

*Bram Stoker, Dracula and the Victorian Gothic Stage*

Catherine Wynne

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Whether you are interested in Stoker, *Dracula*, the Gothic, nineteenth-century theatre, changing notions of gender, Ellen Terry, Geneviève Ward, or Henry Irving, Catherine Wynne's most recent study belongs on your bookshelf (or in your e-reader).

One reason this book is worth studying is Wynne's careful primary research. Digging through archives in museums and libraries, including the British Library, the National Library of Ireland, and the Brotherton Library at the University of Leeds, Wynne assembled Stoker's writings on the theater for her two-volume collection, *Bram Stoker and the Stage*. The present volume demonstrates that she did not simply collect, but also read carefully, analyzed, and understood these early (and often unpublished) theatrical reviews, works of fiction, and essays on his theatrical colleagues and their art.

Even though Wynne's title references *Dracula*, this study is equally insightful in its analysis of Stoker's other works, including some that rarely receive critical attention: *The Watter's Mou'*, *The Lady of the Shroud*, *The Primrose Path*, *Snowbound*, and a number of the short stories. She is especially astute at demonstrating how Stoker, who occupied a marginal place in the Victorian theatrical community, wove his understanding of all aspects of theater, including technical spectacle, into his own fiction. Reading *Dracula* numerous times, I had often pondered Stoker's numerous references to *Macbeth*, and Wynne probes the connections between *Dracula* and The Lyceum productions of Shakespeare's play in the 1870s and again in 1888. I thought I was an expert on Stoker, yet I learned something new about him on almost every page.

There's a great deal in this book to intrigue even people who aren't especially interested in Bram Stoker, however. Chapter 1: "Stoker, Melodrama and the Gothic" provides one of the best discussions I've ever encountered of the relationship between Gothic fiction and Victorian melodrama and, even more important, puts both literary forms into a larger social and political

context. Indeed, this opening chapter, which incorporates Wynne's intelligent synthesis of theoretical discussions of both movements, would be extremely useful for anyone needing an overview or a quick refresher course. Incorporating the work of scholars such as Frank Rahill, Eric Bentley, and Michael R. Booth, Wynne discusses the emergence of melodrama in an increasingly secular era. Equally useful is the fact that Wynne also includes summaries of works rarely read or performed today, including Boucicault's Irish melodrama *The Colleen Bawn* and *Vanderdecken*, which was part of The Lyceum's regular offering and, according to Wynne, contributed "to a supernatural climate at the Lyceum" (47) that influenced Stoker. In many cases, she draws specific connections between these dramatic works and Stoker's fiction.

Equally interesting though from a completely different perspective is Chapter 2: "Irving's Tempters and Stoker's Vanishing Ladies: Supernatural Production, Mesmeric Influence and Magical Illusion" in which Wynne explains (through illustration and discussion) a number of the stage illusions, such as the 'Vanishing Lady Trick,' with which Stoker and the Lyceum audiences would have been familiar and which were among the many technical innovations that Irving used to create a supernatural stage. Wynne makes the connection explicit: "The stage celebrates the power of technology under the guise of the supernatural; Stoker's writings explore the supernatural under the guise of the technological" (45).

As someone who has written quite a bit about Stoker's fictional treatment of women, I had also studied his essays on the theatre and his *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving* and thought I knew quite a bit about Stoker's close personal friendships with Ellen Terry and Geneviève Ward. Wynne's chapters on Terry and Ward provide brief synopses of their lives on and off the stage and showed me just how little I knew about these two very interesting women as people. It also revealed that I knew almost nothing about how their theatrical performances might have influenced his depiction of women characters. Wynne posits in Chapter 3; "Ellen Terry and the 'Bloofer Lady': Femininity and Fallenness" the connection between Terry and Lucy and "examines how Stoker's writing and fiction respond to the complex negotiations of late Victorian femininity on stage and how Terry becomes associated with the vampire Lucy in *Dracula*" (79). Her chapter on Ward, to whom Stoker dedicated *The Lady of the Shroud*, demonstrates how her life may have contributed to the plot of that novel.

Wynne's chapter on *Macbeth*, though interesting, is in many ways the weakest chapter in the book though it does point out important parallels in the two works and demonstrates the

extent to which Stoker was aware of the Shakespearean criticism of his day. She also demonstrates how Irving's rendering of *Macbeth* is a radical departure from that of his predecessors and thus reveals the innovation of The Lyceum's productions.

Finally, Wynne's brief conclusion reflects on a number of Stoker's minor works and points to the extent to which his theatrical reviewing in Dublin and his work at the Lyceum exerted a stronger influence than is generally thought. Her final paragraph sums up the significance of her careful work on Stoker:

He viewed theatrical culture from a slant: as critic, he recognized the dynamic between audience and production; as business manager, he saw the mechanics of the stage revealed and concealed. As neither actor nor playwright, but reviewer and administrator, he was both part of and separate from the world he inhabited for most of his adult life. (170)

I opened Wynne's study in hopes of supplementing my existing knowledge of Stoker and found that *Bram Stoker, Dracula and the Victorian Gothic Stage* introduced new ways of thinking of Stoker and his works. Grateful to Wynne for the careful archival work that she did for her previous set of books, I'm even more appreciative of her careful reading and smart synthesis of various aspects of the Victorian stage.