

# PRECEDING DEMONS

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**ABSTRACT**

*Preceding Demons* is a psychological period drama that explores the fictionalized relationship between *Dracula* novelist Bram Stoker and prodigious serial killer Jack The Ripper. Set in the years *before* both the infamous murders (1888-91) and the novel's publication (1897) took the world by storm, this feature screenplay repurposes the Ripper as an enigmatic yet troubled Londoner destined to serve as the primary inspiration for Stoker's legendary creation.

Best described as a dual-origin story for both iconic figures, *Preceding Demons* also illuminates Stoker's struggles as a fledgling, doubt-addled writer, as well as his involvement with a murder investigation involving the Occult. A confluence of historical fact and bloodthirsty fiction, this work ultimately provides an ominous insight into the dark side of creativity; culled through the emotionally vampiric bond between a tortured artist and his twisted muse.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Without coming off as too much of a preening sycophant, I would also like to thank the forever beguiling Bram Stoker; a man who, even in death, manages to live on through his life's work. Such is the gift bestowed to those few brave artists who aren't afraid to go toe-to-toe with the Devil -- or in Stoker's

case, befriend him.

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## ORIGIN OF EVIL

When I was eight years old, my father bought me a copy of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. The text was dense, the smell of the pages, miasmatic, but what terrified me the most was the hand-rendered cover illustration of the author's eponymous villain. Malefic and haunting in its representation of pure evil, it looked like something Stoker could have drawn himself when words failed to capture the true horror of the face that stared into his soul whenever he closed his eyes. Remembering it now, the image is no less potent; almost as if the author had asked the Devil himself to sit and pose atop a black throne, under the half-light between dusk and an eternal night. The image was so frightening I had to give the book away.

Ever since my love of all things Batman since the tender age of three, I've traced the origins of my own irrepressible fascination with the hidden dualities of humankind and its dark side. Man by day, bat-winged creature by night, the Bruce Wayne/Batman persona became a nascent source of lifeblood to me when I craved more than the topical, vapid machinations of pre-teen escapism usually found in early-morning cartoons and made-for-TV kid flicks. By fourteen, I'd stumbled upon the iconography of Universal's monster movie roster of villains and misunderstood anti-heroes. Whether it was the love-torn Creature

from *The Creature From The Black Lagoon*, the desperately disfigured under-dweller from *The Phantom of The Opera* (himself a kind of hybrid between Batman and Dracula to my precocious young mind) the monosyllabic flesh-baron of Boris Karloff's *The Mummy*, or misunderstood lycanthrope Lawrence Talbot, a.k.a *The Wolf Man*, I'd found a place to park my dark fascinations and watch them flourish.

All of this is not to say that I wasn't absolutely terrified by darker fiction; whether it was *Tales From The Crypt*, *The Twilight Zone* or the late 90's resurgence of horror cinema back into the mainstream, I was at once terrified and ensnared by cinema's rare ability to suspend the collective disbelief of its ill-prepared audience. Through my late teens and early twenties, I'd gravitated towards writing this kind of material on my own; preferring jumps and bumps in the proverbial night to bloodshed and the tacky, Eli Roth-ian escapades of a generation of shock-jock filmmakers seemingly more interesting in inducing vomiting in their viewership than a true and iconic thrill. After having written numerous works that very much emulated many of the works stated above, it was as a graduate student that the love for creature cinema and the academic demand of a rigorously researched thesis became a match made in monster heaven.

I remember talking to a friend of mine whom I'd met in a Humanities graduate course at York during my first year when my original thesis film - an homage to Italian "Giallo Horror" - was dying on the proverbial vine. She was about to pursue her PhD in England; her dissertation tackling the lurid lore of London's dark underbelly, while I -- a desperate writer looking for ideas to replace my badly failing story -- listened as she regaled me about her research on The Occult, Sweeney Todd and Jack The Ripper. There was something about that last one that struck a chord. In the weeks leading up to me generating this new thesis idea, she and I had bonded over a mutual love for the sinister and the shadowed. In fact, she had even introduced me to a British Ripperologist (a term used to describe anyone professionally committed to the study of JTR), who was currently in the process of writing a book about The Ripper. He sounded like a fascinating guy, but the idea of another solo screen adventure of the notorious killer didn't exactly scream "fresh". It was during one of our late night phone calls that my friend and I started talking about another infamous Victorian figure - Bram Stoker. Confiding in her that I'd always been fascinated by Stoker's greatest work (ever since I'd purchased the novel as a child and been struck by the ghoulish and elemental cover illustration of the bloodthirsty Count), I'd admitted my darkest literary secret -- I'd never actually read the book. After an



intense and rather incredulous moment of silence, she retorted back with a vehement insistence that I drop everything and read it. Stoker and The Ripper... it was at the mention of both men's names in a single breath and the rumor that the former had known the identity of the latter, that a kind of creative lightning struck me. What followed was a question -- What if Bram Stoker and Jack The Ripper... had been friends? Further still, what if that friendship had inspired Stoker the novelist to dream up his famous Transylvanian vampire, based on his best buddy Jack? A second silence came. Though this one, fortunately, was filled with the quiet noise of a million ideas percolating inside my writer's mind.

## A RECIPE FOR NIGHT TERRORS

Bram Stoker; a name as synonymous with literary evil as was the character he created. And yet very few people actually know that much about him, his life, or the inspirations that led to his most famous novel. What fascinated me however, beyond just a simple biographical on screen exploration of the man was the notion of devising and structuring a "dual origin-story". I began to envisage a cross-pollinating cinematic depiction of a very obsessive, symbiotic and emotionally vampiric relationship between a tortured artist (Stoker) and his twisted muse (The Ripper), and how each man had a hand in the other's dark destiny. Since little is actually known about JTR or his origins, I saw this as an opportunity to take dramatic but measured liberties with the Ripper's identity and his backstory; the same free-form re-envisioning of Stoker's experiences during that era. This would allow me the freedom to write unhindered by dates or the impulse of a documentarian, with just enough fact-based material woven into the script to make it feel both historically grounded and narratively compelling.

Can you imagine if one of the most notorious villains in history inspired one of the most iconic villains of fiction? What would that mean for our enjoyment of not only my own work but also of Stoker's text (for further rumors indicated that

Stoker had hidden the identity of the Ripper within his famous novel)? I began crafting a story that was part prequel, part meta-textual analysis of the novel; one that would not only serve answer the unanswered questions about Stoker's own work, as well as aid in reifying the reasoning behind some of his most lurid and controversial elements of plot and character. Oh, and let's not forget, the screenplay would also similarly serve The Ripper; both in elucidating his pathology as a troubled man seeking immortality, and in providing a motive for his unspeakable crimes.

As the horror novelist H.P. Lovecraft once stated in a letter to a friend...*"One can't write a weird story of real power without perfect psychological detachment from the human scene.. Only a cynic can create horror - for behind every masterpiece of the sort must reside a driving demonic force that despises the human race and its illusions, and longs to pull them to pieces and mock them."* (qtd. in Ligotti 59). Though I do not share in his perspective on the psyche of those who devise ghoulish fiction, there was evidence of this kind of cynicism and psychological torment in Stoker's own work that I intended to mine for my own creative purposes. This was a kind of nihilism that I eventually went on to infuse into Bridger's (my iteration of JTR) character. The questions of one's view on humanity- Bridger's misanthropy and Stoker's retained sense of humanity -

then went on to become a core element of the story, elevating it at times to the level of a philosophical discourse on existence, meaning and death. My version of Bram Stoker looks evil in the face while holding onto his humanity - in part, because of the power of his own creativity. For him, evil (once transmuted into or through creativity) is as much a redemptive force as a destructive one. For Bridger, destruction is the only liberation; the true art which leaves no room for redemption, and thus he welcomes horror in all of its forms.

## A PLOT "RIPPED" FROM REALITY

*"Horror is the soul of the plot"* - Edgar Allan Poe

Perhaps the famous German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche saw it clearly when he pronounced that, *"With a talent, one is also the victim of that talent: one lives under the vampirism of one's talent"* (Nietzsche, Kaufmann 458). While I myself have known this kind of creative vampirism firsthand, I became even more curious to see how I could develop this type of obsession inside Stoker. Before even attempting to write a single word of the screenplay, I knew the monumental task of *research* lay ahead of me. But where to begin? With the hundreds of volumes and published works on Jack The Ripper? On London during the peak of its gothic gas-lit dance with the devil? Or on Bram Stoker; a novelist destined to become overshadowed by his greatest literary creation? And what about the unsung star of the show himself, Count Dracula?

After going back and reading through the novel (with all the fury of a bat out of hell), I felt confident that I had a strong enough grasp on the story and its lurid characters; after all, even before reading it, I'd seen countless cinematic and TV iterations of *Dracula* since before the age of ten. So perhaps most appropriately, Stoker's novel was where I first began down

the long and winding road towards a well-researched graduate thesis project.

The following is a rendering of an early outline of the story. I have included it here because - though one of the very first attempts at encapsulating the story in a page of text - I'm shocked by how unchanged it has remained when compared to the final version:

*In the years predating both the publication of the classic novel Dracula and the infamous Ripper killings that provided London with a century of nightmares, author Bram Stoker reluctantly travels to England with his wife, the aspiring actress and famous figure of British history Florence Balcombe, to take a job under the tutelage of friend and manager of the iconic Lyceum Theatre, actor Henry Irving. During his stay, Stoker will encounter some of the most memorable and noteworthy figures of British 19th century zeitgeist, including novelist and playwright Hall Caine, famous psychiatrist and alienist L. Forbes Winslow, and an enigmatic merchant operating under the pseudonym of John Augustus Bridger.*

*Forming a complex and lurid bond with Bridger, Stoker finds himself possessed by the stirs of imagination, beginning to outline a distinctly vampiric character sketch based on his recent acquaintance's macabre obsessions and magnetic*

*presence. Stoker's dark imaginings are fanned further when the Lyceum – a theatre with connections to the occult organization The Red Hand of God – becomes the scene of a brutal ritualized murder. Finding themselves helplessly drawn into the center of the investigation, Stoker and Bridger will attempt to navigate their mutual fascination with one another as they seek to untangle the truth behind the growing number of murders in a city on the cusp of a new century of terror and bloodshed; the likes of which will serve both as inspiration to Stoker's greatest work, and insight Bridger's destiny as England's true cloaked myth of the night – Jack The Ripper.*

Using history as a spring-board for an original take on the material and spanning the course of nearly a decade, I designed this story to both serve and illuminate these two historical figures, cinematically dramatizing their origins in a way that irrevocably tied them both together. What was important for me to keep in mind while writing was that Stoker's novel, apart from its sometimes distracting multi-narrator paradigm and controversial [for its time] psycho-sexual explorations, took *history and dramatized it*. I would ensure that at the very least, mine accomplished the same. This semi-epistolary structure was actually a convention of the day; also seen also in Mary Shelly's monster classic *Frankenstein*.

Situating his story between the haunted Carpathian

Mountains of Transylvania the dark heart of sexually-repressed Victorian London, Stoker achieved a rare balance between the factual and the phantasmagorical. His story bordered on the biographical without being indebted to a single historian's account of the facts. Striking this fine balance was one of his great achievements, and was perhaps one of the reasons why his vampire tale -- set against a sea of countless others before and after him -- became the criterion by which all other vampire stories were [and have since been] measured. The task of entering Stoker's world without being swallowed inside its looming shadow was to be my greatest but most rewarding struggle throughout this process. I say only with a modicum of confidence that I made it out in one piece, for there are stones in Stoker's novel that hide secrets that are better left (for the sanity of its investigators) unturned.

Below, I have assembled the following research points with the intention of elucidating the historicity and reinforcing the thematic motivations behind my screenplay as well the reasons for their inclusion. Along with the aid of my research consultant Alicia Edwards and countless hours of my own eye straining research, I owe many of my findings to Barbara Bedford's wonderfully insightful book *Bram Stoker: A Biography of the Author of Dracula*. They are as follows:



- The name of the prostitute who gives birth to baby Bridger in the screenplay's prologue is Lucy, and is taken from Lucy Westerna; a prominent female character in Stoker's novel. The prologue scene in which she is giving birth is intended to partially emulate Stoker's scene in which Lucy is in the throes of a vampiric transformation - shortly after having been bitten by Count Dracula. My Lucy - herself having been "bitten"/impregnated by the equally sinister Lord Overton - exemplifies the metaphor I have created between the fictional transmittance of the disease of vampirism with the act of insemination via sexual intercourse. From the earliest stages of the screenplay I began to draw the parallel between pregnancy and vampirism with each woman Lord Overton seduces as well as with the three other women he has slept with. This was done primarily to solve the issue of the inclusion of vampirism in a completely grounded universe, denuded of any truly supernatural forces. Thus, an equivalent was necessary to convey the concept in full.
- As historical records can confirm, Stoker arrived in London from Ireland in 1878 to act as acting manager and assistant to Henry Irving. As stated, my screenplay is set roughly ten years before the Jack The Ripper murders began (1888). Opening on the scene in which Stoker and Florence arrive

via locomotive during this time is meant to stay true not only to Stoker's own personal biography, but also pay homage to the opening chapter of *Dracula*, when we first see an anxious Jonathan Harker riding in a locomotive [and then a coach] toward Dracula's Castle.

- The Royal Lyceum Theatre (where much of the first act of my screenplay is set) was one of Britain's most popular theatres of its day. The real Stoker was employed there for nearly 30 years, having previously been a Civil Clerk at Dublin Castle in Ireland. Before that, Stoker was a novelist who found modest success with some of the novels he produced. He authored twelve in total (one before his move to England and the rest during his stay) before his eventual death in 1912.
- Henry Irving (a minor but important character in my screenplay) was Britain's most notorious and iconic actor. The real Stoker and Irving met in 1876 and remained the best of friends until Irving's passing in 1905. Thus Irving's inclusion worked not only from a historical point of view, but also from a narrative one; their friendship was to be the mechanism that catapulted my Stoker into the police investigation that takes up much of the story. As Bedford notes throughout her work, there existed the very real possibility that it was Irving himself who was the

inspiration for Stoker's Dracula character. Though this was a potential jumping off point, it was never something that I thought would serve my telling of the story. It was, however, an interesting bit of history that helped to reinforce the idea that Stoker utilized a direct and sole muse after which he based his character.

- The play being performed at The Lyceum in the first act of my screenplay is entitled *The Effervescent Man*, which tells the story of a black magician with the supernatural ability to escape from any prison by turning himself into a gaseous vapor. This play is my own construction, and has been designed to be an allusion to Dracula's uncanny maleficent and supernatural ability to turn into vapor and escape. This play also serves as a microcosmic display of the macrocosmic event that is the screenplay; two men [here magicians], a dead woman, and a collision between good and evil, all eventually leading to the villain escaping police capture (which Bridger does at the end of Act Three). A kind of story-within-the-story, meant to express the themes at play within *Preceding Demons*.
- James Robinson Plance's melodrama *Vampyre* (based off of John Polidori's "*The Vampire*") introduced the vampire trap (a trap door in the bottom of the stage floor) to The Lyceum when it opened there during the Stoker/Irving days.

I thought it pertinent and fitting to include the trap door (especially considering its rather appropriate name) given the obvious circumstances and tropes of the screenplay. Plus, it provided a way for the killer to get the first victim's body onto the stage.

- The Garrick Club was a gentlemen's club in London. Henry Irving was known to have been a frequent guest, along with Stoker. In my screenplay, this club is used as the setting where Stoker and Bridger "officially" meet, near the end of Act One.
- The Hermetic Order of The Golden Dawn was an organization that was pre-occupied by ideas of mysticism, supernaturalism, ritual and The Occult. Many of the people employed at The Lyceum were actual members. J.W. Brodie Ennis (amongst the group in Garrick Club scene, Act One) was a leading member of The Golden Dawn. At the time that this story is set they were known as the Isi-Urania Temple, but as I felt this was a less affective name, I made the executive decision to use their more "recent" name. Though Ennis makes a cameo (and a brief mention of the Order can be found here) I decided to scale back its importance as it related to the murder investigation. Initially, this group was to be public enemy number one until the reveal of the "real" cult [The Red Hand of God]. It ultimately became

more confusing than helpful as was pointed out by my thesis supervisor, and thus both The Order and Ennis exist within the story so as to *introduce* the notion of the supernatural and The Occult to the reader.

- The name Thomas Augustus Bridger is my own invention, and is an alias used by my iteration of Jack The Ripper before he dons the enigmatic top hat and cloak. I also did something similar in reinventing Bridger's backstory; painting him as a man whose father (a royal medical surgeon) had been bestowed a large sum of money for the successful surgical operation on the real life King of Hanover, Ernest Augustus. This was of course the yarn he told Stoker to conceal his true dark past; his true lineage was one connected to the story's antagonists, Lord and Lady Overton.
- Hall Caine makes his first and only appearance in The Garrick Club Scene of Act One, and I have given him the title of author of the play *The Effervescent Man*. In actuality, Caine was a playwright and *Dracula* is dedicated to him by his good friend, Bram Stoker.
- Ellen Terry was one of the premiere actresses in London and had a long history with Irving and The Lyceum. Though she does not make an appearance in the final draft of the screenplay, I do make mention of her name in the

interrogation scene between Stoker and the drunkard in Act Two. For those wondering, she only makes a nominal appearance because I couldn't figure out a substantive way to include her into the story, but felt it was important that her presence be known in the world of my story regardless.

- Chief Inspector Fredrick Abberline was the lead investigator during the Jack The Ripper murders (1888-1891). I thought it interesting to include him in this case as an antagonistic presence to Stoker and Bridger; an inverse of the audience-friendly protagonist he often appears to be in other JTR iterations. In my story, Abberline and Bridger are old friends. I thought it fun for the reader to play with the idea of having The Ripper right under the Inspector's nose without him ever knowing it.
- Dr. L Forbes Winslow (the "alienist" we meet in Abberline's office at the top of Act Two) was a psychiatrist heavily involved in the JTR murder investigation of 1888-1891. He was such a fascinating character to me that I knew I had to include him, especially since he has never been (to my knowledge) brought to life in other JTR fictional stories.
- Passed in 1572, The Vagrant Law (which derided the "intentionally unemployed"), saw acting as an "unlawful profession" and thus punishable accordingly by those in

authority. It is from this ridiculous decrement that I at first positioned Abberline's innate prejudice against Henry Irving, Bram Stoker and The Lyceum as a whole. Developing this further, I insinuated that Irving had an affair with Abberline's wife (or was at least rumored to have), which gives a more grounded reasoning as to why the Inspector hates him so much.

- Hillbaine Castle is a fictional one, but is based on both Bran Castle -- which is located in Transylvania (after which Stoker modelled Dracula's Castle), as well descriptions of Dracula's castle from Stoker's novel. Since Bridger is equal parts Dracula and JTR, I thought it fitting that he should live in a castle that was somewhat reminiscent of The Count's infamous lair. What this provided beyond a visual spectacle was the ability to play with the recurring trope of Stoker as his character Jonathan Harker; the frightened real estate broker who visits Count Dracula and takes up temporary refuge inside his castle. Stoker himself often noted how much the character of Harker was molded after himself. How befitting that here than in my story, the author should walk in his character's shoes. I surmised that by doing this, it might serve to ground Stoker's inspirations for the scenes in the novel dedicated to Harker's stay with Dracula (which Stoker

does in Bridger's); a fun way of explaining where Stoker got his idea for Dracula's castle.

- The dinner scene between Stoker, Florence and Bridger in the first half of Act Two is inspired by the scene in Stoker's novel in which Jonathan Harker dines with Count Dracula on his first night at the castle.
- Stoker was known to keep a "jotting journal" with him at all times in case inspiration should strike. In my story, the journal is an item that serves him in both the writing of his novel and during the murder investigation. The concept of the ever-present journal is also a major trope in *Dracula*; in fact, the the novel is told entirely from the various points of view of its many characters' journal entries.
- The wolf is an animal prevalent to Stoker's novel, almost as much as the bat. Dracula is known for his ability to transform into both. In my story, Stoker experiences a series of nightmares in which he is being chased by a wolf-like beast. The bat also plays a significant visual role in my screenplay, for obvious reasons that allude to the iconography of Count Dracula.
- The real Bram Stoker suffered from an unknown illness, causing him to be bedridden and unable to walk until the age of seven. I have chosen to visually accentuate this



debilitation in my screenplay with the inclusion of leg braces, which Stoker can be seen sporting during the nightmare sequence experiences. These serve to illustrate his creative impotence as a writer as well as his spiritual erosion as a man bedeviled by his own self-doubts; the likes of which manifest in a limp which he carries with him for all the world to see.

- The name of the killer's first victim, Helen Harker, is inspired by the character of Jonathan Harker from Stoker's novel. According to Bedford's biography, Stoker named him after a man who worked with him at the Lyceum.
- In an earlier version of my screenplay, a trade deal was to unfold between a count named Villemarque and the ailing Lord Overton involving the shipment of 50 crates of "Eastern European" soil over to England. In my story, Lord Overton is a wealthy Viscount who made his fortune in agriculture. The 50 boxes of soil were to be a nod to *Dracula*, who brings over the exact amount of dirt from his homeland. Ultimately, this scene didn't make the cut, but I thought it was important to bring up this deleted scene because it illustrates my continued attempt to create a synthesis between Stoker's novel and my screenplay; the events of the latter acting as his source of inspiration for the former.

- The vampiric occult sect The Red Hand of God is my own invention, but it is based on several cults of that time. Sanguinarians in particular were mortals who engage in the drinking of blood, and The Hermetic Order of The Golden Dawn was an organization whose members were prominent figures in the highest echelons of the time. The inclusion of The Red Hand of God (like Bridger, his castle, and so many other sourced elements) is also meant to act as the seedbed of Stoker's inspiration to write a book on vampires. Their particular rituals -- most notably their lust for blood and puncturing of their victim's neck so as to extract it - punctuates this.
- Old Nichol was the worst slum in London during that time, and is an area most notably associated with the Ripper's crimes. This is why I made it the neighborhood that Abberline first takes Stoker to in Act Two shortly after the identity of the first victim is revealed. Many dosshouses (ramshackle temporary lodgings, used mostly by the homeless and prostitutes) just like the one depicted in my story were found in this region at that time, hence its inclusion.
- As discussed above, Bridger's backstory is as much a fiction as the name he goes by in my screenplay. His father's surgical background that he alludes to during the

hunt scene in Act Two is both a nod to several "surgeon theories" taken up by historians and investigators attempting to discern the Ripper's identity, as well as an homage to Alan Moore's *From Hell*, inspired by historian Stephen Knight's postulations in *JTR: The Final Solution*.

- This disarming ability Stoker displays in the interrogation scene of the drunkard who comes forward with false information on the killer's identity is touched upon by Barbara Bedford in her book. Bedford notes that Stoker was known to many in the theatre as "father-confessor" for his apparent trustworthiness and uncanny insightfulness into the troubles of the human psyche; especially when it came to many of the theatre's employees. I have elevated this skill to the realm of criminal application for dramatic purposes which serve to edify Stoker as a potentially invaluable component to the investigation, both to readers and to Abberline.
- Mina Seward and Elizabeth Westerna (the second and third victims) are once again names taken from the pages of Stoker's novel. Mina Harker and Lucy Westerna are their sources of nominal inspiration, with the name Seward coming from Dr. Seward; a character in Stoker's novel who courted Lucy Westerna and ran the asylum where Dracula's servant Renfield is held. These are "Easter eggs" that have been

included into the screenplay for fans of the original novel that serve to illuminate Stoker's sources of inspiration for his novel. As Stoker progresses through the story, he stumbles upon names of people and locations that will continue to inspire him in this fashion.

- The placement of wreaths atop the heads of his victims are additions from Bridger. This has been done to indicate his "marriage" to them. Furthermore, the inclusion of three victims (no more and no less) is a nod to Dracula's three brides; each of whom he had transformed into creatures of the night after being bitten on their necks. I also added the imagery of the victim's torn dresses; done in such a deliberate manner so as to suggest the idea of wings. As was mentioned in the above point, this was similarly done to draw a parallel between Stoker's real life and the one he put to page in his novel (and by that logic, hence his inclusion of three brides for his eponymous villain). Hopefully this clarifies my reasons for including three female victims killed by Bridger; that this was not a decision made by way of implicit bias or unconscious misogyny but rather the invocation of the novel's classical tropes and my conscious use of them to ensure they were serving the story and not being utilized in an exploitative fashion.

- Stoker lived by the water during his childhood in Ireland, and was purported to have watched the ships coming into shore with wonder. The nightmare scene in which Stoker envisages himself as a small boy being carried outside of his childhood home by his mother and placed on a bench by the water is a nod to the scene in the novel in which Lucy Westerna is found in the middle of the night sitting on a bench, overlooking the ocean.
- The surname Holmwood - here used for the abortionist and physician present at Bridger's birth, Dr. Holmwood -- is taken from the character of Arthur Holmwood; a male suitor engaged to Lucy Westerna in Stoker's novel.
- During Stoker's childhood, his mother is reported to have recounted stories of her own youth. One such story is said to have involved a recollection of famine, in which Irish farmers were purported to have slit the veins of cattle and drink their blood to survive. The inclusion of a baby calf as sacrifice during the scene in which Stoker confronts the Red Hand of God cult is a nod to this. Obviously there are also the biblical connotations associated with this kind of bovine sacrifice; as the Judeo-Christian faith does have a minor but undeniable influence in many of the themes discussed within the context of my story, the imagery being resonant with Old Testament mythology. I should also

mention here the obvious New Testament-esque consumption of blood from a chalice by faithful Red Hand acolytes and the clear allusions to Bridger and Lord Overton as Luciferian entities. Furthermore, as it related to Stoker's capture and forcible consumption of blood in the cult scene, I intended to draw a parallel between he and his character Jonathan Harker, in which the latter is attacked and then seduced by Dracula's three brides, who then force him to consume blood. I liked the idea of Stoker having ingested actual blood, which is perhaps why his writings are far more impactful, even in their gore-less depictions of the act, than those tales that predated his.

- Bridger's move from England to Transylvania at the midpoint of Act Two is an inverse of Count Dracula's trajectory in the novel. In my research I came upon a bemusing fact that revealed that although Stoker used Transylvania as the setting for his novel, he never actually visited the region.
- The character of Bennington is an allusion to Stoker's character Reinfield, a loyal servant to Count Dracula (and here a servant to Lord Overton). In Stoker's novel, Reinfield is locked up in a mental institution for much of the story, and prognosticates the coming of his "master" through riddles and gibberish, not unlike Bennington in the

scene in which Stoker interrogates him. The name Reinfield Sanitarium (the location of the interrogation in my screenplay) is chosen for obvious reasons.

- During Stoker's final nightmare sequence aboard the vessel near the end of Act Two, we see an image of Abberline at the wheel of the ghost ship and the bodies of many of the other main characters in the screenplay. This was inspired by the scene in Stoker's novel in which the ship transporting Count Dracula [*The Demeter*] washes ashore with the crew having been slaughtered, the captain lacerated to the wheel.
- "Dracula" means "devil", or "son of the Devil" in the Wallachian dialect. I really wanted the introduction of the name into Stoker's consciousness to come from an organic, justified place, and not simply be something he thinks of while writing; or rather something with no explanation as to its origin. In other words, much like the other key elements in the story, it has to be *discovered*. Thus we have the inclusion of the Wallachian-speaking gypsy woman, who "reveals" this word to Stoker through the use of her Tarot-esque cards in the tent sequence of Act Two.
- Also of note is where I took my inspiration for much of Lord Overton's vampiric actions, including his fascination with The Occult. Elizabeth Bathory - the famous 16<sup>th</sup> century

Hungarian Countess and serial killer known for bathing in the blood of her virginal victims - was a big inspiration for Lord Overton's character (and his bloodlust).

- Leaving two of the most important points for last, I will here explain the inclusion of the pregnancies as they relate to the three female murder victims. I will of course circle back and further unpack this in the following sections of this document:

1. Elizabeth Stride (one of The Ripper's "Canonical Five" victims) was alleged to have been impregnated by a man who she worked for in Sweden before becoming a prostitute, only to be promptly dismissed from her post after her employer discovered she was with child. According to the author of one of the most researched narrative works about the Ripper, *From Hell*, Alan Moore states... *"Liz Stride's history, as given here; she was born on a farm called Stora Tumlhed in Torslanda, Sweden, later moving to Gothenburg where she worked as a servant for a man named Lars Oloffson. It would seem that during her four years in Oloffson's employ she became pregnant and was dismissed, although there is no direct evidence to prove that Oloffson was the father of the child, as we have Liz claiming here."* (Moore, Appendix 7). This seemed to parallel Lord Overton's behavior towards the women he impregnated [who he then



subsequently dismissed in one way or another] and so I used it as a jumping off point for my story.

2. As Erik Larson writes in his Edgar-Award winning historical novel *The Devil in The White City*: "The first of Jack's [The Ripper's] murders occurred on August 31, 1888, the last on the night of November 9, 1891 when he met a prostitute named Mary Kelly and accompanied her back to her room. He slashed her throat in a Van Gogh stroke that nearly removed her head from her spine. Over the next few hours, secure within walls, he carved off her breasts and placed these on a table along with her nose. He slashed her from throat to pubis, skinned her thighs, removed her internal organs, and arranged them in a pile between her feet. Kelly had been three months pregnant at the time."

(Larson 70). Let us mediate on the revelation; that Kelly had been pregnant during the time of her murder. With this now understood, it is easy to see how the pregnancy murder elements in my script are, if you like, a retrofitted narrative device, which elucidate a number of things. First and foremost, they go on to explain and tie together my story with history; namely *why* Kelly had been specifically targeted by the Ripper to be his final and most famous victim, due to the distinctly grim fashion by which she was executed. Being that she was his final victim, this act as

it relates to my story became a kind of ideological fulfillment of the promise that my Ripper (Bridger) made to his mother Lady Overton (through his grim task of eradicating all of his father's unborn spawn from the face of the earth). For all intents and purposes, Kelly is that final trace of Lord Overton's sexual deviancy, and thus the motivation for her murder can [under this new light] be understood as the necessary final kill as it relates to history (which has thus far provided us with no such clues beyond the postulations of historians). One can also find evidence of Bridger's intimation that there are more pregnant women still out there (referring of course to Kelly and the other members of the "canonical five") in Act Three of my script. This occurs when Stoker visits Bridger behind bars, we hear Bridger proclaim that he will escape bondage and go on to finish what he started [with his mother and the killing of the "bridal three"]. Hence we have the historical murders of the five prostitutes between 1880-1891, the likes of which only ceased when The Ripper found that fateful final one, whose womb was harboring a child -- its paternity (to historians and the world alike) unknown. Though the murder of Kelly takes place nearly a decade after Bridger's father's various trysts with the women he impregnated, Bridger is -- by the end of my

screenplay -- a man pulled by the strings of insanity, and as a result is blind to any form of logic save for the one viewed through the light of his own twisted belief.

3. The systematic precision of the actual Ripper murders and subsequent disassembly of their bodies (including the removal of their uterus in some cases) to my mind indicated that he was *looking for something* inside the body of his victims, most specifically within their child-bearing region. If one pushes this train of thought farther, one arrives at the inevitable question: what else could one so ghastly be looking for in so specific a territory, but proof that his victim's either were or were not with child? This led me to conclude that in his rage (upon finding no proof of his fictive imaginings prior to the murder of Mary Kelly), he acted out -- carving their forms and exhuming their organs with all of the hellfire his dark heart could possess. Thus, the systematic precision of the Ripper murders clearly indicated an intention beyond murder or mockery, and so Kelly's death is a fulfillment of Bridger and Lady Overton's dark covenant, the likes of which links the Ripper's real life murders with the gruesome acts in my story.

## GRADUATE SYMPOSIUM

I think that the controversy which understandably ensued during my initial presentation of the material at the initial graduate symposium regarding these matters was the very thing that ultimately improved my script. It challenged me as a writer to figure out a way to properly motivate the bloodshed and gender-specific nature of the violence. Were it not for the constructive discourse that was produced as a result of the symposium, I would have never pushed myself to search for such a motivation; one that allowed me to weave my story together with the history of JTR and his victims and elevate my script above an exhibition of mere tasteless violence.

## SHADOWS FROM THE PAST

What was by far one of the most exciting elements of this story was the notion of creating characters based on real life men and women, whether as composites or whole-cloth permutations. Though initially daunting, the process of finding their unique voices and three-dimensionality never became overwhelming because of the extensive research I had conducted leading up to the actual writing of the script. What I also found to be creatively rewarding was the process of creating original characters within the context of a narrative replete with flesh and blood incarnations of past literary and historic icons. Those most important were:

### **Bram Stoker**

One of the biggest challenges in generating a cinematic iteration of Bram Stoker was creating an interesting character based on a real person about whom not that much was known. As famous as the name is, Bram Stoker is largely a question mark to general audiences who might know the name, but certainly not the man. One major element of Stoker's life that has plagued even historians was the diagnosis for the mysterious illness he suffered from as a child that rendered him largely bedridden until nearly the age of ten. What historians and biographers can

tell us about this period in Stoker's life is that he walked very little, spending most of his days inside, staring at his bedroom walls, nurturing a very rich inner life. One postulates this allowed the young Stoker a forum in which to concoct his wildest tales, as nascent as they must have been at the time. After making a miraculous recovery near adolescence, Stoker went on to pursue both higher education (which included mathematics and eventually law) as well as a robust career as an amateur athlete. Though it was long before he actually penned his first novel, it would come as no surprise to those who knew him just how talented Stoker truly was.

Now, all of this makes for some interesting cinematic elements if I had been setting out to write a film based on his life, but there were still many questions about the man left unanswered; namely, where he got his creative inspirations from. At the very least I knew that I had to do a lot of heavy lifting in order to create a protagonist in Stoker who would be an active character (a challenge any time your main character's livelihood is tied up in the passive profession of being a writer). I had to make the reader believe he was a man capable of ingratiating himself into the company of a foreign police agency and leading a murder investigation in an attempt to rescue his friend Henry Irving. Also, I had to generate the idea of his illness as being one that was fertile soil for a man

plagued by nightmares about the inability to [literally and figuratively] run away from the darkness baying at his door. Impinged by his inability to move as a child, my version of Stoker experiences a recurring nightmare which suggests not just a kind of physical impotence, but also a psychic one; he is a man manacled as much by the actual traumas of his past as he is his own creative demons.

As stated, there are large swathes of Stoker's own biography that remain unanswered, but the gaps concerning his inspirations for writing his most famous novel were the ones I found the most compelling. Numerous theories have filled the pages of speculative texts (both fiction and nonfiction alike) as to the specific seedbeds from which he took his creative cues, but as there was no definitive progenitor for his blood-thirsty Count (aside from the collective assumption of a certain 15<sup>th</sup> century Transylvanian Prince with a penchant for impaling his enemies) I was free to implicate my own. The idea that Bram Stoker based Dracula on Jack The Ripper quickly gained a credibility in my mind, particularly because it was the most fascinating of the circulating theories - and what better a way to be inspired by someone than to have known them on a very personal, very intimate level?

The "congruity" between the Ripper and Dracula as characters also worked in my mind because of the historical

context (London's gothic iconography and lurid atmospherics, their similarity in garb and proclivity for the shadows, etc.) they both existed within. Both sharing so many natural similarities, it seemed to make sense that one should end where the other began. Thus pitting Stoker and Bridger as friends in the early stages of their respective "careers" against the backdrop of a world suffused with the kind of dark forces neither man could ignore seemed to me the perfect story, both in terms of immediacy and potency.

In an early Icelandic edition of the published novel, Bram Stoker even mentioned The Ripper: *"This series of crimes has not yet passed from the memory -- a series of crimes which appear to have originated from the same source, and which at the same time created as much repugnance in people everywhere as the murders of Jack the Ripper, which came into the story a little later."* (*Powers of Darkness*, 1901). Many historians have read into the text and concluded that Stoker must have in some way or another either known the identity of The Ripper or at least used his crimes as inspiration for his novel. While I have re-envisioned this relationship into a unique prequel/dual-origin/fresh cinematic take, the resonance of the numerous conspiracy theories that have spawned from this quote have, if nothing else, reinforced my own original work.



Another challenge with Stoker's character was to create a compelling enough iteration of the man so as to be able to stand his ground with my iteration of Jack The Ripper; a man who would no doubt be a scene-stealer whenever he appeared from out of the shadows. One thing I had promised myself early on was to never lose sight of Stoker as the protagonist. Anyone else - no matter how enigmatic or captivating - had to play second fiddle to this character; after all, there have been countless films about JTR, but never a single one about Stoker. The test, however, lay in not only establishing Stoker as an active protagonist but maintaining his active nature now that Bridger had been introduced. It was in fact one of the most challenging elements to master in my story, as his passivity was a serious problem, especially in early drafts of both the outline and the script. It was only through the very careful and decisive work that I did to solve this that I was finally able to stave off Stoker's natural inclination towards passivity. As they say, writing is rewriting.

### **John Augustus Bridger (a.k.a. Jack The Ripper)**

The most challenging component of creating this character was the simple fact that there have been countless interpretations of Jack The Ripper, and the last thing anybody wanted or needed was one more. I knew I had to follow my

instincts by not emulating the versions I'd seen and read about in other works of fiction, but to devise an entirely new character. The fresh approach I took involved telling an aspect of The Ripper's story that we'd never seen on screen before - an origin story of a troubled man bounded by a murderous fate. What was fresh and unique about my approach to this story was that I had envisaged it as a "dual-origin story" set against the backdrop of Victorian-era London's dark underbelly. This meant that I would not simply be creating an origin story for JTR but one that was to both influence and be influenced by the simultaneous ascension of Bram Stoker and his journey to create the character of Dracula. In this respect, both men were immediately indebted to each other; Stoker to Jack for inspiring the character of Dracula, and Jack to Stoker -- who I'd posited was in some way responsible for encouraging The Ripper's reasons for seeking life everlasting at any cost. One could therefore not exist without the other, and thus I'd stumbled onto what I considered new ground. Out of the confluence of these forces, John Augustus Bridger was born.

One of the things I like the most about my conception of the JTR character is that he is just as much Dracula as he is The Ripper. In fact, Bridger starts off more as Dracula when we first meet him (cloaked, enigmatic, lives in a castle, etc.) and then evolves into The Ripper, just in time for my story to catch

up with the beginning of JTR's murderous timeline (but not before reigniting Stoker's abilities as a writer). The story, having set it exactly 10 years before the actual killings began (1878) worked for two reasons. The first was that 1878 was the exact year in which the real Bram Stoker traveled from Dublin to London with his wife Florence to take a job with Henry Irving at The Lyceum. The second reason this worked was that it gave me enough screen time to cover and include the many different elements this story required in order to give it the weight I felt it deserved. There is often so much that goes into the creation of a character, and much of this takes place over months (if not years) of a writer's life and across a myriad of [often personal] experiences. If I've done my job right, readers of my screenplay will be able to detect these subtle but specific inclusions of details imbedded into the story, which would eventually [in one way or another] ground and give life to Stoker's Count Dracula. These were the kind of meta-fictive elements that elevated my screenplay to the level of a kind of intertextual commentary; one that aided in not only telling the story in the most grounded way possible, but also provided a bridge between Stoker's novel and my screenplay.

Though the seamless interaction of both Stoker's and my work would be something taken on faith based on the degree of pre-existing knowledge of any reader's individual experience

with the novel, my script functions independently enough so as to not depend on said reader's prior awareness of the source material. Though that being said, if one were to be well enough educated on all of the aforementioned details I'd woven in from the original novel, then all the better. In the same way, my version of Jack The Ripper is very much an original character, and can exist independent of any reader's pre-existing knowledge of the man.

### **Bridger's Pathology**

I played around with the idea of several types of existential motivations for Bridger, trying as best I could to weave in a philosophy that would propel his actions and ground his pathology. I like the idea of introducing a philosophy that was representative of the zeitgeist, born perhaps out of his perception of the increasing scientific discoveries that continued to usurp the influence of religion. This is where the concept of deism first arose; the belief in an intelligent creator of the universe who has no desire to interact with its creations. I then began to try and explain his reasons for committing murder, thinking that perhaps killing was Bridger's only release from misery; that the promise of a thousand deaths would in some way be promise of personal reprieve from his own intrapsychic torment. This led me to the idea of Bridger seeing

himself as an emissary sent from hell (metaphorically and pun intended) to spread a kind of anti-life diatribe. His dogma would become the belief that existence was the metaphoric knife that twisted its cold steel into the abdomen of every poor soul who is born. Thus, Bridger was to be a man who intended to deracinate the human race just as much with violence as with words -- his doctrine a kind of deicide or anger towards an indolent, despondent God; perhaps even operating under the delusion that he would become some great religious libertine as a result of this repudiation. I envisaged that since he could not feel [the Christian] God's love, he might possibly have felt that Christ was not his savior but his tormentor; tormented by a God he could not love back (which drew a subconscious similarity with the relationship with his unloving father Lord Overton).

As it relates to his relationship with Lady Overton, there is a scene in the screenplay in which Bridger confronts her, only to become immediately infantilized in her presence. This was intended to ground the idea that he is trapped within the psychology of a child caused by the lack of maternal love he was never offered as a child. Bridger believed that in order to receive love he had to not only commit murder to win the affection of his mother, but that he should also kill the oppressive love-denying God (Lord Overton), least this privation come to define and ultimately destroy him. I also envisaged that

out of that deicidal behavior, Bridger would see himself as God of his own universe; an all-powerful, reprisal-transcending being that sees the perpetuation of human life -- especially when incited as a result of sexual deviance - in itself an aberration of the moral universe, or at least a universe of morality according to his own shattered lens. From this point, I could conceive that Bridger's misanthropy would be the thing to steady his hand and motivate him further to kill. Coupled with an antinatalist pathology - which had by this point malformed into a murderous psychosis without end - the man would be motivated to strike down the innocent as rebellion against a silent God, similar to a child by throwing a tantrum and destroying every precious piece inside his parent's china cabinet.

What I found the most befitting out of all of these concepts was the idea that although tormented by a parent who would never reciprocate the depth of his love (and thus his natural disposition towards them was nothing short of pure hatred), Bridger should not appear overtly tortured when we are first introduced to him. Although slightly philosophically unhinged from years left alone in a castle with nothing but nihilistic volumes and dark thoughts for company, the measure of his insanity would only be perceived in the aggregate; through spending time with and living in close quarters with the man.

By the end of the script, it would be made clear that Bridger --having been imbued with the delusion that Lord Overton's sexually deviant behavior had somehow perpetuated ad infinitum many more women to kill beyond the "bridal three" -- was quite insane indeed. Thus setting up an explanation as to why the real Jack The Ripper targeted and mutilated prostitutes could unfold in a way that served both history and my story, including (as was explained above) why he abruptly ended his killing spree once the pregnant and final victim Mary Kelly had been executed.

### **Lady Overton**

Lady Overton plays a central role in this story, though for a large part of it, she remains victim not only to the sexually abhorrent behavior of her husband, but to our own preconceptions about who and what a killer should be. For most of the story, I wanted the reader to vacillate between shared suspicions -- is Lord Overton the sole killer, or is Bridger in some way aiding him? And what about Bennington; surely such a salacious and revolting fly of a man should in some way be guilty of having a hand in the bloodshed? But surely the killer is not... a woman? Lady Overton plays a powerful mistress; unassuming and perceived by the reader only through a veil of victimhood. And though she is a victim, it is not one to a murderous husband (for it is her

hand orchestrating the killing and Bridger's enacting it) but rather a husband too blinded by his carnal appetite to see the karmic forces of a woman scorned about to target his reputation and legacy. Though this is not to say that she is in any way an extension of her husband. Rather it is both through the degradation she feels when having her own humanity and power constantly usurped by the men of her world that she is able to edify and seize her power. Her "limitations" are simply the visage she hides behind in this male patriarchal system in order to expose the hypocrisy of her husband during a time in which misogyny was the currency of the day.

All the while, Lady Overton is forced to sit by her ailing husband's side as he engages in his own sexual and bloodthirsty fantasies, biding her time. A greater strength I know not than the patience of a slowly blooming revenge, served colder than ice.

### **Lady Overton's Motivations**

Her motivations for controlling her "son" Bridger were a challenge to streamline, and even more so to articulate, especially in a medium where exposition often sticks out like a sore thumb. After evolving the relationship between Lord Overton and Bridger from one of mere client/assassin [see original story outline] to that of estranged father and son, I liked the idea



that Lady Overton herself had cajoled her boy Bridger into killing the women who her husband had so shamefully impregnated. This felt poetic from Lady Overton's POV, for the simple and somewhat obvious reason that by using her husband's son to implicate him in these crimes, she was also using her husband's sin against him; for Bridger was the result of a previous tryst Lord Overton had with a prostitute those many years ago. From this I conceived of a way for Lady Overton to use Bridger, forcing him to make the murders public, and then subsequently reframe the tropes of Lord Overton's blood cult to implicate him in the murders. By doing so this would forever mar his legacy by exposing him as a killer of helpless women and their unborn children (which is, of course, untrue), and finally free Lady Overton from bondage. This also evolved from our very first discussion directly after the symposium that Lady Overton should be an even more powerful woman pulling invisible strings in the background - perhaps an even more powerful figure than the male figures in the foreground. This raw concept was improved over time and in subsequent drafts until it reached the stage I was most pleased with.

But the question remained as to why? Why would Lady Overton - a woman who had for many years endured the ignominy of her husband having impregnated a prostitute largely because she herself failed to conceive an heir - strike out against her

husband in such grim a fashion? Initially, I thought that perhaps it was power and money that was her driving force behind this. Maybe Lord Overton's yet-to-be-born children out of wedlock (from the three victims) threatened in some way to repeal Lady Overton's power? No, materialism was too vapid a drive for her... But what about -- shame?

## A SHARED MOTIVATION

It became evident towards the later part of my writing journey that the one key element that was motivating many of the characters in my story was indeed that of shame. For it is shame that propels Lady Overton to take revenge on her husband (because of what his irrepressible libido has now threatened to do to her reputation) and thus she wants to shame him by exposing his true nature (here dramatized for the public through crimes violent enough to represent her perception of his true self). It is also shame that Stoker feels as a writer - both in front of the audience on the night of his failed play and in front of his wife Florence that drives him to first recoil as an impotent writer and then re-emerge as a successful one. He also feels ashamed by his own physical disabilities, especially during childhood when he was largely bedridden and physically immobile (the result of which he feels caused the death of his family due to his inability to save them - see nightmare sequences).

Bridger too lives in shame; the shame of being the product of his father's affair with a prostitute, the shame of not only being the son of a prostitute but also of parental and social rejection. There is also the shame of pregnancy; both from the perspective of the women who are with child and those who would suffer greatly should this fact ever be brought to light. It was

only through countless drafts and discussions with my thesis committee that I was able to see this theme clearly through the writing. In fact, when my thesis supervisor and I stumbled upon it (fairly late into the final draft), the entire screenplay seemed to take on an entirely new and exciting perspective. There is perhaps only one character who is completely shameless, and that is Ann Caden; who is herself a prostitute. Going one step further, it is Ann who exposes the shame of those who try their hardest to conceal it; namely the police, who attempt to project a sense of despondency towards the crimes and unfamiliarity against the many women of the night who suffuse this world, despite the fact that most of them are paying customers.

## BLOOD BROTHERS

In creating both Stoker and Bridger's character, I became aware of an interesting thematic overlap. Just as the character of Dracula had given Stoker infamy and [one might say] a kind of immortality, so to was my Stoker about to give the latter gift of eternal life to Bridger. This was a fascinating bit of intuition that stuck with me as I wrote the script, propelling much of the kind of thematic interweaving that I engaged in with respect to the cross-pollination of my work and Stoker's novel.

On the topic of the evolution of Stoker's character, I had posited that it might be beneficial to establish Stoker's nascent fascination with the darker side of the human capacity (i.e. murder) early on, and subsequently throughout the story have him be tempted to cross the line. Though he never does, I imagined him more than willing to do so in his writing; which — while neither a vicarious exercise in and of itself or a sublimation for his own bloodthirsty urges. This would have in some respects served to elucidate his own dark fascinations, which could be safely housed within his stories. Furthermore, the idea was discussed that he should find himself time and again in a position where he imagines what it would be like to cross that line; to kill, to bring death in exchange for his own

chance at eternal life (or at least at the infamy that was sure to follow).

Bridger too shares this fascination, though obviously he is much more inclined to act on it than his novelist friend. As he himself is what I would call a rather extreme antinatalist, he sees by default all of creation as one deserving of a negative connotation, and murder as a way to facilitate his philosophy.

While the above anecdote on Stoker was interesting food-for-thought in the beginning of my writing process, the idea of a horror writer sublimating his desire to murder through his writing felt trite and ultimately, uninspired. Furthermore, there was an esoteric quality that the above philosophical postulations contained that just didn't seem to translate to the format of a screenplay. While I intended to preserve them, I knew they needed to in some way be actualized.

When we first meet Stoker, it was discussed between my thesis committee and myself that we should find him in a much lighter place. It is here that we would then expose his "flat writing"; projecting him as a writer who engages in a kind of creative prostitution in order to make ends meet by taking on work purely for the money. Low on creativity and desperate to find a way to support he and his wife, Stoker would be forced by circumstances beyond his control to write a piece of vapid literature just to pay the rent, which would only further drive

him to want to write his "masterpiece". His desire to create a work in contrast to the former would thus come from purity, would possess depth, and more honestly articulate the voice of his artistic spirit in its most potent form. Elements of this thinking process can be found in the final version of the script, even though ultimately attempting to visualize this on the page would prove too tangential.

It was also suggested by my committee that I meditate on the question: "What is the nature of prostitution?" Prostitution can be found in many forms and should not be limited to the sexual-monetary exchange; a trope intrinsically linked with any Jack The Ripper tale. Before Lady Overton was to be Bridger's Svengali of a mother and Lord Overton his brutalizing father, I had conceived Bridger to be a mercenary killing for Lord Overton in exchange for compensation. Bridger would then in turn also be prostituting himself, as he would be working for a powerful figure who wanted him to ensure the indecencies from his personal life were erased, even at the cost of the former's soul. Bridger's motivation beyond financial reward was to then be killing in spite of himself (though the murders would no doubt fire-harden his own philosophical beliefs and ignite his proclivity for murder in the process). Killing not for money or for some warped sense of revenge against women, but rather so that his own closeted skeletons (i.e. the disposal of

information that exposed his own late mother as prostitute). You can see how this quickly became complicated...

It was brought up that by having Bridger as a "hired-hand" in this way would undermine his own pathology [to want to kill on his own]. Being the stubborn writer that I am, I initially disagreed. I referenced various cinematic examples to back up my case: look at the Joker in *The Dark Knight*; a psychopath hired by the mob because he is the only one crazy enough to take on the Batman. Look at Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver*; a PTSD-suffering vet who channels his bitter societal distaste and philosophical ideologies towards his city's scum as he embarks on a warped moral crusade to save the life of a young prostitute. Or Anton Chigurh in *No Country For Old Men*; another murderous psychopath who is hired to kill but would gladly do it for free. Or even a real life figure such as the notorious killer depicted in *The Iceman*, Richard Kuklinski; who worked as a hitman for the mob but had a deep, pathological love of the act of murder independent of the compensation. These were characters who held pre-existing, deep-seated misanthropic ideologies, and found external causes that helped them channel their vitriol for the human race and achieve a kind of transcendent catharsis.

When this failed to hold up, I proposed that it would be an interesting reversal and somewhat befitting if, instead of Lord



Overton ordering the hits, that it was Lady Overton herself who would be doing so. My conception for her motivation was simple; having found out about her husband's affairs and the resulting pregnancies, Lady Overton could attempt to cover up his indecencies [and spare herself the displeasure of them becoming public] by hiring a man from her husband's past (Bridger). Alan Moore's *From Hell* had done something similar, wherein the Queen of England hired her doctor (who by Moore's conception happened to be JTR) to kill the five women -- each of them prostitutes -- as each were aware of a child born out of wedlock to her relative with a woman not of royal blood. Moore in fact took this idea from Stephen Knight's research in the book *Jack The Ripper: The Final Solution* and ran with it. I quite liked the royal conspiracy angle, but as it is now a familiar theory I needed to find something original to make this story my own.

It was suggested that a character be designed that could personify all of the backlash this story had thus far received. I then set out to create a female prostitute character who could be a voice to expose all of the male hypocrisy of the time. It was also suggested that this prostitute could incite some kind of rebellion (if only an ideological one) through which the other prostitutes could then "rise up". Out of this, the character of Ann Caden was created. Not only does Ann represent this kind of revolutionary woman, but she also becomes an

integral part of the story; in fact, she is immensely important to Stoker, who seeks out her help during his quest to solve the murder investigation.

## CONTROVERSY

As stated previously, I had received a lot of harsh but fair feedback during my pitch of this story at the symposium. Before continuing to address this, I would like to first contextualize some of my story motivations philosophically. In numerous places, I have woven into the narrative many different tranches of philosophical thought, most specifically ones from the areas of existentialism, nihilism and the lesser known antinatalism. It is in this section that I will continue to expound upon why these more controversial elements are important and how they serve the larger themes contained within the narrative.

May I first start off by stating that to my mind a horror film (such as one that tackles the retelling of one of the most heinous figures of real life horror), denuded of that which is truly horrifying [or that which makes us truly horrified], cannot lay claim to land ownership within the proverbial property lines of the genre. And what, pray tell, is more horrifying a notion than a story that deals with themes of "anti-life"; that is more disturbing than a character who despises the very idea of life itself? In a letter to a friend, horror novelist and icon of the genre H.P. Lovecraft again writes, *"Who ever wrote a story from the point of view that man*

*is a blemish on the cosmos, who ought to be eradicated?... There is nothing outre about wanting to conquer the earth; Alexander, Napoleon and Wilhelm II wanted to do that. Instead... should conceive of a man with a morbid, frantic, shuddering hatred of the life-principle itself, who wishes to extirpate from the planet every trace of biological organism, animal and vegetable alike, including himself."* (qtd. in Ligotti 59). According to Lovecraft one must confront themes which really do evoke a sense of the repulsive and the dreadful. It is from here that my original conception of the more graphic elements in my story began.

It should also be noted that the killer behind these unspeakable tasks, Bridger, is targeting these women because of two primary factors: his mother and his ideology. A major trope in the film is birth and its opposite. After all, Bridger himself was born as the result of a relationship between his father -- a man of wealth and influence -- and a prostitute. Thus the murders of pregnant women (who are themselves prostitutes, each impregnated by a man of wealth and influence; the same in fact) are not only conceived to engender morbid visions within the reader's mind but also to create a parallel between Bridger's past and his present, and in so doing ground his motivations for agreeing to such a gruesome assignment. Furthermore, Bridger's own self-loathing drives him to commit

the act of killing pregnant women *beyond the decree from his mother* so as to satiate a kind of psychic pain [mentioned in the thematic recurrence above], which constantly haunts him; for subconsciously he wishes the same could have been done to his mother and thus prevented his own birth. What all of this produces is an extreme and malformed version of the aforementioned antinatalism. The philosophy of antinatalism can be defined as a belief in the cessation of all [human] reproduction, as this life-impulse represents an endless cycle of pain, suffering and the inescapable and haunting awareness of one's own death to all who live long enough to bear the weight of consciousness. As the famous existential novelist and philosopher Albert Camus writes, "*If this myth [of Sisyphus] is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious. Where would his torture be, indeed, if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld him? The workman of today works every day in his life at the same tasks, and this fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious.*" (Camus 121). In unpacking Camus' quote, it may be understood that the Greek mythological figure of Sisyphus, sentenced to the eternal struggle of rolling a heavy boulder up a hill (only to have it roll back down and have this process repeated up ad infinitum) represents man's eternal struggle to bear the weight of his own humanity. Each of us exists in a world riddled with

the endless repetitions of our respective routines and mundane lives, broken only by small moments of reprieve in the seconds before the proverbial boulder rests atop the precipitous hill. Where is our escape, our salvation, our absolution? It would seem that the answer lies certainly not in life, but rather in the eternal rest that both horrifies and delivers us from this eternally recurring charade. Some find sublimation in externals, or as Nietzsche decried, "*...We have art in order not to die of the truth.*" (Camus 93). Though even in art do we find the incessant reminders of our fixed finality, such as in William Blake's painting of *The Great Red Dragon and The Woman Clothed in the Sun*; a prime example of antinatalist illustration brought to life with the colors of The Book of Revelations and Blake's own sardonic hand. Here the dragon (taken to mean Satan by most interpreters of the work) attempts to kill the child that the fallen woman is pregnant with. Having seen the original in person, I can attest to just how unnerving the work truly is.

As the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer -- himself a steadfast nihilist and despiser of humanity's impulse to propagate itself -- writes, "*... the noble fact that every woman, while she would be ready to die of shame if surprised in the act of generation [conception], nonetheless carries her pregnancy without a trace of shame and indeed with a kind of pride. The reason is that pregnancy is in a certain sense a cancellation of*

*the guilt incurred by coitus: thus coitus bears all the shame and disgrace of the affair, while pregnancy, which is so intimately associated with it, stays pure and innocent and is indeed to some extent sacred.*" (Schopenhauer 64) Bridger, taking his cues from the Schopenhauer wanted to remind the so-called guilty of their alleged guilt; that pregnancy does not excise coitus from such guilt but *exacerbates it*. For only those who [according to Bridger] become pregnant revel in the inevitable death of that which they create. This is not why he murders them (we know that his mother, Lady Overton, is the one initiating this), but it is perhaps why his conscience is unfettered by the act of killing, and perhaps even explains why he takes the murders to such extremes.

Here I want to make clear that Bridger is not a misogynist. He is far from it; in fact, he does not exclusively hate women, he hates people. He despises the aforementioned life impulse; the compulsion of nature which insists on the perpetuation of a species born into pain and fated with the terrible knowledge of its own mortality. As it relates to women, they are the metaphoric "gateway" between nonexistence and this life, and thus he sees the root of all evil in their ability to give life. In this respect he hates men just as much for their ability to impregnate women. Though never made explicit in the script, I

imagined that he has thus remained resolutely abstinent for his entire life as an act of rebellion against his own species.

In talking with my research consultant, it was actually not all that uncommon for many of the prostitutes working in that day to be doing so while pregnant. As a result, many back alley abortion clinics -- which utilized chemical elixirs consumed by those hoping to eradicate their unborn fatherless children -- were consumed, as surgery was more dangerous and caused excessive blood loss, often resulting in death. Of course, history already tells us that one of The Ripper's victims was [as was stated on page 18] pregnant, so this should come as no surprise that my story involves these elements.

With respect to the concerns surrounding gratuity, I would like to make it clear that there is never a single scene or moment in the film that contains any female character (pregnant or otherwise) actually murdered on screen. My intention was not to fetishize the acts by not showing them to the reader, but rather to emulate the reality of the JTR crimes. As the real Ripper was never seen performing the gruesome murders he committed -- simply leaving the result of his crimes (in the form of his fallen victims) for the police to find -- this was something I wanted to carry over into my story, by also not showcasing the kills. Besides that, I had no interest in showing the brutalization of women (or anyone really) on screen.



For the purposes of further clarification along this line of thinking, I would like to draw the reader's attention to the six-month *New York Times* bestseller *The Alienist*. In it, author Caleb Carr details a story about a religious zealot-turned-serial-killer who targets small children (mostly young boys) and disposes of them by removing their genitals, stuffing them into their mouths, gouging out their eyes and dissecting their bodies. I bring this up to show the extreme lengths to which fiction can go while still retaining its literary dignity; for it is all in the approach to this kind of sensitive material where the balance of violence and art is to be found.

In a chapter from *The Alienist*, Carr details the fate of a young boy who had been forced into prostitution at no more than 10 years old... "*Severing of the complete genitalia at their base... Severing of the right hand just above the wrist joint - both the ulna and radius cleanly cut... Lateral lacerations of the abdominal cavity, with attendant damage to the small intestine... massive damage to the entire arterial system within the thorax, and apparent removal of the heart... Removal of the left eye, attendant damage to the malar bone and supraorbital ridge on that side... Removal of those sections of the scalp covering the occipital parietal bones of the skull.*" (Carr 329-330). This murder is followed, perhaps most brutally of all, by the murder of another young male child, whose [as mentioned] genitalia is

removed and subsequently forced into his mouth. A crueler description of a murder in fiction I know not, and yet the book - littered with several more murders of that ilk, each more upsetting than the last -- went on to soaring acclaim, both from critics and readers alike. Again, I only bring this up to draw a comparison between my screenplay and this striking example of a very graphic work's ultimate success within the medium. It was made possible through the author's careful handling of the material and his effective justifications for these kinds of macabre inclusions within the text.

In summation of this point, I would say that this work is not a work of misogyny, nor should it be seen as a commentary on misogyny; it is if anything a macabre exploration of the creative process. Though the story does in fact point out many of the male hypocrisies of the day (i.e. Lord Overton's promiscuity and sexual depravity, the police and their penchant for prostitutes but public condemnation of them, Bridger's loathsome views of the birth cycle but inescapable existence-as-a-byproduct, etc.), it is crucial to understand as a reader that this piece is not out to do anything other than tell a good story. The offense it generated is something I am grateful for only in that it helped to open my eyes to the fact that, when writing a story with such graphic elements, more thinking needs to go into the work, especially at an MFA level.

## BRIDES FOR THE MASTER

Along with the pregnant women controversy, the blood draining is something that I feel demands a proper explanation. From a story point of view, I have included this element because it is the trademark of the vampiric occult group that Lord Overton controls. Furthermore, Lady Overton and Bridger's attempt to bring Lord Overton down is done so using the cult's iconography, which is secondarily used to direct the focus of the investigation onto them. I also needed this element because this was to represent the seedbed from which Stoker garners his inspiration; in regards to both Dracula's targeting of women and subsequently draining their blood. Essentially I have designed the character of Bridger so that he is a combination of Stoker's Dracula character and the character of the Ripper from popular culture. As such, he holds many of the characteristics of Dracula (and the Ripper), even down to details such as things he says, who he kills (and how he kills them), places he goes, his physical appearance, and so on. For the observant reader, one will be able to pick up on all of the Easter eggs I have so meticulously planted in the script. As the historical theories that I am drawing from posit that Stoker was inspired by the character of the Ripper when it came to creating Dracula, it is

only fitting that Bridger be retrofitted to exhibit the characteristics of Dracula.

Another note was suggested, which was that Bridger should be drained of blood by a women and killed at the end of the film. Though a fitting retribution, it did not work, as I couldn't kill Bridger – after all this is [partly] an origin story of how JTR came to be. By killing him off, the entire narrative would fall apart. This story is (among other things) supposed to set up how and why the Ripper does what he does, and is designed to end by sending him into the night on the eve of his first victim's murder right before I cut to black.

## **THEMES**

*"We have been force-fed for so long the shudders of a thousand graveyards that at last, seeking a macabre redemption, a salvation by horror, we willingly consume the terrors of the tomb... and find them to our liking."* - Professor Nobody, *Sardonic Harmony*.

### **Your Fate Recurs, Eternally**

There are numerous themes which I have suffused into the screenplay, but let us first start with the most important and the least obvious. The thematic connection between Bridger and his victims was designed to represent a cyclical one, almost Oedipal in nature. The fact that Bridger is the result of an affair between Lord Overton [his father] and a prostitute named Lucy [his birth mother], who has then gone on to murder the prostitutes impregnated by his father, cannot be overlooked. It is a theme that is meant to represent a kind of spiritual suicide; by taking the lives of Lord Overton's unborn children, Bridger is metaphorically attempting to reach back through the linearity of time itself (perhaps believing on some level that he actually can) with the hopes that his actions will eliminate *the unborn version of himself* from the belly of his birth mother. It is almost as if he were trying to kill himself by

killing those who have been conceived in a way concomitant to his own origins, believing that if successful he can achieve both release (from the cycle continuing) and a kind of maternal absolution by way of Lady Overton's love. Unfortunately, this logic is rooted in madness, leaving Bridger forever stuck within the eternally recurring nightmare that is his facticity.

### **The Dark Side Of Creativity**

The theme of creativity is also one that is mined throughout my story, especially through the ways in which it relates to the darker regions of the writer/artist's own mind. As was discussed in a previous section, we first meet Stoker when he is in a place of low self-esteem, doubting his talents, even wrestling (like Bridger to an extent) with his own self-loathing. He has achieved his dreams of becoming a writer, but they have been granted at the cost of exposing his own mediocrity within the medium; his work (evinced from a past play which haunts him) has thus far been quite flaccid and uninspired. I envisaged that the reasons for this lay in Stoker's own lack of a personal muse. Again as was noted above, the real Stoker was rumored to have used his mercurial theatre-pal Henry Irving as a foundation upon which he devised Dracula. To my mind, I posited a further, more sinister source point; that the darker the fiction, the darker the inspiration for said

fiction must be. What better a source to generate the most iconic villain ever imagined than from the experiences of a murder investigation involving anti-natal paraphilia, the Luciferian-inspired immolations of an Occult sect, and the blood-forged friendship with a man whose eventual real-life exploits would echo through the hallways of eternity? Would this be enough of a seedbed out of which a man already tortured by his own demons could render a vision destined to outlive even the most sinister of previous literary foes? One can only hope that the real Stoker's inspiration did not come from a much darker place.

### **The Blood is Life**

In the above I have posited the metaphor between vampirism and pregnancy. Here I would now like to unpack this further. To my mind the teeth of a vampire has always been a phallic allusion; one capable of transmitting the fluids necessary in order to bring about a great inception from the synthesis of infectious blood and unwitting victim. If we can except this then we are able to arrive at the following conclusion; that the male sexual organ, like the teeth of a vampire, are equally responsible for both the penetration of the female and the exchange of the life-producing fluids (found within the saliva of the vampire's mouth). Thus, through the receiving of bodily

fluids by way of marring penetration, we can further envisage the character of Lord Overton as a kind of Dracula figure in this context; a man that not only lusts after blood, is [psychologically] dependent on it for his survival and who lords over both vast wealth and servants alike, but also one who took three women as his nubile, undead brides and gave them life.

What I also want to stress is the connection between Bridger's birth [via the impregnating of the prostitute Lucy] within the context of my story and the vampiric transformation of the character Lucy Westerna in Stoker's novel. Beyond simply sharing a name, both women have been irrevocably changed by their interactions with the respective dark antagonists. My Lucy, impregnated by the evil force that is Lord Overton, is the only woman impregnated by Lord Overton to actually give birth. Due to this, she shares a connection with the character of Lucy Westerna, who is the only character in Stoker's novel to be fully "impregnated" by Count Dracula's vampiric curse and transform (the others victims in the novel, save for his dead wives, never reach the point of full metamorphosis). For the eagle-eyed reader, another comparison between these two women comes to the fore. I am of course talking about the birth pangs of Lucy in my story and the pangs of transmutation suffered by Stoker's Miss Westerna; both women showcased in the midst of a terrible transformation. I place the scene in the prologue, a



kind of cinematic imago, fashioned after Stoker's scene in which Lucy [Westerna] becomes a vampire whilst in a bed, surrounded by doctors and those anticipating a great and terrible change. I've done this kind of thing in several places, but thought this was an especially important one to point out.

Themes of attaining immortality through fiction also permeate the work; perhaps our only chance at everlasting life. Bridger, a man besieged by dark reflections on his own mortality, wants to obtain life everlasting. Knowing there exists no supernatural way to obtain this, he surmises that he can achieve the status of an infinite entity through Stoker's bloody fiction; as a characterization, a kind of malevolent and elemental spirit stuck between the pages of a novel that has the potential to outlive an entire generation, possibly even beyond. He also knows that feeding Stoker's dark imagination will give him this.

Our hero (Stoker), is forever changed by script's end and walks away with a personal triumph over his inner demons - some of which he has even been able to put down on paper. In an attempt to save his friend Irving from the noose - an assignment which forces him to put aside his artistic self-interests towards becoming a recognized, even great, writer - he ends up both freeing his friend and creating a piece of masterwork fiction that gives him universal praise beyond his wildest

dreams. Both set-ups are thus paid off; Irving is freed because of Stoker's efforts, and the novel *Dracula* forms out of these attempts.

There is I suppose an element of Greek Tragedy to this story in that it is not a happy ending, at least in terms of normative cinematic expectations. The bad guy (Bridger) gets away at the end, though he is not without his scars. Beyond that, the horrific irony is that Bridger's desire for immortality is also sated; not so much by the individuation of his essence into the character of Count Dracula (in fact this kind of literary immortality is bestowed more to Stoker), but rather by killing in order to serve a phantom master (as he has already begun the process of killing prior to meeting Stoker, though Stoker does concretize the concept of immortality inside Bridger's mind through killing) . And what a price to pay for life everlasting, then that of eternal damnation earned off the blood of the innocent.

## A SCREAM RIPS THROUGH THE NIGHT

The kinds of crimes portrayed in my screenplay and expanded upon in this document were committed in an era where there was movement away from The Church; when the worship of the Occult was a commonplace as were the moral crimes committed in their name. It will forever be remembered as a ghoulish, gas-lit era where one could reign supreme over one's own universe, seek and create order out of the chaos of a budding existential ideology, even play God (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Section 125 - *The Madman*). It was also one of the last remaining eras in time -- if not the last -- where one could kill and not get caught. Unfortunately, Jack The Ripper (who undoubtedly took advantage of this) was never caught. Although there have been other serial murderers who have similarly escaped justice, he was the first 19th century killer to revel in his own showmanship, announcing his work in the press, taunting his would-be captors at every turn (causing one to wonder if perhaps this combination is why he is so celebrated). But we may take solace that his crimes have no doubt come to a definitive end, for no man; God of his own universe or acolyte to an omnipotent deity, can escape the eventuality of his own mortality. Not even Dracula was able to avoid the inevitability of a corporeal fate (he is killed at the end of a novel by the story's heroes). His

creator, on the other hand, will be remembered the world over for a character that epitomizes the very definition of iconic.

In what has been both the most creatively challenging work of my life and the most creatively rewarding, I have spun a tale that explores the dark side of creativity through the eyes of two men who lived in a London now remembered only in the half-light of myth and nightmare. Each man, whether known to the other or not (for beyond this tale of fiction it makes no difference), was hell bent on writing his name across the pages of history; a black vision in his heart, and with a quill dipped in blood.

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