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**Patriarchal Propaganda and Manipulation in Bram
Stoker's *Dracula*: In Search of a New Model of
Victorian Femininity**

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Maria Magdalena

Abstract

The Victorian Era, the 63-year period from 1837-1901 that marked the reign of Britain's Queen Victoria, was an age of tremendous change. During the nineteenth century, and particularly in the Victorian *fin de siècle* (the final decade or so of the 1800s), the "woman question"—which refers to the various debates about women's role and place in society—became a central issue of discussion. From a patriarchal perspective, improvements in women's education and employment prospects threatened the conventional ideal of middle-class Victorian womanhood, the domestic virtuous wife and loving mother, also known as "The Angel in the House". In this context, the figure of the "New Woman" emerged; women who challenged conventional gender roles and advocated for individuality and autonomy.

According to many scholars, in *Dracula* Bram Stoker addresses the fears and anxieties that women's feminist awakening and breaking of the status quo spread among the Victorian patriarchal society through the metaphor of vampirism. Indeed, it has been argued that the threat that the New Woman posed to the conventional model of Victorian femininity is shown through the female vampires that appear in the novel.

In this TFG, I aim to approach Bram Stoker's *Dracula* as an element of patriarchal propaganda. Understanding that the model of femininity presented through the Victorian Angel could not survive in an era of constant change, and that a new and patriarchal-friendly model of Victorian femininity was needed was essential. Following this line of thought, I argue that Mina Harker and Lucy Westenra, the two main female characters in the novel, are given a purely experimental "role", as their femininity is tested; one of them will emerge as the new Victorian woman ideal.

Wilhelmina Murray, better known as Mina Harker, is presented as the perfect candidate for this new model of femininity. The character of Mina shares similarities with both the figure of The Angel in the House and the New Woman. Because of this dichotomy, the general trend has been to study her from either perspective, exclusively. Nevertheless, significantly less attention has been paid to the fact that Mina is manipulated by the group of men throughout the novel. It is precisely the dangerous attraction that Mina feels towards the revolutionary New-Woman ideology that alarms the group of men, who self-impose the duty to "protect" her from deviating towards a form of female identity that is not in alignment with patriarchal values. The aim of this argument, then, is to propose that the group of men manipulate Mina Harker by masking her with protection so that she can fit into an acceptable model of femininity. Consequently, I aim to uncover the ways in which this manipulation is orchestrated by closely assessing key moments in the novel through reference to critical studies on the character in question. Finally, through close reading of the last scene in *Dracula*, in which Mina appears as a virtuous mother and as a loving wife, I will argue that, again from a patriarchal perspective, Mina's manipulation is seen to have been a complete success.

Keywords: *Dracula*, Bram Stoker, Wilhelmina Murray, Victorian femininity, patriarchy.

Introduction

I. Contextual historical overview.

Abraham “Bram” Stoker (Clontarf, 1847 – London, 1912) was an Irish writer, journalist, theatre critic and manager, best known for being the author of *Dracula* (1897), a novel that has been regarded as the culmination of the Gothic. More than one hundred years after it was first published, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* is still one of the most popular novels around the world and, almost certainly, will continue to be so for years to come. The factors that have led to the success of *Dracula* are many; apart from having been a major focus of academic criticism practically since its date of publication, recent cinematic and musical adaptations have helped enormously to keep the spirit of Count Dracula alive and have encouraged new readers’ interest in the novel. Among the well-known adaptations are Francis Ford Coppola’s 1992 interpretation of *Dracula* and the recent series-based retelling released by the BBC and Netflix in January 2020.

Bram Stoker lived during the Victorian Era, the historical period from 1837-1901 that marked the reign of Britain’s Queen Victoria. This was an age characterized for its unprecedented political, social and economic change. The period saw the expansion of the British Empire, which, by the end of Victoria’s reign extended over about an area of four million square miles. Under the reign of Queen Victoria “Britain was the world’s most powerful nation. Though not always effortlessly, it was able to maintain a world order which rarely threatened Britain’s wider strategic interests” (Evans). Britain’s growing international influence and the subsequent construction of such a powerful empire was to a large extent due to innumerable advances in technology such as steamships, railways, electric lighting and the electric

telegraph, to name only a few of the important developments of the era. At the outset of this technologically fertile period, the late eighteenth century had seen the first major steps taken in the world's first Industrial Revolution, which forever reshaped the image of Britain. Massive migration of people from the country to the cities brought about the demise of rural life with a consequent, and frequently chaotic, growth and expansion of the cities. During the Victorian age, the industrialization of Britain was largely completed.

The Victorian era, seen as “the domestic age *par excellence*, epitomised by Queen Victoria” (Abrams), a monarch who was often described as “the mother of the nation” and who came to represent a kind of femininity centred on the domestic sphere of the home and motherhood. The term “The Angel in the House”, coined by Coventry Patmore with his narrative poem of the same name published from 1854 through 1862, has subsequently been much used in critical studies to refer to the contemporary middle-class ideal of Victorian womanhood. In this narrative poem, Patmore presents his wife, who he believed was the epitome of female perfection, as a model for Victorian middle-class women to follow. As the poem gained popularity, the same happened with the conception of women as Angels in the House, that is: women were to be passive and submissive, caring mothers and devoted wives, but above all modest and pure.

The transformation of Britain into an Industrial nation affected women, and their role within a male-dominated society, most profoundly. Whilst for some, mainly working-class women, the Industrial Revolution resulted in a life of hardship, for others it provided “independent wages, mobility and a better standard of living” (“Women in World History Curriculum”). In the Victorian *fin de siècle*, the “woman question”, referring to the various debates about women's role and place in society, became a central issue of discussion. From a patriarchal

perspective, improvements in women's education and employment prospects and the blurring of boundaries between the public sphere (traditionally viewed as a masculine domain) and the private sphere (the female domain of the home) threatened the survival of the submissive Angel ideal of womanhood, which was essential for the continuity of the Victorian patriarchal system as well as a key element for the success of the British Empire. Crozier-De Rosa, in her discussion about the British new woman, states that middle-class Victorian women were held up as "guardians of the nation's and the empire's moral health, and therefore as fundamental preservers of British character and identity" (Crozier-De Rosa, 2009: 7). In the same article, it is also argued that the main reason why changes to traditional types of femininity were regarded as a threat to the empire was the fact that Britain's imperial mission depended on the stability of the concept of family in the "Mother Country" (Crozier-De Rosa: 5). In other words, the British man's 'mastery' of the colonies was founded on his 'mastery' of his household, which depended on the "prior naturalizing of the social subordination of women and children within the domestic sphere" (Crozier-De Rosa: 5). With this in mind, it is easier to understand the Victorian believe that if this hierarchy of powers was not respected within the private sphere of the home, then a hierarchy of powers in the public sphere of the colonies nor the success of the British Empire could be guaranteed.

In this context, the figure of the "New Women" emerged. A type of womanhood which instead of being defined by a clear set of characteristics is "typically represented by a collage of ideas—all with at least one thing in common—the desire for greater female emancipation than her present society granted her" (Crozier-De Rosa: 11). Korytkowski (2014) claims that the figure of the

New Women was introduced for the first time by Mary Wollstonecraft in her pamphlet *A Vindication of Women's Rights* but that it was not until the end of the 1800's, when the traditional Victorian conservative spirit began to deteriorate with the introduction of new laws and attitudes towards women, that the New Women gained popularity in the Victorian Britain's context. The New Women's education went beyond the skills traditionally taught to Victorian women to the point that "New Women were expected to be well-versed in a myriad of conversational topics, much like men, such as politics, world news, science, and literature" (Korytkowski: 6). Korytkowski (3) also remarks that "both men and women were for or against the New Woman and her ideals". Nevertheless, the rise of the New Women "movement" and their members' effervescent discussion of controversial topics such as women's suffrage, marriage and female sexuality had become a cause for deep concern among those who valued the stability that Victorian patriarchal society offered.

II. Critical framework.

By the time that Bram Stoker started to write, however, the picture of a glorious British Empire had changed. Due to a series of colonial uprisings, rifts at home and defeats abroad, the late nineteenth century was marked by a sense of decadence and decline in social order in the territories of the Empire. A large number of scholars such as Swartz-Levine, Buzwell and Senf, have suggested that Bram Stoker addresses in *Dracula* through the metaphor of vampirism, the fears and anxieties that women's feminist awakening and breaking of the status quo spread among the Victorian patriarchal society. In her paper "Staking

Salvation: The Reclamation of the Monstrous Female in *Dracula*” Swartz-Levine discusses the theme of the attribution of monstrosity to those Victorian women who deviated from the standards of middle-class femininity “an Impudent woman is looked on as a kind of Monster; a thing diverted and distorted from its proper form”(Swartz-Levine, 2016: 346). In other words, deviations from the standard model of Victorian femininity were seen by many as unnatural, grotesque and even as a threat to the Victorian social order. Swartz-Levine argues that, in *Dracula*, this kind of monstrosity is portrayed through the female characters of the novel that have a direct contact with vampirism—Mina Harker, Lucy Westenra and the three vampires who attack Jonathan Harker—as the more vampirised they are, the more monstrous they appear and the further they are situated from an acceptable standard of Victorian womanhood.

In line with the idea that Stoker uses the figure of the vampire “as a thinly veiled shorthand for many of the fears that haunted the Victorian *fin de siècle*” (Buzwell), it can be suggested that the challenge posed by the New Woman to the conventional model of Victorian femininity is shown through the female vampires that appear in the novel. Similarly to the ways in which the New Woman was perceived from a patriarchal position, these vampires are portrayed as monstrous, aggressive and a threat to the integrity of society. Carol Senf, for example, focuses on the first encounter of Jonathan Harker with the three female vampires to justify the association of these creatures with the New Woman. Senf claims that it is “their aggressive behaviour and attempt to reverse traditional roles” (Senf, 1982: 40) that reveals them to be New Woman. Such characteristics can be seen through the narration of the encounter by a horrified Jonathan. From the three women, the fair vampire is the one that caughts Jonathan’ s

attention. Unlike the other two, whose physical appearance resemble that of the Count, the fair vampire seems to be strangely familiar to Jonathan, he describes her as “fair, as fair as can be, with great, wavy masses of golden hair and eyes like pale sapphires” (Stoker, 2012: 43). It has largely been argued that the sense of familiarity that Jonathan feels towards this vampire results from her “apparent Englishness” (Swartz-Levine: 348). Their first and only interaction is erotically charged and has often been interpreted as an attempt of fellatio, Jonathan writes the scene in his journal “The fair girl went on her knees, and bent over me, fairly gloating. There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive” (Stoker: 43). Swartz-Levine claims that “Jonathan’s fascination and revulsion occur because the fair one tries to perform an act of aberrant sexuality, one which no good English girl should actually know about (...)” (Swartz-Levine: 348), and because in attempting to do so, the vampire sets a clear reversal of gender roles; while takes she a very active role, Jonathan assumes a passive one. As already mentioned, non-submissive behaviour in English women or any attempt of reversal of the well-defined Victorian gender hierarchy could prove fatal for the Victorian male-dominated society and for the British Empire itself.

One of the most controversial and recurrent topics, particularly among those who choose to address the subject of femininity in *Dracula*, is whether the text conveys a patriarchal position or whether, in presenting female characters that willingly deviate from the Victorian standard of womanhood, creates spaces of subversion. This TFG will focus on the novel and its content should not, in any case, be interpreted as an attack on the author but rather as a personal interpretation of the story. However, I have taken the liberty of selecting a

passage that effectively reflects my opinion on the question: “[Stoker] creates women characters who are the intellectual equals of the men in his novels; however he seems to have drawn the line at sexual equality, and he has his heroines choose traditional roles of marriage and motherhood instead of careers”(Senf: 38). Objectively speaking, even though Bram Stoker was familiar with the feminist movement, it has been suggested that he was influenced by “the strong character and feminist views” (Senf: 38) of his mother Charlotte, the female characters in *Dracula* are far from achieving the degree of autonomy that their male counterparts display throughout the novel.

Although I am aware of the political readings that have been applied to *Dracula*, this is another ambit that—for questions of space and direct relevance to my fundamental line of enquiry—I do not intend to discuss in this TFG. However, I would like to briefly refer to the *Big House* debate in connection with *Dracula*. The term Big House has traditionally been used to refer to the residences of the Anglo-Irish landed class in Ireland. “Big” in size, these residences became a symbol of the power and elitist status of their owners, as well as a physical representation of the social and economic disparities between the Anglo-Irish and the so-called autochthonous Irish. For the latter, Big Houses came to represent the Anglo-Irish oppression of their community. During the Irish revolutionary period, Big Houses were targeted and a large number of them were destroyed, with only a small minority being subsequently rebuilt. From the political perspective of the Big House, two main readings have been extracted from *Dracula*, one in which the Count and his castle embody the decline and fall of Anglo-Irish power, this interpretation has been favoured by influential critics such as Terry Eagleton and Seamus Deane; and another in which Dracula, his dwelling and

Transylvania represent the backwardness of a dark and superstitious Ireland which is finally overcome by the forwardness of the English.

III. Aim and structure.

Due to the complexity of the novel and the wide range of topics that it covers, I have decided to address two different but related questions in this degree final project. A more partial approach in which only one of these two concerns was addressed would have resulted in an insufficiently complete response to my overall enquiry. The two questions that this TFG intends to provide an answer to are the following: Can Bram Stoker's *Dracula* be considered an item of patriarchal propaganda? What is the aim behind Mina Harker's manipulation in the novel? With regard to the first question, in this project I aim to approach Bram Stoker's *Dracula* as an element of patriarchal propaganda which presents a form of Victorian femininity that is in alignment with patriarchal values. Understanding that the conventional model of Victorian femininity could not survive in an era of constant change, a new and patriarchal - friendly model of Victorian femininity was needed in order to ensure the continuity of the Victorian patriarchal society. Following this line of thought, I argue that Mina Harker and Lucy Westenra, the two main female characters in the novel, are given a purely experimental value, as their femininity is tested; one of them emerges as the new Victorian woman ideal.

Regarding the second question, the second aim of this TFG is to propose that this new model of Victorian female identity is achieved in the novel through the manipulation of the character of Mina Harker. This manipulation, orchestrated by the group of men lead by Professor Van Helsing, is mainly

motivated by Mina's dangerous attraction towards the revolutionary New Woman ideology and results in a new model of Victorian femininity, one that is neither too conventional nor too modern so as to pose a threat to the Victorian patriarchal society. The fact that this TFG addresses the topic of Mina Harker's manipulation is particularly relevant, since literary criticism has paid little attention to it, the general trend has been to study this character from the perspective either of the Angel in the House or else of the New Woman.

Chapter one focuses on depicting *Dracula* as an item of patriarchal propaganda and on how, in view of the decadent state of the conventional model of Victorian womanhood, the different types of femininity that Mina Harker and Lucy Westenra embody are tested in order to discover a new ideal of Victorian womanhood.

Chapter two focuses on how the group of men that appear in the novel manipulate Mina Harker by masking her with protection so she can fit into an acceptable model of femininity. In this chapter, the main ways in the manipulation is orchestrated will be discussed.

Finally, in chapter three through close reading of the last scene in *Dracula*—in which Mina appears as a virtuous mother—I will argue that, from a patriarchal perspective, Mina's manipulation is seen to have been a complete success.

1. Chapter I

This chapter focusses exclusively on the first question that this degree-final project (TFG) intends to cover, namely, can Bram Stoker's *Dracula* be

considered an element of patriarchal propaganda? As mentioned in the previous section, from a patriarchal perspective at the time of the Victorian *fin de siècle*, the conventional model of Victorian Woman had practically become an endangered species. The growing popularity of the New Woman, along with the revolutionary ideas that the movement brought to a British society posed a direct threat to this traditional model, to the hegemony of a male-dominated society and, ultimately, to the success and stability of the British Empire. This TFG proposes a reading of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* as an element of patriarchal propaganda that presents Mina Harker as the perfect candidate for a new model of female identity for Victorian women to aspire to. This model is one that is neither too asphyxiatedly conventional nor too waywardly modern to escape from the control of a male-dominated society, in opposition to Lucy Westenra, who—in this reading—embodies the conventional and now-decadent Victorian femininity. A fuller assessment of these two characters will be provided below. However, before proceeding, I would like to make clear at this point that my essential approach—which sees an association between vampirism and the threat that New Women posed to the Victorian society—is informed by critics such as Swartz- Levine and Senf.

In *Dracula*, the character of Lucy Westenra unfolds into two different versions: Lucy before being bitten by Count Dracula and a vampirised version of herself. The Lucy that we meet at the beginning of the novel has generally been perceived as a representation of the figure of the Victorian “Angel in the House” (already, as I have argued, somewhat decadent), as she is portrayed as a passive, powerless and charming creature, possessor of an ethereal and effortless beauty,

according to Boyd: “Lucy comes across as a vain, giggly, girly, and not much else. She appeals to men because she represents the traditional fair, submissive wife (...)” (2014: 3). It is mainly through Lucy’s correspondence with Mina that the reader forms an idea of Lucy as a loving, yet defenceless young woman whose only concern seems to be gossiping about trivial subjects “Here am I, who shall be twenty in September, and yet I never had a proposal till today, not a real proposal, and today I have had three. Just fancy!” (Stoker: 65). The characters that surround her are well aware of the young lady’s weak condition, for instance, Mina fears that her beloved friend “(...) is of too supersensitive a nature to go through the world without trouble” (Stoker 102). Lucy’s weak disposition, along with her “angelical” appearance, is what makes those who appreciate her willing to protect her at all costs. It has been suggested that those aspects of Lucy’s personality that are in line with the traditional Angel in the House are what bring her to her ultimate fate. For instance, it has been proposed that, as opposed to the determined nature of her friend Mina, Lucy’s lack of autonomy is what “leads her to succumb to the vampiric curse of the male Count Dacula” (Boyd: 2).

When the Count bites Lucy during one of her sleepwalking episodes, she becomes a vampirised version of herself; Lucy loses her purity, as, apart from being “infected” by Dracula, Lucy’s blood is mixed with that of her male fellows due to the numerous blood transfusions that she receives in order to survive; she becomes aggressive, especially in nocturnal encounters with the group of men “...Van Helsing sprang forward and held between them his little golden crucifix. She recoiled from it, and, with a suddenly distorted face, full of rage, dashed past him as if to enter the tomb” (Stoker: 245). Very tellingly, she also becomes antimaternal: in chapter sixteen, Lucy appears covered in blood growling over a child “as a dog growls over a bone” (Stoker: 245). However much the group of men appreciate and love Lucy, they realize that she

cannot be saved, since her existence as ‘un-dead’—a creature trapped in a trance-like state between life and death— implies the perpetuation of the Count’s project. In consequence, Lucy must be destroyed in order to preserve the integrity of their community. The fact that Lucy Westenra—who represents the traditional model of Victorian womanhood—is vampirised by Count Dracula and has to be terminated, could be read as a textual suggestion (subliminal or not) that the conventional ideal of Victorian femininity could not adapt itself to the new times and that it would inevitably be replaced.

The character of Wilhelmina Murray, better known as Mina Harker, has generally been studied either from the perspective of the Angel in the House or from that of the New Woman, as she shares similarities with both. This TFG adopts David Glover’s interpretation of Mina as an ‘extremely hard to place’ character, “an unmoored sign of change as well as a firm attempt to hold the line against the New Woman” (Glover, 1996: 488). In other words, the character of Mina Harker can be read as a “modernized version of the ‘angel in the house’”(Ledger, 1997: 106), which constitutes in itself a new type of Victorian femininity that locates Mina as the perfect candidate for a new model of femininity, one that is neither too conventional nor too modern to represent a challenge to the Victorian patriarchal society.

Mina’s similarities with the Angel in the House can be seen throughout the whole novel. Like the Victorian “Angel”, Mina is portrayed as a loving wife, as a dedicated friend and (eventually) as a protective mother. As a wife, her deep affection and devotion towards her husband Jonathan is unquestionable. After marrying him, Mina tells Lucy in one of her letters that “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” (Stoker: 122-123). That Mina is a loving and caring friend is also indisputable, firm proof of it is the role that she assumes of safeguarding Lucy during her dangerous sleepwalking sessions. “Fortunately, each time I awoke in time, and managed to undress her without waking her, and got her back to bed” (Stoker: 100). Finally, as is expected from the Victorian “Angel”, Mina is also portrayed as a “protective mother figure” to her friends. This aspect of Mina’s personality is explicitly shown in a sequence when she appears comforting Lord Arthur Godalming after Lucy’s loss, in which Mina says to herself while stroking his hair as if he was her own child “We women have something of the mother in us that makes us rise above smaller matters when the mother-spirit is invoked (...)” (Stoker: 262). From a patriarchal perspective, Mina’s similarities with the Angel in the House are what make her a suitable candidate as a new model of female identity for Victorian women to aspire to.

However, from her very first appearance in the novel, the reader can infer that Mina’s femininity somehow deviates from what was generally understood as conventional. She makes her first direct appearance in chapter five, in a letter addressed to Lucy in which Mina mentions that “The life of an assistant schoolmistress is sometimes trying” (Stoker: 62). She also reveals her interest in writing—especially shorthand, which marks her out as technologically advanced—and that she is keeping a journal because she wants to “(...) try to do what I see lady journalists do” (Stoker: 62). Boyd (16) points out that, although Mina’s job as a schoolmistress was an accepted occupation for women of her time, “(...) true Victorian standards would never allow women to leave the domestic sphere for a professional position”. Mina’s character is full of contrasts; while she justifies her genuine thirst for knowledge by saying that her

intentions are to keep up with her husband's studies, she also leaves room for the reader to interpret that her writing-related activities are, for her, a sort of space of liberation and personal growth. As Prescott and Giorgio express it, writing represents for Mina "(...) an attempt to establish a strong sense of self, which in this charged historical moment carries the political resonance of the New Woman" (2005: 490). This reinforces the idea of Mina's femininity as a deviation from the conventional Victorian womanhood and as a "modernized" version of the Angel in the House.

As already mentioned, Mina is aware of the New Woman debate and although she shares some similarities and interests with the members of the movement, she tries to distance herself from them. Mina refers to the New Woman twice in her journal; after a long walk with Lucy the two young women make a stop and have "a capital 'severe tea'" (Stoker: 103), after which Mina confesses: "I believe we would have shocked the 'New Woman' with our appetites. Men are more tolerant, bless them!" (Stoker: 103), directly differentiating herself and Lucy from the New Woman. Although Mina attempts to hold a line against the New Woman, it cannot be denied that she feels unconsciously attracted, in a certain way, to their ideas, this is evident from her second reference to the New Woman. This time, watching Lucy sleep Mina thinks to herself:

"Some of the 'New Women' writers will some day 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! There's some consolation in that'" (Stoker: 103-4).

As may be noted, this time the distancing is more subtle and less direct. It could be suggested that, through this nocturnal thought, Mina expresses her own position of resignation towards the era that she lives in as well as an acceptance of the limitations

that this implies for her as a woman. In the fragment just cited, it might also be understood that Mina hopes for a better situation for women in the future. In short, from a patriarchal perspective, Mina Harker is the perfect candidate for a new model of Victorian femininity. This degree-final project proposes a reading of Mina as a modernized version of the Angel in the House who, despite being well aware of the New Woman debate and sharing certain interests with the members of the movement, nevertheless finds herself confined within the walls of a Victorian patriarchal society, since her modernity is limited by the Victorian gender conventions that are imposed on her.

2. Chapter II

Mina's similarities with both the Victorian "Angel" and the New Woman have led to a general trend towards studying her from either perspective. In other words, there has been a strong tendency to reduce the complexity of Mina Harker to a mere debate about her femininity, thereby overlooking, many aspects of this character that —given her essential role in the novel—should certainly be accorded special consideration. For this reason, this TFG connects the topic of femininity in *Dracula* with a topic that has been paid significantly less attention, the fact that Mina Harker is manipulated by the group of men lead by Professor Abraham Van Helsing. This chapter addresses the second question that this degree-final project intends to cover, that is, what is the objective behind the manipulation of Mina Harker in the novel? The current section proposes that the new model of Victorian female identity embodied by Mina, is achieved in the novel by means of her manipulation; the main ways in which this is orchestrated will also be discussed.

The previous chapter proposed a reading of Mina as a “modernized” version of the Angel in the House. This new construct of an acceptable model of femininity locates Mina at some point between the Victorian Angel, traditional and sympathetic, and the New Woman, unconventional and modern. From a patriarchal perspective, Mina’s similarities with the New Woman are precisely what alarm the group of men. At first, Mina’s intelligence and acumen—the traits of her personality that deviate most from what could be expected of a woman of her time—are welcomed by the group of men, as her rationality, her organizational skills, and her good memory, are all seen as potentially useful in their fight against the Count. At the beginning of the novel, Professor Van Helsing is, on more than one occasion, most surprised by Mina’s intelligence, “Oh, you so clever woman!” (*sic*, Stoker: 212) he exclaims, after having a look at her shorthand diary, a writing method with which the Professor is not familiar. Once the usefulness of Mina’s skills to the group’s cause has been proven, she then starts to work hand in hand with the men. However, the situation changes after a certain period of time. It could be suggested that Professor Van Helsing, who has studied men and women all his life and has specialized on “the brain and all that belongs to him and all that follows from him” (Stoker: 213) has closely and silently analysed Mina’s behaviour. He has noticed that Mina’s cleverness and thirst for knowledge are what push her to deviate from the Victorian “Angel” ideal of femininity towards nonconventional and —again from a patriarchal perspective—unacceptable forms of femininity, such as that of the New Woman.

Following this reading, it could be proposed that what Professor Van Helsing is really doing when he says about Mina that “[s]he has a man’s brain—a brain that a man should have were he much gifted—and a woman’s heart”

(Stoker: 273), rather than complementing her, is sharing his conclusions of his study of Mina's nature with his colleagues. In connection with Van Helsing's remark on Mina's brain, it should be recalled that the roles of men and women in the Victorian Era were sharply differentiated: while middle-class man represented "the Head" and the brain "of the social system as well as the Head of his household (...)"(Davidoff, 1979: 89), Victorian middle-class women "(...)" represented the emotions, the Heart, or sometimes the Soul, seat of morality and tenderness" (Davidoff: 89). With this in mind, it might be suggested that Van Helsing, in pointing out that Mina not only has a "man's brain", but a brain that a man would have were he brilliant, is, not primarily acknowledging Mina's high intellectual gift, but instead drawing attention to an issue that must be addressed. Indeed, immediately after praising Mina's intelligence, he prevents her from joining the group of men by claiming that their mission "is no part for a woman" (Stoker: 273) and proceeds to remind Mina where she, as a woman, really belongs: "And, besides, she is young woman [*sic*] and not so long married; there may be other things to think of some time, if not now" (Stoker: 274).

By openly demonstrating their intellectual capabilities, New Women challenged gender roles traditionally assigned to them, for instance by pursuing recognition or positions of power that were exclusively occupied by men, and which often resulted in their being labelled as "overeducated" women or even as " 'manly' New Woman" (Crozier-De Rosa: 6). In the very same way, Boyd claims that "Mina's intelligence and actions challenge the gendered notion of a divide between logic and emotion, and through her character she transcends the gender binary to form a complete identity of personhood" (2014: 20). Needless to say, this had no place in a patriarchal society. When the group of men become

aware of this circumstance, they self-impose the duty to “protect” Mina from deviating into a non-acceptable model of femininity and her manipulation begins. To Mina they assign the role of “damsel in distress”; unlike her friend Lucy Westenra, this distress can still be successfully resolved and the damsel saved from destruction.

Mina Harker is manipulated throughout the novel principally in three distinct ways: through physical limitation; through exclusion from knowledge; and by being deprived of intimate thoughts. The first means of manipulation by which the men impose their control over Mina has already been discussed; once the group is aware of Mina’s tendency to overstep the limits for a respectable Victorian woman, they physically prevent her from joining their missions. Chapter eighteen provides an example of this form of manipulation, in a scene in which the group is preparing to march off to Carfax Abbey. Soon after having decreed that there is no part for a woman in their expedition, Professor Van Helsing commands Mina to remain at Dr Seward’s house, apparently a safe place: “And now for you, Madam Mina, this night is the end until all be well. You are too precious to us to have such risk. When we part tonight, you no more must question” (*sic*, Stoker: 282). Mina accepts the Professor’s command with visible resignation “(…) though it was a bitter pill for me to swallow, I could say nothing, save to accept their chivalrous care of me” (Stoker: 282). Most certainly, Mina would have preferred to be of some use on the front line rather than being “kept in the dark” (Stoker: 299) while being victim of a “devouring anxiety” (Stoker: 300) and a victim of Dracula, too, who takes the opportunity to attack her for the first time in the absence of the men. Mina’s manipulation begins to take effect as soon as her restriction on not joining the men is imposed; almost immediately after Professor Van Helsing delivers his command, certain intrusive thoughts appear to settle in her mind. For

instance, Mina refers to her great fear of being a “drag or a hindrance” (Stoker: 282) to the group of men—she is induced to experience self-doubt—and she fears the possibility of being left out of their counsels, which is precisely what happens afterwards.

The second way in which Mina’s manipulation is orchestrated is by excluding her from knowledge. Initially, and despite having proved her intellectual capabilities, Mina is reduced to being the secretary of the group, “He (Dr Seward) made me sit next to him on his right, and asked me to act as secretary” (Stoker: 275). That is, she occupies a decent (even an unexpected) position for a woman of her time; but she is nevertheless subjected to men and their instructions, working with but basically *for* them. On the other hand, this position provides her with unlimited access to any type of information about their plans. Nevertheless, not long after Mina is bitten by the Count, the group of men start to suspect that, in the same way that Mina has access to Dracula’s mind via her hypnosis sessions, the Count could also visit Mina’s mind whenever he pleased and use Mina’s knowledge of their positions against them. For this reason, they have to be very careful with the information that they share with her. There is some evidence to suggest that Dr Seward and Professor Van Helsing, in his observational study of Mina resulting from their suspicions, intimidate Mina in such way that—even before they can communicate to her their decision to exclude her from their councils—she herself becomes conscious that her tongue is tied by Dracula, and decides not to join them “as she thought it better that [the men] should be free to discuss [their] movements without her presence to embarrass [them]” (Stoker: 376) and to act with precaution until Dracula had been killed. In connection with the approach that sees an association between vampirism and the threat posed by New Women to the Victorian society, the force that Dracula operates upon Mina (about which the group of men are reasonably certain)

could be interpreted as Mina's attraction towards the New Woman, a connection that the group of men can only cut by destroying Dracula before it is too late. In the same way that Dracula, after having infected Mina, has control over her mind and thoughts without Mina being able to do much to prevent it, the ideas of the revolutionary New Woman, once settled in the mind of innocent Victorian women like Mina, "corrupted" and "polluted" their thoughts. As Swartz-Levine (359) points out, Englishmen could not count on their countrywomen to be strong enough to deter the menace on their own; this strengthens the idea of the men as Mina's indispensable protectors.

The third and final way in which Mina is manipulated is through the deprivation of her intimate thoughts. This control over Mina is imposed at a narrative level. The fact that Mina Harker is presented as an extremely hard-to-please character is due, in part, to the narrative structure of the novel. *Dracula* is an epistolary novel, it is formed by a compilation of journal entries, letters, telegrams and newspaper clippings, among other pieces of writing. This narrative structure forces the reader to form a construct of Mina from many different perspectives, which in a textual sense confounds the reader's ability to know the "real" Mina. With the exception of her own journal entries and those by Lucy, the remaining perceptions of Mina that the reader receives are from members of the group of men, which in turn may offer a distorted version of Mina as a modernized version of the Victorian Angel, a new model of femininity for Victorian woman to aspire to and not much else. Moreover, despite being given voice through her journal, the only Mina that readers meet is the "public" version of this character, a young woman who writes about the events that occur in the public sphere, a woman committed to her friends, to their safety and well-being. The intimate version of Mina, the one who moves in the domain of the private sphere, is silenced and is thereby deprived of having intimate thoughts. For example, apart from the two occasions in

which Mina makes explicit her awareness of the New Woman debate, the reader knows nothing else about her position. Someone who is so evidently as curious and reflective as Mina most surely has well-defined views on this matter, but they are never made accessible.

3. Chapter III

In the previous section, it has been argued that the new model of Victorian female identity embodied by Mina Harker is achieved in the novel by means of her manipulation, which is motivated primarily by the similarities that Mina shares with the New Woman and the interest that she feels for this movement . It has also been proposed that this manipulation is orchestrated principally in three distinct ways: through physical limitation; through exclusion from knowledge; and by depriving Mina of intimate thoughts. This chapter, through a close reading of the last scenes of the novel—in which Mina appears as a virtuous mother and as a loving wife—argues that, from a patriarchal perspective, Mina’s manipulation is seen to have been an absolute success.

This chapter revolves around the final mission of the group that will determine the future of the “infected Mina”, namely, Count Dracula’s annihilation. With this objective in mind, they begin their journey to Transylvania, more specifically, to the castle of Dracula. The group separates into pairs and Mina leaves with Professor Van Helsing. When they arrive at their destination, Mina and the Professor have an encounter with the three women vampires that Jonathan had described in his journal. The three women try to persuade Mina to join them and they even call her “sister” (Stoker: 427), as if she

was one of them; but to Van Helsing's surprise, Mina remains in her place, not without feeling uneasy about the situation: "The terror in her eyes, the repulsion, the horror, told a story to my heart that was all of hope. God be thanked she was not, yet, of them" (Stoker: 427). Mina's repulsion towards the three vampires, despite practically being one of them at that moment—or at least physically so—may be explained as a direct consequence of the manipulation that the group of men exert on her. Following this reading, it could be inferred that Mina has been induced to think that she does not belong with them, that the three women are monstrous creatures that, like her friend Lucy, cannot be saved in this life and therefore that they must be destroyed. In her case, in contrast, she may think that there is already hope for her.

With regard to the final battle with the Count, the group, with the exception of Mina and Professor Van Helsing, who witness the scene from the distance, finally manage to kill Dracula in a quick yet fierce battle with the gypsies, with the price that they have to pay being the life of Quincey Morris. After Dracula is dead, the power that he had over the creatures that responded to him presumably vanishes, since Mina notices that "[t]he wolves, which had withdrawn to a safe distance, followed in [the gypsies'] wake, leaving us alone" (Stoker: 439), no longer responding their master's orders to surround the group. It is Van Helsing who points out Mina's transformation to her old self when he exclaims: "The snow is not more stainless than her forehead! The curse has passed away!" (Stoker: 439). Considering again the perspective that sees an association between vampirism and the New Woman, as well as the argument presented in the previous chapter—which proposed that the connection that Mina had with Dracula could be interpreted as Mina's attraction towards the New

Woman—it could be suggested that Dracula’s death implies not only that the link between Mina and the Count is no longer active, but also the end of the dangerous attraction that Mina felt towards the New Woman and the ultimate success of the group of men in preventing Mina from deviating, from a patriarchal perspective, towards an unacceptable model of femininity.

Interestingly, Mina does not comment on her transformation, reinforcing the idea that she is deprived of expressing her intimate thoughts. Instead of writing in her journal how she felt when her connection with Dracula was cut, the first thing that Mina writes after the Count’s death is how she rushed to the dying Quincey Morris: “I flew to him, for the Holy circle did not now keep me back; so did the two doctors” (Stoker: 439). Although Mina is aware that the Holy circle has no longer any effect on her, she prioritizes the narration of her friend’s final moments over giving an account of her physical and mental transformation, to which the reader has never access. This action, innocent as it may seem, situates Mina close to the Victorian Angel and as the “damsel in distress” who has finally been saved, at the feet of the “gallant gentleman” (Stoker: 439) who has given his life for her.

The last chapter of the novel concludes with a note from Jonathan Harker, who steals the voice from Mina after her journal entry in which she narrates their final mission. In this brief note, Jonathan makes the reader travel forwards in time, specifically to seven years later. Jonathan announces that Mina and he have a boy, who has a bundle of names that links their band of men together; that Lord Godalming and Dr Seward are happily married; and that Professor Van Helsing is still close to the family. This image that Jonathan seeks to portray could be seen as a restoration of the “natural Victorian order”, since Mina is depicted as a

loving wife and as a virtuous mother. Or else it might be interpreted, as Boyd (4) suggests, as the successful re-integration of Mina into the patriarchal system. Moreover, the mere existence of the boy, as well as the fact that he has been named after all the members of the group of men, could be considered as a final trophy for the group, one that confirms their success in making of Mina a decent Victorian woman. Had Mina deviated towards a nonconventional and more modern type of female identity, she would, we must imagine, not have had this child. Again, Mina's thoughts on motherhood, are silenced and the readers do not get to know her own version of her life seven years after Dracula's death. The last paragraph of Jonathan's note is particularly interesting: Mina is definitively identified as a modernized version of the Angel in the House and as the perfect candidate for a new Victorian model of femininity. Tellingly, Van Helsing says of Mina that she is "a brave and a gallant woman" (Stoker: 440), adjectives that were traditionally associated with men, yet also speaks of "her sweetness and her loving care", attributes that were typically associated with the Victorian Angel.

4. Conclusions

The aim of this present degree-final project was twofold. First, it sought to address the question of whether *Dracula* could be considered an item of patriarchal propaganda. In chapter one, it has been argued that, indeed, the novel can be interpreted as an element of patriarchal propaganda, since it has been proposed that it presents, through the character of Mina Harker, a new form of female identity in alignment with patriarchal values for Victorian women to aspire to. Two types of femininity are examined in the novel: that of the Victorian Angel, embodied by Lucy Westenra, and a modernized version of the

same, embodied by Mina Harker. While the former proves to be unable to adapt to an era of constant change, the latter emerges as the perfect candidate for a new type of female identity for Victorian woman to admire. Mina represents a type of femininity that is neither too conventional so as to succumb to decadence nor too modern to escape the control of the Victorian male-dominated society. The second aim of this project was to discuss the aim behind the manipulation that Mina Harker undergoes throughout the novel. It has been proposed that this manipulation by the group of men is motivated by Mina's similarities and her dangerous attraction to the ideal of the New Woman. The main goal behind Mina's manipulation is to prevent her from deviating into an unacceptable form of female identity (from a patriarchal perspective), and her manipulation is manifested mainly in three different ways: she is physically limited; she is excluded from knowledge; and she is deprived of intimate thoughts. Finally, in chapter three, it has been argued that the group of men succeed in their mission of manipulating Mina, since she is presented to the reader, through the voice of Jonathan Harker and Professor Van Helsing, as a modernized version of the Victorian Angel. That is, she is portrayed as a protective and caring mother but also as a brave and fearless young woman.

This project aimed to provide a reading of the character of Mina Harker that went beyond the marked tendency to reduce this "hard-to-place" character to a mere debate about her femininity. For this reason, the notion of her manipulation has been introduced. Further work on this question is needed to fully understand the complex wealth of nuances that the character of Mina Harker displays.

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