(Re)Consuming Stoker: Neo-Gothic Biofictions of the Monster and his Maker

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'*This story is true*', or so the story goes that when Bram Stoker took his original manuscript to Otto Kyllman at Archibald Constable & Company, his immediate advocation was for its truth; the editor's initial reply was a simple '*No*' (Stoker and Barker 2018a: 483-485). Before its publication on 26 May 1897, the novel's title was changed from *The Un-dead* to *Dracula,* and more significantly, one hundred and one pages are said to be missing from its opening.[1] It is within this narrative absence that Dacre Stoker, the Canadian great-grandnephew of the author consumed with the family legacy, writes the neo-Gothic biofictions, *Dracula: The Un-Dead* (with Ian Holt, 2009) and *Dracul* (with J. D. Barker, 2018). Asserting his authority with 'Since I am a Stoker' (2009: 399), Stoker clearly believes it is both his birthright to add to the narrative and a necessary act to reassert familial control over the novel's legacy. With Ian Holt, he makes clear that '[w]e have long stated that one of the key reasons for writing this sequel was to remedy the cannibalization and bastardization of Bram's novel by Hollywood and other authors' (2009: 407).

The implication in the pejorative 'bastardization' of *Dracula* is that there are unacknowledged, non-familial rewritings of the text; that said, to charge others with consuming the original text as one's own narrative — one externalizes and casts off the bastard while the other internalizes the narrative. To cannibalise, or to 'overwhelm, destroy, or eat away at, as if by cannibalism; to crush or manipulate (a person)' (*OED*), is a very specific, powerful image supplied by the authors; though, its alternate description is to 'use (something) as a source of

parts or content for another of a similar kind; to take (a part) from one thing to use in another' (*OED*). Tammy Lai-Ming Ho rightly argues that to see neo-Victorian literature as cannibalistic 'provides a framework for understanding the genre's origin, its conflicted and violent relationship with its Victorian predecessors, and the grotesque and gothic effects it generates in the fiction' (2019: 2). It is not the intention of this piece to argue that vampires are cannibals; rather, the figure is a provocative critical metaphor to articulate questions of literary consumption and consummation that are integral concerns in the latter Stoker's two neo-Gothic biofictions.[2] These two works exemplify consumption; first, they assert that Bram stoker was fed truthful material which he dis/re-membered from real experiences wherein he knew the participants, and second, that combining genres — biography, fiction and Gothic — is a legitimate means of bringing a new generation to the older text and its author.

Both of these terms — cannibalism and neo-Gothic — are relevant to what follows in the twenty-first century texts. They use the original *Dracula*, plus bit parts found in notebooks or inferred from origin folk tales, to create a cannibalistic remix that allows the un-dead to rise as a kind of haunting, and to express anxiety in a new millennium. Ironically, despite his own provocative idea of how others have cannibalised *Dracula* or Stoker's persona, there is no recognition by Dacre Stoker that his own two novels follow this pattern of consumption which re-members Bram Stoker's life, desecrates his characters, disrupts his narrative and usurps his authorial right to be incomplete and transgressive.

Bram Stoker's literary presence is often mitigated through his most famous novel, creating a problematic (bio)fictional representation. Despite having a fascinating and complex life,[3] there has been surprisingly 'little straightforward biofiction to employ Stoker as a subject' because he is 'often only used as a character in the neo-gothic romance being told' (Ho 2019: 90-

91). Stoker's great-grandnephew seeks to legitimize his *Dracula* remixes by asserting familial authority, because '[a]s a Stoker, I felt Bram needed to be a character in this story, so we could finally give him a share of the limelight' (Stoker and Barker 2018a: 405). That said, unless perhaps creating a well-researched biography, such a claim is nonsense; intentionally or not, neo-Gothic authors consistently 'undermine the authorial power of the originary Stoker' (Ho 2019: 94) by over-writing, re-writing, or gap-filling his *ur*-text to consume it for their own production. These texts manifest a 'postmodernist dual cannibalism' which raises questions of authenticity, authorship, originality and anxiety of influence' (Ho 2019: 96).[4]

Not only are Dacre Stoker and his co-writers' novels themselves objects of reader consumption, but their narratives demonstrate a rapacious consummation of the source material for the authors' own needs and Dacre's efforts to save *Dracula* from what he sees as its misappropriation by outsiders.[5] The writers tell an unknown story of how Bram Stoker came to write *Dracula*; they make claims to truth and infer proprietary knowledge about the author. While an increasing amount of neo-Victorian biofiction is being written — 'literature that names its protagonist after an actual historical figure' wherein authors 'have a particular objective, so they strategically select and organize biographical facts and historical information in order to communicate their vision' (Lackey 2018: 7) — I would argue that such works require active readers who are 'curious, critical, and active readers of biography and history' (2018: 8). In the case of *Dracul* and *Dracula the Un-Dead*, an informed reader would consider how these novels' palimpsestic layers of biography, history and fiction are jumbled together to capitalise on the family's history, both literal and literary.

Any such biofictional project in the postmodern age is difficult in that it 'underscores the degree to which fiction necessarily plays a role in the construction of a biographical subject and

why, therefore, an accurate representation of the biographical subject is ultimately impossible' (Lackey 2016: 5). Biofiction writers immediately concede that their work is an interpretation of a life because no one can 'accurately signify or represent the biographical subject because the author's subjective orientation will always inflect the representation of the person' (2016: 5). Cora Kaplan argues that biofiction is not always possible, since the 'bio' references an 'embodied element of identity, a subject less than transcendent but more than merely discourse. It implies there is something stubbornly insoluble in what separates [biography and fiction] and that prevents them from being invisibly sutured; the join will always show' (2007: 65). Further, such a splicing of genres invokes questions of ethical responsibility when both ventriloquising (or speaking in place of or for another) and cannibalising (or consuming) an historical subject alongside their fictional creation(s). Decisions must be made as to which biographical facts and historical information are relevant to the twenty-first-century authors' narrative, and what information may be altered or omitted entirely.[6]

While the Gothic 'is frequently considered to be a genre that re-emerges with particular force during times of cultural crisis and which serves to negotiate the anxieties of the age by working through them in a displaced form' (Punter and Byron 2004: 39), the neo-Gothic adds what Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham consider the spectral in neo-Victorian fiction and how it 'represents a "double" of the Victorian text' (2010: xv). Certainly, *Dracula* is both Gothic and Victorian fiction wherein the links among nostalgia, perversion, rewriting and creativity are complex; as a result, 'the Gothic's perverted nostalgia and nostalgic transgression lead to a far-reaching blending of self and other, opening up the liminal space of creativity' (Van Elferen 2007: 8) for just such projects which combine biography and Gothic genres. Such writings demonstrate a 'double gesture, since they return to these moments in the literary past, both

repeating and transforming them' (Dunn 2007: 12).

The creative tension between the Gothicism of the past text with the postmodern questions of the neo-Gothic are found in the re-creations that disrupt visions of nostalgia for the past as simple; rather, both neo-Gothic and neo-Victorian narratives must be seen as more than biographical or historical fiction because they '*self-consciously engage with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians*' (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 4). To reread and rewrite Victorian experience — and I would argue the neo-Gothic experience — 'is something that defines our culture as much as it did theirs' (2010: 4). Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn warn against generalizing an 'homogenized identity' (2010: 2) for neo-Victorian texts because it is now the case that several subgenres, like the neo-Gothic, have been identified as further means to particularise a scholar's inquiries. Still, an engaged if somewhat skeptical reader must be mindful that 'rewriting looks backward (as if nostalgically) in order to correct or perpetuate predecessor texts, and ignores the way rewriting *also* complicates (perverts) the return to such origins' (Dunn 2007: 23).

When biofiction is added to the neo-Gothic genre, the implication is that both the subject and its creator are bound to the monstrous recombining of fragmentary pieces so the person and their text might be consumed at the same time. Like the vampire, these narratives are seductive because 'the mysterious artistic process is seductive [. . .] one greatly enhanced by the biographer's [as well as biofiction writer's] and the subject's shared medium of words, their common interest in literary forms, and the particular closeness of fictional and historical narrative' (Benton 2015: 2). For this reason, neo-Gothic biofiction is self-consuming. It is in this vein that Dacre Stoker argues that his work is a necessary and legitimate extension of his ancestor's text, particularly because of the preface published in the Icelandic version of the story,

Makt Myrkanna (1901),[7] which he believes escaped editorial interference. The passage he relies on is ostensibly by Bram Stoker:

> I am quite convinced that there is no doubt whatever that the events here described really took place, however unbelievable and incomprehensible they might appear at first sight. And I am further convinced that they must always remain to some extent incomprehensible [. . .] 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. (Stoker and Barker 2018a: 483-484)

Dacre Stoker further argues that when *Dracula* was first published it was drastically cut by the editor (2018a: 492), a move reminiscent of missing and retrieved manuscripts in earlier Gothic fiction. Indeed, Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben remind readers of the 'self-evidently Gothic tropes—of spectrality, monstrosity, the double, madness, spiritualism, incarceration, and the trace (of lost manuscripts/documents, histories and voices' (2012: 5) that reappear in such fictions, including the spectrality of the missing which begs completion.

To assert the authenticity of their own project, Stoker and Barker use the epistolary format of the original *Dracula,* which included telegrams, journal entries, voice-recorded phonograph diaries, shorthand texts, letters, newspaper clippings and other means of communication, in order to maintain a multi-perspectival approach to the unwinding of Bram Stoker's life that converges with his fiction. In their works, Stoker is 'recast at the centre of his own mythology' (Murphy 2018: np); his documented life now exists alongside the fiction that *Dracula* was inspired by.

Dracul opens in the 'Now', a moment sometime before *Dracula*, with the vampiric threat imminent. Bram Stoker is now a character who believes '[t]here can be no rest, no sleep, no safety, no family, no love, no future, no —' (2018a: 3). As he hides in a room walled with mirrors and crucifixes, the door sealed shut with communion wafers and wild white roses at its base, and his rifle aimed at the entrance, Stoker 'picks up the tattered leather-bound volume', plucks 'a pencil from his breast pocket', and 'begins to write by the quivering light of the oil lamp' (2018a: 6). Other family members, including his parents, his siblings Matilda and Thornley, his brother's wife Emily (the parallel victim to Lucy Westenra), and his acquaintance, Arminius Vambéry (the new version of Professor Abraham Van Helsing), all join the story. Stoker's actual childhood nanny, Ellen Crone, is given voice as a central figure in the young Stoker's developing sense of Irish folklore and Gothic monstrosity.

The reader of *Dracul* is presented with Bram Stoker's journal; the fictional Bram Stoker's first entry in Stoker and Barker's volume addresses, unexpectedly, the biographical 'peculiarities of Ellen Crone. That is, of course, where I should start, for this is as much her story as it is mine, perhaps more so. This woman, this monster, this wraith, the friend, this [. . .] being' who was 'there at my beginning, and will no doubt be there for my end, as I was for hers. This was, and always shall be, our dance' with her 'hand always reaching out, even as the prick of her nails drew blood' (2018a: 7). By invoking his childhood nanny, the narrative draws on both the Stoker bloodline and on the idea of blood as the life of his fiction — dual blood and duality of his character(s). Recounting that his beginning was a 'horrid affair' with his early years marred by being a 'sickly child, ill and bedridden from birth until my seventh year, when a cure befell me' (2018a: 7), the opening biographical details match Stoker's life spent in the family attic. The cure for his illness is the central narrative question:

> What ailed me, you wonder? [. . .] Whatever it was, my affliction found me shortly after birth and clung to me with wretched fingers. On my worst days, it was a feat for me to cross my room; the effort would leave me winded, bordering on unconsciousness. A mere conversation drained what little energy I possessed; after speaking but a few sentences, I often grew pale, and cold to the touch, as sweat crawled from my pores, and I shivered. [. . .] My heart would sometimes beat fiercely in my breast, irregular, as if the organ sought rhythm and could not find it. And the headaches; they would befall me and linger, day upon day, a belt tightening around my head at the leisurely hand of a fiend. (10)

This recounting of his childhood by the fictional Stoker reads like a definition of consumption, but by what or by whom is the question; further, to describe his physical symptoms is, in itself, a means of setting up the character(s) of Stoker's own novel as a parallel text for a reader's consideration.

The term for the illness designated in the nineteenth-century as 'consumption' arose from the idea that the body was being consumed as the sufferer wasted away. Its symptoms ranged from coughing, pain with breathing, weight loss, fatigue, fever, night sweats and chills, as well as loss of appetite. The possibility that Stoker is a victim to a consumptive disorder parallels his own descriptions of Lucy in *Dracula:* she 'complains of difficulty in breathing satisfactorily at times, and of heavy, lethargic sleep' (Stoker 1897/1998: 147) and is 'horribly white and wan-looking' (1897/1998: 163). In *Dracul*, Stoker's fever worsens and his Uncle Edward, a doctor, quickly diagnoses that '[b]loodletting [via leeches] is the only treatment called for by such a case' (Stoker and Barker 2018a: 25), although Stoker's mother warns that their excessive penetrative feeding weakened him.

When science fails, Ellen Crone comes to Stoker's aid. She demands the room be cleared in a 'voice [that] was not hers but was instead a wail, a banshee shrieking into a storm-filled night' (2018a: 27), asking '"[d]o you trust me?"' to which he affirms with a nod. She warns, "'[y]ou shouldn't'" (2018a: 31). Matilda claims their nanny "'walked you back from the Gates of Hell last night and rescued you from the Devil's touch'" (2018a: 37), while his family denies Ellen's inexplicable assistance and enforces the narrative of Uncle Edward's pseudo-scientific leeching success. A subtle change comes over Ellen, shifting from flawless beauty to aged crone as if she has become ill or lacks nourishment. Even the gifted Matilda, who makes many drawings of her, '"cannot capture her no matter how hard I try; her image eludes me"' (2018a: 21) since Ellen's eyes move from brightest blue to deepest gray.

The novel enters the neo-Gothic 'contest between different versions of history' with works that 'indulge a kind of creative anachronism, proposing untoward, perverse connections between the deep past and contemporary life and politics' (Ellis 2000: 14). This narrative fluidity extends another connection to an author's historical life and his Gothic characters, such as the unknown cure for the real Stoker's childhood illness. In *Dracul,* the narrator's health drastically changes in October 1854. Stoker and his sister hear of a man who has been '[b]uried alive' in the suicide graves near Clontarf (2018a: 12); a story followed quickly by the horrific recounting of the O'Cuiv family massacre, where a devastated Patrick O'Cuiv is thought to have killed his family to save them from starvation. The Potato Famine (1845-1849) is thus the historical context for Stoker's childhood. Here, as a child character, he is well-versed in its effects from his mother's stories of those who suffer to the point where the 'poor are robbing the poor. Men who once worked their own fields are begging on corners in order to scrape together food for their

families. Don't ever underestimate what a man will do to put food into the mouth of his starving child' (2018a: 41).

Because of what is revealed as an unholy, non-medical, unsanctioned consumption and/or consummation of and with Ellen Crone, unlike these men the young Stoker finds himself not 'the least bit tired' with 'the adrenaline surging through my body [. . .] Every sight and sound seemed enhanced' (2018a: 45). The two curious children infiltrate their nanny's room to find it is covered with a thick layer of dust and a bed of 'dirt, thick and black. Centred in the dirt was the concave impression of a body' with worms 'slinking over the putrid soil' full of the 'stench, of death and decay' (2018a: 55). After learning she only pretends to eat at the dinner table, there can be no doubt for a reader of vampire narratives: Ellen Crone is *nosferatu,* a vampire.

The textual present and the historical past mix together with Stoker as both child and adult with a multi-modal spectral voice that consumes his attention. The voice 'comes to him again from somewhere deep within his own head. Not the thick and heavy voice' he expects, 'but a soft and child-like voice, female, the voice of an angel' (2018a: 101) that creates a nexus of knowing among himself, his nanny and his creative mind, then morphs into his sister's voice. She reminds him that, as he writes in his notebook, '*I know you are rushed, but a good storyteller never leaves gaps*' (2018a: 102). To be the consummate author, he must rearticulate his experiences for the reader as he recalls Ellen's stories, which were '*enthralling; I couldn't resist*' (2018a: 103), just as Matilda obsessively tries to capture her image from the memories of her childhood. Matilda's many efforts to 'capture [her] likeness on canvas' leads to 'an oil of a woman with flowing blond hair and the most beautiful blue eyes', which wins her a trip to the Louvre in Paris to collect the 'Young Artist's Award for Painting from Life' (2018a: 129). Ellen

Crone, as undead, has supplied both Stoker and Matilda with a desire to tell stories, to create portraits on paper of unknowable, uncatchable persons like Dracul and herself.

The novel follows the facts of his life when Stoker worked in the civil service but wanted to spend his time in the theatre; where it diverges is that, as he writes reviews, he lives with a flatmate, William B. Delany, who captures flies. Creative license by Dacre Stoker takes a note from Stoker's notebook on 27 October 1872 — 'I once knew a little boy who put so many flies in a bottle that they had not room to die!' (Miller and Stoker 2013: 66) — and brings the 'boy' to life as fodder for both Renfield's possible origin and to add interest to their novel. The fictional Stoker is now, in his free time, writing and thinking about the 'monsters and horrid things we would make up in order to frighten each other', and how 'the true and the fantastic blend together, becoming as one' in 'tales of creatures, so in our minds she became one. Our imaginations fed on these stories, twisted them; we wanted to believe, so we did. But that doesn't make them fact' but only 'imagined things, the ramblings of creative, overactive young minds, nothing more' (Stoker and Barker 2018a: 147).

The historical stories of his family and his early adulthood now become the fictional ingredients for *Dracul* Stoker's imagination. The young Stoker lives vicariously through stories told by his mother and Ellen Crone, including one of the 'Dearg-Due' on the tragic female vampire of Irish folklore.[8] Dacre Stoker's use of a supposedly Irish tale parallels Bram Stoker's real use of folklore. Even the reviewer in *The Argus* notes that the original was 'a bold attempt to concentrate the fables and superstitions which have existed in Eastern Europe especially for many centuries into a shape sufficiently like reality to cheat the imagination of the nineteenth century' (1897). Once a man, Stoker finally learns the whole story. He remembers the moment when 'Ellen's mind opened to me, her thoughts, her memories, revealing the true fate of the

Dearg-Due, revealing to me the true life of the woman before me' (Stoker and Barker 2018: 364). This is an embedded narrative of her life before Clontarf that involves a tyrant for a husband who dismembers her loved one (Deaglan O'Cuiv) alive. She is the 'Countess Dolingen von Gratz' from Styria (2018a: 426), who escaped to hide with the family Stoker.

To dismiss the over-the-top acts that follow as parody would be unproductive; Julian Wolfreys reminds us that the Gothic, 'as a body of fiction, is always excessive, grotesque, overspilling its own its own boundaries and limits' (2000: xi). These narratives directly intertwine when Stoker's older brother, Thornley, a preeminent doctor with particular interest in the mind, is told by the siblings of Ellen Crone's vampiric condition. Stoker confesses he has met with her over the years to feed off of her blood so he will remain healthy (Stoker and Barker 2018a: 266). Thornley believes them and agrees to help; his own wife, Emily, suffers an illness that seems akin to madness but involves punctures on her neck, as well as an intense aversion to sacred objects of the Church. The only means of containment is to create Emily's alternate need for laudanum, red wine and rest (Stoker and Barker 2018a: 305). A bargain is struck to help Ellen who is, in fact, their protector, to reconstitute her lover's body and destroy Dracul — this will return Emily to the family. Like in *Dracula*, the band of heroes (now including heroines) hunts down the vampire to win the day, a feat that has structured the narrative in the leather-bound book in which he records his story. While hunted by Dracul, 'Stoker the historical figure morphs into Stoker the vampire slayer' (Murphy 2018: np). In the fashion of a selfless Victorian gentlewoman, Nanna Ellen ultimately sacrifices herself to save them.

Stoker and Barker's textual cleverness culminates on 2 August 1890, when Stoker works through what is left in a box of documents that explain where the heroes are now; while he sorts them, he receives a visitor. As the novel closes, its tone seems turn to domestic realism[9] when,

‘at the moment when [the story] appears to have given up the ghost [. . .] It starts to be celebrated, or perhaps even fed upon, by the spectre of criticism’ as it ‘feeds upon itself, adopting a knowingly self-referential manner’ (Wolfreys 2000: xii), allowing Stoker’s story to fuse with one more of his characters. Mina Harker appears, a woman ‘who, in just fifteen minutes, has somehow managed to turn [Stoker’s] life upside down and shake it’ and whom he ‘placed her in her mid-twenties, but her age was difficult to ascertain; she possessed, shall we say, a timeless beauty’ (Stoker and Barker 2018a: 473). Mina observes Stoker and sees the manuscript is titled COUNT WAMPYR, but he ‘picked up a pen and drew a line through WAMPYR, and replaced it with DRACUL, then added the letter A at the end’ (2018a: 474) before putting the papers into his leather satchel. She leaves a provocative note: ‘*Vambéry said you know where this beast hides? Where he goes to lick his wounds?*’ (474), an intriguing transition to the next narrative, *Dracula: The Un-Dead*, a prequel of sorts to the Victorian novel. Stoker has now ostensibly met the real woman who inspires his story, or her manuscript is subsumed by Stoker as his own story.[10]

Dracula: The Un-Dead explores the ramifications of an unconsummated quest that turns to obsessive, consuming need; the biofiction(s) here implicates both the original author and his characters, as well as the toll taken on them because of the unfinished business of their quest: Dracula yet lives. According to Leslie Klinger, ‘[t]hat’s not to say that “The Un-Dead” [. . .] is a bad book, just that no author would permit a sequel that baldly claims the original got the story wrong’ by changing places, people and dates, but it ‘pushes the story in unexpected directions while remaining true to the dark heart of the Transylvanian vampire-king’ (2009: np).

This biofiction takes ‘apart the gothic corpse, dismembering and re-membering it’ (Wolfreys 2000: xiii) by recombining elements of Stoker’s biography and creating biographies

for the fictional characters. Dr. Jack Seward lives in a bohemian Parisian flophouse, self-alienated in a room of 'crumbling plaster walls, which bore the evidence of his morphine-induced rants, his wild insights handwritten in ink, coal, wine, and even his own blood', but he is positive 'these writing would one day prove his sanity' (Stoker and Holt 2009: 7). He awakens to a 'small, smoked brown bottle of morphine' and 'quickly caught the precious liquid, untying the leather belt form his left bicep with a practiced movement' as he looks at autopsy photos of Jack the Ripper's five known victims as part of the *tableaux* of death on his wall that also includes 'a portrait of an elegant, raven-haired beauty', the 'Countess Elizabeth Bathory circa 1582' (2009: 6-7). He grabs his vampire hunter kit and runs for the train where he reminisces of Lucy — '*Oceans of Love, Lucy*' — and remembers her 'odd idiosyncrasy of watching a speaker's mouth as if trying to taste the next word before it passed by his lips' (2009: 9). The imprint Lucy has left on Seward is both sensual and sad.

Seward, now a vampire hunter, seeks Bathory, a queer vampire who, 'dressed in an evening jacket, complete with fitted, starched white, wing-collared shirt and black tie. In its severe lines, her tailor had found a way to accentuate her voluptuous feminine figure while projecting a masculine strength' (2009: 15).[11] She was a '*highly educated*' young woman who was not 'born a monster, but had become one' (2009: 223) after enduring years of rape and sadistic abuse at the hand of a husband forced upon her, all of which leads to her sexual turn away from men and her expertise in vampirism as a means of survival after she is saved by her cousin, Vlad Dracula III (2009: 227). Stoker and Holt use legitimizing reassurances like '[a]ccording to historians' (2009: 223) to give Bathory a brief biofiction that includes 'bathing in and drinking' over six hundred young women's blood (2009: 225); her vainglorious gluttony is intended to minimize Dracula's own excesses.

Characters from the *ur*-text are used but the biofiction devours their meaning; postmodern complications obfuscate characters' characters and suppositions about historical figures — Bathory and Vlad the Impaler — are made, neither of which were in the original novel or, as far as is known, significant to Bram Stoker. Here, Quincey Harker is now a young man hoping to go into theatre, Jonathan is an alcoholic who drinks to escape Mina's desire for the Count, Quincey Morris is dead and Arthur Holmwood is now Lord Godalming. This world of fictional characters interacts with the real world Théâtre de l'Odéon, the theatre owned by Bram Stoker after the death of Irving, his real-life employer at the Lyceum Theatre and the man whom some believe was the inspiration for Dracula.[12] Stoker, who after several strokes is 'a prisoner in his own body, paralyzed on his left side, unable to move, or even feed himself' at times (2009: 287) is desperately trying save the theatre from bankruptcy with a successful stage adaptation of his novel.

In a move that Bram Stoker would, most likely, have disdained, Stoker and Barker have resurrected a character, police Inspector Cotford, whom they believe was initially to be in *Dracula* but was replaced by Abraham Van Helsing (Miller 2009: 174).[13] Cotford's importance is to tie the neo-Gothic narrative to truth. In *Dracula: The Undead,* Cotford is involved with the hunt for Jack the Ripper. The combination of the Rippers victims, Bram Stoker, Dracula and other equally spectral, unknowable presences creates a neo-Gothic revisitation of earlier texts — real, biographical, and fictional — into 'constant returns, uncanny disturbances, dismembered remains and improper forms, deferrals and differences' that are '*unburiable*' (Wolfreys 2000: xv). A child of Ireland who shares heritage with Stoker, including the effects of tuberculosis and influenza, Cotford is aware of how the ongoing bodily devastation of Ireland's people at the time gave pause to medical science and theology, both of which were concerned with how the illness

should be understood as a 'sympathetic, astral or diabolical effect' (Hamberger qtd. in Groom 2018: 17). He recounts how physicians and priests traumatically desecrated his brother's body believing that, because patients could not breathe while suffering from consumption, it was 'evidence of a vampire sitting on their torso, sucking their blood' so they must have an iron stake driven through their hearts (Stoker and Holt 2009: 141).

Stoker and Holt's intentional conflation of biography and fiction is disorienting, as is the rewriting of Count Dracula as the devout, sympathetic saviour and father of Quincey rather than as the unholy, devouring monstrosity of *Dracula*. Instead, enter Basarab, the great Hungarian actor of the day who is the toast of Europe. Particularly charismatic in tragic roles like Richard III, Basarab sees the young man's interest and encourages Quincey to work at the theatre. One conversation considers how writing affects representation of an historical character. After Quincey reads Bram Stoker's novel and believes the involvement of his parents, he turns to the actor for guidance. Holding up a copy of *Dracula*, Basarab says,

> "I've read the book that you left for me."
>
> Quincey was amazed that he could have read it so quickly. "What did you think?"
>
> "I've done some research," Quincey said, proudly pulling the German books from his satchel. "The title makes sense when you know there actually was a fifteenth-century Romanian prince named Vlad Dracula. He was quite a villain."
>
> "I would hardly refer to him as a villain," Basarab said. "He was the father of my nation". (2009: 95)

Their exchange takes place over a 'delicious looking roast chicken' that was the 'best [Quincey] had ever tasted. Basarab warns him against the 'spicy chicken's heat' of the 'paprika hendl' (2009: 95). Indulging in the historical information from the books is not enough. While Quincey

eats the exotic food, he also ingests information as Basarab posits an alternate theory of Dracula, one that positions him as heroic, not villainous.

Dracula is, in this novel, itself recognised as a biofiction. Quincey wonders if 'there had to be a reason that Stoker chose his parents as models for the lead characters' (2009: 91-92) and if 'Stoker was a genius at creating the characters, or if his depiction of Dracula was actually based on someone' (2009: 93). Quincey parallels the position into which Stoker and Barker hope to cast the twenty-first-century reader. During a reading, Stoker is almost killed by his own fictional creation when 'Basarab snapped his hand around Stoker's neck and squeezed', warning '"I am a gauntlet thrown before you [. . .] I am your judgement before God!"' (208); like Victor Frankenstein, the creature assembled from pieces seeks recognition. Quincey then listens to the actor onstage who 'had *become* the character of Count Dracula' (2009: 209) or, really, has become himself for audience entertainment to be consumed by the masses. The writer has been usurped by his creation and, through Dacre Stoker's sense of ownership, the characters created by Stoker make his own life story irrelevant.

In their acknowledgements to *Dracula: The Un-Dead*, after some facsimiles of Bram Stoker's notes, Stoker and Holt make a postmodern acknowledgement that 'the characters who pop up in our sequel are also real historic figures' (2009: 412), alongside a list of the names of real persons. Using both documents and real people to ground their own text, they further declare how they 'have followed Bram's lead' for 'actual time period train routes and schedules, street names, and locations' (2009: 413), all of which seeks to grant legitimacy to their own cannibalistic enterprise. In such a self-conscious reflection on the past, one could argue that 'the past always lingers in the present, whether as disturbing shadow, a reverberation in a hollow space, a mental reflection, or a [projection] of the unconsciousness' that 'recasts pasts upon

present, and brings with it unease and uncanniness as well as nostalgia and longing' (Van Elferen 2007: 2-3). Neo-Gothic biofiction may cannibalise the past text and persons in the service of the present, and transgress the past text to investigate the present. The choice to consider these neo-Gothic texts, particularly when a reader is a Victorian and/or Gothic scholar, is tempting; perhaps it would be better if we had not read the texts but had, like Mina, chosen to heed Jonathan Harker's original warning: '[h]ere is the book, take it and keep it, read it if you will, but never let me know' (Stoker 1890/1998: 140).

Notes

[1] According to Dacre Stoker, in March 2017, he was invited by Microsoft cofounder Paul Allen to view the original manuscript of *Dracula.* That manuscript 'begins at page 102, crossed out at the top and renumbered as page 1' (Stoker and Barker 2018: 492).
[2] Neo-Gothic texts mobilise 'what is accepted as the Gothic in order to deal with a post-postmodern, sometimes posthuman, world to expose the ambivalence and banality that now greets questions of evil, to address questions of memory, violence and traumatic experience, to investigate non-linear identities as well as spectral selves and to give voice to multifaceted cultural, scientific and artistic complexities in a time of complexity' (Maier and Ayres 2020: 4).
[3] For excellent biographical studies, see Barbara Belford's *Bram Stoker: A Biography of the Author of Dracula* (1996), Paul Murray's *From the Shadow of Dracula: A Life of Bram Stoker* (2004), Lisa Hopkins' *Bram Stoker: A Literary* Life (2007), and Matthew Gibson and Sabine Lenore Müller's *Bram Stoker and the Late-Victorian World* (2019).
[4] Ho prepares a very convincing argument regarding the narrative voice and Stoker's authorial position, as well as investigates other 'neo-*Draculas*'. See her excellent work (2019).
[5] Dacre Stoker tours and writes almost exclusively about these aspects of Bram Stoker's novel and his family. See his website at http://dacrestoker.com.
[6] Michael Lackey addresses issues of ethics in his work on biofiction (see 2018).
[7] Some critics believe this is a completely separate book given the liberties taken in translation; see Eschner (2017).
[8] Although there are several versions of the 'Dearg-Due' story that can be found on the internet at sites (like http://emeraldisle.ie/dearg-due) and these versions include connections to the Banshee, both of which are relevant to the descriptions of Ellen Crone, when I consulted with Ailbe van der Heide at the *Cnuasach Bhéaloideas Éireann* [National Folklore Collection and Unesco Memory of the World Site] at University College, Dublin, they had not heard of the 'Dearg-Due' before I contacted them. They took a great deal of time and effort to try to track down a source but, according to Ailbe, 'although the internet has no problem telling me what a dearg-due is, I cannot find any reference in the sources I would usually rely on here. There is no

mention of it in *A Handbook of Irish Folklore,* a book that is a very good indicator of the material in our collection, nor can I find any reference to it in Dáithí Ó hógáin's *Encyclopedia of Irish Folk Tradition.* Even the term "vampire" produces very few results - I can only find four likely stories about a "corpse-eating woman" in our entire collection - three of which are not available online, as yet. The fourth is in a book by Jeremiah Curtin - *Tales of Irish Fairies* - and yet it does not mention the term "dearg-due" or mention "Strongbow's Tree" or any other details the internet seems to use. One internet source did mention Thomas Crofton-Croker as a source for this legend, which I thought was likely, but again, I could not find those specific terms in his book at all' (email September 2020). Not to be deterred, another attempt was made, but, after consultation with other colleagues, Ailbe returned without a source. I would like to express my gratitude for such an extensive search on my behalf! For the folklore collection, please see http://www.ucd.ie/folklore/en/.

[9] See Alexandra Warwick (2018) on original readings and context of the late-Victorian text.

[10] A final point of interest: the last section of Dacre Stoker's family recreation, or cannibalisation, is a case record of Patient #40562 of WM. Thornley Stoker, M. D. with whom he spends twice weekly visits as she is locked behind a door that is 'a large, heavy monstrosity with only a small slit to pass the tray through at the very bottom and a simple wall vase mounted to its center holding a single white rose' and having no windows for escape (2018a: 479). In life, Sir William Thornley Stoker's wife, Emily, did suffer from an unknown mental illness that might have been schizophrenia, and lived contained 'sequestered in a distant wing of their Dublin residence Ely House with two women caretakers' (Belford 1996: 244); sadly, there were incidents where she burst into the dining room unclothed and was led screaming from the room, much to Thornley's mortification (Stoker and Barker 2018a: 316). A painful historical moment is rewritten into the modern novel when Emily appears unclothed before them all; once conquered, the novel ends with Emily having the voice of an angel and hands so 'smooth and soft, the skin of a child' (2018a: 478). Thornley laments that he cannot be with her because she still belongs to Dracul, but he will stay with her as he wastes away over time.

[11] It is interesting that he is not repelled, but fascinated by her as she feeds: he watches through her window as she passionately kissed each of her 'Women in White' on the lips while calling them "'My sweets'" before they take a young girl, 'a beautiful package just waiting to be unwrapped' (2009:14), hang her upside down, whip her, and as the 'blood dripping from the young woman had turned into streams', they lay under her with 'their mouths open to catch the precious crimson drops that fell like some hellish form of rain' before Bathory stood 'magnificently naked' under her as the innocent girl's throat is slit; Bathory's 'fanged mouth open[ed] wide as she orgasmically bathed in a shower of blood' (2009: 17). She believed 'Man was easy prey, and his blood was like a fine vintage' and the only human she respects is Charles Darwin for his theory of survival of the fittest (2009: 148); without question, she is rapacious in her desire for survival.

[12] Barbara Belford investigates this possibility in her biography of Bram Stoker (1996). There was a very strong bond between the two men; the obituary for Stoker in the *New York Times* makes clear that 'Irving placed implicit confidence in Stoker's judgement and business sense, while Stoker looked upon Irving as the only supremely great man in the world' (1912: 12), while their friend Hal Caine admits 'without any hesitation that never have I seen, never do I expect to see, such absorption of one man's life in the life of another' (1912: 16); whether that was interpreted by Stoker as vampiric need by Irving is unknown.

[13] Stoker had initially intended to include the police in his original novel but, disgusted at their lack of success in catching the Ripper, he choose to exclude them from the vampire chase.

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