

Dracula

– a portrait of Stramonium

The vampire story is the substance of nightmares, writes *Marysia Kratimenos*, and as such is a perfect description of the homeopathic remedy, Stramonium

Bram Stoker claimed the inspiration for this gothic horror came to him in a dream. Although many other authors, including Arthur Conan Doyle, wrote of vampires, Stoker's novel is still regarded as the archetypal description of the human vampire. It has been made into numerous films, some more accurate to the original text than others. None, in my opinion, can compete with the sheer terror experienced while reading the book on a cold autumn evening as Hallowe'en approaches – the night when all spirits and demons are said to be free to roam the earth. The season is perfect for vivid imaginings.

Bram Stoker was born in Ireland. He worked as manager of the Lyceum theatre in the Strand, London and was in close contact with the celebrities of the day, including Oscar Wilde and Dr Charcot, a famous neurologist and proponent of hypnotism. His love of literature and the theatre is evident in the text. His brother was a famous surgeon, who assisted Bram with the relevant medical descriptions. Although Bram Stoker wrote many books, he will always be remembered for just one novel, namely *Dracula*, which was published in 1897.



Photo: Aquarius Collection

Christopher Lee will always be remembered for his portrayal of Count Dracula

The novel and the remedy

Vlad the Impaler or Vlad Dracula was a historical figure, a Wallachian prince, who fought against the Ottoman Empire. He was renowned for his brutality towards his opponents, although this is somewhat glossed over by many Romanians who regard him as a national hero. Dracula was added to his name at a later stage – dracul meaning dark power. Stoker took his name and created the wonderful prince of darkness, the personification of Stramonium.

The story is related in the form of extracts taken from the diaries of the leading characters, a clever device as it

allows the reader to experience the storyline from a series of different perspectives. It opens with the diary of Jonathan Harker, a solicitor, describing his journey to Transylvania, Romania and his subsequent stay with the Count. Even as the book opens we are introduced to the homeopathic Stramonium state: “an awful nightmare”. Harker finds himself “paralysed with fear” at the sight of a “ring of wolves with white teeth and lolling red tongues... a hundred times more terrible in the grim silence which held them than ever when they howled.”

Stramonium is a remedy of intense fear which paralyses the victim. There

is a close association with wolves, Dracula's "children of the night". The herb was used by the Berserkers, ancient Nordic warriors, to induce a state of near madness prior to battle. The men would drape themselves in wolf coats, a shamanic ritual to embody the power of the creature.

The remedy *Lac caninum* (dog's milk) is a related remedy to *Stramonium*; both are used for the intense fear and anger that follow abuse. The inter-relationship between these two remedies is further emphasised by the presence of hairs in the centre of Dracula's palms, his canine teeth and his ability to shape-shift into a dog at will.

Dracula is dressed all in black – a colour favoured by those who require the remedy. He has a dread of mirrors and shining things, again a trait of the *Stramonium* state. The sight of Harker's crucifix infuriates him and he is repelled by it. The herb *stramonium* was demonised by the Catholic Church, who feared the wise women herbalists, accusing them of witchcraft and burning them. Henceforth *stramonium* was known as the devil's apple. Dracula uses the pseudonym Count De Ville in London.



Photo: istockphoto.com/Konrad Lange

Stramonium fruit known as devil's apple

Dracula forces Harker to stay in his castle, although the "nocturnal existence" makes him fear for his sanity. There are beautiful descriptions of the intensity of his terror... "I start at my own shadow, and am full of all sorts of horrible imaginings." In the *Stramonium* state of intense fear, the imagination runs wild. Fear of ghosts, vampires, the dark, graveyards, the dead and dogs, especially black ones, predominate and the fears are worse at night. The nightmares of the *Stramonium* state are horrific and the person wakes screaming with terror, eyes wide and glistening, the pulse racing and the skin flushed.

Although Dracula warns him to sleep only in a particular room, Harker takes "pleasure in disobeying". *Stramonium* can be used for certain types of hyper-

activity, especially those children who have co-existing oppositional defiant behaviour. Traditionally Native Americans used the herb to "control unruly children".

Harker falls asleep and three female vampires appear; voluptuous creatures who would seduce him. The vampires remind us of the three witches in *Macbeth*, again emphasising the dark side of the remedy and its association with witchcraft. Harker is enthralled, aroused by them, but just as he is finding the strength of character not to betray his love, Mina, in virtuous Victorian fashion, Dracula storms in, claiming Harker as his own. "Never did I imagine such wrath and fury, even to the demons of the pit" is a glorious description of the intensity of *Stramonium*'s anger. Those requiring homeopathic *Stramonium* may exhibit the fear one moment, and the intense fury the next.

Although *Stramonium* is a plant remedy, it is as sexually charged as many of the animal remedies. The herb was reputed to be an aphrodisiac. Indian prostitutes used it in higher doses to subdue their clients, inducing dreams that were indistinguishable from reality. It was used as "a tool of brothel keepers, wicked seducers of girls, depraved courtesans and shameless lechers"¹ because of its ability to induce submission and amnesia – possibly the first date-rape drug. It is thus used homeopathically for severe trauma, often of a sexual nature.

The book *Dracula* is indeed a Freudian fantasy. The attempted seduction of Harker by the vamps, Dracula's erotic biting of the women and the intermingling of his blood with theirs: this all alludes to the darker side of *Stramonium*, a remedy used extensively by professional homeopaths for cases of childhood sexual abuse and rape.

Nightmares and sleep-walking are often tell-tale signs of trauma and *Stramonium* deals efficiently with them, as well as the shell-shocked traumatic state, which Harker enters into following his escape from Castle Dracula. When Van Helsing reads his diaries and tells Harker that he believes him, Harker states that "You have cured me already", emphasising the need for the victim to be believed.

Harker is so confused by the experiences in Transylvania that he is unable to differentiate between imagination and reality: "I do not know what to trust, even the evidence of my own senses." Little wonder Freud was misled by victims of abuse to produce the theories of the Oedipus and Elektra complexes; it was

easier than accepting the unacceptable. If only he had had some homeopathic *Stramonium* to hand!

Stramonium induces a "psychomimetic" state; users are unable to differentiate between reality and the effects of the drug. Unlike other hallucinogens, which only induce visual hallucinations, every sensation is affected. It is like a living nightmare, and the effects may last days. Some users experience flashbacks, hence its use for "bad trips" and flashbacks in homeopathy.

Lucy, one of Dracula's victims, is subject to sleepwalking and horrific nightmares. She is a perfect victim for the evil vampire, "of too supersensitive a nature to go through life without trouble", in other words a typical *Phosphorus*. Her tubercular nature is evident in her pallor and weakness, even prior to the attacks. She is morally corrupted by him: "the sweetness changed to adamant, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness", again a sign of sexual interference at a tender age.

In death she regains her beauty, but her vampire status soon manifests as she begins to prey on young children. Victim has become abuser, the "curse of immortality: they cannot die, but go on age after age adding new victims and multiplying the evils of the world". The *stramonium* seed pod echoes this theme of immortality: seeds stored for 39 years still had a germination rate of over 90 per cent.

Mina's reaction to Dracula's attack is somewhat different, she declares herself "unclean". She is a marked woman – the burn of the Holy Host is on her forehead, an analogy to the mark of Cain. This reaction to trauma is common in the *Lac caninum* state. The victims are riddled with shame and guilt that they should have somehow prevented the attack on their honour. She did not resist further attacks, saying she "did not want to hinder him. I suppose it is part of the terrible curse, that such is when his touch is on his victim." She is even able to find compassion for her abuser, but fears sleep lest he return. Those needing *Lac caninum* for traumatic events often see the face of their abuser just as they start to fall asleep.

As Dracula has forced Mina to drink his blood, she is able, in hypnotic trance, to merge her spirit with his and lead the heroes to him. *Stramonium* can induce such a deep trance that it is also known in Haiti as the *Zombie's Cucumber*, and so can be used for severe cases of post-traumatic stress disorder where the victim is almost left catatonic.



Photo: Joseph Dougherty MD/leology.org

Stramonium belongs to the nightshade family

Stramonium belongs to the botanical family Solanaceae, the nightshade family. It is found world-wide, although it is believed it originated in the area around the Caspian Sea. It is reputed that gypsies spread the seeds. Dracula is helped throughout the book by Szygany, Eastern European gypsies.

Some of the Solanaceae are beneficial to man, like potato, tomato, aubergine, and capsicum pepper. Others are deadly poisons, such as Belladonna, Stramonium and Hyoscyamus. Their toxicity is related to the presence of atropine and related compounds which have a powerful effect on the nervous system, blocking the actions of the neurotransmitters (chemicals which allow for nerve transmission).

The effect of stramonium is that one becomes “as blind as a bat, mad as a hatter, red as a beet, hot as a hare, dry as a bone, the bowel and bladder lose their tone, and the heart runs alone”² – all signs of an adrenaline rush that may occur with terror or violent anger.

Despite this, stramonium has medicinal uses. The refined chemicals are still used today in orthodox medicine to dilate pupils for eye examinations and operations, to prevent vomiting following opiate pain-killers and chemotherapy, to stimulate the heart, and to treat sarin and nerve gas poisoning. In the past it was also used for asthma.

The concentration of the chemicals varies considerably – the plants are more potent in the night, hence Dracula’s nocturnal existence, and in cloudy, dark autumnal weather, again perfect vam-

pire conditions. The white trumpet shaped flowers open in the twilight, hence the nickname Moonflower. The term lunatic is derived from the belief that insanity was associated with the moon.

Stramonium toxicity is well documented, and it has been used by the injudicious as a recreational drug. In ancient times it was honoured as a powerful shamanic plant; the Oracle of Delphi was reputed to gain her prophetic powers from a concoction of the herb.

The drug was used by certain Native North American tribes in shamanic rituals, marking the passage into adulthood. The chosen men were kept apart from the tribe and given stramonium regularly, until all traces of immaturity and memories of boyhood were eradicated. The stramonium drove them to the brink of insanity in order to free their souls.

This is clearly demonstrated by the character of Renfield, the “homicidal maniac”, who becomes Dracula’s servant. He is clearly psychotic, with paroxysms of rage and violence, totally delusional and yet an educated articulate man in his sane moments. Stramonium can be used in mania and psychosis, obviously by professional medical hom-

eopaths and in conjunction with conventional medical treatment. There is often an alternation between profound delusional behaviour and total normality in those requiring the remedy.

Stramonium can induce inappropriate behaviour, often comical. The film “Dracula: Dead and Loving it” is a delicious spoof of Dracula and surprisingly accurate to the spirit of the text, though obviously artistic liberties were taken to enhance the humour. “The Rocky Horror Picture Show” takes the sexual undercurrents alluded to in the book to a whole new dimension of hilarity.

The chemicals are powerful hallucinogens and as such stramonium was a powerful ingredient in flying ointments. Dracula is able to fly by shape-shifting into a bat; Stoker cleverly blends fantasy with reality. Vampire bats exist, predominately in South America, and spread rabies – the theme of hydrophobia is strong in the Solanaceae family.

Stramonium plants act as a “toxin sponge, leaching heavy metal elements from polluted soils”. Heavy metals, such as arsenic and mercury, were used in medicine to cure syphilis. The disease was endemic in Victorian society, despite their puritanical morals and led to madness with intense cruelty, typified by Dracula, both the fictional character and the historical, again a theme witnessed in those requiring homeopathic Stramonium. It is a delightful irony that Goths, who typify the appearance of Stramonium, with their black clothes and flamboyant silver crucifixes, have such a love of heavy metal music.

Stramonium is an immensely powerful homeopathic remedy, perfectly personified in Dracula. The match is so close one wonders if Stoker’s nightmare was in fact induced by a cup of stramonium tea. He would not have been the first, or indeed the last, to use hallucinogens in the pursuit of art!

Footnotes:

1. *Prisma Franz Vermulen quotes an “indignant German writer” no doubt from their equivalent of Tunbridge Wells.*
2. *Datura stramonium on Wikipedia, the free internet encyclopaedia.*

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