

BRAM STOKER'S *DRACULA*. A STUDY ON THE HUMAN MIND  
AND PARANOID BEHAVIOUR

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The Victorian *fin-de-siècle* experienced the growth of scientific naturalism, and witnessed the birth and development of sciences such as modern psychology, supported by the scientific efforts to unravel the processes of the human mind. Nevertheless, the 1890s were also notable for the participation of educated people in Spiritualism and other occult activities, their interest in folklore of all sorts and the writing of a great corpus of fantasy literature. The aim of this essay is to offer a reading of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* as an example of the dialogue established between science, literature and the study of the supernatural in Victorian England. The novel, as part of the *fin-de-siècle* scientific period, can be interpreted as a conscious inquiry into the functioning of the mind and, most especially, into the aetiology of paranoid behaviour. Thus, Stoker's text becomes a testimony of a mental disorder known as *folie à deux*, or shared madness.

Keywords: Bram Stoker; *Dracula*; *fin-de-siècle*; paranoia; *folie à deux*; vampire

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DRÁCULA DE BRAM STOKER UN ESTUDIO SOBRE LA MENTE HUMANA Y EL  
COMPORTAMIENTO PARANOIDE

*El fin de siglo victoriano experimentó el crecimiento del naturalismo científico, y presenció el nacimiento y desarrollo de ciencias como la psicología moderna, apoyada en los esfuerzos científicos por desenmarañar los procesos de la mente humana. No obstante, la década de 1890 también destacó por la participación de ciudadanos educados en el Espiritualismo y otras actividades ocultistas, por su interés en todo tipo de folclore, y por la creación de un gran corpus de literatura de fantasía. El objetivo de este ensayo es ofrecer una lectura de Drácula de Bram Stoker como ejemplo del diálogo entre ciencia, literatura y el estudio de lo sobrenatural en la Inglaterra victoriana. Como parte del período científico del fin-de-siècle, la novela puede interpretarse como una investigación consciente del funcionamiento de la mente y, en particular, de la etiología del comportamiento paranoide. Así, el texto de Bram Stoker se convierte en testimonio de un trastorno mental llamado folie à deux, o locura compartida.*

*Palabras clave: Bram Stoker; Drácula; fin-de-siècle; paranoia; folie à deux; vampiro*

## 1. Introduction: Science, Spiritualism and Bram Stoker in XIX-century England

More than a hundred years have elapsed since *Dracula* was first published and it still stands out as one of the most influential creations in the world of literature and arts.<sup>1</sup> Appearing in June 1897, Bram Stoker's novel raised the vampire tradition—from previous works such as Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819), James Malcolm Rymer's *Varney the Vampyre: or, The Feast of Blood* (1847) or Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872)—to its highest and most popular summit, and created, at a stroke, one of the greatest myths of Western culture. This epistolary novel was released at the dusk of the nineteenth century, in the so-called *fin-de-siècle*. As several critics have pointed out, this period was characterized by an astonishing development of the different sciences, along with a profound inquiry into the degeneration principles arising from Darwinist postulates (Ledger and Luckhurst 2000; Stiles 2006b). To highlight two new intellectual standpoints, the end of the century experienced the growth of a scientific naturalism, and witnessed the birth and development of modern psychology, with outstanding names such as David Ferrier, John Hughlings Jackson and James Crichton-Browne (founders of the *Brain* journal in 1878), or Sir William Thornley Stoker (Bram Stoker's brother and President of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland).

Additionally, the new discoveries in sciences and the scientific attitude towards life and existence percolated into the lives of the common citizen. Newspapers and periodical publications brought closer to the readers detailed descriptions of scientific reality and burning topics concerning social issues. Henry Mayhew, for instance, displayed an autopsy of the *London Labour and the London Poor* of the metropolis' society, with his articles appearing in *The Morning Chronicle* between 1849 and 1850, while Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins offered their 'realistic' narrations in instalments that kept to precise dates. Narratives with overtly clear chronological sequencing seem to be related to the objective account of events as described in newspapers such as the *Illustrated London News* or the *Illustrated Police News* (which began publication in 1842 and 1864, respectively).<sup>2</sup> Thus, as Anne Stiles affirms, "Victorian intellectual culture permitted a dialogic conversation in which scientific researchers and literary authors were mutually responsive to one another" (2006b: 5).

Nevertheless, Victorian culture and sciences also hid a darker side where the supernatural played an essential role. The 1890s were notable for the participation of

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<sup>2</sup> When *Dracula* was first published in 1897, readers were already familiar with sequenced narrations in newspapers. These narratives included literary fictions such as those of Dickens or Collins, but also real-life accounts of outstanding police cases, such as Jack the Ripper's murders. The case was thoroughly followed by the media which, throughout 1888, published the news of the case, including the letters sent by the murderer to the police (Evans and Skinner 2003).

educated people in Spiritualism and other occult activities, their interest in folklore of all sorts and the writing of a great corpus of fantasy literature (including Stoker's own works). Thus, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of the arch rationalist Sherlock Holmes, believed that spirits could be photographed, as is evinced in *The Coming of the Fairies* (1922). The struggle between the rational scientists and the educated Spiritualists reached the public spheres. As Richard Noakes points out: "In articles in mass circulation periodicals, textbooks, in public lectures and in classroom teaching, Victorian professionalisers and popularisers of science enforced the contrast between science and Spiritualism, and helped represent Spiritualism as beyond the domain of natural enquiry" (in Bown, Burdett and Thurschwell 2004: 24). Hence, mid-Victorian Britain witnessed the appearance of works, such as William Howitt's *The History of the Supernatural* (1863) or Alfred Russel Wallace's *The Scientific Aspect of the Supernatural* (1866), about the supernatural, the Spirit ontology and their relationship with the scientific world.

In this context of communication between Victorian science, fiction and the study of the supernatural, I place the object of analysis of this essay. My aim in the following pages is to offer a reading of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* as an example of the dialogue established between sciences and the supernatural in Victorian England. It is my contention that *Dracula*, as part of the *fin-de-siècle* scientific period, can be interpreted as an inquiry into the functioning of the human mind and, most especially, into the aetiology of paranoid behaviour, thus becoming a literary example of what Castilla del Pino refers to as *folie à deux* (1998: 194). The novel would offer a wonderful recreation of the human mind's processes as they are increasingly affected by paranoid fits and delusions. Consequently, I detach myself from previous analyses of the novel, where the events narrated by the characters are considered as reality inside their own literary diegesis (Stiles 2006a; Almond 2007).<sup>3</sup> And I believe that the events depicted in the characters' diaries may have not happened; they could, rather, be the product of psychological delusions and paranoid behaviour.

Stoker's interest in the development of Psychology has already been highlighted by other critics. Stephanie Moss, for instance, points out the writer's inclination towards "psychology and the mind/body connection" (in Davison and Simpson-Housley 1997: 124), and proves his acquaintance with Freud's earliest book on hysteria, since the Irish writer attended a talk on Freud's theories at a London meeting of the Society for Psychical Research.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> These articles offer excellent analyses of the Dracula myth, Stiles from the point of view of the neurosciences, Almond from a psychoanalytic perspective. Nevertheless, they take for granted the existence of a vampire in the novel, following the testimonies of unreliable narrators such as Jonathan Harker.

<sup>4</sup> This Society's aim was "to discover scientific evidence for Spiritualism" (Davison and Simpson-Housley 1997: 142), and among the publications its members released in its early stages of life we can mention the book *Phantasms of the Living* (1886) and the 'Census of Hallucinations' project (1889-1892), both debating the scientific nature of ghost apparitions (Hill 1918: 117).

Besides, Stoker was also acquainted with the works of the French psychiatrist Jean-Martin Charcot, pioneer in the study of hysteria and mentor of Sigmund Freud, Pierre Janet and William James, at the Parisian hospital of La Salpêtrière. Evidence of this fact can be found in *Dracula* (1993: 247) and in Stoker's *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving* (1906: 316). Interestingly enough, in the third volume of his *Clinical Lectures on Diseases of the Nervous System*, Charcot analyses Spiritualism's alarming influence over hysteria-prone individuals, and discusses the outstanding case of what he calls "the epidemic of hysteria" of 1884 (Charcot 1889: 198-206). In the account of this case, a family becomes 'infected' by hysteria, as parents and children share hallucinations and hysterical fits, after having attended Spiritualist séances for long periods of time.

Hence, as Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst explain, "the *fin-de-siècle* enthusiasm for translating all problems into scientific terminology was the product . . . of a group of brilliant workers in science . . . This group contested theological explanations of the natural world with an unapologetically secular scientific naturalism" (2000: 221). For these scientists, the fantastic, the marvellous, as well as the religious, could be explained in rational terms. Consequently, placing Stoker inside this trend of thinkers would imply that the supernatural *per se*, *Dracula* as a vampire, cannot exist as a marvellous creature, but as a mental phenomenon that could be explained in rational terms. The rationality that I propose for the scientific explanation of the novel relies on the consideration of the different diaries as accounts of the characters' paranoid experiences. Thus, the information they give and share creates a testimony of their own mental disorder, and relates the text with the writing of psychological reports.

## 2. Harker, Schreber and the development of paranoia

In this vein, we can establish a comparison between Stoker's text and an authentic example of a psychological report. In 1903, Judge Schreber published *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, "in which he described an illness since quoted as an outstanding example of paranoid schizophrenia and one which supports psychoanalytical explanations of the development of paranoia" (Stanley 1986: 236). His case became famous in 1911, when it was included in Freud's collection of case histories, 'Psychoanalytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)' (1991: 129-223).

Judge Schreber, ill at the age of 42, described the details of his own suffering, affected by delusions and hallucinations. According to his report, paranoia follows six different stages in its evolution: firstly, hypochondriac ideas; secondly, feelings of being chased and persecuted (isolated sensory hallucinations). These lead to the third and fourth stages, namely, hypersensibility to light and noise, and visual and hearing hallucinations. The fifth and sixth stages appear in combination: suicidal ideas, and mystic and religious manias (talking with God; harassment by demons; witnessing miraculous appearances; perceiving divine music; or believing that the end of the world is near).

If we compare Judge Schreber's account with Jonathan Harker's journey to Transylvania, we realise that *Dracula's* first part seems to fit the pattern of the development of paranoia. The young lawyer's behaviour turns from the absolute scepticism of a rational mind into a presumed suicide while trying to escape from the Devil's claws of the Count.

His very first words (and, therefore, the very beginning of the novel) present objective information, as a disembodied omniscient narrator that informs about train schedules: "Left Munich at 8.35 p.m. on 1<sup>st</sup> May, arriving at Vienna early next morning; should have arrived at 6.46, but train was an hour late" (1993: 7). Nevertheless, his self-assurance and objectivity are quickly changed to a strange, different mood that he cannot understand: "Whether it is the old lady's fear, or the many ghostly traditions of this place, or the crucifix itself, I do not know, but I am not feeling nearly *as easy in my mind as usual*. If this book should ever reach Mina before I do, let it bring my goodbye" (1993: 12, emphasis added). Interestingly enough, in the opening pages of the story, the lawyer already announces his future demise, as his mind is starting to behave in an insane way. Apparently, Harker is entering the first stage of paranoia: hypochondriac ideas. As an educated rationalist of the end of the century, he attempts to find objective agents for his mental state; thus, he blames the old lady, the crucifix, or the general superstition, as he confesses: "It was within a few minutes of midnight. This gave me a sort of shock, for I suppose the general superstition about midnight was increased by my recent experiences" (1993: 20).

The following stage of paranoia comes equally soon during his stay with the Count. With no other reason apart from his fear of being in a foreign country, his mind is now immersed in a persecution mania. Needless to say, this nervous state leads to a suffocating feeling of imprisonment, and Harker gives voice to his condition out loud: "The Castle is a veritable prison, and I am a prisoner" (1993: 39). Unaware of Harker's unbalanced condition, Count Dracula, an eccentric elderly man, has been the perfect host to this moment of their relationship. The decaying aristocrat has looked after his guest's comfort and, in a certain sense, he has become the lawyer's butler, caring for his luggage (1993: 26), and even making his bed (1993: 40), for "there were no servants in the house" (1993: 41).

Nevertheless, his paranoid guest sees in Dracula the threatening figure chasing him. Harker distrusts the Count, so he aims to write short letters, in the belief that Dracula will read them. Thus, he affirms in his diary: "I understood as well as if he had spoken that I should be careful what I wrote, for he would be able to read it. So I determined to write only formal notes now" (1993: 46).

The lawyer's personal letters are to provoke Dracula's anger when Harker tries to secretly send two unsigned letters by means of the Szgany (1993: 59-60). The Count is given these letters and discovers Harker's betrayal of his Transylvanian hospitality. Nevertheless, Dracula apologizes for having read them. In fact, the old man should not be blamed. Dracula, as the owner of the castle, has the right and duty to open letters without identification. His words are telling: "Your letters are sacred to me. Your pardon, my friend, that unknowingly [there was no name in the envelope] I did break the seal" (1993: 60). This incident may have, at least, two different interpretations: on the one hand, we can believe Harker's manias and think that Dracula is trying to

prevent him from escaping. Seen thus, the Count would be an evil creature who tries to imprison Jonathan. It is my contention that this is the paranoid interpretation, as it is emphasised by the lawyer's writing.

On the other hand, Dracula's dealing with the letters may be seen as reasonable behaviour. An old man who has offered his hospitality and home to a foreigner finds two letters: one signed by Jonathan and addressed to Peter Hawkins (Harker's boss); and an unsigned letter that arouses Dracula's anger. In his own words: "The other [letter] is a vile thing, an outrage upon friendship and hospitality! It is not signed. Well! So it cannot matter to us" (1993: 60). This said, he burns the letter to ashes. Obviously, all the tension emerges from Harker's mind, as there is nothing to blame Dracula for. He is the owner of the Castle, and has given food and shelter to the foreign lawyer. And in return, he has received this affront to his 'friendship'. Surprising as it may seem, Dracula does not get mad at the young man. He obviously knows that Jonathan wrote the second letter. However, he prefers to forget about the incident, and, later on, when he returns to Harker's room, "he was very courteous and very cheery in his manner" (1993: 60).

Hence, it seems important to emphasise that, at this early point in the narrative, Harker, as the only source of focalization, depicts the Count as a Machiavellian, mischievous figure (with statements such as "the dark look came into his face, and his eyes blazed wickedly" [1993: 60] or "this looked like some new scheme of villainy" [1993: 61]). The attentive reader should ask him/herself whether we can really trust his words. As stated before, he was not "feeling nearly as easy in [his] mind as usual" (1993: 12). And as I am trying to prove, he is in the midst of a paranoid process. Therefore, he is far from being a reliable narrator.

Eventually, Harker acknowledges his own nervous disorder: "I am beginning to feel this nocturnal existence tell on me. It is destroying my nerve. I start at my own shadow, and am full of all sorts of horrible imaginings" (1993: 48). His fear-laden mind is playing horrible tricks. Nevertheless, after this recognition of his illness, the reader is supposed to believe one of the few explicit supernatural events: Dracula crawls down the castle wall from his window, "just as a lizard moves along the wall" (1993: 49). Although he cannot see his face, Harker knows that the shadow is a reptilian Dracula moving lizard-like towards some evil villainy.

As Judge Schreber clearly stated throughout his description of the complete case, for a paranoid patient, hallucinations appear to be absolutely real. Thus, following the progression of the mental disorder, we may say that Jonathan Harker has entered the fourth stage of paranoia: visual and auditive hallucinations. The depiction of Dracula's world in his journal may be said to refer simply to the pathological world of his mind, a world that he, as a paranoid, completely believes in.

Dr Carlos Castilla del Pino's analyses of hallucinations are very revealing for the consideration of Harker's condition. Castilla del Pino affirms that:

En la alucinación, en el ensueño, en algunos instantes de sobrecarga emocional intensa [such as Harker's situation], los objetos internos, las representaciones (de un sonido, de una voz humana, de alguna figura humana o de animal, de algún olor o sabor), salen del espacio interno que les corresponde y son ubicados en el mundo exterior. (1998: 32)<sup>5</sup>

The patient projects the fears hidden inside his mind to the outside world, and thus perceives a deceit created by his own disorder. Dr Castilla also points out the fact that the delirious subject does not make a temporal mistake, but rather, lives in the mistake; the paranoid subject dwells in an absolute failure to recognise himself or his surroundings. The paranoid grants these beliefs the status of evidence and truth (1998: 32).

Thus, Harker's reality, recorded by himself in his journal, may be said to be the paranoid projection of his unbalanced mind. Behaving in the same way as Schreber, Harker writes down his own case, as he relentlessly enters the fourth stage of paranoia. Immersed in his own delusion, the young lawyer's hallucinations are bound to continue as his mental disorder progresses. Harker's delusive world strengthens as the reader reaches the ending of chapter III, when he is supposed to meet the three female vampires. In this episode, the boundaries between reality, fantasy and dreams are blurred, as he notes in his journal: "I suppose I must have fallen asleep; I hope so" (1993: 52). But for him this event is also part of his reality and, thus, real in his paranoid world. His ability to witness the pseudo-pornographic scene "perfectly under the lashes" (1993: 54) confirms him as an unreliable narrator.

As the narrative unfolds towards the end of this first part, we can appreciate another step forward in Harker's paranoid development. As stated before, the fifth and sixth stages of paranoia appear together. These include suicidal ideas and megalomania (talking with God or becoming a divine figure). At one point (1993: 65), the young lawyer willingly tries to become the divine figure that Dracula embodies in his mind. By imitating the monster's acts, he intends to flee the castle through the window: "I have seen him myself crawl from his window; why should not I imitate him, and go in by his window?" (1993: 65).

Harker follows his relentless progress and enters the final stage of his mental disorder at the end of chapter IV, thus closing the first part of the novel. His mind plunges him into trying to commit suicide as a way of escaping from his own (mental) reality. His delusive world has become so hostile and threatening that his only means to escape is death. Hence, a suicidal urge pushes him to jump through the window: "At least God's mercy is better than that of these monsters, and the precipice is steep and high. At its foot a man may sleep—as a man. Goodbye, all! Mina!" (1993: 73). Undeniably, he expects death at the bottom of the precipice to set him free from such a bizarre reality.

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<sup>5</sup> 'In hallucinations, in dream fantasies, at certain moments of intense emotional overload [such as Harker's situation], the internal objects, the representations (of a sound, of a human voice, of a human or animal figure, of a certain smell or taste), escape from the internal space where they belong and are placed in the outside world' (my translation).

Castilla del Pino explains that any delirium or mania is similar to any other non-delirious *Weltanschauung* (world conception), in the sense that the paranoid subject offers an irrational explanation that becomes rational in its own delusion. The patient does not leave any door open, no problems without solution, once the paranoia is strongly articulated (1998: 133). Harker's world of obscene monsters and menacing vampires can be considered real just in terms of the lawyer's unbalanced perception. Therefore, the attentive reader can perceive the progressive degeneration of the character's mental state, fitting the evolution pattern of a case of hallucination-based paranoia. Consequently, his journal's notes (the first four chapters in the novel) can be read as a representation of the evolution of the six stages of paranoia and, hence, the description of a diegesis that exists only inside the character's insanity.

Keeping these ideas in mind is essential for the understanding of this reading of *Dracula*. Harker's journal is to influence the rest of the characters' behaviour; and, additionally, at the end of the novel, the reader discovers that both he and Mina are the fictional editors of the bundle of journals, notes and diaries that constitute the narration.

### 3. Van Helsing, the Crew of Light and *folie à deux*

This takes us to the third section of my essay: Harker's journal in relationship with the Crew of Light, and Van Helsing's role in spreading the 'disease'. Surprisingly enough if we consider that the Crew of Light is a group of rational, well-educated, Victorian gentlemen, the lawyer's journal is taken seriously, as absolute reality, and both Van Helsing and Dr Seward label the lawyer's testimony as a "wonderful diary" (1993: 241, 285, respectively). The paranoid process that Harker has undergone in Transylvania can also be perceived in the text as a whole, as the Crew of Light moves forward through every stage of paranoid development. However, now the case not only involves a single patient, but a collectivity,<sup>6</sup> therefore, certain differences will become apparent between the characters.

Paranoia has been classified according to different types of hallucination. According to Mesa Cid (1999: 103), there are three basic types of hallucinatory experience: sensitive hallucination, hallucinosis, and pseudo-hallucination (or psychic hallucination). In sensitive hallucinations, the perceived 'something' is granted a high quality and fidelity of reality, through a precise sensory channel (that is, what is perceived seems to be produced outside the subject, in objective space). The patient is completely convinced of the reality of the situation, and his behaviour reacts to that experience. Applying this type to the present study, Jonathan Harker would perfectly fit this classification. In his adventures at Dracula's castle, he actually describes his reactions towards his delusions.

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<sup>6</sup> As stated in the analysis of Harker's paranoid evolution, the last stages of this disorder involve the creation of delusions of mystic nature and megalomania. As the name of the group implies, *the Crew of Light* already believes they are God's chosen ones to destroy the Devil's spawn, embodied in Count Dracula the vampire. Their own name is a symptom of the final stages of their mental disorder.

In hallucinosis, the second type of hallucinatory experiences, the subject perceives the delusion with enormous realism, through a precise sensory channel. His reaction answers the experience, although the patient is not completely convinced of the perceived reality. He understands it, rather, as something unreal and absurd; he does not actually believe what is perceived, but *pretends* that it is real. This type is exemplified by Dr Seward, who enters Van Helsing's 'game', although he tends to introduce rational comments in the novel: "I sometimes think we must be all mad and that we shall take to sanity in strait-waistcoats" (1993: 353).

Finally, the third type, pseudohallucination (or psychic hallucination), means that the subject perceives that reality more vaguely, not through the senses, but feeling it inside the mind. Nevertheless, the patient's experience of these hallucinations is real, and his behaviour is congruent to the hallucinatory *Weltanschauung*. Obviously, in this third type, Mina, the character *mentally* bound up with Dracula, can be included.

The protagonists of the novel seem to fit the different types of paranoia. Thus, "one is tempted to propose that the vampire hunters . . . act like a posse of deluded zealots and religious fanatics" (Smaji 2009: 53-54). Nevertheless, I have not mentioned where Abraham Van Helsing could be placed. Whereas the rest of the characters may be said to become 'infected' by paranoia, it is my contention that Van Helsing is, in fact, the source of the infection, the origin of "the epidemic of hysteria", as Charcot would put it (1889: 199). The complete fantasy world, where vampires crawl down castle walls and purchase lands in foreign countries, seems to take root in the Dutch doctor's paranoid mind.

Van Helsing's insanity is clearly depicted by Dr Seward in his diary. At the end of chapter XIII, the Dutch doctor suffers a hysterical fit after Lucy's burial:

The moment we [Van Helsing and Seward] were alone in the carriage he gave way to a regular fit of hysterics. He had denied to me since that it was hysterics, and insisted that it was only his sense of humour asserting itself under very terrible conditions. He laughed till he cried, and I had to draw down the blinds lest anyone should see us and misjudge; and then he cried till he laughed again; and laughed and cried together, just as a woman does. (Stoker 1993: 225)

Van Helsing's behaviour, haunted by the power of "King Laugh" (1993: 226), shows the drives and ravings of a madman. Despite his efforts to conceal his condition, Seward, a doctor acquainted with Charcot's studies of hysteria (as evinced on page 247), diagnoses him with a "regular fit of hysterics" (1993: 225).

However, the Dutch Professor grants authenticity to the delusive existence of the vampire, and convinces the Crew of Light of their Messianic duty to save the world. Thus, after this proof of Van Helsing's perturbed condition, he asks Seward "to believe in things that [he] cannot" (1993: 249), and even persuades Arthur to "cut off the head of dead Miss Lucy" (1993: 265), his deceased fiancée. Additionally, he also gives reality to Harker's diary after the young man had considered the experience as the product of a mental breakdown (or a brain fever). In a letter from Van Helsing to Mina, one of the few examples of the Dutch doctor's voice in the novel, he affirms: "I have read your husband's so wonderful diary. You may sleep without doubt. Strange and terrible as it is, it is *true!*" (1993: 241, emphasis in the original). Taking advantage of Harker's mental

weakness, of Seward's cerebral exhaustion (1993: 165) and Mina's emotional situation (after Lucy's tragic demise), Van Helsing's mind creates not only the Crew of Light, but also the *Weltanschauung* where all the characters are dragged to.

Psychiatry also has a name for these cases of induced paranoia. In psychiatric terms, the Crew of Light would be an outstanding example of *folie à deux*, a shared psychotic disorder that works by means of induced delusive ideas. In 1877, the French psychiatrists Ernest-Charles Lasègue and Jean-Pierre Falret coined the term for those cases in which a delirious paranoid subject convinces another (or others) of the reality of his hallucinations and, therefore, the sane individual does not consider the paranoid either delirious or insane (Castilla del Pino 1998: 194).

*Folie à deux* inevitably involves two subjects: a mentally insane patient, and an induced individual who is convinced by the first of the reality of his hallucinations. Taking this concept to the pages of Bram Stoker's text, I contend that the Dutch doctor plays the prominent role of being the creator of the paranoid reality.<sup>7</sup> Van Helsing holds all the information about Count Dracula and vampirism and introduces the ideas about vampires and Dracula's myth, even before Lucy's tragic death. In addition, he even seems to control the Count's behaviour, anticipating all his movements, when Dracula, scared to 'death', is forced to flee from the Crew of Light and returns to his homeland at the closure of the story. Had Van Helsing's theories about vampires (1993: 306) been true, the Count could have destroyed them easily with his impressive supernatural abilities. Nevertheless, he escapes, frightened by the Crew of Light, in an interestingly not quite vampirish fashion.

Thus, Dracula, the ancient and evil king of the un-dead, may not exist outside Van Helsing's perturbed mind. Considered under the light of the *folie à deux* or, in this case, *folie à plusieurs* (madness of many), the vampire belongs to the delusive world built by the unbalanced imagination of the Crew of Light. Van Helsing spreads the paranoid seed among the living, as he infects the rest of the characters with the overwhelming information that he gives. Hence, as he imposes his delusive reality over the rest of the characters, we may consider their notes and diaries as examples of this type of induced psychosis.

As Castilla del Pino explains: "El inducido no delira y no es enfermo (mental), sino que por su ingenuidad, buena fe, o por su vinculación afectiva con el delirante o con el tema mismo del delirio, considera que tiene razón [...] El inducido no es delirante, sino creyente" (1998: 195).<sup>8</sup> In this reading of *Dracula*, Van Helsing could be said to be the insane mind that moves the narration towards the realms of fantasy and paranoia, towards vampires and demons. The rest of the members of the Crew (among them, a mentally weakened Harker and the incredulous scientific Seward) are unconsciously persuaded to share that delusive reality, as they rely on the Dutch doctor's information.

<sup>7</sup> Stoker's original intention of including a mad doctor in the novel is clear in his notes for the development of *Dracula*'s plot (Eighteen-Bisang and Miller 2008: 14-15).

<sup>8</sup> "The induced subject is neither delirious nor insane, but due to his naivety, good faith, or emotional bond with the delirious patient or with the subject of the delirium itself, he considers the paranoid to be right . . . The induced subject is not delirious, but a believer' (my translation).

In fact, the spreading of paranoia among the Crew of Light is directly related to an obsession with sharing information. In order to fulfil their Messianic mission to free the Earth from the evil vampire, Mina Harker, always under the Dutch doctor's close guidance,<sup>9</sup> states a declaration of principles: "Because in the struggle which we have before us to rid the Earth of this horrible monster we must have all the knowledge" (1993: 286). Sharing information, thus, becomes the basic principle that gives cohesion to their quest, and strengthens Van Helsing's unbalanced conception of reality.

Therefore, as soon as this principle is broken, the Crew's reality is threatened. Due to the failure to sustain their paranoid reality, Mina is bound to succumb to Dracula's attack when she is left apart from the rest of the group (chapter XXI). As she has been prevented from sharing the information about Dracula, she is weakened against the powers of the vampire (which are, in fact, the powers of her own mental condition).

In psychiatric terms, Castilla del Pino explains that paranoid patients feel a compulsion to gather information in order to maintain their confidence in the delusive reality. He expresses this principle with the following equation (1998: 88):  $+Inf / -Inf = K$ , where  $+Inf$  stands for the information that is already shared;  $-Inf$  is the information that is unknown; and  $K$  is the subject's degree of confidence. The more information the characters share, the higher the degree of confidence they will have on each other, and regarding the reality that is taking place inside their minds.

In chapter XXI there is a flaw in this equation concerning the variable  $-Inf$ , as Mina is excluded from the Crew of Light. The young woman is bound to suffer from a decrease in confidence ( $-K$ ) and, therefore, an increase in the dangers coming from the paranoid world (Dracula's attack, in the delusive ontology, and mental breakdown, in the phenomenological reality).

Consequently, the characters are eager to share their personal diaries and notes, as this helps them feel safe against the vampire's threat. Nevertheless, the reader has to be aware that such information cannot always be considered reliable, as it is mostly based on personal diaries, subjective perceptions or even translations (such as the Log of the Demeter, translated by "a clerk of the Russian consul" [1993: 109]). As soon as the protagonists compulsively share all their knowledge, the paranoid interpretation of reality (where evil vampires from foreign countries seduce and murder young and beautiful ladies and control young men's wills) starts to spread inside their minds. The characters convince each other of the delusive reality, sharing the madness (*folie à plusieurs*) that initially originated after Van Helsing's reading of Harker's journal. Thus, slowly but surely, Van Helsing's paranoid diegesis increasingly prevails over the real world.

Not surprisingly, the Dutch doctor's testimony will appear in the novel to bear witness of overtly supernatural events. To mention some examples, he first describes Dracula's abilities as a vampire (1993: 307-08); then he narrates how he had to mark Mina's forehead with a piece of sacred wafer (1993: 381); and afterwards, in the final

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<sup>9</sup> Van Helsing, as a vampire-like figure, seems to control Mina's and Jonathan's acts and will, as she affirms: "Jonathan and I have been working day and night since Professor Van Helsing saw us" (1993: 286). The Dutch doctor gives explanation and convinces them that the lawyer's delusions are real, thus triggering off all their subsequent actions.

memorandum, he relates how the three female vampires are destroyed (1993: 466). Interestingly enough, there is no other witness of these supernatural events, and once again, we have to believe the words of a man who has granted reliability to Harker's text (although it may be proved to describe the development of a mental disorder).

Van Helsing's words seem to offer the clue for this reading: "It is this very obliquity of thought and memory which makes mental disease such a fascinating study. Perhaps I may gain more knowledge out of the folly of this madman than I shall from the teaching of the most wise" (1993: 329). The Dutch doctor apparently presents here the key for this analysis of *Dracula*: Stoker's text as a study of 'madmen' and their 'follies', offered to the reader by means of the testimonies that come from unbalanced minds.

However, the attentive reader may realise that certain events in the novel go beyond the delusive world and affect the characters' phenomenological reality. For instance, Lucy's death is a 'real' event in the diegesis of the novel. If we are reluctant to accept the involvement of the supernatural, and we do not believe that she may have become Dracula's victim, we should try to find a rational explanation for her tragic demise. It is clear that this explanation will involve a murderer in the Crew of Light.

Lucy's memorandum, in chapter XI, gives a wonderful account of the events that took place on the fateful night of her death. From her narration, I would like to draw attention to two aspects that may help us discover a possible suspect for the young lady's murder. On the one hand, we can highlight the fact that the murderer employed laudanum to drug the servants. As Lucy explains, the four servants "lay helpless on the floor, breathing heavily. The decanter of sherry was on the table half full, but there was a queer, acrid smell about. I was suspicious, and examined the decanter. It smelt of laudanum, and looking on the sideboard, I found that the bottle which Mother's doctor uses for her . . . was empty" (1993: 187). Dracula, the vampire, is blamed for Lucy's death, but it seems important to remember here his supernatural powers (as Van Helsing explained them): "He can come in mist which he create (*sic*). . . He come on moonlight rays as elemental dust . . . He become so small . . . He can, when once he find his way, come out from anything or into anything, no matter how close it be bound or even fused with fire, solder you call it. He can see in the dark, no small power this, in a world which is one half shut from the light" (1993: 308).

It is my contention that, so powerful a creature as Dracula would not have needed to employ laudanum to reach the young woman in her house. The vampire could have become elemental dust and slipped down the door while she was sleeping (as is implied at one point [1993: 186]) and there would have been no need to use such a *human* strategy as poisoning the servants. Thus, if we take Dracula out of the picture because of the rudimentary means of housebreaking, there are two other characters that may come to mind. These are Seward and Van Helsing, the two doctors in the novel. As physicians to the young woman, they both knew about the existence of the mother's bottle of laudanum.

The second aspect to be highlighted from Lucy's account is the presence of a grey wolf. The same wolf is supposed to have escaped that very night (17 September) from the Zoological Gardens, leaving "the rails broken and twisted about and the cage empty" (1993: 177). The animal definitely received some help in breaking the bars of its cage, as it could not possibly break them on its own. The distortion of the bars of the

wolf's cage finds a parallel event that is directly related to Lucy's death, and involves both Seward and, most especially, Van Helsing. When both doctors arrive at Lucy's house the following morning, they are forced to cut the iron bars of one window in order to enter. As Seward explains in his diary, Van Helsing "took a small surgical saw from his case, and handing it to me, pointed to the iron bars which guarded the window. I attacked them at once and had very soon cut through three of them" (1993: 190). Thus, the text seems to create a parallelism between the distortion of the wolf's cage and the way both doctors enter Lucy's house. Taking this parallelism to a possible interpretation, we may think that the Dutch doctor could have released the wild animal with his surgical saw, and, in this vein, he may have also poisoned the servants in order to reach Lucy on the night of her murder.

It would be too far-fetched a conclusion to accuse the Dutch doctor of Lucy's murder, because there is not enough evidence. Nevertheless, this very idea also crosses Dr Seward's mind, as he records it in the entry on 28 September of his diary:

I have no doubt that *he* [Van Helsing] *believes it all*. I wonder if his mind can have become in any way unhinged . . . *Is it possible that the Professor can have done it himself?* He is so abnormally clever that if he went off his head he would carry out his intent with regard to some fixed idea in a wonderful way. I am loath to think it, and indeed it would be almost as great a marvel as the other to find that *Van Helsing was mad*; but anyhow I shall watch him carefully. I may get some light on the mystery. (1993: 262, emphasis added)

Neither Seward nor the reader can reach conclusive proofs of Van Helsing's acts. All we can grasp are plausible conjectures in the quest to gain access to the 'real events', so as to escape from Van Helsing's delusive reality. Besides, the reader of *Dracula* is never offered the personal notes of the Dutch doctor, except for very specific examples. Thus, we may never get to know the explanation for these supernatural, and sometimes contradictory, events.

It may be interesting to remember here that Bram Stoker, in 1910, published his book *Famous Impostors*, in which he wonderfully unveiled the real identity of historical impostors, from the mythical figure of the Wandering Jew to Perkin Warbek. Applying Stoker's own words to this analysis of Van Helsing's figure, we could say that "if it be true, its investigation will tend to disclose the greatest imposture known to history; and to this end no honest means should be neglected" (1910: ix).

#### 4. Dissecting the sources

Having analysed Harker's paranoid behaviour in Transylvania and Van Helsing's infectious *folie à plusieurs*, we can move on to the last section of this essay: the textual consideration of letters, journals and diaries as reliable texts. According to 'traditional' readings of the novel (such as William Patrick Day 1985, Ken Gelder 1994, David Punter 1996 or Robert Mighall 1998, among others), *Dracula* can be considered as a bundle of diaries and letters, arranged according to the aim of an unknown and objective editor. The novel, then, has the form of an epistolary narrative, similar to

Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747-9) or Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778). The reader would be offered a first-person acquaintance of the characters' personal experiences that have been compiled years after the events have taken place.

"Seven years ago we all went through the flames" are Jonathan Harker's first words in the final note (1993: 485). This note, like the paragraph at the very beginning of the novel (before the first journal entry), is not part of any character's diary. It is directly addressed to the reader by the fictional editor/compiler of the different testimonies. Jonathan Harker, the character that signs that final note and, therefore, proves to be the fictional editor, introduces the book with the following words: "How these papers have been placed in sequence will be made manifest in the reading of them. All needless matters have been eliminated, so that a history almost at variance with the possibilities of latter-day belief may stand forth as simple fact" (1993: 6).

An objective editor is supposed to offer a certain degree of reliability and truthfulness, as he or she grants authenticity to the story. The editor's claims of objectivity imply that his figure should be foreign to the story narrated (a heterodiegetic character), or a trustworthy subject inside the diegesis. According to Meir Sternberg, the editor in a novel should provide an objective point of view, similar to that of a historian (1978: 45). However, as the reader reaches the end of Stoker's text, he or she will discover Harker's unaddressed note, and the character's role as editor of the bundle of testimonies.

The unbalanced lawyer suffering from hallucinations, paranoia and suicidal fits is, then, supposed to be the objective editor of different diaries that narrate the supernatural story of an evil vampire from the land beyond the forest. Thus, we may affirm that Harker's task as editor of *Dracula* is similar to Van Helsing's role in spreading paranoia. In a metafictional leap, Harker is to infect the reader and make him or her believe in the existence of vampires, thus breeding a new generation of paranoid readers imbued in a *folie à deux* hallucination.

In this vein, other aspects of the novel emphasise the scent of distrust and ambiguity that pervades the complete narration. For instance, Harker acknowledges in his final note that "in all the mass of material of which the record is composed, there is *hardly one authentic document*" (1993: 486, emphasis added). The notion of authenticity is put to the test, especially when the editors, a proved paranoid patient and his delirium-induced wife, confess to having rewritten and, therefore, manipulated the original texts. "And so", Stoker wrote somewhere else, "after all, coming from this source it is to be accepted with exceeding care—not to say doubt" (1910: 110).

Another element which may be said to problematise the concept of truth in *Dracula* is the fact that these diaries were written to be read by the rest of the Crew of Light. Meir Sternberg analyses the narrative structures of diaries and argues that:

The strongest realistic motivation for deviations from the fabula is to be found in the narrative form that is characterized by an unselfconscious as well as restricted narrator, namely, the diary. Nobody can blame the diarist for withholding expositional material since he is generally *unaware of the existence of any prospective reader* and does not regard what he is writing as a story intended for publication. On the contrary, what often induces the narrator to be absolutely frank with himself is the reassuring consideration that

nobody else is ever going to violate the privacy of his writings. (1978: 277; emphasis added)

The attitude of a diary's narrator may be reliable as long as he is conscious of the "privacy of his writings" and "unaware of the existence of any prospective reader". Contrariwise, in *Dracula* the characters do not write for themselves. Their aim is to share their diaries with the rest of the Crew, thus increasing the level of confidence in the delusive reality (K). We may affirm that theirs are not 'real' diaries, but first-person narratives consciously addressed to an audience.

Stoker's masterpiece seems to consciously play with these ambiguities between scientific objective truth and subjective interpretations of phenomenological events. As Carol A. Senf has wonderfully explained, Stoker's literary, fantasy world dialogues with scientific innovations of his times and, therefore, "readers would be wise to pay particular attention to the way that Stoker handles both Gothic materials and science" (2002: 17). The discussion between science and Spiritualism has been introduced in this essay by means of the analysis of paranoid behaviour and reliability of the characters. However, the text also offers clues that connect these two spheres with its own literary ontology.

Intertextual presences throughout the narrative emphasise the existence of different readings at the same time. For instance, the supernatural reading of the text (the paranoid one, according to this essay) may be said to be reinforced by Van Helsing's reference to the Hungarian-born linguist and orientalist Arminius Vambéry, whose works about vampire folklore Stoker actually employed for the writing of *Dracula* (1993: 309).

The text, nonetheless, also offers other intertextual references that support the reading of the novel as a study of mental disorders. The most outstanding example is made up by several references to William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Jonathan Harker, Lucy and Dr Seward allude to this masterpiece (1993: 44 and 52, 173, 348, respectively), where the prince of Denmark pretends to be mentally insane in the eyes of the rest of the characters, whereas the external audience is consciously aware of his plot and mental condition. Hence, whereas Shakespeare presents a sane character for the audience, but is nevertheless insane for the rest of the characters, Stoker reverses the situation. The characters in *Dracula* may be proved unbalanced in their delusive world, although they consider themselves rightfully sane. Thus, the boundaries between reality, dream, fantasy and paranoia are blurred in a world in which the four of them combine to create a collective, delusive monster embodied in the figure of Dracula, the vampire.

## 5. Concluding remarks

The Quixotic "old knights of the Cross" (1993: 412) that make up the Crew of Light can be seen as poor insane, mental patients, who dwell in a delusive reality created by their own fears and failure to prevail over Van Helsing's delusions. Harker's adventures in Transylvania seem to fit the pattern of evolution of a case of paranoia, exemplified by Judge Schreber's account. When the young lawyer returns to England, Van Helsing will convince (induce) him and the rest of the community to believe in the existence of

vampires and demons. In this way, they not only create the Crew of Light to destroy the un-dead monster, but, at the same time, they also exemplify the XIX-century psychiatric concept of shared madness, or *folie à deux*.

Thus, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* proves to be an excellent example of a literary masterpiece, in that it may be said to be always open to new readings and interpretations. Reading *Dracula* as a study of the human mind and how paranoia can affect a collectivity makes sense if we take into account the historical and cultural context in which it was created. Previous readings of the novel have offered interpretations of the meaning of the vampire as a symbol. In this essay, I have proposed a different way of reading the text. Needless to say, it is not my aim to affirm that the creator of one of the greatest cultural myths was a failed Dostoyevsky, as none of his readers saw that he was analysing the inside of his characters' minds. Rather to the contrary, the greatest asset of Stoker's novel offers a wonderful example of the dialogue established between science, Spiritualism and literature at the end of the nineteenth century, while, at the same time, being capable of engaging twenty-first century readers' interest.

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