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The Uncanny Women of the Count: the 'double' in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*

Although Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is permeated with uncanny<sup>1</sup> features, one in particular is remarkably present: the relation of uncanny with the representations of women in the novel. More specifically, the "double"—such as described by Freud as one instance of uncanny occurrences—is present throughout the novel, while the characters of Mina and Lucy fall into the spell of the vampire. The trajectory of the two major female characters can be divided in two specific moments: "normal" and vampire. In this paper I will analyze their representations in the novel, first as perfect Victorian 'specimens' and then as their uncanny vampire selves. The three female vampires of *Dracula*'s castle, although uncanny in some ways, do not embody the aspect of 'double' as presented in this paper, and, therefore, will not be present in this analysis.

The theoretical parameter of this paper, the concept of the uncanny, is that of Sigmund Freud's 1919 homonymous essay. The definition he gives on what constitutes uncanny is "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (620). In his essay, Freud relates several instances of what he believes could be described as causes of the uncanny feeling. Among his examples are the phenomena of the 'double', coincidence, "animism, sorcery, the omnipotence of thoughts, man's attitude to death, involuntary repetition and the castration complex," and even a person, if he or she has evil intentions and plans to carry them out "with the help of special powers" (635). From this brief summary it is already possible to see in how many different aspects *Dracula* can be related to Freud's concept.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper I will adopt Freud's definition of uncanny.

The ‘double’ is actually the first cause of uncanniness that Freud explores in his essay. He does so after discussing Hoffmann’s short story “The Sand-Man”. In fact, Freud’s essay is in part a response to psychologist Ernst Jentsch’s essay entitled “On the Psychology of the Uncanny” published a few years earlier in 1906, that uses as an example the same short story by Hoffmann. What Freud argues in Jentsch’s position is that the latter contends that the uncanny in the story is found in the “uncertainty of whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton” [referring to Olympia] while Freud suggests that the uncanny lies in the figure of the Sand-Man, which among other things is connected to the phenomenon of the ‘double’ (625).

When describing the origins of the ‘double’, Freud, citing Otto Rank<sup>2</sup>, associates it with “reflections in mirrors, with shadows, with guardian spirits, with the belief in the soul and with the *fear of death*,” and, even further, “an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an ‘energetic *denial of the power of death*’” (630, my stresses). Interestingly, this view, in a way, characterizes the vampire, that is, in a manner, an escape from death, a denial of death. It is also interesting to point that Freud describes these ideas as “from the primary narcissism which dominates the mind of the child and of primitive man,” and after this [friendlier] primary stage has been surpassed, the ‘double’ gains a different aspect (630). This, in relation with the vampire, could mean the *corruption* of the primitive fear of death: “[f]rom having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death” (630).

The ‘double’ in *Dracula* appears clearly in the characters of Lucy and Mina as they undergo the transformation that turns them from ‘normal’ women into vampires. To illustrate their first moment, I turn now to their representations as ideal Victorian women in the novel, starting with the language used in reference to their characters.

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<sup>2</sup> Freud is in this passage citing the work of Otto Rank (1914) who had primarily made the associations between the ‘double’ and fear of death.

Throughout the novel—in a somewhat condescending way—their names always appear accompanied by “sweet,” “dear,” “poor,” “child,” “little,” and so on. The adjectives can even sometimes appear combined, as “poor dear Lucy,” or “sweetly pretty” (284, 285). A perfect example of this kind of language can be found in Van Helsing’s compliments about Mina:

She is one of God’s women, fashioned by his own hand to show us men and *other women* that there is a heaven where we can enter, and that its light can be here on earth. So *true*, so *sweet*, so *noble*, so *little an egoist* – and that, let me tell you, is much in *this age*, so sceptical and selfish. (243, my stresses)

Van Helsing’s words reproduce the idealized Victorian woman, an ideal shared by the other male characters in the novel.

When the language is not condescending, it is used to indicate that they are even above the ideal woman, such as in the following passage, where Van Helsing compliments Mina’s intelligence:

‘Ah, that *wonderful* Madam Mina! She has man’s brain – a brain that a man should have were he much gifted – and woman’s heart. The good God fashioned her for a purpose, believe me, when He made that so good combination’ (302, my stresses).

But even then, she does not rise above her status as Victorian woman, for in the same speech given by Van Helsing, he advocates that she is ‘cut out of the loop’:

[. . .] but it is no part *for a woman*. Even if she be not harmed, her heart may fail her in so much and so many horrors; and hereafter she may suffer [. . .] And, besides, she is a *young woman* and not so long *married*; there may be *other things to think* of some time, if not now. (302, my stresses)

By doing that, he at the same time acknowledges her qualities as an above average woman—which in his mind combines the qualities of a man—but still clings to the fact that she is a woman nevertheless, and as such has duties to fulfill.

These implicit duties are not recognized only by the men in the novel, the women are well aware of their roles in that society. Mina has based her life in being “useful to Jonathan,” which is why she has learned shorthand and memorized all the train schedules (74). When she tells Lucy about her marriage, Mina is happy but aware of the “grave and sweet responsibilities [she] has taken upon [herself]” (139). As Mina says “yes” to Jonathan, she also declares to have nothing to give him but herself, her life, her trust, and “that these went with [her] *duty* for all the days of [her] life” (140, my stresses). Further on the letter, she advises Lucy and wishes for her friend the same happiness, which seems to be always associated with the idea of duty: “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” (140, my stresses). What these lines seem to indicate is that, in her mind, marriage comes with responsibilities, and that one of these duties is to feel [or appear to be] happy while fulfilling them.

The matter of appearances is also one that occupies Lucy and Mina’s minds frequently. This issue can be separated in two different aspects: how they appear to their fiancées or husbands; and how they appear to society. Frequently Mina and Lucy try to hide their feelings, in order not to disturb their fiancées or husbands with their problems and concerns. When Lucy is suffering from the nightly visits of Dracula, she acknowledges that something is not well with herself, but even then can only confess this sentiment to Mina. Lucy reports in her letter of being “unhappy,” “full of vague fear,” “weak and worn out,” having “bad dreams,” “ghastly pale,” with a sore throat, and finally that there “must be something wrong with [her] lungs, for [she doesn’t] seem

ever to get air enough” (144). Certainly a worrisome condition, but still whenever her fiancée comes to visit she tries to conceal it from him, pretending she is well. Two moments in her letter refer to that: “When Arthur came to lunch he looked quite grieved when he saw me, and I hadn’t the spirit to try to be cheerful. [. . .] I shall try to cheer up when Arthur comes, or else I know he will be miserable to see me so” (144). Lucy seems to completely disregard the severity of her condition, worrying more—and actually feeling guilty—about not being able to hide it from Arthur. Apparently for her it is more important to look well—her duty—than to actually be well.

Lucy is not alone in her attitude; Mina does exactly the same thing. More than one time in the novel she writes either for Lucy or in her journal that she had to conceal her sufferings and anxieties from her husband. One of these times is when Jonathan inherits Mr. Hawkins’ business and becomes a bit overwhelmed with the responsibilities:

He says the amount of responsibility which it puts upon him makes him nervous. He begins to doubt himself. I try to cheer him up, and *my* belief in him helps him to have a belief in himself. [. . .] Lucy, dear, I must tell someone, for the strain of keeping up a brave and cheerful appearance to Jonathan tries me, and I have no one here that I can confide in. (204-5)

In her mind, it is her support that helps him keep going, and she therefore does it without complaint. She even reflects upon this aspect of a woman’s duty:

There now, crying again! [. . .] I must *hide* it from Jonathan, for if he knew that I had been crying twice in one morning [. . .] the dear fellow would fret *his* heart out. I shall put a bold face on, and if I do feel weepy, he shall never see it. I suppose it is one of the *lessons* that we *poor women have to learn* ... (331, my stresses)

It is this knowledge of how proper women should act that drives her character throughout the novel.

On the issue of propriety, two passages of Mina's journal illustrate perfectly her thoughts and beliefs on the subject. The first one refers to when Lucy goes out sleepwalking to the pier, and, as both walk back to the house, Mina's concern was not restricted to Lucy's health; it was also about what people would think if they happened to see her wandering the streets at night in her nightgown. Mina writes: "I was filled with anxiety about Lucy, not only for her health, lest she should suffer from the exposure, but for her reputation in case the story should get wind" (122). Lucy of course shares the same concern when implores Mina not to say a word of it to anybody. They both seem to be aware that, in their time, the reputation of a woman is a matter to be taken very seriously, especially when it concerns unmarried women.

Another occurrence of the theme of propriety arises in an apparently [at least for a twenty-first century reader] innocent situation. In the following passage, Mina writes about a walk she and her husband made on Piccadilly:

Jonathan was holding me by the arm, the way he used to in old days before I went to school. It felt very *improper*, for you can't go on for some years teaching etiquette and decorum to other girls without the pedantry of it biting into yourself a bit; but it was Jonathan, and he was my husband, and we didn't know anybody who saw us – and we didn't care if they did – so on we walked.  
(222, my stresses)

The example points to the fact that the mere act of touching one another in public is vexing for Mina. She acknowledges that she may be overreacting, and is [on the surface] satisfied with him holding her arm. However, interestingly enough, she only feels really okay with the fact once she is aware that no one knew her. In fact, the last

lines of the quoted passage (“and we didn’t care if they did”) seem to subtly indicate that she is in denial, and is, actually, still feeling the impropriety of the situation.

All these examples serve to illustrate three things: first, that the men view Lucy and Mina as the collection of the best qualities [in their view] a woman can possess; second, that the ladies themselves feel impelled to fulfill men’s expectations, even if in detriment of their own; and finally that, in general, the novel portrays the two characters as ‘perfect’ Victorian women both on men and women’s view. I will focus now on the representation of Lucy and Mina as their ‘other’ selves, their vampire selves, their ‘doubles’, and, most importantly, on how this is characterized as uncanny by the men who witness their transformation.

Lucy is the first one to undergo such transformation, and it takes a while before the other characters realize the meaning of her changed state. The first uncanny feeling related to Lucy is found in Dr Seward’s entry in his diary on the night of her death. At first he is only intrigued by the fact that she apparently had two distinct reactions regarding the garlic flowers.

It struck me as *curious* that the moment she became conscious she pressed the garlic flowers close to her. It was certainly *odd* that whenever she got into that lethargic state, with the stertorous breathing, she put the flowers from her; but that when she waked she clutched them close. (207, my stresses)

The moment that he realizes—with Van Helsing’s help—the real dimension of the situation, that what is taking place before his eyes are two distinct personalities fighting each other within the same body, a shift of attitude may be noticed, he goes from “curious” to frightened: “I bent over and looked too, and as I noticed some *queer chill* came over me” (207, my stresses). This scene is the first one where the phenomenon of the ‘double’ clearly appears.

Right before she dies, Dr. Seward describes another similar incident of uncanniness. As her fiancée approaches her bed, Lucy “whisper[s] softly: Arthur! Oh, my love, I am so glad you have come!” (208). She is then her ‘normal’ self, with all the delicacy that befits her: “[. . .] and she looked her best, with all the *soft* lines matching the *angelic* beauty of her eyes” (208, my stresses). Her transformation into her vampire self is summed up in the following passage also described by Dr. Seward.

And then insensibly there came the *strange change* which I had noticed in the night. [. . .] she opened her eyes, which were now dull and *hard* at once, and said in a soft, *voluptuous voice*, such as I had never heard from her lips: —

‘Arthur! Oh, my love, I am so glad you have come! Kiss me!’ Arthur bent eagerly over to kiss her; but at that instant Van Helsing, who, like me, had been *startled* by her voice, swooped upon him, and catching him by the neck with both hands, dragged him back with a *fury of strength* which I never thought he could have possessed, and actually hurled him across the room. [. . .]

I kept my eyes fixed on Lucy, as did Van Helsing, and we saw a spasm as of *rage* flit like a shadow over her face; [. . .] Then her eyes closed, and she breathed heavily. (208-9, my stresses)

It is the first time that sexuality is related to Lucy’s vampire self. The two men, the only ones who are aware of what is actually going on in the scene, experience the uncanny feeling when sensing lust in her voice. Van Helsing—to Seward’s surprise—in response to this feeling even manages to gather strength enough to pull Arthur out of her deadly embrace.

After her death, Lucy starts to prey on children, a clear corruption of the motherly ideal of the Victorian woman—one that Mina is so good in performing to all the men. Van Helsing and Dr. Seward’s reaction to the knowledge of her recent acts as



her other self is worth looking into. The idea of Lucy, once so sweet and fragile, now feeding on children, makes Van Helsing practically have a fit when he comes to that conclusion: “he threw himself with a despairing gesture into a chair, and placed his elbows on the table, covering his face with his hands as he spoke: — ‘They were made by Miss Lucy!’” (249). A week after her burial, as they break into her tomb, Dr. Seward again, unconsciously it seems, establishes a connection between sexuality and uncanniness:

[. . .] then a *shock of surprise* and *dismay* shot through me. There lay Lucy, seemingly just as we had seen her the night before the funeral. She was, if possible, more radiantly *beautiful* than ever; and I could not believe that she was dead. The *lips* were *red*, nay *redder* than before; and on the cheeks was a *delicate bloom*. (257-8, my stresses)

Her once so familiar face, now possessed of such beauty is, for him, the cause of a shock; a reason to be frightened. Not only is it possible to connect sexuality with his shock, but, even further, it is the *fear of unbridled* sexuality that rises in this scene. Her sexuality is uncontrolled because it is free from Victorian rules; she is the same Lucy, only now, in her vampire state, no longer controlled. She is free to enjoy all her desires. In fact, one might remember that Lucy indeed had repressed desires, when for example wanted three men for herself, but was then restricted because of conventions [“Why can’t they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble? *But this is heresy, and I must not say it*” (81, my stresses)].

This uncanny feeling when seeing Lucy’s ‘double’ is also evident in their final trip to the cemetery. Several times Dr Seward compares the two Lucys:

[. . .] as we recognized the features of Lucy Westenra. Lucy Westenra, but yet how changed. The sweetness was turned to adamant, heartless cruelty, and

the *purety* to *voluptuous* wantonness. [. . .] Lucy's eyes in form and colour; but Lucy's eyes unclean and full of hell-fire, instead of the *pure, gentle orbs* we knew. [. . .] As she looked, her eyes blazed with unholy light, and the face became wreathed with a *voluptuous* smile. Oh God, how it made me shudder to see it! (271, my stresses)

The connection established by him, that what was once pure has now turned “voluptuous,” expresses clearly his fear, and, even further, the relation in his mind between sexuality and evil. It is only with the dissociation of the idea of ‘Lucy’ from the idea of ‘vampire Lucy’ that the phenomenon of the ‘double’ disappears, which means that the feeling of uncanniness goes away. Only then they are able to kill her ‘other’ self without remorse. Dr Seward refers to her as “The Thing,” and when “the foul Thing” is killed, she goes back to being ‘old Lucy’ as they idealize her, “as [they] had seen her in her life, with the face of unequalled sweetness and purity” (278-7). This idealization of women, and the subsequent fear of their corruption, is even more prominent in Mina’s case.

The feeling of uncanniness is even greater when it is Mina’s turn to be possessed by Dracula, for she is the epitome of the Victorian woman [even more than Lucy], in the men’s eyes. She is not only loved by all, as is Lucy, but is also ‘mother’ to all. Her character is so unselfish, so abnegated, that she more than once offers to sacrifice herself—if necessary to kill her ‘other’ self—even her soul, if it should prove necessary (374). Besides the uncanny feeling generated by the subversion of the idealized Victorian woman—which occurs in the same manner as in Lucy’s case, which I will not illustrate it again given that the examples are pretty similar—Mina’s transformation presents two particular characteristics that are very interesting from the perspective of the ‘double’.

The first interesting characteristic is that Mina carries within her the ‘mark’ of the ‘double’. In an attempt to protect her from Dracula’s attack, Van Helsing touches her forehead with a piece of Sacred Wafer. He blesses her in the name of the Holy Trinity, but—as Jonathan writes—by the time Van Helsing gets to the Holy Ghost “[t]here was a fearful scream which almost froze [their] hearts to hear” (381). The Sacred Wafer burns Mina’s forehead, leaving a permanent unholy mark. Whenever one of the characters looks at her and sees it, he is reminded that she has a profane ‘double’. One of Jonathan’s entries in his journal shows this case: “In the midst of my thought my eye fell on the red scar on my poor darling’s white forehead” (406).

Hypnotism is the second characteristic that differentiates Mina’s case from Lucy’s. What takes place during the hypnosis is a connection between Mina’s two selves. It is done at dawn and sunset, when she is presumably freer from Dracula’s spell, but it is an attempt to reach him, therefore an attempt to awaken her ‘double’, to use their unholy connection to gain access to his whereabouts. Mina and Dracula share a bond, a blood alliance, one that she cannot escape, and her slow transformation and increasing difficulty to be hypnotized are constant reminders of it. This situation causes constant uncanny feelings on the men’s part. Every time she gets out of a trance, or that she shows signs of her ‘other’ self [by not eating, or being too quiet, or sleeping too much] she arouses this uncanny feelings on those who are watching her.

Ultimately, the uncanny feeling relating to Mina and Lucy is always associated with the corruption of an ideal. This ideal of the perfect Victorian woman is perpetuated throughout the novel, by both men and women. Men construct it, and women live by it. Mina and Lucy’s ‘double’ shatter this built-up ideal woman. They transform into powerful, sexualized, un-motherly, daring, and independent women; all opposites of what the patriarchal Victorian society rules estipulate proper women should be and act

like. Lucy and Mina, therefore, could only be viewed as uncanny, for their ‘doubles’ embody the exact reversal of the features they strive to show throughout their lives. When the men come in contact with the transformed women, their first reaction is to freeze in awe. That is why the men seem to be more horrified with the sight of their lovely women as vampires than with the sight of the three female vampires or even the Count himself. After all, it seems, the latter are mere monsters, the real danger is in the ‘perversion’ of their own women.

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