Dracula: The man/men behind Dracula

1. Introduction
This paper will go into several different backgrounds for the character of Dracula. After all, his portrayal has given rise to many theories regarding his identity. Over the years, critical reception has often described this gothic villain as a composite figure. First, previous villains in gothic literature will be discussed, and what makes Dracula different or alike by comparison. Secondly, the paper will argue that several real-life individuals might have been models for Dracula, in some way or another. In this text, focus will be on, respectively, Oscar Wilde, Henry Irving, and Charles Stewart Parnell as plausible sources of inspiration for Dracula. Finally, the text will end up with a few comments on overdetermination and the kind of questions it generates.

2. Previous villains in Gothic literature
Dracula has now become one of the archetypical Gothic villains, but to what respects can he be compared to the tradition of the Gothic villain? In an attempt to define the villain of the earlier Gothic novels Elizabeth MacAndrew presents to us three types:

Villains fall into three types. Villain/heroes, whose madness and evil derive from the conflict within them … In contrast, a second type has little of the Sentimental hero about him because it is his function to be the darkness opposing light … Finally, the villain as a figure of the grotesque is demonic, confronting the reader with unrelenting evil. (p 83-84)¹

Although of course these do not mutually exclude each other, it is that third category in which we best find Dracula represented. When we read descriptions of Dracula’s appearance, we are immediately told of Dracula’s bodily deformities such as his aquiline nose, the sharp long teeth, and the hair on his palms. Dracula and the female vampires as grotesque monsters inspire terror but they are also alluring. “The grotesque is according to Mikhail Bakhtin a life confirming and ambivalent fact; It entails both destruction and regeneration: Life and death are complementary”.² It is for that reason that the protagonists fear his reproductive power more than anything. In contrary to the protagonists Dracula is bursting with vitality. But like many other Gothic villains, he is also to be pitied as a damned creature that is hunted down without remorse.

These and other grotesque monsters were especially popular in the later Gothic novels. Even though there were vampires in English literature as early as Coleridge’s Christabel (1797), it is Polidori’s The Vampyre (1812) that set in motion the tradition of the bloodsucking vampire that would become a very popular monster in the nineteenth century in stories such as Varney the Vampire.

¹ Gothic Tradition in Fiction, 81-82
² Lexicon van Literaire Termen, 193
Carmilla, and Dracula. All these stories have in common that the villain vampire is a very eloquent and charismatic aristocrat.

In The Vampyre we see the notion of the modern vampire for the first time. Lord Ruthven, much like Dracula, is a creature incapable of loving who uses his charisma and eloquence to seduce young women in order to survive. Many of those characteristics however were copied from the character of Lord Byron, Polidori’s rival. It is remarkable that Lord Ruthven is the first male vampire. Before him the vampires in English and continental literature were often exclusively females.

Varney the Vampire, or the Feast of Blood was a very popular serial story that was published in book form in 1847 by James Malcolm Rymer. Stoker already hid an easter egg referring to this story by calling one of the characters Arthur Holmwood, a reference to the Ringwoods from Varney.\(^3\) Another possible reference to Varney is that Dracula gets hit by a shovel in the head, a wound that will never heal. Varney is characterized by a scar on the forehead too. We read that he has a “mark or cicatrix of a wound in the forehead”\(^4\). But whereas Ruthven’s seducing is followed by a brutal act of mere slaughter, it is Harvey that is the first vampire to come at night through the window, mesmerizing his victim so that she enters a trance.

It is Sheridan Le Fanu’s Carmilla (1872) however that most likely had the most impact on Stoker’s novel. Countess Mircalla -the vampire in the story- is much like Dracula a very dominating personality. But she also shares many of Dracula’s peculiar vampire traits. In one particular instance the countess transforms herself into a large black feline creature. Dracula on the other hand, is often linked to (male) canine creatures such as a large dog, or even a wolf. Parallel to Lucy, the victim in Carmilla is haunted by nightmares as the vampire parasites on her. Although already hinted at before, the vampire is now clearly a creature that induces a sexual awakening in its victims and is therefore a clear threat to the Victorian family values. Another significant vampire trait shared between both is the supernatural strength of their hand: “One sign of the power of a vampire is the power of the hand. The slender hand of Mircalla closed like a vice of steel on the General’s wrist.”\(^5\) In Dracula this is almost a leitmotif:

“The driver helping me with a hand which caught my arm in a grip of steel.” (17)

“His hand actually seemed like a steel vice” (21)

“His hand grasped mine with a strength which made me wince, ..” (22)

It can be argued -but not completely proven- that Dracula shares many peculiar habits and characteristics with earlier villains and vampires. Stoker had made use of many literary sources and

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\(^3\) Norton Critical Edition, 56, footnote 7


\(^5\) In a Glass Darkly, 315
dreams when composing his masterpiece. But he also made prolific use of many real life characters and events. It is not surprising then that Dracula is a masterful shapeshifter.

3. The real-life man/men behind Dracula

3.1 Oscar Wilde

3.1.1 The real-life individual Oscar Wilde
Oscar Wilde was born in 1854. He grew up in Dublin and majored in classical studies at Trinity College. There, he won a scholarship to Oxford. In 1878 he graduated from Oxford and settled in London. From then on he was a spokesperson for the school of “art for art’s sake” and he decided to become a writer. Wilde also travelled to America to give lectures on aestheticism. He was a typical 19th century dandy: he wore colourful costumes and showed everlasting youth, even in his later years. Although Wilde was married and had two children, he was arrested for sodomy (i.e. homosexuality) in 1895. His success came to an end and the trial was the horror of the century. Wilde was sentenced to two years in jail, after which he was bankrupt and divorced from his wife. He moved to France where he lived under an assumed name by the financial support of friends. Oscar Wilde died in Paris three years after leaving jail.

3.1.2 The relationship between Wilde and Stoker
Stoker and Wilde both grew up in Dublin. They first met in Trinity College. Stoker had a very close relationship with Wilde’s parents, Sir William Wilde and Lady Wilde. At that time, Oscar Wilde was in love with a woman, Florence Balcombe. A few years later he learned that Florence was engaged to Bram Stoker. Florence and Stoker married in December 1878. It is very clear that there was a kind of rivalry between Wilde and Stoker which reached its high in the marriage with Florence. It is known that Stoker wrote a letter to Walt Whitman, which is said to portray Stoker’s love for men and with it, his homosexuality. In the 1870’s, Stoker openly took part in the homosexual culture around Whitman. We can conclude that Wilde and Stoker probably also knew each other through that community.

3.1.3 Oscar Wilde: the man behind Dracula

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6 The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Seventh Edition, Volume 2, 1747
7 The Norton Anthology: 1748
8 The Norton Anthology: 1749
9 Schaffer, T. “A Wilde Desire Took Me’: The Homoerotic History of Dracula”.: 390
10 Schaffer, T.: 391
11 Schaffer, T.: 382-383
12 Schaffer, T.: 384
The trial of Oscar Wilde shocked Stoker severely. Not because of his own homosexuality, but because of the negative way people looked at homosexuals in general and at Oscar Wilde in particular. From then onwards, Stoker knew it was best to keep quiet about homosexual feelings. For Stoker, the only option to speak about Wilde and the Wilde Trials was by writing it down. This text could not speak openly about this matter but had to do so covertly. For example, in the 1899 American edition Dracula says to the three demonic women that ‘To-night is mine’, meaning that he is going to feed on Harker that night. In the 1897 English edition Dracula only says ‘To-morrow night, to-morrow night is yours’. Stoker leaves here no further clue of Dracula feeding on another man. In this aspect, Dracula can be considered as an example of what we now call a “roman à clef”: it looks like a normal narrative but it actually deals with a matter that can not be dealt with openly. Only one month after the Wilde Trials, Stoker started to write his masterpiece Dracula.

Dracula shows Wilde the same way people portrayed him at the trials: a monstrous and evil man. The first five chapters in the book, in which Harker meets Count Dracula, Harker and Dracula can be perceived as projections of Stoker and Wilde. Dracula is not an allegory of Wilde himself, but more of the fears, desires and punishments which at that time were evoked by the figure of Oscar Wilde. Thus, this gothic monster Dracula may not be mistaken for the real-life Oscar Wilde, it is more a cultural construction than the actual historical person.

The reason why Stoker chose a vampire as protagonist can also be found in the light of the Wilde trials. At the time of the trials, the late 19th century, homosexuals were looked upon as neither male nor female creatures. In the gothic context of the story, this dwelling between two existing places leaves a homosexual in a no-man’s land, just like the undead who are neither dead nor alive.

For homosexuals, the figure of the vampire was also very appealing. It was a metaphor for their love (towards people of the same sex) that was constantly repressed and for “the enforced interment of their desires”. At one point in the novel, Stoker describes Dracula as if he was describing Oscar Wilde: “There lay the Count, but looking as if his youth had been half renewed, for the white hair and and moustache were changed to dark iron-grey; the cheeks were fuller, and the white skin seemed ruby-red underneath; the mouth was redder than ever,...” Talia Schaffer argues that this may be a literal reference to Oscar Wilde because at the time of the Wilde Trials, Oscar Wilde had grey hair and was heavily overweight. The fact that Stoker illustrates the historical figure of Oscar Wilde with the blood-smudged Dracula does then not mean that he finds Oscar Wilde repulsive. This passage may then be read as Dracula as the Wilde-as-

14 Norton Critical Edition: 471
15 Norton Critical Edition: 52, footnote 2
16 Norton Critical Edition: 472
17 Norton Critical Edition: 472
18 Norton Critical Edition: 473
19 Norton Critical Edition: 53
20 Norton Critical Edition: 473
monster, and everything this Wilde can be associated with\textsuperscript{21}. We point out on this matter the differences between the appearance of Dracula and Wilde. Dracula always wears black, as was the tradition in Victorian England. Wilde on the other hand, was a true dandy: he wore flamboyant, colourful clothes\textsuperscript{22}. Again we can say that Stoker wanted to embody in Dracula the fears, repulsiveness and other feelings the image of Wilde brought about in society. Contrary to what Schaffer argues, we propose that Stoker thus did not want to describe the appearance of Dracula as an actual image of Wilde, but as an exaggerated demon-like Wilde.

There are also similarities between Harker/Dracula and Stoker/Wilde. Harker and Dracula share the same interest, as Harker notices that “Dracula would have made a wonderful solicitor”\textsuperscript{23}. Dracula’s library has everything in it to amuse Harker. Stoker and Wilde on the other hand had also a lot of things in common: their love for Florence Balcombe, their studies at Trinity College, their hometown Dublin, etc.\textsuperscript{24} This connection between both the protagonists and the two writers may emphasize the correlations between Stoker and Harker and Wilde and Dracula.

Imprisonment is another theme that connects Oscar Wilde and Dracula. As we have said before: Dracula is an example-figure of a homosexual who is obliged to inter his desires. Also literally, Dracula illustrates Oscar Wilde’s imprisonment. Dracula is imprisoned by daylight, he cannot go out during the day. He can only return to his coffin. He is captured in a body that finds itself neither in the land of the living, nor in the land of the dead.

One of the most striking similarities between Wilde and Dracula has to do with the notion of homosexuality. The first line Stoker wrote for Dracula, was “This man belongs to me”, the words said by Count Dracula\textsuperscript{25} and his declaration of homosexual desire\textsuperscript{26}.

There are also more practical similarities between Dracula and Oscar Wilde, for instance, the nocturnal nature of Dracula. During the trials, it was said that Wilde received nightly visits from young boys. They also found evidence of anal sex in Wilde’s bed, so the association of Oscar Wilde and Dracula’s bed of smelly dirt is to be made easily.

As a last remark we would like to point out that Wilde really was seen as a monster. He symbolises a new kind of monster: one that is not absorbed by solitude (e.g. The Frankenstein monster)\textsuperscript{27} but one that is a threat to society and culture. At the end of the 19th century, homosexuality was seen as a disease that could infect other people. They did not know how to cure the disease or what caused it. Homosexuality “encodes a fear , [...] that homosexuals want to ‘corrupt’ heterosexuals into a lifetime of evil sodomy”\textsuperscript{28}. Here we can also see why Stoker chose the vampire: Dracula goes

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Norton Critical Edition: 474
\item Norton Anthology: 1748
\item Norton Critical Edition: 37
\item Norton Critical Edition: 475
\item Norton Critical Edition: 43
\item Norton Critical Edition: 478
\item Norton Critical Edition: 480
\item Norton Critical Edition: 481
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
around while carrying on his vampirism. The “disease” can catch on from one person to another. According to society, homosexuality and vampirism are the same.

3.1.4 Conclusion
After we looked at all these similarities, we may conclude that Stoker probably had Oscar Wilde in mind when he wrote his horror novel Dracula. He did not want to portray the looks of Wilde and his appearance but he wanted Dracula to symbolise all the negative feelings Oscar Wilde evoked. This can only mean that the Wilde Trials had a great impact on Stoker’s life. The fact that the trials were seen as the biggest and most horrific event in the late 19th century, tells us that the subject of homosexuality lived among people. The trials shocked a nation and Dracula is the personal confession by Bram Stoker of how the trials influenced his life, his relationship with Wilde and his opinion on homosexuality and the Wilde Trials.

3.2 Henry Irving

3.2.1 The real-life individual Henry Irving
Sir John Henry Brodribb was born in 1838 in Keinton Mandeville in the county of Somerset. At first, John Henry Brodribb – later knighted as Henry Irving – was a clerk to a firm of East India merchants in London. He soon quit his job and chose to become an actor. It was in 1878 that Irving took over the Lyceum Theatre in London. In the very beginning, the fortunes of the Theatre were at low ebb, but Irving altered this situation very soon with some successful parts in well-known plays. In the same year of the taking over, Irving entered into a partnership with Ellen Terry, who was an actress herself. Sir Henry Irving died at the age of 67 and was laid to rest in Westminster Abbey.

3.2.2 The relationship between Irving and Stoker
It was in Dublin that Stoker and Irving first met, when the latter was staying in town for the performance of one of his successful plays, The Rivals. Stoker was simply overwhelmed when he saw the performance of this – to him - unknown actor, Henry Irving. He described him as follows:

A man of quality who stood out from his surroundings on the stage as a being of another social world. A figure full of dash and fine irony, and whose ridicule seemed to bite; buoyant with the joy of life; self-conscious ; an inoffensive egoist even in his love-making; of supreme and unsurpassable insolence, veiled and shrouded in his fine quality of manner.

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29 Oxford World’s Classics, xii
30 Oxford World’s Classics, xi
After this first stay, Irving visited Dublin a couple of times more and he became close friends with Stoker. From that time on, Stoker devoted himself completely to the promotion of Irving’s career and consequently became his business manager. He was terribly devoted and accompanied his master on many tours, even to the United States.  

3.2.3 Henry Irving: the man behind Dracula  
In Stoker’s description of Henry Irving cited above, there are many hints at vampirism. Firstly, the fact that Irving appears to Stoker as ‘a being of another social world’, could be seen as the first of many resemblances between the actor and the Count. In the novel, Count Dracula does not seem to belong to our own human world: he crawls face-first down the castle wall and sleeps in a coffin in the daytime. Furthermore, he never eats or drinks and has no servants in his house at all, which was rather suspicious for a landlord. The fact that his ridicule seemed to ‘bite’, can be linked up with the diabolical vampire in Stoker’s book.

In addition to all of this, Stoker also described his friend as being ‘patrician’ and displaying a ‘slumbrous energy’. Count Dracula was obviously low in energy in the daytime. The fact that Irving was nocturnal in working life also contributes to this strong resemblance between him and the Count.

Moreover, the cover of the Norton Critical Edition of this novel displays a picture of Irving himself in the role of Mephistopheles. It is generally assumed that Stoker wrote this book with the idea to make a stage adaptation of it later on. Stoker probably had Irving in mind for the title role, for Dracula’s tone and sweeping gesture are obviously reminiscent of this man. The Count’s dark clothing and his obsessive memories also recall Irving. Even though the Victorian actor was specialised in diabolical roles, Stoker did not succeed in persuading him to actually play this role.

Despite the many clear resemblances between Count Dracula and Henry Irving, there are certain things that do not correspond. Sources tell us that Irving was always overspending and never saving. Consequently, even though the Lyceum Theatre seemed solid, the whole of it was built on sand. This is one of the characteristics that are not to be found in the way the Count is portrayed in the novel: we learn that Dracula keeps a great heap of gold in his room, covered with a film of dust. The money is over three hundred years old, which insinuates that he never touches it.

3.2.3 Conclusion

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31 Oxford World’s Classics, xii  
33 Oxford World’s Classics, xii  
34 Norton Critical Edition, vi  
35 Oxford World’s Classics, xii  
38 Norton Critical Edition, x  
39 Norton Critical Edition, x  
40 Norton Critical Edition, 50
Basing themselves on the above, many critics claim that the bond of friendship between Stoker and Irving must have been the basis for the relationship between solicitor Jonathan Harker and Count Dracula in the novel. Even though we have got no proof whatsoever that Irving actually was the model for this character, many things make us believe so. However, where the relationship between Dracula and Wilde was more of the emotional kind, we notice a more physical resemblance between the Count and Irving. It seems as if Stoker focused on Irving especially for the appearance, the clothes and the gestures of the Count.

### 3.3 Parnell

#### 3.3.1 The real-life individual Charles Stewart Parnell

Born in 1846, Charles Stewart Parnell grew up in a wealthy Anglo-Irish family to become a protestant landlord. Because of the increasingly oppressive imperial British government, he and his family became all the more patriotic. Being already a charismatic figure as a young man, he was elected at British parliament and soon became the leader of the Irish National Land League, a nationalist party which strove for the abolition of landlordism. With Parnell at the helm of the Land League, the Irish cause was given a boost in Britain. This evolution jeopardised the British rule in Ireland and consequently Parnell was thrown in jail, along with some fellow party activists. Their arrest instigated a social upheaval in the whole of Ireland, culminating in a soaring of the agrarian violence. William Gladstone, the then British Prime Minister, was compelled to set them free to restore social rest. After his release, Parnell established the Irish National League, which pursued total independence for Ireland, the so-called Home Rule. As Parnell was such a popular figure in Ireland, Gladstone wanted to remain on good terms with him. They formed an alliance and Gladstone introduced a Home Rule Bill, which was eventually defeated by the House of Lords. Despite of this defeat, the Irish cause became still increasingly important at Downing Street. A few months later however, Parnell’s career was over as it became known that he was having an illicit relationship with a married woman, Kitty O’Shea. A year later, in 1891, Charles Stewart Parnell died a broken man.

#### 3.3.2 The relationship between Parnell and Stoker

Although Stoker and Parnell were both Anglo-Irish Protestants, the relationship between the both of them was clearly ambiguous. Stoker was a champion of Irish nationalism and Parnell’s Home Rule, but disapproved of many of Parnell’s tactics and respected the British Empire. In that sense, Stoker

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42 Parnell approved openly of many controversial tactics of the Land League like rent strikes or boycotting: Moses, 70.
bore greater resemblance to William Gladstone, who favoured peaceful negotiations to accomplish Irish Home Rule.

3.3.3 Charles Stewart Parnell: the man behind Dracula

In this chapter, we try to argue that Parnell was in several ways a model for Stoker’s Count Dracula. This particular allegorical reading of *Dracula* is controversial and we do acknowledge that Bram Stoker may not have had all correlations and innuendoes in his mind when writing the novel. We therefore try to be critical.

One way of perceiving Parnell as a model for Count Dracula is their mutual aristocratic descent. This specific comparison is however problematic. Parnell was not a typical Anglo-Irish landlord, as he chose to defend the rights of all Irish people. The Count in contrary, “incarnates a demonized version of the […] traditional […] Anglo-Irish Ascendancy landlord who despised Parnell as a traitor to his class” 43. The description of the Count’s castle also contributes to the perception of him as an aristocrat: “[…] the walls of my castle are broken […] and the wind breathes cold through the broken battlements and casements. 44 To further draw the comparison, Transylvanian society correlates with faded glory of Irish Big House society 45.

Moses (1997) alleges that Stoker might be inspired by Parnell’s obsession with finding gold in the Wicklow mountains for his characterisation of Dracula. When taking Jonathan Harker to his castle, the Count suddenly stops when a blue flame emerges and runs towards it 46. We later find out that this blue flame arises once a year and indicates the location of a treasure. We cannot deny that there is a resemblance to Parnell, but it does seem unlikely that Stoker was aware of his hang-up. As we do not want to succumb to conjecture, we only mention this but do not judge this aspect.

The fact that both the Irish nationalist and the Transylvanian Count are perceived as being “[…] a foreign threat, […] a hostile alien presence 47” is an interesting observation. Parnell spent a great deal of time in England as a politician in British Parliament, but he “acted like a foreigner. […] He was not one of us in any sense. 48” It is clear in the novel that Dracula was as Parnell “a foreign threat” in England.

This strangeness was however compensated in their thorough knowledge of English and the English legal system. Dracula does not want to be “a stranger in a strange land, he is no one, men know him not - and to know not is to care not for. 49” Parnell, although being a stranger, was said to have an impeccable English accent, he was “the most English Irishman ever yet seen. 50.

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43 Moses, 69
46 Stoker, 19
47 Moses, 75
48 Moses, 75
49 Stoker, 26
50 Moses, 82
Their reasons for being in England were also similar. They both wanted to establish a nation of their own. Parnell sought for political independence for Ireland, Dracula wanted to be “the father […] of a new order of beings” (as Van Helsing puts it)\(^{51}\), i.e. the Undead.

Moses argues that, with respect to Dracula’s view upon women, Stoker was considerably inspired by the often problematic relationships Parnell had had with women.\(^{52}\) Moses equates Kitty O’Shea with Mina Harker and alleges that they caused downfall of Parnell resp Dracula\(^{53}\). To conjure is not what we do and therefore we cannot judge the validity of his assertion. Stoker may have been inspired by Parnell’s adulterous relationship with Kitty O’Shea to characterize Dracula, but he may very well have looked at other vampire literature, such as Polidori’s *The Vampyre*.

Another quality which the two shared, is their use of disguise. We know from the novel that Dracula transforms himself occasionally: into a bat, a wolf, a dog, a coachman and even into Jonathan Harker. The reason why he does this, is to get in the vicinity of Lucy and Mina. As Parnell was in an extramarital relationship, his visits to her always had to be kept secret. After the public disclosure of their affair, Parnell became paranoid and “made attempts at disguise which only served to give him a sinister appearance”\(^{54}\).

At the beginning of the 1880s Gladstone and Parnell publicly tried to scorn each other. In one of his speeches, Gladstone speaks of Parnell as follows:

> He desires to arrest the operation of the Land Act; to stand as Moses stood between the living and the dead; to stand there not as Moses stood, to arrest, but to spread the plague…If it shall appear that there is still to be fought a final conflict in Ireland between law on the one side and sheer lawlessness upon the other […], then I say, […] the resources of civilization against its enemies are not yet exhausted\(^{55}\) (emphasis added)

In the same speech Gladstone accuses Parnell of being “the vampire of free trade [that] was insidiously sucking the life-blood of the country”.

Moses alleged that a cartoon (“The Irish ‘Vampire’”, see figure 1), published in 1885, shows Parnell as a vampire bat. The vampire flies over a young woman, who seems unconscious, and next to her there is a harp that says “Hibernia” (the Latin name for Ireland). On the bat is written “National League” (Parnell was president of the Irish National Land League) and similar to Parnell, the vampire has a beard and looks as if he were to attack the woman. A feature of this vampire, that was also ascribed to Parnell, is its hypnotic gaze\(^{56}\).

\(^{51}\) Stoker, 263  
\(^{52}\) Moses, 87  
\(^{53}\) Moses, 88  
\(^{54}\) Moses, 76  
\(^{55}\) Moses, 76  
\(^{56}\) Moses, 75
To conclude this allegorical study, we think it correct to say that Dracula is a demonized version of Parnell as an aristocrat, a foreigner and an adulterer who poses a threat to the harmony of the British empire\textsuperscript{57}.

4. Overdetermination

Very often critics have approached the character of Count Dracula as a composite figure. This might refer to all these proposed real-life people, who might have inspired Stoker into creating Dracula, but it also hints at the multiple significations of the character. This is where overdetermination comes in. Because of its various critical receptions, the single effect of Dracula has been related to multiple causes, which can never really exclude one another as plausible interpretations. For one, the contention that a political figure like Charles Stewart Parnell might have inspired the portrayal of Dracula, is part of an interpretation that suggests \textit{Dracula} to be “an allegory of Ireland’s social, political, and cultural upheavals at the end of the nineteenth century.”\textsuperscript{58} In this approach, \textit{Dracula} becomes a \textit{roman à clef} (or “novel with a key”), in which the author has consciously established a relation between the

\textsuperscript{57} Moses, 76

fictional characters and real-life people. The author’s motives to do so then might have been to satirize or to indirectly write on controversial topics.

Now, the first few chapters, containing Jonathan Harker’s journal account of Transylvania and his stay at Count Dracula’s castle, certainly endorse that theory. First of all, some parallels can be drawn between Stoker’s representation of Transylvania and Ireland, both in the setting and the inhabitants’ superstitions. Also Jonathan Harker’s patronizing attitude towards those superstitions is reminiscent of the Protestant’s attitude towards Irish Catholics. Secondly, a psychological profile of Count Dracula’s sympathies and aversions makes him a typical Anglo-Irish aristocrat. Dracula’s anglophilia, his humanist taste and his cultivation of hospitality can all be used to serve that idea. Finally, Dracula’s monologue on the history of his family is a great defence for the allegorical interpretation. It is probable Stoker might have incorporated this piece of narrative for its value in identifying the character that is Dracula. It’s not an essential part of the plot and its dullness does not contribute to any sensational value. Stoker does not even let the monologue just speak for itself, but also offers the reader an interesting reflection through Jonathan’s comments on Dracula’s discourse:

In his speaking of things and people, and especially of battles, he spoke as if he had been present at them all. This he afterwards explained by saying that to a boyar the pride of his house and name are his own pride, that their glory is his glory, that their fate is his fate. Whenever he spoke of his house he always said “we”, and spoke almost in the plural, like a king speaking.\footnote{Stoker, Bram. \textit{Dracula}. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997, 33.}

This \textit{we} Dracula consistently uses, may tell the historicist reader that the Count actually embodies a type, or more specifically, that he is a portrait of an entire Irish class. His tales of past glory could presumably voice the sensibilities of the Anglo-Irish aristocrats, who were a declining society at the time. The second part of the novel, however, does not really continue that allegorical representation of 19\textsuperscript{th} century Ireland. Nevertheless, the second part can still be consistent with the allegory, if Dracula’s bloodthirstiness is considered a critique on everything he represents. The first part then merely serves the idea of identifying Dracula as the Anglo-Irish aristocrat.

Yet, despite every possible textual argument to maintain that allegorical interpretation, it’s hard to see the whole novel as one consistent and coherent allegory. Other goals, like commercial success through sensation, seem to be present as well. Therefore, Stoker also taps into the core elements of popular gothic fiction, as we’ve already seen. So, previous villains in gothic literature obviously constitute another source of influence.

When these questions are put into their most extreme form, one might ask if Dracula was ever really intended as an allegory. Didn’t Stoker just try to write a popular gothic novel, letting the inspiration of his surroundings do its work? However, one will have to recognize that both the gothic and the allegory have enough arguments to prove their right of existence in defining Dracula. The
novel can most likely be described as a mixture of both. This gives rise to some interesting questions, which we’d like to keep unanswered, for there is much room for discussion. In how far did Stoker succumb to the traditions of vampire literature? In what measure did he make the genre subservient to the creation of his allegory?

5. Conclusion

To conclude, we can say that sources of inspiration might have been quite diverse in the creation of Dracula. When considering the genre of the novel, the character is of course very much indebted to previously existing vampire literature. Nevertheless, several of Stoker’s contemporaries can claim a great amount of influence as well. When considering the description of Dracula’s physical appearance, Henry Irving may well have been the model. On the other hand, when one focuses on a psychological profile of Dracula, the notion of homosexuality draws a parallel between the count and Oscar Wilde. In this interpretation, the threat and the fear of vampires come to symbolize the Victorian stigma on homosexuality. Finally, Dracula’s similarities to a political figure like Charles Stewart Parnell also endorse an allegorical reading where Dracula embodies the Anglo-Irish aristocrat. So, because of all these different factors, Dracula can be regarded a rich, multi-dimensional character. He’s an overdetermined figure that allows different interpretations to coexist.
6. Bibliography


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