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Transylvanian Society of Dracula

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Whose *Dracula* is it Anyway? Deane, Balderston and the “World Famous Vampire Play”

Anne-Marie Finn

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Bram Stoker's *Dracula* has accomplished something that almost no other novel has ever done: it has been thoroughly embraced by Western popular culture. From Halloween costumes to breakfast cereal, from books to movies, to a multitude of merchandise, “Dracula” is everywhere. The title is one of the most instantly recognized in the history of publishing and readily conjures up the image of a black-caped villain who preys upon members of an unsuspecting British society. This is the image most often associated with the character but it does not derive from Stoker. It originated on the stage. The purpose of this discussion is to examine the transmission of the text of *Dracula* from the novel into its first stage adaptations.

Bram Stoker was quite familiar with the conventions of the stage. He worked as acting manager of the Lyceum Theatre in London for seventeen years and was closely associated with the well-known actor Sir Henry Irving (Skal, Introduction vii). In 1897, Stoker went to the trouble of actually writing a stage version of *Dracula* in order to protect the copyright of the plot from unauthorized stage adaptations. According to some sources, Stoker had tried on several occasions to convince Henry Irving to be part of such a production (Skal, Introduction viii; Ludlam 123). However, upon seeing Stoker's copyright adaptation performed at the Lyceum, Henry Irving was rumored to pronounce it “dreadful” (Ludlam 123). The actor would never play Dracula and *Dracula* was never again staged under Stoker's supervision at the Lyceum or any other theatre.

Stoker died in 1912 but *Dracula*, in proper vampire fashion, would find life after death as a theatrical production. In 1924, having failed to convince anyone else to attempt it, Hamilton Deane, English actor/producer, approached Bram Stoker's widow, Florence, for the right to produce *Dracula* on stage (Ludlam 171-72). At this time, Florence was in the middle of a difficult legal battle concerning *Nosferatu*, the unauthorized German film version of *Dracula*. According to David J Skal in *Hollywood Gothic*, she was in a desperate financial situation, with *Dracula* as nearly her only real means of support, and she saw the financial potential of Hamilton Deane's production. She also recognized the lack of quality in the production, which had been written in only four weeks, but as Skal sums it up, “she needed the money” (59).

Dracula: the Vampire Play toured successfully in England from 1924-1927. American producer Horace Liveright witnessed for himself the phenomenon of *Dracula* (Skal, *Hollywood Gothic* 65) and saw its potential, though he was unimpressed by Deane's writing. He solicited a second playwright, John L Balderston, to rewrite the dialogue. Of course, they would first need Florence Stoker's permission. Balderston acted as mediator between Stoker and Liveright (whom she disliked) and succeeded in securing the rights for the play. Balderston claimed that though he used virtually none of Deane's original dialogue (about twenty lines), he only included his name as playwright when he saw that the production could be successful (Skal, *Hollywood Gothic* 81). Liveright then produced *Dracula: The Vampire Play in Three Acts* for Broadway.¹

The audience member going to see either of the plays and expecting to see Bram Stoker's *Dracula* would have been sorely disappointed. In the transmission process from novel to stage play characters, scenes, dialogue and narration were all altered to become almost unrecognizable. Naturally, for a stage presentation of the novel to be possible, certain limits had to be imposed upon Stoker's text. However, how much of *Dracula* can disappear before the reader is no longer able to recognize the original novel? For instance, a novel of *Dracula*'s length cannot be transferred to the stage intact due to the simple constraint of time. One would therefore expect much of the extraneous action to disappear or become condensed on the stage. Right away, then, the transmission of the text becomes problematic.

In order to understand the significance of some of the alterations, and to see what happened to the text, it is necessary at this point to present a brief summary of the characters and plot of Stoker's *Dracula*. The text itself consists of twenty-seven chapters and some 445 pagesⁱⁱ written in epistolary form. The action revolves around approximately nine principal characters and the majority of these characters contribute their voices to the epistolary narrative in diaries, journals, letters and other forms.

The novel opens with the narrative of Jonathan Harker, a young solicitor who is enroute to Transylvania to conduct legal affairs for Count Dracula. Dracula wishes to purchase property in England with the intention of moving there. Upon arrival at the Count's castle, Harker discovers oddities about his host, both in his appearance and his actions. It is important to point out that the title character, at least according to Stoker's text, is very different from the vampire which would appear on the stage. Harker describes Dracula in great detail:

Within stood a tall old man, clean shaven save for a long white moustache, and clad in black from head to foot, without a single speck of colour about him anywhere.... His face was a strong, a very strong -- aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils.... His eyebrows were very massive, almost meeting over the nose.... The mouth ... was fixed and rather cruel looking with peculiarly sharp white teeth; these protruded over the lips ... his ears were pale, pale and at the tops extremely pointed.... The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor.... Strange to say there were hairs in the center of the palm. The nails were long and fine, and cut to a sharp point. As the Count leaned over me and his hands touched me, I could not repress a shudder. It may have been that his breath was rank, but a horrible feeling of nausea came over me, which, do what I would, I could not conceal. (23-26)

Harker soon realizes that Dracula is a diabolical creature intent on spreading his evil to England. However, he is unable to warn anyone since he is left imprisoned in the castle as the vampire makes his way to England by sea.

The action of the novel switches to Whitby, England, where Mina Murray (Harker's fiancée) and her friend Lucy Westenra are vacationing. Three friends, the psychiatrist John Seward, the aristocrat Arthur Holmwood (later Lord Godalming), and the American, Quincey P Morris, have all proposed to Lucy and she has accepted Holmwood. Seward is head of an insane asylum and has been recording the odd behavior of a patient, R M Renfield, who is fascinated with (and eats) flies, spiders, and birds. This character foreshadows the arrival of Dracula and, if one reads the novel as Christian allegory, he acts as a kind of "anti-John-the-Baptist" to Dracula's "anti-Christ." While Lucy and Mina are in Whitby, Dracula arrives by way of a shipwreck. Shortly afterward, Lucy begins sleepwalking and falls strangely ill, unknowingly becoming Dracula's victim. Mina leaves her friend to go to her fiancé (Harker) who has made it out of Transylvania and resurfaced in Buda-Pesth.

In London, Lucy fights for her life and Dr Seward enlists the help of his friend from Amsterdam, Professor Abraham Van Helsing. Van Helsing recognizes the nature of her illness and prescribes blood transfusions to help her. He also makes use of garlic and crosses to protect her but his attempts are in vain since Lucy succumbs to the vampire's attacks. It is important to note that, up to this point, none of the characters have seen the vampire. Mina, now married to Harker, realizes that he has endured some horrendous experience and they return to England to discover that her friend has died. Upon their arrival, Harker sees and recognizes Dracula, who has grown young. Van Helsing reads Harker's journal, which

finally gives him the identity of the vampire. It is revealed that Lucy is now a vampire as well and so Van Helsing, along with Seward, Holmwood, and Morris, go to her grave and destroy her. Once this has been accomplished the characters are free to devote their time to hunting Dracula.

The characters make Seward's asylum their base of operations and bring together all their information (from the various journals, letters, newspaper articles, etc). Van Helsing acts as their leader, explaining to them what vampires are and how to destroy them. The vampire hunters (Van Helsing, Seward, Harker, Holmwood and Morris) seek out Dracula's lairs and make them uninhabitable for the vampire. Mina is excluded from the action of the vampire hunters and thus becomes Dracula's next victim. Renfield is able to warn the men about Dracula, and dies for this betrayal, but they are unable to save Mina from becoming initiated by Dracula. The hunters are now fighting for her soul, since if they do not destroy Dracula, she will become like him. Dracula then attempts to flee England and return to Transylvania. The other characters pursue him, by land and sea, and finally defeat him just before he reaches his castle. Quincey Morris is killed at this climax, along with Dracula.

It is from this textual source that Hamilton Deane adapted his stage play (and it is Deane's stage play that was in turn adapted by Balderston). Many elements from Stoker's novel survive intact, but become almost unrecognizable due to the nature of Deane's presentation. The remnants of the plot appear scattered and out of sequence throughout the text of the stage play since Deane concentrates his adaptation on the action from the second half of Stoker's text. That is, his stage play includes many plot details and actual text from approximately ten chapters of *Dracula*, starting with chapter fourteen and going through to chapter twenty-three. There are elements of Stoker's story from earlier parts of the novel that make their way into Deane's adaptation, but they are taken out of sequence and associated with the wrong characters. For the most part, however, the first twelve and the final six chapters of Stoker's text have completely disappeared. Due to Deane's surgery, the text of over half of Stoker's novel has not survived the transition from novel to stage play. In his version of the vampire play, Balderston does nothing to correct these omissions. In fact, as will be discussed, he compounds the problems of Deane's text and further removes *Dracula* from Stoker's original version.

In Deane's play, for instance, as the action opens in Harker's drawing room (which is never a scene in the novel), Seward and Harker discuss the strange illness which has befallen Harker's wife Mina. They are anticipating the arrival of Abraham Van Helsing, who has been called in on the case. As has already been illustrated in the plot summary, Van Helsing is called in to help Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker does not fall ill until much later. In order to accommodate the action of the stage play, Deane has done some creative reworking of the plot and of the characters. Mina Harker thus becomes a combination of Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker. She suffers as Lucy does, Van Helsing intervenes as he does for Lucy in the novel with blood transfusions and garlic protections, but she is attacked as Mina is and survives like Mina does.

For the most part, the characters remain essentially similar between the novel and Deane's play, though several significant alterations have occurred. Unlike the novel, the major characters in Deane's play (excluding Dracula, Van Helsing and Renfield) have all been friends for years. As Seward expresses it, "in fact, the Harkers, Lord Godalming, Miss Morris ... Lucy Westera [sic] and myself have for some years past formed a little 'coterie' of our own...." (Deane and Balderston 12-13). This change is due to the fact that Deane has picked up the story in medias res, at a point where the characters all know each other. In other words, he changes the relationships to suit his adaptation. Another extremely strange thing has happened. "Quincy [sic] Morris" has undergone a gender switch. Morris is no longer the strapping male Texan who sports a Winchester rifle and a bowie knife and who sacrifices himself for his friends in the novel. He is now a she, but she still carries a gun.

Another major change has occurred with the physical representation of Dracula himself. A cultured, courtly continental dressed in evening clothes and a cape has replaced the pasty, old, unattractive villain dressed completely in black. This is particularly significant since it is this image of Dracula and not Stoker's that has become the image most often associated with the character. Dracula is also out of place in Harker's drawing room since, except for the opening sequence in Transylvania where he interacts with Harker (and which Deane has deleted), he rarely appears in the action of the novel. This is mostly due to

the nature of the epistolary narrative since Dracula does not contribute to the collaboration with his own account of the events. He is emancipated in Deane's play, however, and is able for the first time ever, to interact freely with the other characters without a second glance from any of them.

Deane has created a problem for his adaptation, however, by allowing Dracula to interact freely. Since Van Helsing does not have access to Harker's Transylvania journal, and hence the information that Dracula is a vampire, the playwright must invent a situation that leads the professor to suspect Dracula. However, Deane does not rely on his own imagination for this situation. Instead, he relies on Stoker's text. The following is an excerpt from Stoker, which is recorded in Harker's journal from Transylvania:

I had hung my shaving glass by the window, and was beginning to shave. Suddenly I felt a hand on my shoulder, and heard the Count's voice saying to me, "Good morning." I started for it amazed me that I had not seen him, since the reflection of the glass covered the whole room behind me. In starting I had cut myself slightly.... The whole room behind me was displayed; but here was no sign of a man in it, except myself.... When the Count saw my face, his eyes blazed with a sort of demoniac fury, and he suddenly made a grab at my throat.... "Take care," he said, "take care how you cut yourself. It is more dangerous than you think in this country." Then seizing the shaving glass, he went on: "And this is the thing that has done the mischief. It is a foul bauble of man's vanity. Away with it!" and opening the heavy window ... he flung out the glass, which shattered into a thousand pieces on the stones ... below. (34-35)

The scene in Deane unfolds in a similar fashion, but this time it is Professor Van Helsing instead of Harker who witnesses Dracula's odd behavior:

Van Helsing: It is strange that you should have so startled me just now -- for I was looking in the mirror—and the reflection covers the whole room.

Dracula: Ah the mirror -- it is a foul bauble of man's vanity (Deane and Balderston 24)

Van Helsing goes on to cut himself while opening a parcel of garlic flowers. This evokes a strange response from Dracula:

Morris: Oh Professor! You've cut yourself!

Van Helsing: It is nothing -- a scratch. [To Dracula.] See?

Dracula: Take care -- take care how you cut yourself -- it is more dangerous than you think!
(Deane and Balderston 26)

It is obvious that this scene has been lifted directly from Stoker's text, altered to suit the purposes of the stage play and then reinserted into the plot. Balderston (who, incidentally, does a better job of incorporating it than Deane) also adapts Stoker's original scene:

Van Helsing: [Looking at himself, touching face, shakes head.] The devil.

Dracula: Come. [Van Helsing turns suddenly to him and looks back into the mirror.] Not as bad as that.

Van Helsing: [Long look in mirror, then turns to Dracula] I did not hear you, Count.

Dracula: I am often told that I have a light footstep.

Van Helsing: I was looking in the mirror. Its reflection covers the whole room, but I cannot see...

[Pause. He turns to mirror. Dracula, face convulsed by fury, picks up small vase with flowers from stand, smashes mirror]

Dracula:[Recovering composure.] Forgive me, I dislike mirrors. They are the playthings of man's vanity (Deane and Balderston 114)

Also, as in Deane, Van Helsing cuts his finger. Different from Deane's version, however, Balderston's Dracula actually lunges at Van Helsing when he sees the blood. This is quite similar to his behavior in Stoker's text, as is illustrated above.

Similarly, in Deane (and again in Balderston) Renfield has a much more crucial role than in Stoker's novel. In the novel, Renfield, like Dracula, is afforded little opportunity to interact with the other characters. In his case, however, it is because he is a patient locked away in an insane asylum. In order to have him participate in the drama of the novel, the characters must go to him. On the stage, however, Deane allows Renfield to escape and participate in the drama more directly. Much of his dialogue is reproduced verbatim from Stoker's text. In fact, in one scene in particular Deane incorporates text from at least three separate sections of the novel (Deane and Balderston 39-42).

One of the most important elements in Stoker's plot is the information that is incorporated into Van Helsing's speeches to the other characters. He knows how to deal with vampires and Stoker gives him plenty of dialogue to impart his wisdom. There are several long speeches that are seldom interrupted by the other characters. For this reason they do not translate well to the stage. Either the audience must be subjected to a character with long monologues or the text is condensed to include only the important points. Unfortunately for his audience, Deane tended to opt for the former approach. In Act I, for example, Deane incorporates a great deal of Stoker's text in a conversation between Van Helsing and Seward. Van Helsing gets forty-four lines while Seward gets only twelve (Deane and Balderston 21-22). As well, early in Act II, Deane gives Van Helsing an uninterrupted thirty-three line speech (35). Again the speech is lifted entirely out of Stoker's text, from a Van Helsing speech that takes three and a half pages (Stoker 286-290). His approach may have had something to do with the fact that he played Van Helsing on stage. However, when it comes to editing, Balderston's play is another matter entirely.

Not only does Van Helsing have less to say in Balderston's adaptation than in Deane's, very little of what he does say is from Stoker. The thirty-three line speech from Act II of Deane is absorbed into the end of Act I of Balderston's rewrite. The playwright spreads Van Helsing's knowledge over several pages in the normal give and take of dialogue. In the process, Stoker's text disappears almost completely. Thus Balderston's adaptation is, on the whole, twice removed from Stoker. He looks at Stoker's *Dracula* through the filter of Deane. Balderston incorporates most of Deane's plot, retaining the drawing-room melodrama as the framework of the story. However, he completely reworks Deane's dialogue. Since much of this is actually Stoker's dialogue, what had remained of Stoker's text in Deane's play disappears almost completely in Balderston.

In addition to this, Balderston eliminates the extraneous characters from Deane and Stoker. Since the play does not include any of the plot from the first half of the novel, Balderston discards the unnecessary characters from the stage play. Arthur Holmwood and Quincey Morris disappear entirely as separate characters and become amalgamated with Harker who then takes on facets of their personalities and some of their dialogue. Similarly, Balderston collapses Lucy and Mina into one character, Lucy Seward, who is now Dr Seward's daughter. Instead of the young man motivated to help Lucy in the novel because he is in love with her, Seward is now a middle-aged man motivated by fatherly concern. The principal characters are reduced from nine in Stoker to eight in Deane to six in Balderston. Balderston's adaptation seems to be an exercise in reduction, but is a much neater and more logical presentation.

Since both playwrights have abandoned Stoker's text concerning the conclusion of the drama, the final scene becomes partially their own invention. Deane's epilogue, where Dracula is killed, is virtually

without dialogue, but Balderston creates dialogue to accompany the action. Neither scene has any of the drama and excitement of the final scene in the novel where Dracula is chased to his death and where Quincey Morris meets an heroic end. Once more these alterations are dictated by the choice to present the story as a drawing room melodrama. The stage characters do not go any further than Dracula's lair in the house called Carfax. In Stoker, they follow the vampire from England into Eastern Europe by train, horseback and boat. It is clear, then, that only bits and pieces of Stoker's text have survived the move from novel to stage play.

So what has happened to *Dracula* in this process of transmission from the novel to the stage? One thing, which is lost immediately in the transition, is the epistolary narrative structure of the novel. One of the most important thematic elements of *Dracula* is the collaboration of the characters. In the novel the characters put a great deal of effort into bringing together their information on Dracula's activities. If they are to work in tandem, they need all the available facts. Each character, in their turn, contributes to and is informed by this collaboration. In this way, the story is told from a multitude of perspectives and in several different forms (typewritten diaries, phonographic journals, letters, newspaper clippings, a ship's log, etc.). Of course, this would be difficult to represent on stage while simultaneously being true to the novel and also keeping the audience awake.

Only one piece of the epistolary narrative survives more or less intact from Stoker to Deane to Balderston -- a newspaper article, which details the activities of the vampire girl.ⁱⁱⁱ The "original" article appears at the end of chapter thirteen in *Dracula*. Since it is a newspaper, it is more easily incorporated into the stage plays. It is much easier to have a character read the account from this article than show it in the action on the stage. It is far more difficult to incorporate other epistles, however, since it would amount to having the characters sit around reading each other's diaries as they do in the novel. The thematic significance of this collaboration would, unfortunately, have to be sacrificed on the stage.

However, what about other considerations? What about the way the novel is physically presented? Both Deane and Balderston adapted *Dracula* as a drawing-room melodrama. As has been illustrated, this style does not suit the novel since in it the characters move around over great distances. For instance, there are scenes in the novel from Transylvania, and from Whitby and London in England. Within London are several different settings: an insane asylum, a churchyard, as well as Dracula's various residences. The narration is also given from trains, coaches, hotels, houses, and boats. *Dracula* becomes quite limited in its scope on the stage. In both productions, except for the final scene, the action moves between two main settings, the drawing room or library and the boudoir of a single house. Only a limited amount of the action from the novel can therefore be represented. What remains is either dropped or altered so that it appears in these two areas. The audience is unable to witness the opening sequence in Transylvania, which is one of the best parts of the novel. As well, the final dramatic sequence where Dracula is killed is lost.

One question remains, then. Are these plays really *Dracula* and would *Dracula*'s author have approved of the Deane and Balderston adaptations? Unfortunately, or fortunately, depending upon one's point of view, authorial intention has little influence in this case. The author of the original text had no direct input, since he died long before Deane produced the first play. Only Deane's and Balderston's intentions are at work here and, without the direct input of the original author, the plays become separate entities from the novel. The text becomes fragmented like the mirror Dracula smashes in the story, each one reflecting a different perspective.

Clues concerning what Stoker may himself have intended for a stage play production can be found in his own adaptation of the novel. There were a total of five acts, not including the prologue, made up of forty-seven scenes. Stoker's was a vast undertaking that took over four hours to read on the stage. As has been discussed, this crude adaptation was meant to protect the copyright of the novel from piracy on the stage and was never done again. Due to its obscurity, it is unlikely, then, that Deane or Balderston consulted this adaptation. They had only Stoker's text and their own agendas to guide them. They were, above all things, constrained by their medium (i.e. the stage), by the person who held the rights (Florence Stoker) and they were removed from the Victorian society that produced *Dracula* by some twenty years.

Dracula had no choice but to change. For the vampire, there is always a price for immortality: adapt or die.

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Notes

¹For the sake of convenience and to avoid confusion, the Deane and Balderston play will be cited as Balderston.

²Page references are to *The Essential Dracula*, ed. Leonard Wolf (1993).

³Dracula's first victim: Lucy Westenra in Stoker, Lucy Westera in Deane, and Mina Weston in Balderston.