The Professor and the Typist: 
Characterisation and Plot Devices in *Dracula*

Erica Friberg
Bachelor Essay
Literature
Fall 2011
Supervisor: Irina Rasmussen
Goloubeva
Abstract

*Dracula* is a novel that has been said to have flat and uninteresting characters. Only two characters have been acknowledged as having depth, Wilhelmina Harker and Abraham Van Helsing. However, no extensive research has been done to determine what it is that makes them complex, leaving a gap in the understanding of *Dracula*. This essay will appraise the significance of the two characters to the novel by examining how they are characterised and by studying their importance to the plot. This allows for a new perspective on *Dracula* that revises the standard generic definition of the novel as Gothic. The stereotypical characters in Gothic novels are replaced with more intricate characters and subtleties. For instance, this essay argues that one can find Mina an ambiguous character who is stuck following rules she despises, and Van Helsing might be hiding his fear of Mina behind the mask of appreciation. Furthermore, the importance of Mina and Van Helsing to the plot, shown in several ways where the most prominent one is their associations with knowledge, changes what characters are the real protagonists of *Dracula* and shows another difference to the traditional Gothic novel. This essay reveals that there are holes in the *Dracula* research, and that many new readings can still be found. If one resists looking at the novel as purely Gothic, there are nuances that show that it does not quite fit the genre, and characterisation is one aspect that clearly differs.

**Keywords:** *Dracula*; characters; characterisation; Mina; Van Helsing
Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* has for a long time been discussed in the light of the Victorian society. Critics appear to favour topics that concern the characters' sexuality or Dracula's defeat by the utilisation of modern equipment; the typewriter and the phonograph. While these focuses are quite different from each other, they still hold something in common: they are, in some ways, concerned with the novel's characters. However, character analysis is not central to either approach. Why has character analysis been disregarded?

One answer could be that the standard perception of the Gothic genre novel is that its characters lack depth and development. A view that is shared by many scholars is that Stoker's characters are flat and uninteresting. David Gates, for instance, believes that “the four men [Seward, Godalming, Morris and Jonathan] in *Dracula*, have all the standard virtues, novices, and all the depth of character of cardboard figures” (sic) (31). He takes it a step further as he proclaims that the men are “practically indistinguishable from each other in terms of character” (36), because they share the same purpose, which is to fall in love with Lucy and later on try to avenge her death (37). While Seward, Godalming, Morris and Jonathan are seen as flat, critics differ in their opinions regarding Mina and Van Helsing. David Seed and Carol A. Senf are two critics who have made their standpoints clear. The former thinks that “the characters of all the protagonists except Mina are superficial and easy to grasp” (70), clearly believing that Wilhelmina Harker has a deeper and more complex character than the rest of the protagonists. Senf, however, disagrees with this and is of the opinion that “[w]ith the exception of Dr. Van Helsing, all the central characters are youthful and inexperienced - two dimensional characters whose only distinguishing characteristics are their names and their professions” (“The Unseen
This split in opinions creates an interesting question: are Mina and Van Helsing both flat characters, or do they have depth? Since none of the scholars elaborate their views, the topic is up for discussion.

This essay suggests that both Mina and Van Helsing are complex characters. A look at the critical material written about Mina hints at her depth as a character, as the contradicting ideas critics hold regarding Mina show a difficulty in understanding her. The most distinguished example is the discussion on what Mina's character represents. While “Stephanie Demetrakopoulos describes Stoker as a feminist […] [a]t the other extreme [is] Judith Roth, who argues that 'hostility toward female sexuality' contributes to the popularity of the novel” (Senf, “Stoker's Response” 33). Van Helsing's case is somewhat different, as there is little material to be found that deals directly with him, and the critics' views are not as contradictory as the readings of Mina. As it has been suggested that he is a complex character, the subject obviously needs a further examination. Due to these gaps in the analysis of Dracula characters, I will put focus on Mina and Van Helsing as characters and explore their depth.

Why are these two characters more acknowledged than the rest? They are important to the novel in more aspects than their depth. A closer look at Dracula's plot reveals that most of the characters are not actually that important to its development. As is typical of Gothic novels, Seward, Godalming and Morris are Gothic types that were created for the purpose of slaying the vampire. While Jonathan also holds the same purpose, his role is slightly different, since he is important in the first few chapters. However, once the story has changed settings and is located in England, his role is diminished and becomes similar to the rest of the men. This is true for neither Van Helsing nor Mina. The latter is mentioned from the very beginning by Jonathan and keeps her importance until the very end. She is a character who is central to the plot since she is the one who brings the main cast together. After Van Helsing has been introduced to the story, he comes to share Mina’s centrality, becoming the leader of the group.

The depth of these two characters, combined with their importance to the plot development, makes them essential as characters. Furthermore, the way they are portrayed differs from traditional Gothic heroes, and that would question the genre the novel has been given.
The depth of character is often associated with roundness of character. Schlomit Rimmon-Kenan discusses Joseph Ewen's model of defining roundness and states that it discusses the complexities of characters “as points along a continuum rather than according to exhaustive categories”, and that there are three of those axes, “complexity, development, [and] penetration into the ‘inner life’” (41). The complexity axis is based on the number of traits a character holds, where stereotypes, who are only built up from a single dominant trait are placed at one pole, and at the opposite pole the complex characters, who hold several traits, are placed. Within the two, there are “infinite degrees of complexity” (Rimmon-Kenan 41). The development axis shows how much a character's personality changes through the work, how dynamic they are. Similarly, on one pole of the development axis the static types are placed, and on the opposite are those who fully develop through the text. However, Rimmon-Kenan states that a character does not have to develop in order for it to be complex; yet I believe that development points to a further degree of depth in the character as it can often bring out new traits. The final category Rimmon-Kenan describes as being there to determine how much of the “consciousness is presented from within” (42), or how they portray themselves. Therefore, a round character would be one who portrays several different dominant traits and preferably develops through the novel. All characters who are not “[a]llegorical figures, caricatures, and types” (Rimmon-Kenan 41) can be said to be complex, but to a greater or smaller extent.

Since “character is a construct, put together by the reader from various indications dispersed throughout the text” (Rimmon-Kenan 36), finding Mina and Van Helsing's characteristics will be done by looking at how they are described in the novel and how the characters describe each other. One important aspect to consider is revealed by looking at what critics have said about Mina. They hold opposing opinions; the main debate is concerned with Mina's status as a New Woman, and what the disagreement reveals is how different readers view Mina in different ways. Senf claims that “[b]y providing Mina with a responsible profession and a means of economic independence, Stoker reveals that she is a modern woman” (“Stoker's response” 45). She changes her position, however, claiming that Mina is not a New Woman, because she has been given a profession that was not commonly taken by the New Women. Additionally, Senf claims that Mina is a traditional woman because by the end of the novel she chooses to marry Jonathan and becomes a mother, ending her
professional career. However, Charles E. Prescott and Grace A. Giorgio have a slightly different opinion on the matter. They argue that “if we resist this self-presentation and place Mina squarely within two late-century discourses of disputed femininity, the New Woman and passionate friendship, a much more ambivalent sense of self becomes legible” (488). Mina emerges as neither simply a New Woman or a traditional one. They follow that argument up by bringing out both signs of Mina as a traditional woman and as a New Woman.

The debate about her placement as a woman indicates the ambiguity that surrounds her character, created by different reader interpretations. The question is what aspects of her personality allow these differing understandings. To begin with, Dracula is most usually defined as a Gothic novel, much due to its use of traditional locations; “the castle, the abbey, the neglected country house, the crypt, and the asylum” (Gates 19-20). Even so, it is different from the fundamental Gothic novel, and one of these differences lies in characterisation. As Gates points out, “Stoker worked variations on the traditional types of the persecuted maiden, the stalwart young hero, and the diabolic villain” (31). However, this essay argues that the changes he made to the roles are quite significant. Mina is one of the characters that is truly changed. Together with Lucy, she takes on the role of the persecuted maiden, and while Lucy's character fits the role, Mina's is more complex. To begin with, Lucy and Mina are not playing the part at the same time. Benson Saler and Charles A. Ziegler discusses how Dracula fits into the pattern of a monster slaying tale, where there are three stages: the appearance of the monster, its attack on humans and finally the hero defeating the monster. In addition they also state that “[t]his cycle is likely to repeat itself for, if the monster is driven away, it returns, and, if it is slain, its kin may later appear” (221). Lucy plays the maiden in the first cycle, and Mina in the second. Additionally, Mina held a different role before she became the maiden. This role, I would argue, is based on a type, characterised by Vladimir Propp as a helper, that has its roots in folk tales rather than the Gothic genre. Mina acts as a helper who provides the heroes with vital information. This can be seen in the way her typewriting enabled the heroes to gain more information about Dracula which led to his defeat.

Mina emerges as the persecuted maiden because of the way she is treated by the male characters in the novel. Giorgio states that “[f]orced into passivity [...] she gives in to paternalistic dictates” (503), meaning that when Van Helsing decides that Mina should be excluded from the rest of the hunt, he has, in essence, removed her
from the position of a helper. When he then tells her that she “must be our star and our hope” (201), he treats her as nothing but a fragile female, which leaves her open and defenceless against Dracula. Yet Dracula is also a changing factor, for when he changes her into a vampire, her role as a helper is returned as she gains the ability to read his mind. In the end, this makes Mina's role in the novel almost a hybrid of roles.

Mina’s contradictory victim and helper roles, even though partially belonging to the Gothic genre, create clear ambiguities in the readers conception of her character. The first time she is referred to in the novel is by Jonathan, when he mentions that he will collect recipes for her. This sets Mina up as a good housewife, who is interested in cooking. However, this idea is disputed by her first narrative.

The life of an assistant schoolmistress is sometimes trying. I long to be with you, and by the sea, where we can talk together freely and build our castles in the air. I have been working very hard lately, because I want to keep up with Jonathan's studies and I have been practising shorthand very assiduously. (46)

The letter she sends to Lucy reveals that she is not at all a meek woman who takes an interest in cooking. Instead she is a hard-working woman who has taken on a project of her own to learn shorthand. A completely different side of her is revealed, and it adds to the depth of her character. Furthermore, in the beginning of the novel Mina works as a schoolmistress. This furthers the strength of her character and shows her as industrious and capable. As Dracula progresses we find out that Mina was an orphan, and this is most likely the source of her strength. By the middle of the novel Mina marries Jonathan, and appears to give up her profession. But even as a married woman she will not leave everything in his hands, “[w]hen we are married I shall be able to be useful to Jonathan, and if I can stenograph well enough I can take down what he wants to say in this way and write it out for him on the typewriter” (46). In essence she wants to be something similar to a secretary to her husband, creating a situation where she is both married yet still working. However, the end of the novel does not reveal whether her ambition has been fulfilled or not, even though she certainly functions as a secretary for the duration of the novel.

Van Helsing's characterisation of Mina as having a “man's brain – a brain that a man should have were he much gifted – and a woman's heart” (195) is confirmed in the novel. She demonstrates her intelligence and dares to follow her instincts and act upon them. Intent on investigating Lucy’s death, she persuades Seward to give her access to his phonograph.
You do now know me, I said. When you have read those papers [...] you will know me better. I have not faltered in giving every thought of my own heart in this cause; but, of course, you don't know me – yet; and I must not expect you to trust me so far. (184)

At that moment Mina thinks about Lucy and that she was right about Seward's “noble nature” (184). While this might seem innocent enough, Mina has clearly used what she knew about him in order to get the result she wanted.

It is not only her power of persuasion and her self-perception that reveal her nature, but also her independence in decision making. Van Helsing is the unofficial leader of the group of vampire hunters; the other characters hardly ever take actions that concern the hunt, unless they have been told to do so. However, Mina acts against this unwritten rule. Before the group has completely formed, the Professor visits her and Jonathan. When leaving he asks that “perhaps you will come to town if I send to you” (157), receiving the promise that they will come when he calls. However, about twenty pages later he receives a telegram informing him that Mina “[is] coming up by train” (181). Instead of waiting for him to call, she has decided when to come up. The reason she gives in the telegram is “important news” (181), which is Jonathan’s suspicion about the Count’s earth boxes. If anything, it is he who has the information and not Mina, yet she still deems it fit to go up to London beforehand.

Stoker portrays Mina as being able to take action when she feels necessary, and uses her intelligence well. This almost makes her more “masculine” than the men as she is an active and resourceful woman. Yet she does show feminine sides as well. The “woman's heart” Van Helsing speaks about reveals itself when she interacts with the men. She feels sympathy with Jonathan after his ordeal in Transylvania, and says that she wishes that “my belief in him helps him have belief in himself” (131). Later on when she is supporting Lord Godalming she says that “we women have something of the mother in us that makes us rise above smaller matters when the mother-spirit is invoked” (191). Therefore she has no trouble with comforting Godalming, despite the fact that she hardly knows him and that it would probably have been considered bad form, as she finds something as innocent as Jonathan holding her arm “very improper” (143). The “woman's heart” is also connected to another characteristic. It is weaker and more easily frightened than the men's and makes the women more emotional. While it is Van Helsing who first informs the reader of this, Mina herself helps to justify it: “I own that my heart began to fail me when the time for action came close” (201).
However, while she acts partly like a male and partly like a female, a certain rebellion against these patterns can be found. After crying she promises herself that she will never show her tears to Jonathan but instead “put a bold face on”. The paragraph ends with her dubious statement: “I suppose it is one of the lessons we poor women have to learn...” (214). The fact that she refers to herself as a “poor woman” makes one react, since she has proven to have a strong personality, and the statement contradicts that. It clearly shows that she is aware of her standing in society and how women are supposed to act. Mina saying it herself gives the sentence a sarcastic tone. This makes it possible to read the sentence in two ways: the first one is that she agrees with society, and the second is that she is ironic as well as being critical. There are other instances when Mina’s sentences are ambiguous. “How can women help loving men when they are so earnest, and so true, and so brave!” (296) she asks, but the way she talks about women here does not necessarily include herself. Moreover, she immediately moves away from men to praise the wonder of money, which in a way places men and money on the same level. This could be interpreted as her thinking that men are useful for what they can do, just like money.

The novel does not ascribe Mina a particular role, casting her not as a character type but as a psychologically believable character. Both her thoughts and actions can be read in different ways, allowing different interpretations. She can be seen as cunning because she managed to break down Seward’s resistance, but at the same time it could also be an expression of her concern and wish to help. It is no wonder the critics have differing opinions, when it is unclear what the character’s opinions are. But this is precisely what makes her a complex character, the combination between “man’s brain and woman’s heart”.

When comparing the characterisation of Mina to Ewen’s three axes, complexity, development and penetration into inner life, her placement on the first continuum would be in the direction of a complex character. She has several contradictory traits, for instance in the way she is caring about the men, yet have no qualms about manipulating them. Additionally, she reveals her “inner life” (Rimmon-Kenan 41) through her journal. However, is she developing throughout the novel? Stoker presents Mina as evolving from a housewife to a woman with strong personality with a professional identity. There are also notable differences between how she acts in the beginning of the novel and by the end. Her role is much more passive at the start of the novel, since her actions consist of practising shorthand while
waiting for Jonathan to return from Transylvania. The Mina that returns to England, after having nursed Jonathan back to health in Budapest, is different, and changes even more after she and Jonathan encounter Dracula in London. She feels forced to open Jonathan's diary, and the outcome leads to the improvement of his mental health. This positive result seems to encourage her to follow her instincts more often and she is changed into a stronger and more decisive woman. Additionally, she goes through a further transformation after Dracula turns her into a vampire. While it at first sets her back, the end result is that it leaves her stronger as she manages to take advantage of the negative situation by realising that she can spy on the Count. Her dynamic character as well as complexity add up to her being a round character according to Ewen's classification.

But how well would Van Helsing fit these classifications? He is not a character that is as ambiguous as Mina, nor does the novel’s form of diary and letter records give access to much of Van Helsing's direct communication. The reader is first introduced to his character by Seward who describes him as

a seemingly arbitrary man, but this is because he knows what he is talking about better than anyone else. He is a philosopher and a metaphysicist, and one of the most advanced scientists his day; and he has, I believe, an absolutely open mind. This, with an iron nerve, a temper of the ice-brook, an indomitable resolution, self command and toleration exalted from from virtues to blessings, and the kindest and truest heart that beats. (94)

Stoker created Van Helsing to fit the mould of the folk tale character type of “a descendant of the wise old man or magician figure” (Gates 40), and while this role can also be found in the Gothic novel to a certain extent, in *Dracula* the type is merged with the role of a hero. While the novel is filled with situations that reveals Van Helsing to be even more learned than first expected, such as the titles that are listed in the beginning of his letter “M.D., D.Ph., D.Litt., etc., etc.,” (94), there are aspects of the Professor's character that give him more depth. To the reader, Van Helsing is often seen as a bit of a comical character as his broken English gives the effect of moderating his intellect. Furthermore, he is not a cruel or haughty man, because Stoker reveals that Van Helsing treasures his friends. In a letter we find proof of this as he assures Seward that he would come for the sake of his friend any time and also promises to spend all the time that is needed to solve the case: “But if need be I shall come again in three days, and stay longer if I must” (94). That last promise is held, and Van Helsing is present throughout the rest of the novel.
Van Helsing is also shown as a self-disciplined man during his attempts to save Lucy. He performs blood transfusions with a steady hand and without batting an eye. While this confirms Seward's understanding of Van Helsing, the novel reveals the Professor's character to be more intricate than expected when he exhibits hysterical traits. The most prominent outburst happens at Lucy's funeral, where Seward describes how Van Helsing “laughed till he cried and [Seward] had to draw down the blinds lest anyone should see [them] and misjudge; and then he cried till he laughed again; and laughed and cried together” (145). Even though Van Helsing himself claims that he did not have “a regular fit of hysterics” (145), the behaviour is clearly out of the ordinary. Yet the result is that a much rounder Van Helsing emerges, especially when considering the fact that no male characters exhibited strong emotions before. What might have been prominent feelings in the first chapters in Jonathan are less tangible because he takes the time to sit and write his feelings down, failing to capture their strength. Yet Van Helsing is allowed to exhibit these feelings, which gives the reader a deeper contact with him. It is not the first time that Van Helsing breaks down either. When Mrs Westerna takes out the garlic flowers from her daughter's room, he is brought to tears by the desperation of the situation, but it doesn't take long before he is back on his feet again, just as he soon appears to recover from the hysterics at the burial.

That same scene is also important because it reveals details about Van Helsing's life outside the setting of the novel. The first thing that is divulged is that the Professor had a son, who appears to have passed away, “that dear boy so of the age of mine own boy had I been so blessed that he live, and with his hair and eyes the same” (145). He is at the time referring to the similarities between Godalming and his late son. Because of this connection, an earlier statement suddenly becomes clear; Van Helsing asked Godalming for his permission to call him Arthur, “I must not call you “Mr”, and I have grown to love you – yes, my dear boy, to love you – as Arthur” (141), revealing that the Professor seems to accept Godalming as a substitute son, explaining why he seems so willing to do everything in his power to help him. The second thing that is revealed is that Van Helsing has a wife. He says that “with my poor wife dead to me, but alive by Church's law, though no wits, all gone” (146), an announcement easily missed as Seward lectures him on making a joke during the funeral, without paying any attention to the remark. But the detail lets the reader wonder just what it is that has happened to his wife; she could be in a coma or could
have gone mad. These details open up several possible interpretations, one of which might be that his wife killed their son in a fit of madness. However, since the details are not mentioned again, they can not be treated as more than speculations. Yet they have a function to provide framework to the otherwise mysterious character and as such makes him more human in the eyes of the reader. It also creates a motive as to why he is fighting against Dracula so vehemently: he is a man who desperately needs to protect Lucy and the rest of the protagonists because he wants to make amends for failing his wife and son.

Since Stoker gives us these details, it is reasonable to wonder why he does not make further use of them. The reason could be connected to the way he has built up Van Helsing's character. After the Professor's hysteric, Seward says that “[h]is reply was in a way characteristic for him, for it was logical and forceful and mysterious” (145, italics mine). He is a character that is based on secrecy, even though he appears to understand almost all that is happening. He tells Seward that he won't tell him anything because “you do not find the good husband dig up his planted corn to see if he grow” (99), that is, he will not reveal anything before his mind has reached the correct conclusion. Alison A. Case states that “Van Helsing always seems to feel that knowledge is more valuable when it is not shared”; instead he is keeping it for himself until “the moment when it [the revelation] will carry the greatest force” (171-172). What makes him even more mysterious is the fact that for the first half of the novel he only speaks briefly, and at those points his comments sound cryptic. The lack of actual insight in his thoughts makes him even more mysterious and strange to the reader.

This secrecy surrounding Van Helsing is a part of how he is characterised, and a lot of his character's depth lies in the fact that only sparse details about his life are given and the mystery they create. This is comparable to another character, Count Dracula. Both of the characters have pasts that are hinted at, rather than told and their characters are shrouded in mystery. They are also the only two characters whose appearances are described closely. Mina says that Dracula's “face was not a good face; it was hard, and cruel, and sensual” (143). Contrasting this, she describes Van Helsing's face as being “clean-shaven, shows a hard, square chin, a large, resolute, mobile mouth, a good-sized nose” (151). The descriptions point out both similarities and differences between the men. Glover comments that “[p]hysiognomy [...] has a foundational status in Stoker's work: it locates and stabilizes lines of difference and
danger” (987), and this can be seen clearly in the descriptions. While Van Helsing is described in rather positive terms that reveal his character, Dracula's face is from the beginning said to be a “bad” face and is also meant to reveal his character.

Apart from the similarities in appearances, the two hold the status of being foreign in common. While Van Helsing has a broken English that sets him up as a foreigner from the start, Dracula is attempting to learn the perfect English. But it is his obsessive concern with linguistic perfection and standardization that truly sets him apart [...] Dracula never learns to speak English like a native because of his unwillingness or inability to bastardize the language in the same manner as its domestic speakers. (Christine Ferguson 238-239)

Dracula's precise language differs from that used by native speakers and marks him as foreign. This denotes a difference between him and Van Helsing, who has no such qualms about breaking grammatical rules. This contrast in language emphasises the opposition between the pair, which is also revealed by Gates who notes that Van Helsing “is as potent a force for good as Dracula is for evil” (Gates, 41). These resemblances between the Count and the Professor further strengthen Van Helsing's importance as he is placed in a position that is equal, yet opposed to Dracula's.

These similarities function to underline Van Helsing's importance as a protagonist, however, what they also do is stress that except for information given in minor details, he is very close to being a type. However, the details do make his character more than just a simple type, even if he is nowhere as complex as Mina. Furthermore, Van Helsing is not a static figure, but instead I would argue that he is also a character who develops through the novel. The hysterical attacks he experiences in response to Lucy's misfortunes appear to be something that is uncharacteristic of him, because when it happens Seward writes “for the first time in my life, I saw Van Helsing break down” (111). This points to a change in the Professor's character. The most noticeable development, however, is a change of narrators in the novel. Van Helsing begins to actively narrate events, starting with the spoken message he leaves for Jonathan, and this increases as Mina becomes more of a vampire than human. Correlated with this, Van Helsing also begins to reveal what he knows to the rest of the protagonists. The Professor appears to have learned that sharing the information will lead to success since his keeping secrets lost them Lucy, while Mina's sharing of the knowledge with the protagonists brought success and the defeat of Dracula. Despite the fact that Van Helsing does not reveal much of his inner
thoughts, he is still given a certain depth which is bolstered by his development through the novel.

One could argue that establishing the complexities of Mina and Van Helsing's characters does not reveal their full importance to the plot. Writers and literary critics alike seem to agree that plot and characterisation are interdependent: “Character is difficult to separate from plot, as Henry James announced back in 1884: 'What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?'” (Suzanne Keen 299). What Henry James said is important to this analysis because simply looking at the characteristics of Mina and Van Helsing is not enough to do them justice. In order to fully appreciate their importance, I would suggest that we need to consider not only how they are described, but also what their values to the plot are. By finding their importance to the plot, it is also possible to find another difference from the Gothic genre – namely that it is not the young men who are perceived as the heroes, but rather Van Helsing and Mina.

A particular scene in Dracula seems to emphasise the significance of Mina and Van Helsing to the novel. It is in chapter 18, when the protagonists hold a meeting to discuss the vampire.

Professor Van Helsing took the head of the table, to which Dr Seward motioned him as he came into the room. He made me sit next to him on his right, and asked me to act as secretary; Jonathan sat next to me. Opposite us were Lord Godalming, Dr Seward, and Mr Morris – Lord Godalming being next the Professor, and Dr Seward in the centre. (196)

The characters' places around the table can be seen as a kind of symbolism for how important they are to the plot. Morris, who is sitting farthest out, has only a small role to play, while Van Helsing sits at the head of the table, a position given to those in power, or the leader. Seward is the one who placed the Professor at the head of the table, even though the meeting is taking place in his institution. As the seat would have normally been his to take, what is shown is his submission to Van Helsing's leadership. Furthermore, the rest of the scene consists of mainly Van Helsing's speech, where he informs the rest of the characters about Dracula and his strengths and weaknesses. However, this speech is interrupted as he warns them about the dangers of going after the Count: “My friends, this is much; it is a terrible task that we undertake, and there may be consequence to make the brave shudder” (197), only to ask who is willing to follow through with the task. This is the true gathering of the
novel's heroes, where they willingly accept to fight against Dracula. But in this acceptance they are also agreeing to follow Van Helsing's command. The rest of the speech is concerned with how they are going to defeat Dracula and ends with the note that Mina should be excluded from all further discussion, to keep her safe. None of the characters says a word against Van Helsing's decisions, neither to argue about Mina's right to take part in the vampire's destruction, nor about his plans. He has been established as the leader, even if he unofficially held the position before as well.

Mina's seat corresponds to her role as well, as she is seated on Van Helsing's right, where she acts as a secretary. That is a position often given to those who are second in command, or in this case, second in importance to the novel, even if it is debatable whether Mina or Van Helsing is most important to the plot. Van Helsing was the one who directed her to that seat, and he also emphasises her importance about a page earlier when he is talking to Seward. Not only is she the first person he asks about, “Madam Mina is with you?” (195), but he also says that “the good God fashioned her for a purpose, believe me” (195). Here Van Helsing foreshadows the importance she will play in later parts of the novel where she will be guiding the rest of the protagonists toward Dracula and what will eventually be his demise. Yet Richard Astle points out that

Without "proofs," as Van Helsing points out in the last paragraph of the book, the only function of the story is that "This boy will some day know what a brave and gallant woman his mother is. Already he knows her sweetness and loving care; later on he will understand how men so loved her, that they did dare much for her sake" (p. 416). (103)

Troy Boone states that Van Helsing's "concluding note focuses on Mina's role as a mother and her status as ideal of innocence […] Content with their own expanded knowledge, they retire into domestic and ideological security” (86). What he means is that Van Helsing turns the story into a heroic tale, where the brave men save the damsel in distress. Such a reading undermines Mina's importance and places her as nothing but a passive figure who needs to be rescued, even though she helps the plot move along in so many other ways. Case holds a theory that Van Helsing views Mina as something of a threat, and “[t]hough he is effusive throughout the novel in his praise for Mina's “cleverness”, Van Helsing never seems quite comfortable with this aspect of her character” (173). Mina is a double-sided character and what he seems to fear is that the woman takes over the role of men. Case's analysis affirms the theory that Mina as a character is more than just a helpless victim, while at the same time it
points towards a tension between the two characters. Van Helsing’s status as a male leader would place him in a higher position than Mina; however, the way she defies his leadership and takes her own control, mainly by spreading the knowledge, makes her question his authority. Mina takes power where she can get it as “she takes upon herself the role of master-narrator that Van Helsing, concerned as he has been with the withholding of knowledge, has declined” (Case, 173), and as such gains a place of importance. Because of this the two end up in a silent battle over who should be the real leader.

The way the rest of the cast are seated also holds some importance. For instance Jonathan's place is beside Mina as her husband, but it is interesting here to note that while the man usually is the one with more power, here Jonathan easily submits to being seated in a lower position than Mina, even though he has also helped out with the documentation. “Mina and I have worked all day,” he says “and we have put the papers in order” (189). This further emphasises how important Mina is to the plot and how Jonathan's role diminished after the first four chapters. The other three men are seated next to each other and this further supports Gates claim that they are “practically indistinguishable from each other” (36).

The fact that Mina takes control by utilising knowledge is part of a larger aspect of the novel. The use of knowledge is important in *Dracula*, like Seed claims, “[s]ince understanding Dracula is a necessary precondition to defeating him, the exchange and accumulation of information literally is resistance to him” (73). Mina and Van Helsing are both working with knowledge throughout the story, but in two different ways. While Van Helsing in the beginning brings in knowledge, he has one fatal flaw: he does not share the information with anyone else. Although he is the first to realise that they are dealing with a vampire, he does not reveal his suspicions. He insists that Lucy should not be left alone during the night when he tells Seward that “[he] must remain here all the night, and [he] must not let [his] sight pass from her” (104) and encourages Seward to “not fear to think even the most not-probable” (108). But he does not tell anyone what he knows. This turns out to be fatal, for in all their ignorance Seward leaves Lucy alone during the night and Lucy's mother takes away the garlic placed in her room.

It is at this point that Mina becomes crucial. Her connection to knowledge is also to gather it, but not for the purpose of keeping it to herself. Instead she makes sure that all characters have got a copy of the collected facts: “my husband and I,
having typewritten them, had just finished putting them in order. I gave them [Seward, Morris, Godalming] each a copy to read in the library” (190). This sharing of knowledge manages two things. The first one is to spread the information, so that the protagonists are all informed as to what they should be wary of. The second is that it helps Van Helsing with his other function in the story: to be the one who processes the raw material given and informs the rest about his conclusions. He tells them the importance of the information that Mina has gathered, for instance when he tells the group that Dracula “has the strength of many in his hand,” he also mentions what it was that let him draw the conclusion: “witness again Jonathan when he shut the door against the wolves” (199).

Knowledge is not the only thing that matters to the plot, of course. Mina is important not only because she shares information, but also because doing so places her in the centre of the story. Yet her centrality to the plot lies in more than just collecting narratives. We are introduced to Mina before she makes an appearance in Dracula. As she is Jonathan's fiancée when he goes to Transylvania, she gets mentioned in the early stages of the novel: “I shall enter here some of my notes, as they may refresh my memory when I talk over my travels with Mina” (3). The shift from Jonathan's to Mina's narrative becomes very natural as the reader has already been introduced to her character. Furthermore, Mina is also Lucy's friend. It is through this connection the story of Lucy's change into a vampire enters the story, as Mina visits her friend and puts the focus of the narration on to Lucy. Without Mina the first four chapters would have had no connection to the rest of the novel. It is through Lucy that the rest of the protagonists become connected with Mina. When she speaks with Lord Godalming he asks her to let him be like “a brother, will you not, for all our lives – for dear Lucy's sake?” (192), establishing a connection between the two. The final thing that gives Mina a central place in the novel is the bond created between Dracula and her. He bites her and forces her to drink his blood, which turns her into what the vampire calls, “flesh of my flesh; blood of my blood; kin of my kin[...] my companion and my helper” (239). This will turn out to be crucial to the plot, as the connection Dracula created to be able to spy on her turns out to work both ways. Mina tells Jonathan that “[Van Helsing] must hypnotise me before the dawn, and then I shall be able to speak” (259), thereby relaying to the rest where the vampire is. The clue received from the hypnosis is that Dracula is on board a ship, and without
this knowledge the protagonists would never have been able to find out the vampire's escape plan.

Just as Mina has more than one important role in the novel, so does Van Helsing. As previously mentioned he has the task of being the leader of the group. Astle calls him “the nominal hero, or rather the "head" of the corporate hero—is [who] must be prepared for leadership” (99). As the oldest of the protagonists and as the one who has shown himself to be the wisest, his rise to the position as a leader is natural. Even the way his appearance is described points to his status as a leader, “a man of medium height, strongly built […] the poise of the head strikes one at once as indicative of thought and power, the head is noble, well-sized, broad, and large behind the ears” (151). I find that there are at least three similarities between Van Helsing's appearance and personality: intelligence, power and valiance. As Mina puts it, his head is “indicative of thought and power”, and also his “noble” (151) nature. The power can be related to his leadership and also that he has a strong mind. Van Helsing kills the female vampires without any trouble, even though he feels it is “butcher work” and that he should have “fled in terror to leave [his] work undone” (309); yet he forces himself to do it, showing his self-control. Related to power are the Professor's “thoughts”, which surely must point to his intelligence and role as wise man. Finally, Mina mentions the word noble. Van Helsing takes up the hunt of the vampire because he realises what the consequences would otherwise be: “we are face to face with duty; and in such case must we shrink? For me, I say no; but then I am old, and life, with his sunshine, his fair places, […] lies far behind” (197). Even though he uses his age as a way to reason that he has no excuse not to go, he still performs a noble gesture by dedicating his life to the quest.

Other instances in the novel place Van Helsing as the leader. The leadership is starting to establish itself as early as the first time Van Helsing enters the story. In his response to Seward's request for help: “Have then rooms for me at the Great Eastern Hotel, so that I may be near to hand, and please it so arrange that we may see the young lady not too late on tomorrow” (94), he is already deciding how things should be arranged for his visit. Even though he is coming in order to help, he still gives orders. Most of his orders are given with good reason; however, his reasons are not always clear straight away. Earlier in the same chapter we are also given Seward's description of him as a person “with an iron nerve, a temper of the ice-brook, an indomitable resolution, self command” (94), and already there the reader gains an
insight into what kind of character he will turn out to be. This “indomitable resolution” is most clearly seen in conversations involving the Professor because he dominates them and by the end his plans or ideas are accepted and followed through.

Van Helsing's importance as the leader of the group, combined with his and Mina's knowledge and her central function, certainly points to the same thing: how significant the two are to the plot. If that is considered together with their personalities, one can see how the plot is connected to their characteristics. Had Mina been a simple and meek housewife it is unsure that Dracula could have been beaten. Without her typewriting and gathering of facts, there would not have been enough information gathered to beat the Count. Van Helsing would have kept the information to himself, just like he did with Lucy. Additionally, other facts would have been lost even to him since Mina connects the characters of the group. The protagonists would have been divided into two groups, had she not been a part of the novel, and each would have been unable to defeat the vampire due to lack of knowledge. Likewise, Van Helsing's urge to help them out seems to come not only from the goodness of his heart, but also because he is seeking redemption for past mistakes, both connected to his family and to his failure to save Lucy. This gives us enough evidence to call them the real heroes of the novel as the knowledge Mina and Van Helsing collect and their leadership are crucial for the counteraction against the vampire.

Even so, the pair are unlikely heroes, as Mina is female and would not have been considered a hero in 1897, and Van Helsing's status as foreigner would have made him too distant to be a true hero. Jonathan, Seward, Morris and Godalming, who all carry out the active manoeuvres in the novel, and are British men, would naturally be assumed to be the true heroes of Dracula. Yet because they are actually quite inactive and need to be stimulated in order to take action, their roles are diminished. The male characters are also quite flat and stereotypical, in contrast to Mina and Van Helsing, whose roles as heroes are further enhanced by their complex personalities, even if Van Helsing is close to being cast as a stereotype as well. It is the aspects of those personalities that turn them into the driving forces of the novel. In the end, it is Van Helsing and Mina who defeat the vampire even though the men deals the actual strike.

This analysis of the two protagonists and the social dynamics between them has shown that Stoker’s Dracula resists the conventions of the Gothic novel genre. In giving the characters depth and development, as well as by bringing in roles from
other genres, the novel does not follow traditional character patterns and has created its own idea of the Gothic hero. Even though it incorporates and makes use of the four men as traditional Gothic heroes, by diminishing their importance and making Mina and Van Helsing the most essential protagonists, *Dracula* has changed the Gothic genre.
Works Cited


