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Brigitte Boudreau

Université de Montréal, Canada

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Cover Page Footnote

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Sexing the Book: The Paratexts of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*

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"In the . . . years since he [*Dracula*] was created, and especially in recent time, I think that he has been kinkisized."

(Frank Langella)

In the recent past, *Dracula*, the classic vampire opus by Bram Stoker, has experienced a literary revival. Long ignored by literary scholars after it hit the silver screen at the start of the twentieth century, this work of 'great *gusto*'¹ is slowly creeping its way into the hearts of mainstream audiences with an undying appeal. The renewed interest in the figure of the vampire is evidenced by pop culture's unquenchable thirst for Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* saga and Alan Ball's *True Blood* television series, to name a couple. The awakening interest in this iconic monster has in turn led the father of the modern vampire—the little known Bram Stoker—to be given new consideration, ceaselessly intriguing academics and aficionados alike. In contemporary examinations of Stoker's eponymous text, much has been discussed, yet there remains many areas of interest that have yet to 'come out of the coffin',² so to speak. One such area is a paratextual analysis of Stoker's *Dracula*, an exploration of which leads to a more stereoscopic perspective of this *fin de siècle* Gothic masterpiece. Indeed, a paratextual understanding of Stoker's *Dracula* is an intriguing yet understudied facet of *Dracula* Studies, revealing how the subversive sensuality of the undead Count has paralleled the equality sexualized representations of his Anglo-Irish creator. Gérard Genette's concept of paratexts as 'thresholds of interpretation' provides a helpful theoretical lens through which to examine this late Victorian work. In particular, an analysis of the spatial paratexts, that is the peritexts and epitexts of Stoker's vampire tale, reveal interesting findings. Through a paratextual exploration of *Dracula*, this paper displays how every facet of Stoker's creation—including all that comes before the text and all that emerges thereafter—has ultimately come to be understood as reflective upon the libidinal life of Bram Stoker himself.

In *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Genette describes paratexts as 'productions' which allow "a text to become a book³ and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public" (1-2). More specifically, they consist in "'a certain number of verbal or

¹ For the Romantic essayist William Hazlitt, '*gusto*'—a word he borrows from Italian—is an artistic creation that possesses —internal character . . . [and] living principle! (610). In his well-known 1816 essay —On Gusto!, Hazlitt further describes a work with '*gusto*' as one where —the impression made on one sense excites by affinity those of another! (610). The author goes on to rank different works of art and literature as having or lacking *gusto*. Based on the tremendous impact that *Dracula* has had on popular culture, Stoker's vampire tale certainly merits this Hazlittian distinction.

² Charlaine Harris popularized this euphemism in *Dead Until Dark*, Book one of the *Sookie Stackhouse aka Southern Vampire Series*.

³ Tangentially, the issue of examining peritextual productions has been complicated in the age of the e-book.

other productions” (Genette 1) “such as an author’s name, title, preface, dedication, epigraphs, illustrations, book design in the broadest sense, interviews, commentaries, and so on—that frame the text . . . [and] give it its ‘external’ contours” (Stanitzek 30). Genette elaborates that paratexts: . . . surround [the text] and extend it, precisely in order to present it, in the usual sense of this word but also in the strongest sense: to make *present*, to ensure the text’s presence in the world, its ‘reception’ and consumption in the form . . . of a book. These accompanying productions, which vary in extent and appearance, constitute what I have called elsewhere the work’s *paratexts* . . . More than a boundary or sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a threshold . . . a ‘vestibule’ that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. (1-2, author’s emphasis)

The paratexts thus exist in order to ‘serve’ the text, and are but ‘thresholds’ as Genette puts it, that remain on the fringes of the work so that it may be properly delivered to the public (12). Genette further establishes paratextual sub-divisions, dealing with aspects of the spatial, temporal, substantial, pragmatic and fundamental qualities that paratexts possess (4). The elements forming the spatial paratexts will be of particular interest in this study.

The spatial paratexts are comprised of elements that are positioned around the text, either surrounding it or altogether outside of it, and include peritextual and epitextual productions. The peritext is, in one form or another, confined within the physical corpus of a text, and “necessarily has a *location* that can be situated in relation to the location of the text itself: around the text and either within the same volume or at a more respectful (or more prudent) distance” (Genette 4, author’s emphasis). As such, the peritexts represent the more immediate and ‘official’ aspects of a work that cannot be disputed. The epitext, on the other hand, is situated outside of the text, and thus forms “the distanced elements” surrounding the author’s creation (Genette 5). Moreover, “[t]he *unofficial* (or *semiofficial*) is most of the authorial epitext” (Genette 10, author’s emphasis), some examples of which include, “interviews, debates, comments by the author appearing at a later date in letters, diaries, or other genres or media” (Stanitzek 31). The epitext thus refers to the way the work is perceived by the author once it has been released into the public domain. With this in mind, a brief paratextual study of *Dracula*—including an examination of the various peritexts and epitexts of the work—will display that Stoker’s sexuality has and continues to be an integral part of the exploration of the most famous vampire novel ever written, and how several paratextual elements of the author’s text are connected to his elusive sexual trajectory.

Certain peritextual elements of *Dracula*⁴ have been interpreted as vistas into the sex life of Bram Stoker, demonstrating the extent to which this vampire tale—along with its author—have been eroticized. This can be observed, for instance, through a peritextual examination of *Dracula*’s title, dedication and preface. First, one should note the peritextual import of the title. When it first appeared in May 1897,⁵ only the words ‘Dracula by Bram

⁴A peritextual examination of *Dracula* will be undertaken in the order that each element appears in the physical book itself (i.e.: beginning with the book cover and title, dedication and preface).

⁵Specifically, the first edition of *Dracula* appeared on the twenty-sixth of May, 1897, published in London by Archibald Constable and Company (Miller, *A Dracula Handbook* 52). Critics received it moderately well, but as Elizabeth Miller notes, “it was by no means a best-seller” (*A Dracula Handbook* 52). Further, critics in 1897 did not address the erotic content of the novel, and *Dracula* was described as “a ripping good, blood-curdling novel, perfect for reading on the train” (Belford xii). Stoker’s mother, Charlotte Thornley Stoker, arguably foresaw the potential that her son’s work possessed. She wholeheartedly adored *Dracula*, calling it ‘splendid’ and predicting that, “. . . it should make a widespread reputation and much money for you” (Belford 274). Nevertheless, only Stoker’s widow

Stoker' pierced the yellow-colored dust cover with bright red lettering.⁶ At the time, the front cover of the book was not adorned with an illustration as most editions of the novel are today, thus providing no indication as to the nature of the story. Further, in 1897, the name 'Dracula' did not evoke an array of sexually laden references and images in the minds of late Victorian readers. In fact, Dracula was all but unknown to the British populace, and even the historical figure from which some argue Stoker drew his inspiration—"Voivode Dracula"—which in Wallachian means 'Devil' did not ring a bell of recognition in his early audiences (Wilkinson qtd. in Miller, "Coitus Interruptus"). Genette would accordingly categorize *Dracula* as belonging to a category of works with "really simple titles, that is, those reduced to a single element 'title', without subtitle or genre indication" (57). As such, Stoker's designated title is unique in that the name was all but unheard of in 1897, and disconnected from the infamous undead creature of German lore.⁷ Soon after its publication, however, the eponymous book began to take on a life of its own, to the point where most Westerners today have heard of *Dracula*.⁸ According to Elizabeth Miller,⁹ "the name 'Dracula' has become synonymous with 'vampire'" (*A Dracula Handbook* 144), and for many readers, the appeal of *Dracula* and of the vampire in general "lies in its eroticism" (*A Dracula Handbook* 144). Stoker's legacy displays that for each epoch, the vampire has come to mean something unique, and the creature continuously shape-shifts for different generations of readers. This underpins D. F. McKenzie's belief that "for better or for worse, readers inevitably make their own meanings" (19). Essentially, the title *Dracula*, once free of connotations for a *fin de siècle* audience, now resonates with sexuality, and evokes the image of a dangerous, yet desirable creature.

Next, the dedication of *Dracula* has been said to reveal telling autobiographical information about its author. Just as the Count has been touted as a figure of sexual defiance, the seemingly insignificant dedication of Stoker's novel has likewise been linked to the author's

gained significant *Dracula*-related royalties, and in his 1912 obituary, the author's greatest literary achievement was said to be *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving*, rather than his now legendary vampire tale.

⁶The provisional title Stoker chose was *The Un-dead*, and Dracula's name was set to be the quite unoriginal 'Count Wampyr'. According to Barbara Belford, author of *Bram Stoker: A Biography of the Author of Dracula*, the name change was a perceptive one, since "a novel called *The Un-dead* would never have endured in the 21st century" (269). Still, Stoker's 'pre-title' or 'working-title' is important to consider, as it illustrates the work as a malleable process, and considers the "genetic prehistory, or prenatal life, of the title" (Genette 66). Genette would define this type of paratext as 'temporal' in nature, that is a transitory element of the work that is not found in the published text (Genette 12).

⁷Interestingly, in Charlotte Brontë's 1847 novel *Jane Eyre*, Jane describes Bertha Mason as resembling "the foul German specter—the Vampyre", due to her fearful appearance and behavior (Brontë 371). This consists in one of the first references to the vampire in the English novel.

⁸Elizabeth Miller underscores that "almost everyone in the Western world has heard of Dracula, whether he or she has read Bram Stoker's book or not. While most know Dracula from the movies, his fame has expanded much further. The Count has influenced just about every aspect of our culture" (*Reflections on Dracula* 199). Miller's statement certainly rings true when one reflects upon the recent resurgence of interest in the figure of the vampire in popular culture.

⁹In terms of sexualized readings of Stoker's *Dracula*, Miller calls for a re-examination of the novel, claiming that it is much more than the story of a libidinal monster. For example, she points out that the so-called 'phallic' wooden stakes used to kill the female vampires can alternatively be viewed simply as tools employed in order to dispatch the 'un-dead', in accordance with the ancient mythological tradition of hunting vampires. Miller underscores that *Dracula* readers should keep in mind that "sometimes a wooden stake is just that—a wooden stake" (*Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*). Despite this, many continue to hold that vampirism in the text primarily represents a coded manifestation of repressed sexual desires.

portrayal as a closeted homosexual.¹⁰ The dedication of *Dracula* has brought to light the seemingly mysterious relationship between Stoker and the Manx author Sir Thomas Henry Hall Caine (commonly known as Hall Caine). The inscription at the beginning of Stoker's most famous work reads: "*To My Dear Friend Hommy-Beg*" (Dedication 3, author's emphasis), a Manx term of endearment signifying 'little Tommy', and a nickname apparently bestowed upon Caine by his grandmother (Klinger 3). In relation once again to Genette's notion of peritext, Caine would be labeled a 'private dedicatee', described as one who is "known to the public or not, to whom a work is dedicated in the name of a personal relationship" (131). In this case, the dedication seems to be quite personal and even cryptic, since a Victorian layperson would have been unaware that 'Hommy-Beg' referred to Caine, an author who, in his heyday, surpassed Stoker in terms of popularity. Caine was, like Stoker, a novelist who dedicated his own 1893 work, *Cap'n Davy's Honeymoon*, to Stoker (Wolf xx), and is said to have been "the only man with whom Stoker forged a relationship separate from Irving" (Belford 218).¹¹ With this in mind, certain critics have considered *Dracula's* dedication to Caine as a key piece of the Stokerian biographical puzzle.

To be sure, critics who have analyzed the implications of the dedication as well as the relationship between the two men have found theirs to be an ambiguous one. In *From the Shadow of Dracula: A Life of Bram Stoker*, Paul Murray theorizes that Stoker's liaison with Cain may have been sexual in nature:

Homosexuality on Stoker's part could have been . . . [a] reason for discontinuation of heterosexual relations with Florence. Hall Caine, who may have flirted with homosexuality in his youth, moved to an address near Stoker's in 1881 and the two formed a close and lifelong friendship. Caine wrote later in life that the affection between two men could be as tender and strong as the love between women and men. (80)

From this, it is clear that what at first seems like a simple dedication has in fact sparked much debate as to the nature of the liaison between these two 'homosocial'¹² males. Stoker's reference

¹⁰Talia Schaffer underlines that the homosexual inklings in Stoker's famous Gothic tale may be traced back to the author's life history, and in particular to the individuals in his own authorial circle. In "'A Wilde desire took me': The Homoerotic History of *Dracula*", Schaffer posits that "*Dracula* explores Stoker's fear and anxiety as a closeted homosexual man during Oscar Wilde's trial . . . [*Dracula's*] peculiar tonality of horror derives from Stoker's emotions at this unique moment in gay history" (381). The 'birth' of the homosexual is certainly relevant to the study of the man who was Bram Stoker, yet many critics are left with more questions than answers with regards to the sex life of the author of *Dracula*. All can unanimously agree, however, that the trial of Oscar Wilde ushered in the idea of the 'homosexual' as a label or identity, rather than simply an illegal act. The trial further placed the issue of same-sex love into the spotlight, and soon thereafter homosexuality entered into the 'collective consciousness' of Western thought.

¹¹In 1878, Stoker left Dublin for London in order to take the position of manager of the Lyceum Theatre for the famed actor Henry Irving. Stoker held this post for the next twenty-seven years, and served Irving with extreme loyalty and devotion until the actor's death in 1905 (Dorn). Texts such as *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving* and *Dracula*, among others, have come to be regarded by some as autobiographical, revealing Stoker's unstable sex life and possible same-sex desire for Irving.

¹²In *Between Men: English Literature and Homosocial Desire*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick envisions the twin concepts of homosociality and homosexuality as being along the same spectrum. She underlines that, "To draw the 'homosocial' back into the orbit of 'desire' . . . is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual—a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted" (1-2). Sedgwick's notion of 'homosocial desire' may be categorized as being on the same plane of existence as the homosexual, thereby displaying that these two forms of male relations share notable affinities. It has been argued that in Stoker's life, the realm of the homosocial may likewise be understood as bordering closely along that of the homosexual. Certain bonds between Stoker and his male friends might arguably be "separated only by an invisible,

to Caine has become a small yet considerable facet of the tale—that is integral to the text, yet at the same time stands apart from it—and one that has caught the attention of critics eager to decipher Stoker’s obscure sexual past. As one of the central peritextual elements which borders the text, the dedication of *Dracula* has led critics to pontificate about the feelings of same-sex desire that Stoker could have experienced, thereby demonstrating the extent to which every aspect of his vampire novel has been eroticized.

The preface to Stoker’s *Dracula* further represents part of the sexualized peritextual components of the work, and the preface to the 1901 Icelandic edition¹³ is of particular interest here. This often-overlooked piece has been claimed by some to reflect the possible morbid sexual fantasies of its author. Like the original 1897 preface,¹⁴ Stoker continues to weave a ‘fictional preface’ in his 1901 edition in order to create a willing suspension of disbelief, but takes his realism one step further. Genette elucidates the purpose of a fictional preface: “[T]he primary function of the fictional preface, which is to effect a fictional attribution, is supplemented with and reinforced by secondary functions arising from the simulation of the serious preface . . . ” (279). As such, Genette holds that a fictional preface that is in some ways ‘plausible’ serves to strengthen the ‘fantastical’ hold that the author possesses over their audience. Stoker seemingly understood the necessity of a ‘serious preface’, as he attempted to connect his tale with a series of grisly events still fresh in the minds of his British audience; the Jack the Ripper serial murders. Indeed, in the 1901 preface to his first foreign language edition of *Dracula*, ‘*Makt Myrkranna*’ (‘*Might of Darkness*’), he writes:

The reader of this story will very soon understand how the events outlined in these pages have been gradually drawn together to make a logical whole. Apart from excising minor details which I considered unnecessary, I have let the people involved relate their experiences in their own way; but, for obvious reasons, I have changed the names of the people and places concerned . . . I state again that this mysterious tragedy which is here described is completely true in all its external respects, though naturally I have reached a

carefully blurred, always-already-crossed line from being ‘interested in men’” (Sedgwick 89). Sedgwick’s notions about masculinity help to navigate through a social study of relations ‘between men’, and Stoker certainly provides an ideal homosocial subject from this perspective.

¹³It should be noted that the preface to the 1901 Icelandic edition was probably written in 1898 (Klinger 5), and thus has been dated accordingly here.

¹⁴*Dracula* is written in the epistolary style and is comprised of a sequence of diary entries, letters, logs, and newspaper clippings. The original 1897 preface addresses the various sources from which the tale is woven:

How these papers have been placed in sequence will be made manifest in the reading of them. All needless matters have been eliminated, so that a history almost at variance with the possibilities of later-day belief may stand forth as simple fact. There is throughout no statement of past things wherein memory may err, for all the records chosen are exactly contemporary, given from the standpoints and within the range of knowledge of those who made them.

(Author’s Preface, 1897, Stoker 4)

Here, Stoker sets up the novel not as a fiction, but as a series of veritable events that actually occurred. Even before beginning the text, the intention is to create in the readers a sense of trust towards the myriad of different sources of information. Further, this fictional preface attributes authorship to someone other than the novelist. Miller elucidates Stoker’s method in “Shape-Shifting Text: Editions and Versions of *Dracula*”, noting that he “intended the voice of the preface to be that of Jonathan Harker or a fictional editor, who may or may not have been Stoker himself” (181). Stoker thus abandons his position of real-life author and entices his readers to enter a state of willing suspension of disbelief even before beginning the vampire tale (Miller 181). Indeed, by providing his audience with a solemn-sounding fictional preface, Stoker effectively removes himself from the position of author, and becomes a sort of scribe, who simply reports a succession of events. This method enabled him to blur the line between fiction and reality, a technique he continued to perfect in his 1901 edition of the novel.

different conclusion on certain points than those involved in the story. But the events are incontrovertible, and so many people know of them that they cannot be denied. *This series of crimes has not yet passed from the memory – a series of crimes which appear to have originated from the same source, and which at the same time created as much repugnance in people everywhere as the murders of Jack the Ripper, which came into the story a little later.* Various people's minds will go back to the remarkable group of foreigners who for many seasons together played a dazzling part in the life of the aristocracy here in London; and some will remember that one of them disappeared suddenly without apparent reason, leaving no trace. All the people who have willingly – or unwillingly – played a part in this remarkable story are known generally and well respected. Both Jonathan Harker and his wife (who is a woman of character) and Dr. Seward are my friends and have been so for many years, and I have never doubted that they were telling the truth; and the highly respected scientist, who appears here under a pseudonym . . . But in our times it ought to be clear to all serious-thinking men that 'there are more things in heaven and earth/ than are dreamt of in your philosophy'.

London,
August 1898
B.S.

(Stoker, Author's Preface (1898), 5-6, emphasis mine.)

Here, 'B.S.' or the editor 'Bram Stoker'¹⁵ not only claims that he is a long-time acquaintance of the characters of the novel, but he also goes the extra mile by creating a parallel between his vampire fiction and the real-life Jack the Ripper slayings.¹⁶ As Carol Margaret Davison underscores, "Stoker attempts to place his narrative within an actual historical context" by alluding to Jack the Ripper's killings in Whitechapel (148). Davison reveals that Stoker's preface is merely the first in a series of couplings between these apex predators in popular culture.¹⁷

By connecting the terrible twosome that Davison refers to as 'blood brothers' 'Jack and Drac', and stressing that their crimes "originated from the same source", Stoker ensured that the Ripper sex crimes became incorporated into "Dracula's dense narrative whirlpool" (Davison 148). In linking this once again to Genette's notion of a fictional preface, Stoker seems to have gone above and beyond creating a simple statement, and in reality crafted a 'credible' peritextual production that likely resonated with his audience long after they had finished his novel. Accordingly, Genette notes that:

To effect a fiction, one must (as all novelists know) do a bit more than make a performance statement: one must constitute this fiction by dint of fictionally convincing details; one must, therefore, flesh it out—and the most effective way of doing so seems to

¹⁵It should be noted that by including his name in the fictional preface, Stoker imagines himself as a character that is, in fact, part of the story (the 'editor' as it were, rather than the narrator of the tale). Stoker 'the editor' and friend of the *Dracula* characters is therefore made separate from Stoker 'the author'.

¹⁶The Jack the Ripper serial murders are among the most notorious and still unresolved cases in British history, where one or more individuals brutally dispatched several women identified as prostitutes around Whitechapel, London in 1888. John J. Eddleston notes that, "Most writers agree that Mary Ann Nichols, Annie Chapman, and Catherine Eddowes were murdered by the same hand. The vast majority also include Mary Jane Kelly, though some claim that she might have been killed by someone else who used the Ripper murders to disguise his crime" (1). In popular imagination, the figures of Dracula and Jack the Ripper have often been connected.

¹⁷Davison points out that Dracula and Jack the Ripper are pitted against each other, for instance, in the well-known 1985 graphic novel *Blood of the Innocent* by Rickey Shanklin, Marc Hempel and Mark Wheatley (162).

be to simulate a serious preface, with all the paraphernalia of discourse and messages (that is, functions) which such a simulation entails. (279)

As such, Genette holds that an author's ability to produce a great work rests, at least in part, upon their ability to include a 'realistic' fictional preface. Stoker certainly recognized this, and consequently attempted to show how the titular antagonist of his novel could share affinities with one of the most infamous sex criminals of the nineteenth century. By sensationalizing his fictional preface with a reference to Jack the Ripper, Stoker implies that Dracula—like his murderous confrere—stands for perverse sexuality, and that this perversity truly represents a threat to society. The 'credibility' of the fictional preface is thus a significant component of the introductory material of Stoker's tale, as it enables his readers to embark upon a seemingly authentic terrifying adventure.

Moreover, it has been argued that the allusion to the Jack the Ripper murders¹⁸ has reflected back upon Stoker's own sexual persona in the form of rumors and hearsay, as *Dracula* readers have become increasingly unable to distinguish fact from fiction in Stoker's life. This occurrence, it seems, is the result of the way in which readers "take liberties with texts", which Robert Darnton, in his exploration of the history of reading, regards as a common occurrence (132). To be sure, Jack the Ripper was rumored to be infected with syphilis, and Stoker is likewise thought to have caught the disease, "probably around the turn of the century, possibly from a prostitute in Paris" (Murray 267). Belford further highlights that "[i]n biography and fiction, Stoker variously has been given a frigid wife, a penchant for prostitutes (particularly during their menstrual period), a sexually transmitted disease, and inherited insanity" (x). Moreover, Miller points out that some critics have taken this interpretation even further, claiming that "*Dracula* is a book about disease written by a diseased author" ("Coitus Interruptus"). Robert Tracy has gotten even more personal and advanced the rather far-fetched claim that writing *Dracula* became a way for the syphilis-ridden Stoker to enact his 'revenge' upon the prostitutes he blamed for his fate, similarly to Jack the Ripper; "The Staking of Lucy and the other vampire women are at once fantasies of total sexual power and of sexual revenge. The vampires, spreading 'corruption' and 'infection' are a version of the diseased prostitutes presumably responsible for Stoker's illness . . ." (45). To many, these are radical claims, but the fact remains that Stoker's fictitious preface and his vampire tale in general have helped stoke a myriad of theories linking the libidinal figures of Count Dracula, Jack the Ripper, and Bram Stoker himself into a voracious love triangle, so to speak. These hypotheses, which range from the probable to the far-fetched, exemplify Roger Chartier's understanding that a text takes on different meanings with various audiences, and how "[w]hen the 'same' text is apprehended through very different mechanisms of representation, it is no longer the same" (2). In short, Stoker's prefatory material to the novel, including the title, dedication, and fictional author's preface (of the 1901 Icelandic edition in particular), illustrate the extent to which every element relating to *Dracula* has become real—and sexualized—in the minds of readers. It also reveals that a peritextual analysis of Bram Stoker's eponymous vampire tale has led the author's own libidinal life to come under serious scrutiny. This continues to be the case with an epitextual investigation of the novel.

Also central to the examination of the paratexts of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* are the epitexts of the work. These include the documents that Stoker produced after writing his vampire tale that

¹⁸One of the most common theories explaining the motivation behind the Ripper killings was that the individual in question was an insane doctor, who, suffering from syphilis, avenged himself on the harlots he blamed for his fate (Showalter 94).

are directly or indirectly related to the text itself. This brief epitextual analysis will focus in particular on a letter that Stoker produced around the time of the release of the novel, and an essay he wrote several years after *Dracula*. These epitextual elements are hereagain said to provide glimpses into the obscure sex life of the author. Moreover, the epitexts of *Dracula* displays the ways in which Stoker wanted—and did not want—audiences to interpret his fiction through both private and public epitexts. To begin, Stoker claimed to William Gladstone,¹⁹ in a succinct letter sent on the twenty-fourth of May, 1897²⁰ that accompanied an advance copy of the book, that *Dracula* in no way contained references to sexuality. In it he writes:

It is a story of a vampire, the old medieval vampire but recrudescant today . . . the book is necessarily full of horrors and terrors but I trust that these are calculated to *cleanse the mind* by pity & terror. At any rate *there is nothing base in the book*, and though superstition is fought with the weapons of superstition, I hope it is not irrelevant. (Letter to William Gladstone, emphasis mine)

By purporting to Gladstone that his novel aims “to cleanse the mind” and stressing that “there is nothing base in the book”, Stoker unwittingly reveals his imminent fear that many would interpret his text not as a moralistic tale, but instead embrace it as a wanton work of fiction. Moreover, Genette might describe such a letter as consisting in a private epitext, as the memo is sent to “a full-fledged addressee, one whom the author addresses for that person’s own sake even if the author’s ulterior motive is to let the public subsequently stand witness to this interlocution” (371). Indeed, it seems that by sending this ‘interlocution’ to one of the most important men in England, Stoker hoped that his own reading of the novel would circulate amongst Britain’s most prominent individuals. The author was thus arguably aware that critics might ‘falsely’ interpret his work, and wanted a man of great influence, and probably his entire social circle, to rest assured that *Dracula* was no carnal creation.

Several years after the novel’s publication, Stoker seemingly wanted to deliver this message once again, only this time, he aimed to reach a much larger audience. He produced, in 1908, an essay entitled “The Censorship of Fiction”. In this fascist tirade, the author warns that reading libidinal fiction poses a menace to society, particularly Britain’s youths. He accordingly underlines that, “It is through the corruption of individuals that the harm is done . . . the only emotions which in the long-run harm are those arising from sex impulses . . .” (158). Stoker further highlights the need for law in the literary world, and notes that writers who produce sexually explicit material should face the wrath of Lady Justice:

There exists a censorship of a kind, but it is crude and coarse and clumsy, and difficult of operation – the police. No one could wish an art so fine as literature, with a spirit as subtle and evanescent as oenanthic ether . . . put under the repressive measures carried out by coarse officials. But it is the coarseness and unscrupulousness of certain writers of fiction which has brought the evil; on their heads be it. (“The Censorship of Fiction” 161)

¹⁹William Gladstone was, at the time Stoker sent the letter, the former prime minister of Britain, having been elected four times from the 1860s till the mid 1890s. Belford notes that Stoker and Gladstone quickly became friends after meeting (131). Interestingly, Gladstone reputedly delighted in “ . . . rehabilitating prostitutes, a task he masked as charitable work. He would approach women in the Haymarket, engage them in long monologues, and talk them into momentary goodness” (131). Perhaps this explains why Stoker was eager to send an advance copy of *Dracula* with an explanatory letter to his prim and prominent friend. The author might have indeed been concerned that Gladstone would get the wrong impression of his work, and wanted to clarify the ‘true’ meaning of his vampire tale to a man of great political and social importance.

²⁰Although the letter sent to William Gladstone was technically written two days prior to the release of *Dracula*, I would still venture to argue that it represents a private epitext with relation to the eponymous novel.

In this passage, Stoker seemingly suggests that writers of sexual fiction should be hunted down like petty criminals. Clearly, he did not see himself as belonging to such an ‘odious’ category of authors. Quite ironically, a lascivious identity was soon thereafter bestowed upon him and his well-known vampire tale. If interpreted as epitextual material to *Dracula* like Stoker’s letter, Genette would likely categorize “The Censorship of Fiction” as a public epitextual production, since in this case, “the author addresses the public . . .” (371). For many, this strange and seemingly contradictory work²¹ poses a serious dilemma to those who hold that Stoker’s oeuvres represent coded avocations for liberal sexual attitudes. LeBlanc²² notes that many critics have resigned themselves to Stoker’s bizarre views by envisioning him as two psychologically separate authors, “a Victorian puritan and a liberated writer of provocative fiction” (250). To be sure, “The Censorship of Fiction” continues to baffle Stokerian scholars, who find that “Stoker’s prudish call for censorship [is incompatible] with the eroticism of his novel *Dracula*” (LeBlanc 250). This is especially true when the infamous essay is understood specifically as an epitextual reference to the sensualized vampire tale.

Further highlighting the relation between Stoker’s sex life and the epitext of *Dracula*, Murray alternatively suggests that the author, who might have been infected with syphilis, as aforementioned, at the time he wrote “The Censorship of Fiction”, was simply “attempting to build societal structures that would prevent others [from] suffering his fate” (254). Another theory proposes that Stoker did not see *Dracula* as sexually laden in the slightest, and that the novel is an unconscious Freudian production, a “kind of incestuous, necrophilous, oral-anal-sadistic all-in wrestling match” (Richardson qtd. in Miller, “Coitus Interruptus”). It is likely, however, that the stalking, sucking, and staking in *Dracula* registered on some suggestive plane in the mind of its author. Belford reinforces this viewpoint: “Stoker was an intelligent and insightful man . . . He was many things, but naïve was not one of them; he was fully aware of the subtexts in his horror tale” (xii-xiii). It seems that when it comes to *Dracula*, the focus has not been “to reveal, as purely as possible, the original artist’s creative intention” (McGann 41), but rather to excavate Stoker’s texts—and his own personal life—from an increasingly libidinal perspective. Indeed, contemporary critics have largely ignored Stoker’s prudish rants about the evils of the flesh, and instead created their own conception of the man behind the vampire. In relation to this, D.C. Greetham argues that an author does not have the upper hand when it comes to interpretations of their work. Indeed, Greetham maintains that a writer’s personal views should not hold precedence over alternative perspectives:²³

An author may claim to have undertaken one sort of work but in fact have produced another, and an author’s critical evaluation of that work is not *prima facie* any more reliable or authoritative than any other commentator’s. Some authors . . . are perversely unhelpful about their works, and even some intentionalist textual critics may question and ultimately reject the announced intentions of an author. (364)

Despite the fact that author and audience have been at odds, one thing can be unanimously agreed upon; Stoker clearly stated and implied in at least one letter and essay, respectively, that

²¹That is, contradictory when understood in relation to *Dracula*, rather than in and of itself.

²²In opposition to the generally accepted position on this matter, Jacqueline LeBlanc has instead suggested that “The Censorship of Fiction” actually exposes “a continuum between censorship and eroticism” (250), especially when *Dracula* is interpreted as the story about a band of Western males set to stamp out an evil Eastern Count (250).

²³That is, once the work has been released into the public domain.

he did not want *Dracula*—and by extension, the figure of the vampire—to be viewed as a symbol of sexual anarchy. It seems, however, that like many artists, Stoker's text took on alternative meanings once it was published, since by publishing it, he inadvertently relinquished his authorial control. In short, although during his lifetime Stoker attempted to dissuade his audience from a provocative reading of his vampire tale, his epitextual essays to do so were in vain, and his opinion became but one in a sea of interpretations.

A paratextual analysis of *Dracula* and an understanding of sexuality therein helps to elucidate how every aspect of Bram Stoker's vampire tale, however small, has been eroticized. Further still, the Count's sensual appeal has led Stoker's own libidinal life to come under considerable investigation. Gérard Genette theory of paratexts posited in *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* serves as a useful theoretical lens through which to observe the often-overlooked 'external contours' of a text, and Stoker's eponymous novel is the perfect subject. An exploration of the peritextual 'productions' of *Dracula*, such as the title, dedication, and preface have, in various ways, been linked to Stoker's elusive sexual persona. Further, an examination of the epitexts of this classic tale once again reveal the fixation upon the obscure sexual trajectory of this Anglo-Irish author, and illustrate how the text took on a life of its own once it was released into the public domain. Stoker's attempts at controlling the interpretation of his work, as revealed through his epitextual writings, show that once he published his vampire tale, he endeavored to dispel any rumors concerning the presence of 'coded eroticism' therein, through both private and public epitexts. A century or so after these essays, the eponymous Count has become a symbol of "pure sex" as Frank Langella puts it (qtd. in Rosen, "20 Questions: Frank Langella"), and Stoker's opinion has been reduced to a pile of ashes, so to speak. Ultimately, it seems as though the adaptable *Dracula* in many ways belongs more to us than to Bram Stoker, as readers continue to unearth the epicurean possibilities that this *fin de siècle* vampire tale offers.²⁴

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²⁴ An earlier version of this article appeared in my Masters thesis, *The Elusive Vampire: An Examination of Unfixed Sexuality in Bram Stoker's Dracula* (Université de Montréal, 2007).

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