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Michael McGlasson

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### Cover Page Footnote

Michael McGlasson is an independent researcher/scholar and served as the editor for Christopher Gullo's award-winning film biography "In All Sincerity ... Peter Cushing." He has written on 19th-century British theatre, Edgar Allan Poe and Gothic literature. He is currently writing a stage play bound for Broadway. He can be reached at: [mgmleolion@gmail.com](mailto:mgmleolion@gmail.com)

## Hamilton Deane and John L. Balderston: The Men Who “Re-vamped” Count Dracula

*Michael McGlasson*

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On 28 April 1929, Universal Studios producer Carl Laemmle offered his twenty-one year-old son Carl Laemmle, Jr. an extraordinary opportunity, one that at the time might have seemed rather foolish or even downright stupid. As Robert Jameson relates, “Carl Jr. was to be Universal Studios’ Vice President in Charge of Production” (23), a decision which held the potential to financially ruin Universal if Carl Jr. failed to select the right material or the right actors for a line of films slated for production between 1930 and 1931. Obviously, Carl Sr. knew something about his son that was not common knowledge, for in 1931, Carl Jr. surprised everyone at Universal by producing one of the greatest horror films of all time, namely, *Dracula* with Hungarian-born Bela Lugosi in the title role.

The script for this hugely successful film version of Bram Stoker’s 1897 novel was conceived and written by Garrett Fort, who based his script on a play written by a relatively unknown American journalist named John L. Balderston along with Dublin-born playwright Hamilton Deane. After a number of artistic setbacks, the film version of Fort’s *Dracula* opened on Valentine’s Day, 1931 with Lugosi as the infamous Count from the wilds of Transylvania, a role which would make him the most renowned portrayer of Dracula in the history of horror cinema.

Even today, seventy-six years after the release of *Dracula*, Bela Lugosi is instantly recognized by most people. But Deane and Balderston remain virtually unknown, a rather sad situation considering that it was these two men who created the modern image of Count Dracula, the “cultured, courtly continental dressed in evening clothes and a cape” as contrasted with Stoker’s “pasty, old [and] unattractive villain dressed completely in black” (Finn 11). Thus, as Dracula’s “re-vampers,” Deane and Balderston forever altered the physicality of the Count by transforming Stoker’s “pasty villain” into “a smooth-talking Lothario quite at home in the drawing-rooms” of Dr. Seward with Abraham Van Helsing lurking in a shadowed doorway, waiting for the cool light of morning (“*Dracula*, 1931”).

Tod Browning’s *Dracula* not only helped to keep Universal solvent during the Great Depression but helped shape an entire genre. It was also responsible for launching the acting career of Lugosi in America, a career that, because of excessive stereotyping,

comprised roles ranging from Draculaesque parodies (*Mark of the Vampire* and *Return of the Vampire*) to mad scientists, heartless killers, the “undying monster” (*Frankenstein Meets the Wolfman*), bumbling lab assistants and ultimately in 1955 as Dr. Eric Vornoff in Edward D. Wood’s *Bride of the Monster*. It would not be stretching the truth too much to say that Lugosi the man and the actor was “re-vamped” via his portrayal of Count Dracula, just as Stoker’s “pasty villain” was in the hands of Deane and Balderston.

In his preface to *Dracula: The Vampire Play*, Stanley Richards provides some interesting commentary on why Stoker’s *Dracula* has retained such a stranglehold on readers and audiences alike for more than a hundred years:

Unlike other monsters, Dracula is a man who walks among us.... He is an aristocrat, a titled nobleman.... He dresses impeccably and has cultured good manners and good taste to play the gracious host to his victims.... Where other monsters repel their prey, Dracula’s suave, gallant air, his intense burning eyes, exert a hypnotic charm. (vi)

This description bears an uncanny resemblance to Lugosi’s personification of the Count in Browning’s 1931 production as a very prosperous, upper-class opera connoisseur in a black silk top hat, black cape and white tie and tails, casually going about his bloody business while taking in the sights and sounds of Piccadilly Square or the Strand (incidentally, the home of the Lyceum Theatre) in the bustling metropolis of London in the early 1930s. In fact, Lugosi’s Count Dracula blends in with this Edwardian atmosphere so well that no one even bothers to cast a doubting eye toward him, not even a London police officer standing on the sidewalk. In essence, Lugosi, the “romantic Hungarian actor who essayed the title role of Dracula on Broadway and later on the screen” was the quintessential incarnation of Stoker’s master of the undead (Richards viii).

Not surprisingly, almost every scholar of horror cinema within the last fifty years has openly accepted this view of Lugosi as the Count. As D. Bruno Starrs sees it, after Deane and Balderston “transmogrified” Stoker’s original vision of Dracula, he became “a sexually alluring and culturally-refined, opera cape-wearing gentleman” who could safely be invited into English drawing-rooms (17). Similarly, Philip J. Riley notes that Lugosi’s “dignified but saturnine appearance and heavily-accented delivery created a romantic, urbane image far removed from the repulsive ancients envisioned by Stoker” (32) and Skal addresses the fact that Deane’s “dramaturgical surgery” resulted in “a new image of the master vampire in evening dress and opera cloak” (107) due to Deane’s concerns that Stoker’s vision of Dracula had to be toned down for English audiences who in the 1920s and 1930s were still, for the most part, emotionally and intellectually burdened by the canopy of Victorian morality.

By contrast, Stoker’s characterization of Dracula embraces all the physiognomy of a true Gothic nemesis, a repulsive vampire which no one, not even Dr. Seward or Van Helsing, would invite into his parlor or drawing-room without great hesitation:

His face was a strong ... aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils ... [a] lofty domed forehead [with] hair growing scantily round the temples.... His eyebrows were very massive, almost meeting over the nose and with bushy hair that seemed to curl.... [His] mouth ... under the heavy [white] moustache, was fixed and rather cruel-looking, with ... sharp white teeth; these protruded over the lips ... his ears were pale and at the tops extremely pointed; the chin was broad and strong ... the cheeks firm though thin. The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor. (18)

The only physical characteristic in this portrait bearing any resemblance to Lugosi's Dracula or even that of Raymond Huntley, Lugosi's precursor on the stage, is the overall pallor of the skin, a symbolic gesture on Stoker's part to accentuate the terror so often associated with whiteness, much like Dwight Frye's Renfield, whitewashed from the loss of blood, or Dracula's "brides," dressed in long, flowing burial gowns of gossamer white or even the white tie and vest of Lugosi in stark contrast to his black cape and top hat.

This raises a pivotal question which has not been sufficiently answered by any Dracula scholar or horror cinema historian. Why did Deane, the author of the first stage draft of *Dracula*, and Balderston, the "script doctor" of Deane's original play and creator of his own version in 1927, decide to so drastically alter the physical personification of Stoker's bloodsucking nobleman? Most of the answers offered are founded on the premise that Stoker's Count Dracula was much too gruesome and had to be "transmogrified" into a less-terrifying character via a "drawing-room melodrama," a syrupy dramatic piece with pleasant musical accompaniment in the form of violins, viols, brass and woodwinds. Indeed, Carl Laemmle Sr. found the original subject matter in the novel to be "morbid and distasteful," an opinion shared by other Hollywood moguls who "considered it to be so revolting as to be unfilmable" ("Dracula, 1931"). It appears that many script/book readers at Universal's Story Department in 1927 concurred with Mr. Laemmle, for their responses ranged from "Who would want to sit through an evening of unpleasantness such as a picture of this type would afford?" to "Were this story put on the screen, it would be an insult to every one of its audience" (Riley 30). A more well-defined reason relates to Hamilton Deane himself, considered by many of his contemporaries as a "populist producer" whose theatrical interests were strictly inclined toward "the audience and the money they brought to the box office" (Bankard). As Skal sees it, Deane "had no reservations about pleasing audiences, [for] his barnstorming melodramas had gained him a loyal following" (105).

It is worth examining the treatments and drafts for Browning's *Dracula* which demonstrate the evolution of the physical attributes of the cinematic Lugosi/Count after his "re-vamping" by Deane and Balderston for the stages of London and America. In June 1930, Frederick "Fritz" Stephani, an obscure screenwriter who "grappled somewhat listlessly with both the novel and the Broadway play" (Skal 166) submitted a thirty-two page treatment to Carl Laemmle Jr. In this somewhat haphazard attempt, Stephani's initial reference to the Count comes when "Shocked to death, John (i.e., Harker) turns

and looks into the smiling, satirical, mystic face of a tall man” (Riley 36); this sounds very much like Lugosi or even Raymond Huntley.

Two months later, Louis Bromfield, regarded as one of the most promising young novelists of the 1920s and winner of the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1926, offered his treatment for the film to Universal. Unfortunately, it was flat-out rejected, but if it had managed to become the foundation for Browning’s film version, the cinematic history of Stoker’s *Dracula* would indeed be very different. For Carl Laemmle Jr., Bromfield’s treatment epitomized his own personal vision of Stoker’s novel upon the screen. In Scene A8, for example, the Count is described as a “tall man, dressed in musty and unpressed trousers and morning coat. He has a very pale face with [a] drooping white mustache and long, unkempt hair,” the perfect incarnation of Stoker’s “pasty villain” (Riley 45).

The Bromfield treatment was then given over to Dudley Murphy, a screenwriter with experience in not only filmwriting but also directing and producing. At this time, circa August, 1930, it seems that Universal was not too pleased with the type of scripts they were being offered for *Dracula* and when the budget for the film was finalized, Universal seriously considered using the Deane/Balderston play rather than a script based on Stoker’s novel. For some odd reason, Carl Jr., despite his great appreciation of Bromfield’s treatment, did not think that it was sufficiently good material for the end product, so he had Murphy act as Bromfield’s “script doctor.” This new draft, submitted on 8 September 1930, had effectively been excised of a good portion of Bromfield’s action and dialogue and ended up resembling “the Broadway play with touches of Murnau’s *Nosferatu*” (Riley 55). After carefully reviewing this “cut and paste” draft, Carl Jr. was still not satisfied and wished to make a number of changes. However, these changes did not include the excision of Bromfield’s description of the Count, as young Laemmle was well-pleased with the original treatment.

The Bromfield/Murphy script for *Dracula* was then given to Tod Browning and screenwriter Garrett Fort for the “final polish” which converted it “into a film version of the stage play, far removed from Fritz Stephani’s action-packed horror drama” (Riley 56). Typical of Hollywood shenanigans, Bromfield was dropped from all screenplay credits and soon left California for a farm in Ohio. The script then went through a number of re-writes at the hands of Browning and Fort and at some point, they removed Bromfield’s description of the Count and replaced it with the following, found in Scene A34.

INT. HALL—LONG SHOT:

He is a tall, thick-set man of distinguished appearance. His lips are pale, but his large, luminous eyes burn with an unholy light.... He is wearing formal attire and wears a decoration. His manner is invariably suave – his bearing one of distinction. (Riley 110)

When this final version of the script was complete, Bela Lugosi was quickly called to the offices at Universal for a screen test. Having seen the results, Carl Jr. immediately

hired him to play the role of Count Dracula in Browning's film. Undoubtedly, Browning had Lugosi in mind for a good length of time which explains why Bromfield's original description was cut so that Lugosi could have the part. Of course, Lon Chaney Sr. would have been ideal as Dracula if for no other reason than for his amazing talent as a makeup wizard. Chaney could have easily reproduced through his makeup magic Stoker's "pasty villain," but on 26 August 1930, only two weeks before Carl Jr. first laid eyes on the Bromfield/Murphy script, "The Man of a Thousand Faces" died from a throat hemorrhage at the age of forty-seven.

As for Carl Jr. and his ideal vision of the Count, exactly why he changed his mind and allowed Browning to cut Bromfield's original description will probably never be known. But with the assistance of director Edgar Ulmer, we can take a peek into one possible answer: "He [Browning] was a strange man [and] I'm pretty sure that the final shooting script for all of his films was his own, no matter who got credit for the scenario ... the final results were always representative of Browning's own personal style" (Riley 29). Therefore, we can assume that if Browning thought for even an instant that Bromfield's original description of the Count did not suit his artistic style, he would have cut it and replaced it with something more in line with his personal vision of the Count, one very closely resembling Deane and Balderston's Dracula.

To understand the reasons behind Deane and Balderston's decision to forever alter the physical characteristics of Count Dracula, we need to consider their individual theatrical histories. Both were actors long before they turned their creative talents to composing stage plays for the masses. Their careers did not begin with bringing *Dracula* to the stage in the 1920s.

Balderston's obituary in the *Times* of London (11 March 1954) states that he was "well-known [in England] as in his own country [he was a native of Philadelphia, born on 23 October 1889]." Having spent some years in London representing American newspapers, during and just after World War I, he made his home in that city. Later he was closely associated with the *Outlook* of which he was editor for some years. The obituary notes that "When he began to write plays, he remained in London and some of his first productions were made here.... It was only when he took up writing plays for film on a large scale that he found it necessary to make his home in Los Angeles, but even then, he was a frequent visitor to London." Apparently, Balderston was well-educated, for his obituary also mentions that he attended Columbia University in New York City and upon graduation became employed as a reporter for numerous Philadelphia newspapers.

According to *Balderston Family History*, a genealogical account compiled by Marion Balderston, the playwright's wife, John Balderston Sr. "disapproved of the theatre and never went" which makes it rather ironic that "his son should have become a playwright after a brilliant career as a newspaperman and foreign correspondent." Mrs. Balderston then relates that in 1921, her husband "became a London correspondent and European manager of the *New York World*. He was a classics scholar and was incapable of solving even very simple mathematical problems" (Balderston & Gibson 38).

Deane's career is more relevant, given his and his family's earlier connections with the Stokers and with Henry Irving. Gordon Melton notes that Deane's family "owned an estate adjacent to that of Bram Stoker's father," adding that [Deane's] mother had been acquainted with Bram Stoker in her youth" (189). Furthermore, Deane was a member of Irving's Vacation Company, formed after the closing of the Lyceum in 1899. This Company toured the English provinces for more than three months each year and spent six months in America. The exact length of time that Deane remained as a member is unknown, but it is possible that he appeared in some very minor roles in such plays as Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* and *The Merchant of Venice*, *Becket* (with Irving in the title role) and the proverbial favorite of English audiences *The Bells*. It should be mentioned, however, that Deane's name is not included in the cast lists of any theatrical programs from this time period. In 1905, the year of Sir Henry's death, Hamilton Deane would have been a very impressionable young man with perhaps six years of experience on the stage as a "bit actor" in the presence of the great Henry Irving. He also would have come into contact with Bram Stoker, the acting manager of the Lyceum Theatre for almost twenty-five years, and must have had some knowledge of Stoker's *Dracula*. In addition, Deane might even have heard some very tall stories from other Irvingite actors concerning Stoker's alleged desire to have Sir Henry portray Count Dracula in a stage version based on the novel.

Sometime around 1923, Deane turned to a dramatization of Stoker's *Dracula* which came to pass at the Grand Theatre in Derby via a preview-premier on 5 August 1924 with Edmund Blake as Dracula, the "first actor to wear the now-familiar flowing cape of Dracula (Skal 109), and Deane as Abraham Van Helsing. Florence Stoker, Bram's widow, who held the copyright on her husband's literary works including *Dracula*, approved of Deane's play and was "comfortable with ... the 'new' image of the master vampire ... one polite enough to be invited into a proper Knightsbridge living room" (Skal 107). Thus, as Skal observes, "[I]t is clear that the characterization of Dracula that met with [Florence's] approval was a remarkably domesticated one, an image almost perversely sanitized" as compared to Stoker's original conception of the physicality of the Count (107-8).

In essence, this "new image" had absolutely nothing to do with Stoker's original Dracula, due in part to Florence Stoker's insistence that the stage Dracula must reflect "gentility and breeding" and be as far removed as possible from the "obscene, pestilential images of *Nosferatu*," a reference to F.W. Murnau's 1921 film version (Skal 107). As a matter of conjecture, one might assume that Florence was most responsible for the current image of the Count. It is, however, highly likely that Hamilton Deane, long before his encounter with Mrs. Stoker, harbored a very strong desire to somehow immortalize his great benefactor, Sir Henry Irving, and when the opportunity came along for the first stage version of *Dracula*, Deane instantly thought of Irving as his idealized vision of the Count.

By 1923, Irving had been dead for eighteen years, yet his face likely remained indelibly stamped in the creative mind of Hamilton Deane. Sir Henry was described by many people in many different ways, but for the most part, they almost always mention



his expressive, dark eyes, aquiline face, large, black eyebrows, Grecian nose and high cheekbones. In fact, the following description of Henry Irving, seated in his study at 15A Grafton Street in London in 1879, bears a surprising resemblance to that of Bela Lugosi:

He wore a dark, heavy overcoat [and] a black silk scarf fluttered under his chin. Under a very tall silk hat with a brim wider than was the fashion, his black hair curled naturally over the collar of his coat. He was forty-one years old [and] his features were now ... pale and distinguished. One could see his dark, dreamy eyes under bushy and still startling black eyebrows. (L. Irving 321-22)

In the end, Deane and Balderston's "re-vamping" of Count Dracula made it possible for the careers of many unknown actors to flourish and evolve, especially that of Bela Lugosi, now immortalized as the "Master of the Undead" and recognized the world over as the only *true* Dracula. As of 2007, Tod Browning's film version will have survived for seventy-six years and most likely will continue to thrill us for many more years to come. But as for Hamilton Deane and John L. Balderston, they remain unappreciated and undervalued, mere shadows on the landscape of horror cinema. Yet thanks to these two extraordinary artists, and perhaps with a nod to Florence Stoker, the contemporary image of Dracula endures as a twentieth-century caricature of the original, firmly at home in the confines of a drawing-room melodrama. Perhaps it would be appropriate to conclude our journey through the "transmogrification" of Dracula with the words of Lugosi himself, written on 27 March 1931 as part of a radio speech to promote the opening of Browning's film: "I am sure you will enjoy *Dracula*. I am sure you will be mightily affected by its strange story and I hope it will make you think about the weirdest, most remarkable condition that ever affected mankind" (Riley 8).

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