
Bram Stoker's Dracula: Is Mina a depiction of the New Woman

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) can be read from a feminist perspective, as Mina Murray-Harker, one of the most complex characters in the novel, is a mixture between the Victorian woman ideals. That is why she deserves a profound analysis in order to discuss whether she is or not a depiction of the "New Woman". "Initially Mina Murray is one of those secondary characters born to serve as man's helpmate", but readers will see that this fact changes during the novel's evolution.

"*Dracula* is undoubtedly a product of its time, considering the fin de siècle fascination for vampires and Stoker's treatment of the female characters". The "New Woman", aforementioned, was a feminist ideal that emerged by Sarah Grand in the late 19th century. This idea "departed from the stereotypical Victorian woman"; and it talks about an intelligent, educated and independent woman ideal. "New Woman" ideology's aim is to redefine gender roles, to consolidate women's rights and to overcome the patriarchy.

Readers have several examples during the novel to reassert this idea. For instance, after a really long walk with Lucy, Mina says that they have eaten so much they "should have shocked the 'New Woman' with [their] appetites". By saying that, Mina is expressing that they ate as much as they wanted, instead of eating little portions so as to maintain a feminine figure.

Moreover, Mina insinuates later that "New Woman" will sleep with their husbands prior to a proposal of marriage. The reader can also picture Mina insinuating that one day these women will do the proposal to their potential husbands. She writes in her journal:

Some of the 'New Woman' 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 that the New Woman won't condescend in future to accept; she will do the proposal herself. And a nice job she will make of it, too! There's some consolation in that.

She is questioning the power dynamics between men and women before marriage. In other words, according to traditional Victorian morality, men and women can only see each other in very controlled and formal settings or situations before marrying. The idea that men and women should see each other asleep, as Mina expresses, is totally impossible to understand for the Victorians, not to mention the idea that women should be the ones to do the proposing.

Obviously, there are more reasons in Mina's attitudes that make the reader think that she is a representation of the "New Woman". She is intelligent, she works as a schoolteacher (what means that she is financially independent) and well-educated. In the novel, Van Helsing says that she even seems to have a "man's brain—a brain that a man should have were he much gifted—and a woman's heart".

However, contrary to all Mina's traits that would make the reader think she is certainly a depiction of the "New Woman", there are some others which would change the reader's mind. Readers could think that Mina has also characteristics for being considered an "Angel in the

House". The "Angel in the House" is a fundamental Victorian term from the beginning of the century, that explained that women had to remain at the private sphere. In other words, women had to stay at their homes, taking care of their children and husband and doing the houseworks.

Mina could be the "Angel in the House" if one pays attention to some extracts. A good example is the moment when Mina wants to help Jonathan - her future husband - with his studies and she has been "practicing shorthand" . The motif why she had been doing so is because she wants to "be able to be useful to Jonathan" .

Throughout the novel, the reader can see in Mina a perfect wife. When Jonathan, for instance, is trapped at Count Dracula's castle and she does not know anything about him for months, she gets seriously worried. She writes "Another three days, and no news. This suspense is getting dreadful" . Instead of looking for a new husband, she remains faithful to Jonathan and does what she can to bring him back.

Another important point of the novel in order to keep Mina inside the traditional Victorian woman side is that Stoker does not sexualized her. That is to say, during a large quantity of scenes in the novel there is no sexual reference towards Mina. What is more, she is represented as a mother to almost all men who appear in the story. Readers can be aware of that when Arthur cries on Mina's shoulder after having read all the documents about Lucy's death:He stood up and then sat down again, and the tears rained down his cheeks. I felt an infinite pity for him, and opened my arms unthinkingly. With a sob he laid his head on my shoulder, and cried like a wearied child, whilst he shook with emotion.

We women have something of the mother in us that makes us rise above smaller matters when the mother spirit is invoked;

Contrasting with the chastity inherent in Mina, Stoker puts the three vampire women who, at the beginning of the novel, seduce Jonathan:

All three had brilliant white teeth, that shone like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips. There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips.

The three vampires are the representation of sexuality in Dracula. In this particular scene, the blonde vamp "takes a very active role, turns Jonathan into the passive recipient of her advances, and, had she succeeded, this particular act certainly would not result in the procreation of children". The only time when Mina is sexualized is the moment she also gets infected by the Count:

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

Although Mina tries to conserve her chastity, she fails in preserving it and Dracula forces her to drink her own destruction. This scene might be an indicative of losing Mina's virginity as there

appears blood. Although Jonathan and her are married at this point of the novel, he has been so ill that it could be understood the fact that normal marital relations have not occur between the couple yet. "This scene can be rightly read as a rape, since she is assaulted in her own bedroom by a man not legally her husband and the act is violent and angry".

In conclusion, Mina is an interesting character because she contains the traditional Victorian woman's values but she also embodies that ones typical of the "New Woman". Therefore, Mina is a combination of strong intellect and submissiveness. "What Stoker essentially has Mina represent is the whole of the Victorian woman" . In other terms, she is at the same time both the traditional Victorian woman and the New Woman.

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