Journal of Dracula Studies

Volume 21 | Number 1 Article 5

2019

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Recommended Citation

Reiter, Geoffrey (2019) ""Desire of Many Things": The Augustinian Matrix of Bram Stoker's "The Censorship of Fiction"," *Journal of Dracula Studies*: Vol. 21: No. 1, Article 5.
Available at: https://research.library.kutztown.edu/dracula-studies/vol21/iss1/5

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Cover Page Footnote

Geoffrey Reiter is Professor and Coordinator of Literature at Lancaster Bible College and an Associate Editor at the website Christ and Pop Culture. He holds an MA in Church History from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and a PhD in English from Baylor University. In addition to work on Bram Stoker, Reiter has also published articles on such writers as George MacDonald and Arthur Machen.

This article is available in Journal of Dracula Studies: https://research.library.kutztown.edu/dracula-studies/vol21/iss1/5

"Desire of Many Things": The Augustinian Matrix of Bram Stoker's "The Censorship of Fiction"

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Though he is now best known today as the author of the wildly popular horror novel *Dracula* (1897), Bram Stoker was many things in his lifetime: law clerk, stage manager, athlete, and, on the side, a writer. He published novels sporadically, most especially in the few spare moments he had away from his busy job as the stage manager of London's Lyceum Theatre, home of the best-known Shakespearean actor in England at the time, Henry Irving. In the period between Irving's death in 1906 and Stoker's own passing in 1912, Stoker began to increase his output of nonfiction and journalism. Perhaps his most infamous essay from this period is a short work entitled simply "The Censorship of Fiction," in which he suggested that the State should be responsible for censoring works with lewd sexual content. Since its publication in 1908, this essay has been largely ignored, except by Stoker scholars, many of whom take some delight in pointing out the supposed ironies that the author of *Dracula* should pen such a work. Whether or not one accepts Stoker's thesis, however, the essay deserves further attention from Stoker scholarship as a substantive description of his conscious artistic motivations. One aspect of its premises and conclusions that is worth noting is the way in which "The Censorship of Fiction" operates in ways that parallel the thought of Saint Augustine of Hippo, one of the most influential thinkers in all church history. Whether or not Stoker was directly and consciously invoking Augustine, there are enough correspondences between their writings to suggest at the very least that "The Censorship of Fiction" is embedded in a philosophical matrix composed in part of Augustine's ideas.

Contemporary readers of Bram Stoker might not think to associate him with Saint Augustine, but there is good reason for believing he would have been exposed to the church father's work during the course of his lifetime. While Augustine's work has had immense influence on Western Civilization as a whole, the nineteenth century in particular saw a renewed interest in the patristic era of church history. The Oxford Movement, with its Roman Catholic leanings, sought a return to the church traditions of the early centuries, and Victorian historians were less interested than historians of the eighteenth-century in polemical historiography that read those years as the "Dark Ages." The historical novel was becoming fashionable, and this trend led to fictional representations of the early church. John Henry Newman depicted third-century Christianity in his novel *Callista* (1855), which was itself a rejoinder to Charles Kingsley’s account of the fifth century, *Hypatia* (1853). Kingsley was more critical of the patristic church, vehemently opposing what he saw as an effeminate move toward early Christian asceticism and away from Protestant and doggedly heterosexual “muscular Christianity.” But Kingsley and his other theologically progressive friends like F. D. Maurice and George MacDonald also jumped back to the early church in their admiration for Origen, in whom they found a kindred spirit in their own Christian universalism. The liberal theologian and scholar Edwin Abbott, best known for his fantasy novel *Flatland* (1884), penned three books set in the first century, *Philochristus* (1878), *Onesimus* (1882), and *Silanus* (1906), while the Decadent art critic Walter Pater added his own *Marius the Epicurean* (1885). These were just a few prominent examples of a massive sub-genre; indeed, Royal W. Rhodes, who has done the most substantial study of such fiction, must confess that “[t]he mere listing of those Early Church novels is an arduous task” (30). Nor was the interest in the Church Fathers limited to prose fiction. In the realm of poetry, the future archbishop Richard Chenevix Trench penned a lengthy verse entitled “The Story of Justin Martyr” (1835), while the Anglican priest John Mason Neale was exploring the Eastern Orthodox side of the tradition, busily translating ancient Christian hymns, many of which remain in hymnals today.

Beyond a generic interest in patristics, literary critics have identified specifically Augustinian strands winding through many of the best-known writers of the Victorian age. Howard Fulweiler has noted a strain of Augustinian Platonism in many of Tennyson's works. According to Joseph Baker, Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* illustrates principles from Augustine's *City of God*. James Finn Cotter has twice remarked on the heavy influence of Augustine upon the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Marylu Hill sees in the Eucharistic theology of Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* evidence of the *Confessions*, particularly the popular translation done by Tractarian E. B. Pusey, which had made the text available to those unable to read Latin. John Henry Newman's spiritual autobiography, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864), also clearly bears the imprint of Augustine's *Confessions*. Burcht Pranger even finds evidence of the *Confessions* in the work of Henry James.

Whether or not Bram Stoker had read Augustine thoroughly, then, the Bishop of Hippo's overall penetration into Victorian intellectual culture meant that Stoker must have had at least a passing familiarity. But there is good evidence for supposing that he may very well have read Augustine at some point, particularly during his college years. Stoker attended Trinity College Dublin from 1864 to 1870, and it is highly likely he would have been exposed to Augustine's work at this time. The Church of Ireland was disestablished in 1869, meaning that TCD was still officially Protestant throughout most of Stoker's time there, but Augustine was always popular even with Protestant thinkers; faculty and graduates of the college often cite him in their published works. Stoker's tutor at Trinity, Dr. George Ferdinand Shaw (Murray 33), was theologically on the more ecumenical side of the spectrum, but also considered "religious education" to be a "vital branch of knowledge" (Shaw 373). Thus Shaw, who had taught ethics and logic and who appreciated Greek and Latin classics (Hayes), may have discussed Augustine with his young protégé. Trinity historians R. B. McDowell and D. A. Webb also observe that students living on or around campus had to attend "catechetical lectures on the Bible and the creeds" (129), a requirement that only became optional in 1904 (387).[16] Murray notes that, while Stoker's later attendance at TCD seems to have fluctuated due to his job situation, he was a fairly consistent early on, meaning he would have attended such training. Moreover, though he did not distinguish himself for his academic work while at Trinity, Stoker was an active member of both the College Philosophical Society and the College Historical Society. Indeed, during his time at TCD, Stoker would have the opportunity to preside over each, serving as President of "the Phil" in 1867 and Auditor of "the Hist" in 1872. These organizations included many of Dublin's future intellectual and artistic leaders. There is no doubt that Stoker and his associates at Trinity tended toward the eccentric and the liberal end of the spectrum.[17] Nonetheless, given Stoker's associations with the Phil and the Hist, coupled with the avowedly religious background of Trinity College Dublin at the time, one would expect him to come away with some knowledge of Augustine's philosophy.

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[16] McDowell and Webb note that, unlike students at Oxford and Cambridge, TCD students were *not* required to affirm the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion (246-47); but as the foundational theological statements of the Anglican Church, the doctrines of the Thirty-Nine Articles were doubtless covered in the catechetical classes. The Thirty-Nine Articles also draw heavily from Augustinian theology, as can be seen by such elaborations of their content as Edward Welchman's *The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, Illustrated with Notes, and Confirmed by the Texts of the Holy Scripture, and Testimonies of the Primitive Fathers* (1834); Henry Cary's *Testimonies of the Fathers of the First Four Centuries to the Doctrine and Discipline of the Church of England as Set Forth in the Thirty-Nine Articles* (1835); Edward Harold Browne's *An Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles* (1850); A. P. Forbes's *An Explanation of the Thirty-Nine Articles* (1868); T. P. Boultbee's *A Commentary on the Thirty-Nine Articles* (1877); and John MacBeth's *Notes on the Thirty-Nine Articles* (1894). Indeed, Augustine is quoted directly in Article XXIX.

Nor should we be surprised to find evidence of a patristic philosopher in the writings of an author frequently associated with darkness and horror. Anyone who knows Bram Stoker by more than just his reputation will affirm without hesitation his substantial use of Christian language, themes, and imagery. While this usage may be glossed over at times by critics more interested in contemporary literary theories, few would deny their presence. As Stoker biographer Paul Murray maintains, "The world which produced Stoker . . . cannot be divorced from its religious preoccupations and yet their significance passes many commentators by. There are, indeed, attempts to substitute the secular concerns of our own time, the various 'isms', for the obvious reality of Stoker's convictions" (3). Many of the tales in Stoker's collection *Under the Sunset* (1882), for example, are simply fantasized version of Biblical stories. They are, in the words of Stoker critic William Hughes, "implicated in and informed by an identifiably Christian discourse" (17). In the short story "The Judge's House" (1891), the protagonist is haunted by a supernaturally malevolent rat, and only his family Bible has any power to protect him.[18] Christianity is perhaps most prevalent in Stoker's best-known novel, *Dracula* (1897); indeed, Christopher Herbert makes the fully justifiable claim that "critical study of *Dracula* needs to begin by recognizing it as very likely the most religiously saturated popular novel of its time" (101). Clive Leatherdale is even more explicit, suggesting "that one of the basic lessons of the novel was to reaffirm the existence of God in an age when the weakening hold of Christianity generated fresh debate about what lay beyond death" (176).

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[17] With English Professor Edward Dowden, Stoker would champion the poetry of then-forbidden Walt Whitman, favoring also many other Romantic poets like Byron and Shelley who had not made it into full critical acceptability yet.

In other words, Stoker's argument in "The Censorship of Fiction" may not be so incongruous with his fictional practice as it may initially seem. He begins his essay by asserting the vital and largely positive role he sees fiction playing in contemporary society. At its best, Stoker believes, fiction can flourish and prove beneficial when authors consciously restrain themselves from giving their imagination license in writing about harmful topics. He acknowledges that it may be impossible for anyone to prevent fully the imagination from straying into unhealthy realms, but an individual need not put his or her basest desires into written form and thereby risk corrupting the minds of others. While Stoker does not condone the audiences willing to pay money for such corrosive writing, his sternest condemnation is reserved for those without the self-restraint—or "reticence"—to rein in their sinful desires, authors who abuse their powers for motives of pure profit. Stoker is quick to reassert that there is nothing intrinsically evil about using fiction to instill moral truth, and he cites Jesus's use of parables as a prime example. But in egregious cases, when unrestrained writers continue to write and unethical publishers continue to publish and undiscriminating audiences continue to buy, he maintains that the state should step in and censor such products. "Truth can always investigate in a worthy fashion," he concludes, but "those who prostitute their talents—and amongst them the fairest, imagination—must expect the treatment accorded to the class which they have deliberately joined" (487).

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[18] For more discussion on this aspect of the story, see Reiter 236-41.

Stoker refuses to give specific examples of the class of writing to which he is opposed, maintaining, "It is not well to name either these books or their authors, for such would but make known what is better suppressed, and give the writers the advertisements which they crave" (485). Scholars analyzing the essay since its first publication have assumed its target is specifically pornographic fiction. Stoker biographer Barbara Belford reports that one newspaper of the day ran the headline, "Prurient Novel Is Condemned, Bram Stoker Opens Crusade in London" (312). Maurice Hindle likewise reads the essay as an attack on pornography and joins with Belford in singling out the publisher Charles Carrington as likely the particular target of Stoker's ire (419).

Under the Obscene Publications Act of 1857, purveyors of such material could face criminal charges in England. However, Carrington and others evaded this sanction by centering their publishing operations on the continent. Groups like the National Vigilance Association—a successor to the earlier Society for the Suppression of Vice—did their best to aid British authorities in tracking down such offenders, but as Donald Thomas has observed, officials across the Channel

> were not always as obliging to their English colleagues as they might have been, principally because they were not much concerned with postal or other traffic in books from France to England: it was for the English customs or postal authorities to deal with that. There was hardly more than a token co-operation in serving expulsion orders on Carrington in 1901 and 1907. . . (289)

Thomas points out that 1907 saw another case as well in which French police failed to assist their Scotland

Yard counterparts (289). The timing may be significant: "The Censorship of Fiction" had its genesis as a pair of addresses, one to London's White Friars Club in October 1907, and then another to the Author's Club a month later (Murray 253).

Despite his reluctance to name the offenders outright in the published version of the essay, Stoker's White Friars speech was apparently "teeming with references to objectionable fiction" (*LA Times* qtd. in Murray 253). Moreover, notwithstanding the essay's indirectness, there is certainly no shortage of textual evidence to indicate that pornography is the target of Stoker's ire. He explicitly indicts fiction in which "evil effects" are "produced on the senses" (482-83). In particular, however, he believes that "the only emotions which in the long run harm are those arising from sex impulses, and when we have realized this we have put a finger on the actual danger" (483).

In designating sexual desire as the locus of harm, Stoker tracks closely with Augustine's analysis of sexual lust in *City of God*. Like Stoker, Augustine sees sexual sin as in a category wholly its own, since it is a physical desire capable of acting independently of the rational will. In *City of God*, Augustine writes,

> This lust assumes power not only over the whole body, and not only from the outside, but also internally; it disturbs the whole man, when the mental emotion combines and mingles with the physical craving, resulting in a pleasure surpassing all physical delights. So intense is this pleasure that when it

> reaches its climax there is an almost total extinction of mental alertness; the intellectual senses, as it were, are overwhelmed. (14.16.577)

In the *Confessions*, Augustine is similarly troubled by his physical lusts, recalling how in his youth he could not will himself to want to give up sexual sin; he famously tells God, "I had prayed to you for chastity and said 'Give me chastity and continence, but not yet.' For I was afraid that you would answer my prayer at once and cure me too soon of the disease of lust, which I wanted satisfied, not quelled" (8.7.169). Stoker deals harshly with the purveyors of pornographic work because they provide ordinary people the opportunity to indulge imaginatively sexual lusts which, as Augustine was well aware, are often so powerful as to overcome the rational and moral faculties of the human will.

This does not mean that either Augustine or Stoker is opposed to human sexuality; indeed, both writers consider it a natural good. Influenced by the ascetic environment of late antiquity, Augustine at times may go too far in condemning non-procreative sex.[19] Even so, despite his reputation as something of a prude, Augustine actually fought hard against Manichean teachings that sex was intrinsically evil. Indeed, in *City of God*, Augustine argues (rather progressively for his day) that Adam and Eve would have reproduced through sexual means even had they not fallen:

> If anyone says that there would have been no intercourse or procreation if the first

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[19] For a discussion, see Hunter 537.

> human beings had not sinned, he is asserting, in effect, that man's sin was necessary to complete the number of the saints. . . .
>
> It follows that, if there had been no sin, marriage would have been worthy of the happiness of paradise, and would have given birth to children to be loved, and yet would not have given rise to any lust to be ashamed of . . . [W]hy should we not believe that the sexual organs could have been the obedient servants of mankind, at the bidding of the will . . . ? (14.23.585)

For Augustine's ideal unfallen condition, human sexuality is good because it originally would have been under the control of the will, as with other bodily functions. As Donald X. Burt contends, "Augustine's conclusion is that sexuality, like every other human drive, is good in itself and does not necessarily constitute an obstacle to the 'friendship' that is the foundation of the family. Indeed, it can contribute warmth and energy to the oneness of heart that friendship demands" (117).

Similarly, Stoker takes no issue with sexuality *per se*. He does decry the "wantonness" of eighteenth-century writers like Smollett and Fielding (486), as well as the drama of the Restoration (483). Yet the novels to which he objects are far more damaging than the coarseness of pre-nineteenth-century writing.[20] Stoker's own fiction frequently explores the dynamics of both appropriate and inappropriate (marital and extramarital) sexuality. In *Dracula,* the wanton sexuality of Dracula's "brides" and the un-dead Lucy Westenra is contrasted with the implicit conjugal sexuality of Jonathan and Mina Harker, out of which is born their son Quincey by the novel's end. Stoker's novel *Lady Athlyne*, published the same year as "The Censorship of Fiction," is, as Carol Senf maintains, "[a] celebration of sexuality" (3); indeed, as David Glover points out, "Stoker is concerned to celebrate carnal passion" (127) in the novel, going well beyond Augustine in his approbation of mutual attraction in the senses. Moreover, in *Lady Athlyne*, this attraction is specifically united to Eden, indicating that Stoker, like Augustine, considers sexuality a prelapsarian good, as in this passage, worth quoting at length:

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[20] Stoker's distinction between "coarseness" and "obscenity" was no idiosyncrasy but rather reflects the language of Victorian public morality debates; Donald Thomas points out

> Athlyne, seeing and hearing, thrilled through to the very marrow of his bones. His great love controlled, compelled him. He made no movement towards her but looked with eyes of rapture. Such a moment was beyond personal satisfaction; it was of the gods, not of men. And so they stood.
>
> Then the tears welled over in Joy's eyes beneath the fallen lids. They hung on the dark, curly lashes and rolled like silver beads down the softness of her cheeks. Still

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that Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant may have been found guilty in their 1877 obscenity trial in part because their defense failed to recognize the difference between the two categories, a difference assumed by the judge and the prosecution (265-66).

> Athlyne made no sign; he felt that the time had not yet come. The woman was his own now, he felt instinctively; at it was his duty—his sacred privilege to protect her. Unthinkingly he moved a step back on the road he had come. Instinctively Joy did the same. It was without thought or intention on the part of either; all instinctive, all natural. The usage of the primeval squaw to follow her master outlives races.
>
> Then he paused. She came up to him and they walked level. Not another word had been spoken; but there are silences that speak more than can be written in ponderous tomes. These two—this man and this woman—*knew*. They had in their hearts in those glorious moments all the wisdom won by joy and suffering through all the countless ages since the Lord rested on that first Sabbath eve and felt that His work was finished. (151-52)

What is distinctive in this passage is the explicit link between the characters' natural, physical attraction and God-ordained goodness of creation. Stoker would hardly have been so foolish as to publish such a novel as this at the same time as his essay if he thought there was any intrinsic contradiction between fictional discussion of human sexuality and his crusade against pornography.

The essay itself actually makes this carefully delineated distinction. "[W]riters who deal with lewd subjects," he points out, do so "in order that they may deal with what they call 'problems'" (486). But Stoker sees this purely as a thinly veiled subterfuge; such novels, he feels "use the word 'problem' either as a shelter for themselves or as a blind for some intention more base than mere honest investigation" (486). It is this "mere honest investigation" that Stoker would be conducting in his own novels. "Truth," he maintains, "can always investigate in a worthy fashion" (487). Because Stoker believes, like Augustine, that sexuality is naturally good, it is fair game to be explored in a fictional context, provided the intent is "honest investigation" in the pursuit of "truth." Even most Stoker critics concede that his novels do not consciously contradict his axiom, though many believe they may do so unconsciously.[21] That is, if Stoker's fiction *does* contradict his stated position on the purposes of literature, he appears to have been quite oblivious to the effect.

Even though sexuality is intrinsically good in the Augustinian mind-set, it is also very open to abuse. This is because humans are sinful and fallen, and it is the nature of evil to pervert good things. This view is often articulated by Augustine in his writings. In his work *On Free Will*, Augustine explicitly states, "What is bad is [the will's] turning away from the unchangeable good and its turning to changeable goods" (*Earlier* 2.19.53, 168). There is nothing wrong with a sexual marital relationship, but if the focus upon God and his unchanging nature and purposes is lost, a good object used to fulfill a good desire may be skewed or perverted. Moreover, Augustine steadfastly defended against the Pelagians the doctrine of original sin, which asserted that human wills were awry from conception, so that in the fallen world it had become "natural" for humans to sin. In the moments leading up to his conversion in the *Confessions*, Augustine laments his inability to control his will in the way he is able to control the limbs of his body. "For the rule of sin is a force of habit," he laments, "by which the mind is swept along and held fast even against its will, yet deservedly, because it fell into the habit of its own accord" (8.5.165).

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[21] Maurice Hindle maintains, "It would be misguided to suggest that *Dracula* belongs to the class of novel that Stoker is attacking. On the other hand, to assert that there was 'nothing base in the book'—as he did when sending a presentation copy to Gladstone—is characteristically evasive, given the fact that a deeply sensual and erotic terror drives much of the work along" (419-20). Similarly, Maggie Kilgour believes that in *Dracula* Stoker "reinforces the difference between representation and represented as good and evil: the text *Dracula* and the figure Dracula" but finds that "the true success of the text, however, lies in Stoker's ultimate failure to convince his readers of this tidy opposition" (58).

In "The Censorship of Fiction," Stoker likewise locates the desire for salacious reading in humanity's sinfulness. The availability of pornographic fiction is dangerous because it allows the authors and publishers a way to prey on the innate failings of human beings. As noted earlier, in Stoker's view "the only emotions which in the long run harm are those arising from sex impulses" (483), but those impulses are bound to become distorted because of humanity's overall sinfulness, a theme that recurs throughout the essay. Stoker presupposes as a warrant "the imperfection of humanity" (480), "human weakness" (481), "the inherent evil in man"

(485). Indeed, he believes that “[t]he force of evil, anti-ethical evil, is the more dangerous as it is a natural force. It is as natural for man to sin as to live” (481). The distributors of objectionable material are not targeted because they are any worse than the rest of “poor humanity” (481, 485), but because they go beyond merely passive indulgence in sins of the flesh, exploiting the weakness in others for profit. Stoker hopes that in the end, “public ignominy, police interference, or the reproaches of conscience” (486) will ultimately catch up with them. Then, he believes, they will deservedly receive the consequences for indulging in such a variety of sins: “It is the same old problem which has tortured fallible humanity from the beginning, or, at any rate, since desire of many things found itself face to face with inadequate powers and insufficient opportunities for attainment” (486-87).

While not excusing the audiences of erotic fiction, then, Stoker is especially hard on its producers, because they have abused their imaginations and gifts of language purely for personal gain. In this way, he also follows along with Augustine, for whom eloquence and rhetoric were valuable gifts but easily misused. Augustine’s pre-Christian education made him keenly aware of the ways in which good language could be appropriated for less than admirable purposes. In the *Confessions*, he would regret his youthful obsession with “empty romances” like Virgil’s *Aeneid*, lamenting the fact that rather than weeping over the vanities of the world, “instead I wept for Dido, who surrendered her life to the sword, while I forsook you [God] and surrendered myself to the lowest of your created things" (1.13.34). His early training in rhetoric and exposure to eloquent writers like Cicero helped him realize later in life that good phrasing alone was not the only barometer of a text's worth. Augustine also acknowledges the dangers of exploitive writing in his most extensive discussion of rhetoric, *On Christian Teaching*. Here, like Stoker, he attacks both the people who produce wicked writing and the audiences that sustain such writing:

> So much attention has been paid to the charms of style that not only things which should not be done but even things which should be avoided and abhorred—evil and wicked things, eloquently advocated by evil and wicked men—are avidly read about by people without any intention of giving their consent but simply for the sake of delight. (4.81.119)

If Augustine can be this harsh on writers such as Virgil, who most subsequent generations would consider classic, the Carrington-style pornography Stoker has in mind surely would fall under the aegis of "evil and wicked things, eloquently advocated by evil and wicked men."

Yet *On Christian Teaching* also recognizes the potential value of good rhetoric to the cause of Christ, which is a major theme of the work. For Augustine, pagan learning may be turned to good purposes by those with godly ends. In a famous passage, he compares the Christian's task to that of the Israelites at the exodus, who brought Egyptian treasures with them on their journey:

> These treasures—like the silver and gold, which they did not create but dug, as it were, from the mines of providence, which is everywhere—which were used wickedly and harmfully in the service of demons must be removed by Christians, as they separate themselves in spirit from the wretched company of pagans, and applied to their true function, that of preaching the gospel. (2.145.65)

Scripture itself may be said to "plunder the Egyptians" in the way it employs stylistic features found throughout the classical world:

> The literary-minded should be aware that our Christian authors used all the figures of speech which teachers of grammar call by their Greek name of tropes, and that they did so more diversely and profusely than can be judged or imagined by those who are unfamiliar with scripture or who gained their knowledge of figures from other literature. . . . In the divine books we find not only examples of these tropes, as of everything else, but also the names of some of them, like "allegory," "enigma," and "parable." (3.87.87-3.88.88)

Far from being the simplistic text the young Augustine once thought it to be, the Bible is thus actually a model of effective rhetoric. Indeed, as Robert Dodaro has observed, Augustine found it entirely reasonable to believe that God, in his communication with humanity, would employ the tropes and methods of a good orator:

> This rationale for God's use of metaphors, parables, and enigmas depends upon a more fundamental concept of the orator's duties as conceived by traditional rhetorical theorists: teaching (*docere*), moving or persuading (*mouere, persuadere*), and delighting (*delectare*) the audience with his words. Augustine holds that the entire content of the scriptures can be interpreted through rhetorical theory. (Dodaro 121-22)

In these respects once again, we find "The Censorship of Fiction" covering similar ground. As with Augustine, Stoker is alert to both the perils and profits of employing good rhetoric. The authors of pornography sin not only in their production and distribution of deleterious material but, perhaps even more fundamentally, in their perversion of their natural creative gift. As Maggie Kilgour asserts, "Art, for Stoker, is a sacred, spiritual impulse, which in the hands of these criminals is perverted for profit" (49). He acknowledges that "in imagination, of whose products the best known and most potent is perhaps fiction, there is a danger of corruption" ("Censorship" 482). Because of Stoker's high esteem for the role of the imagination—higher, probably, than Augustine's would have been—he feels keenly the betrayal that lewd writers commit:

> They have found an art wholesome, they made it morbid; they found it pure, they left it sullied. Up to this time it was free—the freest thing in the land; they so treated it, they so abused the powers allowed them and their

> own opportunities, that continued freedom becomes dangerous, even impossible. (485)

Throughout the essay, Stoker frequently reiterates his regret that such an act so blunt as censorship should be necessary; but he feels that by debasing “an art so fine as literature, with a spirit as subtle and evanescent as œnanthic ether” (486), such writers have left the state with no other choice.

But Stoker is only faced with his dilemma because he is so conscious of fiction’s potential virtues. “It can be most potent for good,” he is convinced, but “if we are to allow it work for evil we shall surely have to pay in time for the consequent evil effects” (484). To demonstrate fiction’s value, Stoker, like Augustine, appeals to Scripture as the model. Fiction, he contends, has the imprimatur of no less than Jesus himself: “The highest of all teachers and moralists, Christ Himself, did not disdain it as a method or opportunity of carrying great truth. But He seemed to hold it as His chosen means of seeking to instill truth. What is a parable but a novel in little?” (484). As Augustine praised the Bible and its divine Author for its effective use of rhetoric, so too Stoker praises Christ’s ability to use the fictional parable form for moral instruction; and as with Augustine, Stoker concludes that eloquence of expression should hardly be avoided if it can be put to appropriate moral ends: “When Christ taught in such a way, are we to reprobate the method or even to forego it? Should we not rather encourage and protect so potent a form of teaching, and guard it against evil use?” (484).

It is hardly common to read *Dracula*, or any of Stoker's other novels, as moral and even religious parables, yet "The Censorship of Fiction" suggests that that is exactly how he meant them to be read. Insofar as he used genres and plots not commonly associated with moral and religious instruction to gain a wider audience for his work, he was ultimately successful in his ends; but insofar as the moral or religious elements of his "long parables" have been subsequently ignored or misunderstood, he apparently failed. Stoker himself recognizes "human imperfection" in the essay and acknowledges that imagination is ultimately entirely individual; thus, even a work designed to "investigate in worthy fashion" complex moral truths may ultimately be appropriated by its audience in unintended ways. Indeed, most critics now believe that the Stoker's fiction succeeds on the popular and critical levels *because* his moral intentions failed. Even so, if "The Censorship of Fiction" is taken seriously as an accurate representation of Stoker's thought, there can be little doubt that, at least consciously, he thought of his fiction as morally salutary. And in striving to use his own imaginative and rhetorical gifts to pursue truth as he understood it, Stoker was not alone; he was simply one in a great tradition of eloquent religious writers, of whom Augustine stands out above the rest.

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