, 1988: 57). Although Lucy’s character seems innocent and sweet in the beginning, upon the commencement of Dracula’s terrorising influence, she gradually takes on more sexualised attributes which are later amplified to monstrous proportions during her transformation into a vampire.

Lucy is distinct from her friend Mina in a number of ways. Although the differences between the two might seem subtle in the beginning, as the novel progresses, they become obvious and difficult to overlook. Firstly, Lucy also seems to be questioning certain societal norms and expectations. For instance, in Chapter V, she struggles with rejecting John’s and Quincey’s

proposal saying: "Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?" (76). She is fully aware that saying this is "heresy" (76), but she clearly finds it hard to cope with what she is expected to think, say and do. Furthermore, although she loves Arthur dearly, she confesses to Mina that she feels exulted and relishes in the attention she receives from her suitors while being aware of the fact that she might be considered a flirt. In addition to this, Lucy admits to not feeling ashamed of the moments shared alone with Arthur before his proposal to her. Furthermore, even before her proposal dilemma, she doubts the actual purpose of marriage as well: "we women are such cowards that we think a man will save us from fears, and we marry him" (74).

The idea of marriage in the novel is kept heterosexual, in accordance with the Victorian norm, yet the polygamous nature of it also defies the norm. The symbol representing it lies in the brave acts of donating blood to Lucy through transfusions by Arthur, Dr Seward, Quincey and Van Helsing (Auerbach, 1995: 73) in Chapters X and XII. Although Lucy is only engaged, Auerbach employs the term "wife" to indicate her symbolic "marriage" to the four men through the blood transfusions. The important aspect of this act is, once again, heterosexuality, as Van Helsing says so himself: "I fear to trust those women...A brave man's blood is the best thing on this earth when a woman is in trouble" (180). Although the traditional ideal of marriage can be questioned, since four men participate in the act, Arthur gives more blood than the other men because "[h]e is her lover, her fiancé" (156).

The traditional monogamous ideal of marriage is questioned since the act itself is actually polygamous in nature. That is, this "marriage" disrupts the conservative ideal of female propriety. Lucy's desire to marry three men in Chapter V functions as a foreshadowing for the blood transfusions she is about to receive. What is more, the act contains sexual overtones. It resembles an adulteress having sexual relations with various men other than her fiancée, and Van Helsing's insistence on keeping it a secret confirms this reading. In other words, it would "frighten [Arthur] and enjealous him" (156). Since Lucy takes part in this sexually inscribed act of blood-receiving, she is inevitably transformed into a Fallen Woman. That is, her sexuality and the exploration of it are punished regardless of her lack of consent. The Fallen Woman trope is later exaggerated during and after Lucy's transformation into a vampire where her initial sexuality becomes sensual monstrosity. Thus, her punishment in the novel is all the more severe because it strips Lucy of her humanity and free will.

According to Auerbach, Lucy is purified as a wife and matures into “proper” womanhood through vampirism with monogamously heterosexual tendencies (1995: 55). While it is true that her only target is her fiancé, her purification happens only after death. Moreover, Lucy’s transformation results in her becoming a monstrous *femme fatale*. Her appearance is often described in the novel as “awful” (134), “bloodless” (136), “ghastly, chalkily pale”, “dreadful” (147), “horribly white and wan-looking” (155), with also having prominent and sharp canine teeth. Her monstrosity reaches its peak later in the novel when the men recoil in absolute terror upon seeing “the thing that bore... [Lucy’s] shape” (253) feeding off a defenceless child in her tomb in Chapter XII. While Lucy the vampire might be muted sexually (Auerbach, 1995: 34) she still lacks humanity to possess “true womanhood”. According to conservative Victorian ideals, a proper woman would never be seen preying on and attacking an innocent child since such behaviour is in direct contrast to the expected motherly instincts and feelings in a woman. A lack of maternal feelings seems to be a stereotype typically associated with the New Woman and Stoker exhibits its perpetuation through Lucy (Senf, 1982: 46). Demetrakopoulos also suggests that Stoker’s female vampires, by sacrificing children to their appetites and directing their perverse and sexual aggression towards men, renounce conventional feminine roles (1977: 110).

In spite of this, Lucy also possesses and exhibits a certain terrifying appeal. Exactly this aspect of her vampire self classifies her as a *femme fatale*. The *femme fatale* is insatiable, feared for her power; moreover, she has a strong tendency to lust after her lovers’ vitality (cf. Lee, “The Femme Fatale” 1997). Lucy expresses her insatiability when she demands Arthur to come into her “hungry arms” (253) and he quickly falls under her spell opening his arms freely to meet her. As mentioned before, all men fear what Lucy is capable of, but only Van Helsing is completely aware of the extent of her powers, constantly “[dragging Arthur] back with a fury of strength” (194) every time he tries to give in to Lucy’s seductive requests. This unyielding resistance is imperative as any man falling under her influence is at a moral risk of losing his soul (cf. Waller, 2004), just like her. Furthermore, since blood represents life and vitality in the novel, as Renfield exclaims himself, Lucy craves it in the form of blood transfusions or directly from the source from her fiancé. In short, Lucy is a curious case of *femme fatale* as a serial monogamist.

## 5. Susceptibility to Dracula's influence

Right from the start, a distinct characteristic which sets Mina and Lucy apart is Lucy's complete susceptibility to Dracula's influence. Mina seems to harbour a mysterious strength and resilience in the beginning, being unaffected by Dracula's attempts at something that resembles hypnosis in order to drink his victim's blood. What is more, all the vile creatures seem to flee in Mina's presence (including Dracula in the form of a bat at Lucy's bedroom window one night in Chapter VIII, for instance). The answer to this mysterious phenomenon could be found in John Ruskin's view of the Angel in the House (cf. 1865). His ideal woman is not only a domestic and docile creature, but also a wise and pure "soldier of good" fighting against the corruption and evil of the outside world and society as a whole. In this case, this corruption and evil is personified in Dracula.

On the other hand, Lucy all too easily falls victim to Dracula's influence. Lucy experiences sleepwalking frequently and is even lured by him into the churchyard having no recollection either of the event or the bite on her neck the day after. This might be the case because Stoker considers a version of the New Women modelled after Lucy ill-equipped to face the challenges that threaten Victorian society. Only men are capable of this, with their "good" wives at their side. A sexual variant of the New Woman is simply just too easy to influence and lacks strength and integrity. Since Mina can be seen as an inspiration to brave men (Auerbach, 1995: 83) and a moral guard of society (cf. Ledger, 1997), she is more than competent to rise to the challenge of forever vanquishing Dracula alongside her husband and friends. Lucy, however, was not endowed with such exemplary character traits and, therefore, is defenceless and vulnerable in the face of Dracula's evil.

After Lucy's death, however, Mina also succumbs to her attacker. As the men force her out of their vampire hunt with the pretext of ensuring her safety, they quickly realise that leaving her alone was a grave mistake. In Chapter XIX, as soon as Mina is left alone, Dracula seizes his chance to prey on her. Mina notices hints of his arrival such as the thick and misty air gathering in her room. She has no recollection of Dracula's first attack, similarly to Lucy. "In my dream I must have fainted, for all became black darkness. The last conscious effort which imagination made was to show me a livid white face bending over me" (309). This indicates that Dracula's attempts are successful without much resistance on Mina's part. Furthermore, in previous chapters, Dracula was hesitant and anxious in

Mina's vicinity, but now shows no inhibitions or fear around her. Although Mina has no memory of being bitten, Renfield confirms and reveals Dracula's next victim by saying: "she wasn't the same; it was like tea after the teapot had been watered" (334). The Count's second attack, on the other hand, she vividly remembers and it is precisely Mina's conscious awareness (a result of her strength and intelligence) that Lucy lacks (Demetrakopoulos, 1977: 109). However, Mina shows similar symptoms to Lucy during and after the attack. For instance, descriptions of her physical appearance are identical to Lucy's: "Her face was ghastly pale, with a pallor" (337). Secondly, Mina also describes experiencing feelings of immobility and lethargy: "I was appalled and was too bewildered to do or say anything" (Stoker, 1897: 342). As much as the attack was successfully completed, Mina still expressed disgust and revolt against her attacker. She drank his blood, but the scene resembled "a child forcing a kitten's nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink" (336). In other words, she was forced to do it, against her will, and had merely the choice to "suffocate or swallow some of the [blood]" (343). Not only that, she exclaims the word "unclean" at the sight of Dracula's blood on her night gown in Chapter XXI and uses that word derogatively to describe herself in Chapter XXII. However, by exchanging blood with the Count and thus, linking his mind to hers, she chooses life.

## 6. Punishment or domestication?

Lucy's final and inevitable demise in Chapter XVI is heavily romanticised, despite objectively being extremely violent and gruesome. From the men's perspective, Lucy can reclaim her soul and experience release from Dracula's hellish curse only if staked through the heart and decapitated. The act of this is spine-chilling, utterly nightmarish and borders on morbid:

Arthur placed the point over the heart...Then he struck with all his might. The Thing in the coffin writhed; and a hideous, blood-curdling screech came from the opened red lips. The body shook and quivered and twisted in wild contortions; the sharp white teeth champed together till the lips were cut and the mouth was smeared with a crimson foam. (258–9)

Such treatment of Lucy's body is justified through her gradual dehumanisation. She is "horribly white and wan-looking" (155) at first, in Chapter X, and then cruelly reduced to a "foul Thing" (259) in Chapter XVI. This savage attack against a woman in distress is justified because it succeeds in destroying the dangerously sexual New Woman and confirms male supremacy (Senf, 1982: 48). This act is also very reminiscent of Lucy's "marriage" in terms of her excessive sexualisation. Demetrakopoulos describes the staking as a suggestion of group sex in which Arthur drives a phallic symbol, stake, through her heart surrounded by his somewhat voyeuristic friends (1977: 100). In this way, establishing Lucy's nature as abominably sexual is especially bizarre since even the act of saving her soul is grotesquely hypersexualised. Moreover, this is not solely described as a justified act, but as a merciful and blessed duty as well: "It will be a blessed hand for her that shall strike the blow that sets her free" (257). Thus, Lucy's fate is completely out of her hands as it is tossed between the villain and the heroes. This pivotal moment is character-building for the heroes since this "rescue mission" is not only about the greater goal of vanquishing evil, but also a test of manhood and integrity in the face of temptation. The reward of this test is most satisfying: a beautiful woman's corpse.

In Chapters XII and XIII, the obsession with Lucy's "beautiful corpse" (196) and her post mortem grace and appeal is, to say the least, rather bizarre. It is the symbolic act of reclaiming Lucy's soul by staking her through the heart that makes her dead body so enchanting in Chapter XVI, as well. Only after "the soul of the poor lady [is] free" (257) and her "soul with [God]" (260) is Lucy seen as a lovely woman, rather than a hideous monster. In addition to this, death seems to be life-giving in a way. Not only is Lucy's corpse beautiful, it appears to be alive.

Death had given back part of her beauty, for her brow and cheeks had recovered some of their flowing lines; even the lips had lost their deadly pallor ... All Lucy's loveliness had come back to her in death, and the hours that had passed... restored the beauty of life, till positively I could not believe my eyes that I was looking at a corpse. (195, 198)

Death – the executor of ultimate submission – purifies Lucy's appearance making her as graceful and as beautiful as ever. Lucy's body, similarly to Tennyson's *Lady of Shalott*, is a place of union between death and beauty,

sensuality and spirituality (cf. Nelson, 2004). Her angelic appearance is a reflection of her regained humanity through the return of her soul to her body. As much as her body suggests a degree of humanity, it is still a corpse which is unable to act or speak. This might suggest that Stoker prefers dead women to sexualised New Women, but that interpretation would offer only a superficial and narrow perspective on the matter. Conversely, Stoker's view of true womanhood goes beyond the appearance. In other words, all women can look noble and refined, but not all have the strength and nobility of character. Lucy is capable of ensnaring anyone with her beauty, but could never reach Mina's levels of courage, wisdom and kindness.

Dracula's choice of making Mina a clairvoyant (Auerbach, 1995: 42) instead of a blood-thirsty vampire is the Count's way of punishing her. Mina ventriloquises her sentence to the men: "You are to be punished for what you have done. You have aided in thwarting me; now you shall come to my call" (343). What provoked Dracula's attack is the plot against him by everyone in the group, but it is only Mina who is punished for her actions. The Count is furious about the help she has provided in conspiring against him. This might suggest that Mina, as a woman, deserves some sort of punishment for overstepping the boundaries of her domestic sphere and neglecting her wifely duties by pursuing her journalist potential. Alternatively, Dracula's foolish "punishment" transforms into a gift that will become a catalyst in his final fall. His hunters benefit more from Mina the medium than Dracula does from Mina the slave.

This act of revenge can also be understood through Stoker's insistence on infallible heterosexuality when constructing his vampire characters. Dracula, as a man, can only prey on women. In the novel, the blood is not only life, but a representation of something sexual as well. Every instance of blood drinking contains powerful sexual overtones. Thus, to emphasise the utter impropriety of his vampires, Stoker only intensifies the vampire's sexual desire that equals a thirst for blood in order to leave their "heterosexual orientation" intact. Dracula's daughters can be seen preying on Jonathan, Lucy the vampire directs her *femme fatale* destructiveness and hunger towards her husband and Dracula feeds on Lucy and later, Mina. However, some inconsistencies do emerge. Dracula's daughters and Lucy prey on children while Dracula himself proclaims that Jonathan belongs to him in Chapter III. Images of female vampires feeding on defenceless and innocent children serve to portray an exaggerated lack of maternity. Such a character trait is associated with improper, that is, oversexualised female



characters such as Lucy and Dracula's daughters. While the child victims can be seen as genderless, Jonathan is undoubtedly male and the Count's statement of possession has obvious homosexual potential. Stoker's rigid and relentless self-censorship, on the other hand, overpowers Jonathan's and Dracula's repressed homosexuality (Schaffer, 1994: 420). This censorship also prevents Jonathan from ever actually being bitten which disrupts the possibility of their "union". Thus, Stoker's vampires do not adhere to the principles of the homoerotic vampire archetype found previously in vampire literature. For instance, Le Fanu's Carmilla, as a self-accepting homosexual, feeds on the blood of women with an erotic hunger (Auerbach, 1995: 77). As mentioned previously, Lucy's lesbian potential as a human disappears completely upon her transformation into a vampire. Lucy the vampire, then, might share more similarities with Coleridge's Geraldine in *Christabel* in terms of their seductive monstrosity and destructive power. Geraldine, however, is overtly homosexual unlike the sexually muted Lucy. Why Dracula is also conventionally heterosexual can be answered by analysing the context in which the novel was conceived and developed. The year 1895 saw the conviction of Oscar Wilde for "gross indecency with men" which motivated Stoker to create a sexually conservative male vampire (cf. Auerbach, 1995). Schaffer's analysis of *Dracula* points to a similar conclusion. Not only does the novel encapsulate Stoker's anxiety during his friend's trial, but it also exposes Stoker's homophobia as a direct result of his own repressed homosexuality (Schaffer, 1994: 383).

New Women can be perceived as "subversive rebels" (Schaffer, 2012: 735), but such tendencies often fail in New Woman fiction, for instance. Female independence is doomed from the beginning and an attempt at it is punished by domestic enslavement (cf. Ardis, 1990). This also applies to both Lucy and Mina. Lucy questions fixed ideas of marriage by wanting to marry three men and fails to reconcile her sexuality with conservative societal expectations, while Mina's "man's brain" is simultaneously useful and dangerous. Both women experience a type of punishment or enslavement because of this. Lucy is attacked first by Dracula and transformed into a terrifying monster hungry for blood. Her monstrosity is then ended by brutal force, murder and decapitation. Mina, on the other hand, is domesticated as a wife early on in the novel, but is also denied the full development of her valuable secretarial skills. In addition to this, she is made Dracula's slave because of her competence and becomes fully domesticated after his death not only as a wife, but as a mother as well.

Examining the process of “enslavement” that occurs in the novel is also important for an understanding of the severity of punishment meted at a particular character. Although Mina actively explores the public sphere, she simultaneously retains conservative notions of propriety and acknowledges male dominance: “A brave man’s hand can speak for itself; it does not even need a woman’s love to hear its music” (284). In other words, she submits to societal norms while also overstepping the boundaries of her “rightful” place within the domestic sphere. Since her competent contribution is invaluable to the men’s quest, her “masculine” tendencies of intelligence are not severely punished, but rather stripped away by motherhood and domestication towards the end of the novel. Lucy, however, is more than severely punished for her indiscretions. Her character is, unlike Mina’s, predominantly passive since her activities only revolve around receiving guests and writing letters. Such activities do not pose a threat to Victorian conservative society because they can be considered stereotypically feminine. However, her outrageous sexuality and lack of obedience to societal norms is, in fact, what is so threatening about a seemingly inactive character like Lucy. Her rejection of the rigid and conservative ideal of femininity, thus, requires the harshest of punishments. In other words, Lucy’s transformation into a decapitated monster is considered a just and necessary punishment.

## **Conclusion**

At the beginning of the novel, Mina Harker is a middle-class, financially independent woman. However, this freedom is taken away from her to an extent after marriage. She then clearly exhibits behaviour in accordance with traditional Victorian notions of female propriety, such as: obedience, chastity, piety and purity. In addition to this, she takes on various roles available for women of her time, starting with the more controversial ones associated with the New Woman, such as an assistant schoolmistress, secretary, and stenographer, gradually taking on the more traditional ones of nurse, wife and mother. Conversely, her intelligence and skills prove tremendously valuable to the men around her and yet, her male companions are the only ones that benefit from Mina’s abilities. In other words, her sense of importance is never fully realised and is, in fact, quickly stifled. At the very end of the novel, she is celebrated as gallant, but only

as an overture to the final affirmation of her maternal role in the novel – as biological to her son and surrogate to her male friends. Thus, Mina partially represents the New Woman through a modernised trope of the Angel in the House. Through her diary entries and letters Stoker satirises certain aspects of the New Woman Movement that apply to her friend, Lucy Westenra. Mina criticises New Women for their trivial indulgences and extramarital sexual activities.

On the other hand, Lucy is an upper-class woman of leisure who is concerned with trivial pursuits, unlike Mina who is educated and employed. Furthermore, her physical appearance and sexuality are constantly emphasised in the novel. It is because of her explicit sexuality that she evolves into both a Fallen Woman and a *femme fatale*. She becomes a Fallen Woman upon receiving blood donations from men other than her husband, and a monstrous *femme fatale* when turned into a vampire. Her monstrosity serves as punishment for her sexuality and questioning of Victorian gender roles. After her death, a more severe punishment ensues, including a vicious staking and decapitation. Thus, Stoker's acceptable and "proper" New Woman is described as a competent and obedient motherly/wifely figure, more than capable to stand firm in the face of evil. She also must be devoid of any sexual desire to avoid becoming a euthanized and decapitated Fallen Woman.

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