Buffalo Bill Meets Dracula: William F. Cody, Bram Stoker, and the Frontiers of Racial Decay

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On a summer day in 1887, crowds of passers-by gathered to stare at an unusual group of celebrities who drove through Oatlands Park, London. For many, seeing a group of fashionably dressed gentlemen who included England’s greatest living actor, Henry Irving, would have been exciting in itself. But one of Irving’s companions made the coaching party even more intriguing. With long black hair spilling down over his shoulders and stunning good looks, the figure that adorned thousands of colorful lithograph posters that blanketed London that season was instantly recognizable. Beside Henry Irving sat William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody, the impresario of the Wild West show sweeping the English capital that summer. Together, the pair drew gasps and, occasionally, shouts of approval from onlookers.

For historians, though, the party becomes most interesting when we take notice of a third passenger, one who was probably unknown to most observers that day. Large and red-haired, engaging and solicitous, Bram Stoker, the future author of Dracula, shared the carriage with Cody and Irving. This probably was not Stoker’s first meeting with Cody. The two had likely met in the United States at least a year before. Stoker corresponded with Cody and with the showman’s staff, and he almost certainly attended the Wild West show, which in 1887 was enjoying unparalleled celebrity in its first European appearance. Indeed, Cody was hard to miss. British readers had been devouring fictional romances about this living American at least since the 1870s, and now he materialized before their eyes. He did not disappoint.

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1 Bram Stoker, Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving, 2 vols. (New York, 1906), 2: 142; Stoker recalls that the outing occurred in the fall, but Irving made the invitation for June, and both he and Stoker were touring the United States after July. See Henry Irving to W. F. Cody, May 1887, in “Invitations and Letters 1887–95,” Microfilm Reel, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming (hereafter, BBHC); “Mr. Irving’s Farewell,” The Era (July 16, 1887): 13; “Henry Irving’s Farewell,” The Era (July 23, 1887): 12.

2 George Gilbertson to W. F. Cody, May 26, 1887, in “Letters and Invitations, 1887–8,” BBHC.
“The representative frontiersman of his day” and his “exposition” of real Indian warriors, genuine Anglo cowboys, Mexican vaqueros, and women sharpshooters became objects of enormous popularity. In the United States, his show had been touring for four years to great acclaim. Now in London, in 1887, society columns dubbed him “the lion of the season.” The frontier hero became perhaps the most sought-after party guest among the United Kingdom’s upper classes. Queen Victoria even made a rare appearance outside her palace to see the show, then ordered a command performance for her private viewing at Windsor Castle.

Catapulted to these heights, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West would be a major attraction in Europe and America for many years, the lights dimming over its last appearance only in 1916. By then, the show had become the best-known representation of America. And Cody himself, the warrior from the frontier West, had become the world’s most famous American.

In 1897, ten years after Buffalo Bill’s London premiere and at the height of his fame, Bram Stoker introduced another frontier figure to the English capital. Commander of the Christian forces in the wars against the Ottoman Turks hundreds of years before, the “bravest and most cunning of Transylvania’s sons” on the Turkish frontier, his purpose in London was very different from Buffalo Bill’s. So was his reception. After turning one wealthy young woman into a vampire and nearly snagging another, he was chased out of the capital by an international posse of English, Dutch, and American men, who tracked this nemesis to Transylvania, vanquished his Romany bodyguards, and killed him within sight of his castle. Unlike William Cody, Count Dracula was, of course, an entirely fictional creation. This did not prevent his becoming an object of immense fascination. Among the reading public, the count would become almost as popular as Buffalo Bill. Appearing for the first time in 1897, the novel Dracula was in paperback by 1900. It has never been out of print since, and the count’s many film incarnations have made him the preeminent nineteenth-century monster.

Superficially, the contrast between Cody and the count could not be greater. Benign hero and malign villain, one is the center of a progressive myth of regeneration and renewal, the other embodies the decadence and the terrifying power of the gothic imagination. But their differences become more intriguing, an investigation of them more compelling, when we recognize their odd connections, specifically their divergent but eerily similar “frontier histories.” It is well established that Stoker’s monster had many inspirations and literary precursors, including a century of bloodsucking forebears. Less recognized is how much Stoker’s masterpiece turns on a particular frontier mythology of the period, of which Buffalo Bill Cody was the principal expositor.

This article argues both that Buffalo Bill and his Wild West show were

Shoulder-length hair, beaded buckskin, and high black boots with Mexican spurs: popular photographs of Buffalo Bill Cody, like this one from the 1887 London season, later inspired the description of "Grizzly Dick" in Bram Stoker's comic novella *The Shoulder of Shasta* (1895). Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Cabinet photograph, accession number P.69.2088.
important inspirations for Bram Stoker’s novel *Dracula* and that, in the Wild West show, as in *Dracula*, the frontiers of racial encounter were invested with the possibility of degeneration and the necessity of race war. Pairing show and novel in this way, we begin to see how late nineteenth-century, progressive frontier myth and the literature of gothic horror represented homologous fictional worlds, divergent but sprung from common origins on mythic race frontiers.

The connections between Buffalo Bill and Count Dracula go well beyond the popularity of American frontier myth in late Victorian England. *Dracula*, as Steven Arata has written, is a novel of reverse colonization, in which “the colonizer finds himself in the position of the colonized, the exploiter is exploited, the victimizer victimized.” In this analysis, the powerful Count Dracula invades imperial England and comes very close to reducing it to his “imperial” domain. By removing the race essence of his victims, their blood, he turns them into vampires and extends, in the words of the novel’s chief monster hunter, his “vampire kind.” In a fundamental way, he underscores the racial weakness of his victims and the transformative racial power of his own monstrosity.

To grasp the deeper connections between Cody’s show and Bram Stoker’s literary masterpiece, we must keep in mind that race was much more than color in the late nineteenth century. For thinkers of the time, the word invariably implied cultural as well as physical attributes, and was demarcated by more subtle variations than mere skin pigment. Most considered the Irish a different race from the English, and both of these were distinctive from Italians. In evoking fears of English racial weakness and vulnerability to racially powerful people, the novel *Dracula* was part of a much larger cultural obsession with racial degeneration and imperial decline in the late Victorian era. The later nineteenth century saw widespread concern about slowing birth rates, the steady loss of international competitiveness, and a general decline of English political and industrial power, all accented by the diminishing fortunes of the nation’s aristocracy and upper classes. These complicated developments were often ascribed to a weakening of the Anglo-Saxon race. Such notions found their way into popular culture, including the literature of the period, notably Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Rider Haggard’s *She* (1887), and the fiction of Rudyard Kipling.

The enthusiasm for the Wild West show in London sprang in no small measure from these same fears. Most commentators were lavish in their praise of Cody and his “exposition” in 1887. Its drama was overtly optimistic, depicting white Americans—Anglo-Americans—invigorated and racially empowered by the experience of conquering the frontier. And yet between the lines of adulatory show reviews lurked an abiding ambivalence, even a fear, of the powerful American virility on display in

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SIR HENRY IRVING'S MANAGER TALKS
OF PLAYS, BOOKS, PICTURES AND WAR

Bram Stoker Visible But Thirty Minutes Each Day, But
Accomplishes Wonders.

HE DISCUSSES CISSY LOFTUS AND ELLEN TERRY

"You have no idea how busy Sir Henry is."

"You've written another novel?"

Buffalo Bill’s arena. Amid all the English enthusiasm for the Wild West show’s regenerative promise of frontier warfare glimmered a specter of reverse colonization by racially powerful frontier warriors, the Americans, which observers seemed unable to escape completely.

To furrow brows as much as it did, the Wild West show had to be seen as more than a pleasant spectacle. And it was. Cody himself saw his creation as historical epic, which joined the white race to the spilling of blood across the frontier. We shall see that Dracula, although a novel set in the world’s largest city, is also, crucially, a frontier tale. For showman and author both, continual westward expansion and continual race war secured the racial destiny of white people. But they differed, ultimately, on the promise of frontier warfare. Cody believed in it as the salvation of the white race; Stoker’s view was much gloomier, at least in his most famous novel, wherein frontiers become almost as dangerous to the race as vampires themselves.

For all the differences between the Wild West show and Dracula, there can be little question that Stoker had the American West on his mind as he composed the novel. His tale’s European protagonists are joined by a virile Texan, Quincey Morris. Stoker traveled in North America, and seems to have admired the place.9 But reading between the lines of the novel, one has to wonder how deep his admiration ran. Of the three young male protagonists who chase Dracula down and dispose of him, Morris is disturbingly incompetent. His eagerness to use his gun and his poor aim endanger his friends, he fails in simple assignments to follow the vampire, and, in the attempted capture of Dracula in London, the count escapes when Morris bungles. So consistently does he parade his ineptitude that other questions arise. Why did Stoker make his representative American, his westerner, such a fool? For that matter, is Morris just a buffoon? Or are his numerous blunders a mask for a deeper malevolence? He is presented as racial relative to the book’s English protagonists, and in a crucial scene his blood is transfused into one of the count’s English victims . . . who then becomes a vampire. Whose side is the American on?10

The answers to these enduring riddles of Stoker’s plot and intent are connected to the novel’s racial implications, which become salient when read against the backdrop of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show. Its drama, in which the American Anglo-Saxons are hardened in the crucible of frontier race war, had a distorted reflection in Dracula, a dark parable about urban Anglo-Saxons threatened by a frontier hero gone bad. In the twentieth century, scholars have often examined the racial and cultural anxieties that underlie horror and western film genres.11 Tracing the shadowy connections between Bram Stoker and William Cody provides some startling clues not just about the meaning of the novel Dracula but also the

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development of frontier and gothic traditions as racial myths in the fin-de-siècle transatlantic world.

Finally, in doing so, it underscores for us how a generation of scholarship assessing the triumphalism of America’s frontier myth has yet to take full account of its darker twin, the contemporary fear of the frontier as a place of racial monstrosity. New western historians have evaluated the nostalgia of the frontier myth in light of the darker and more complicated events of history but have yet to explore fully the deep-set fears of the West among the white victors, or to use these to help explain the genesis of a decidedly overwrought western mythology. The conjoined study of Buffalo Bill and Count Dracula suggests such fears informed a gothic frontier myth, featuring not a clear-cut conquest of the wilderness by white settlers but the transformation of the pioneer into something more racially powerful—and infinitely twisted—that threatens the decadent metropole. The points of contact between the creators of these tales, combined with the many significant correspondences between novel and show, command our attention. From the relative superficialities of plot and character to the deeper issues of the book’s perspectives on race—blood—the ghost of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West haunts this greatest work of vampire fiction.

The personal histories that connect William Cody and Bram Stoker reveal how entangled the social and literary worlds of frontier myth and gothic terror actually were. Dracula is, in the words of Richard Davenport-Hines, “an intensely personal book,” through which Stoker responded to developments in his private life. Figures in Dracula were often warped reflections of friends and colleagues in the London theater world. Cody’s arrival among that circle constituted Stoker’s most immediate and significant exposure to the American West prior to his visit to California in the 1890s.

Buffalo Bill and Bram Stoker were almost exact contemporaries. Stoker was born in Dublin, in 1847, the son of an Anglo-Irish civil servant, and educated at Trinity College. His early writings consisted of theater reviews for Dublin newspapers and horror stories, which made him a favorite of Dublin’s literary elite, including Lord William and Lady Jane Wilde, parents of Stoker’s college acquaintance, Oscar Wilde. In the late 1860s, Stoker was much taken with the stage performances of a young English actor named Henry Irving, the leading light of the new Romantic school of acting. In 1876, Stoker met the thirty-eight-year-old Irving


at a private gathering where Irving recited a poem in his honor, which sent Stoker into what he called "something like hysterics." Irving was well on his way to becoming the Victorian era's most famous actor, and by 1878 Stoker had signed on as manager for his London theater, the Lyceum. Stoker worked for Irving for the next twenty-eight years, until the actor's death, and the relationship profoundly affected his life and his literary work.14

That Irving provided an uncertain bridge to a life of culture and wealth helps to explain Stoker's obsessive interest in the actor's affairs. Stoker was not only adulatory of Irving but captivated by his presence and devoted to following his every move. As one contemporary remarked, "To Bram, Irving is as a god, and can do no wrong." In the considered judgment of one biographer, Stoker's friendship with Irving was "the most important love relationship of his adult life."15 For all this, Stoker seems to have been largely unappreciated by his employer and idol. Henry Irving was a self-absorbed and profoundly manipulative man. He enjoyed cultivating rivalries between his followers, and to remain in his circle required constant, careful courting of his notoriously fickle affections. Understandably, Stoker felt most secure when Irving took an interest in him personally, as he did in the early 1880s; and he became anxious and jealous when Irving turned his gaze to other men, as he did by 1885.16

Scholars have long agreed that keys to the Dracula tale's origin and meaning lie in the manager's relationship with Irving in the 1880s. The later years of that decade and the early 1890s—the period of Stoker's first work on Dracula—were years of crisis for the manager, as he fought with others in Irving's company to defend the position he had worked so hard to attain. The friction provided the basis for new literary directions. He began to pen his rivals for Irving's attention into his morbid fiction, such as his portrait of the Austin brothers, employees of Irving's whom Stoker envied and despised, as bloodthirsty twins in his horrifying tale "The Dualitists," which was published in 1887.17

There is virtual unanimity on the point that the figure of Dracula—which Stoker began to write notes for in 1890—was inspired by Henry Irving himself. Stoker originally intended the work as a play, with the tragicomed in the leading role. (Irving derided the novel—"Dreadful!"—and would have nothing to do with it.)18 Stoker's numerous descriptions of Irving correspond so closely to his rendering of the fictional count that contemporaries commented on the resemblance. He would remain devoted to Irving, producing a gushing two-volume memoir after his death.


18 Belford, Bram Stoker, 270.
Henry Irving, Britain's premier tragedian of the late Victorian period, was Bram Stoker's longtime employer and a major inspiration for his Count Dracula. He was also the leading cultural sponsor of Buffalo Bill Cody and his Wild West show in 1887 London. Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford-upon-Avon.
But Bram Stoker also internalized the fear and animosity his employer inspired in him, making them the foundations of his gothic fiction.  

As significant as Stoker’s experience in Irving’s circle was in these years, it is surprising that no scholar has noticed how deeply Buffalo Bill Cody ingratiated himself with that circle in the same period. England’s leading actor met Cody for the first time during one of his tours of the United States, seeing the Wild West show at Staten Island—presumably in the company of Bram Stoker—in 1886. Irving gave the show a rave review in advance of its 1887 London debut, predicting it would “take the town by storm.” Even before the show embarked for London, people were introduced to Buffalo Bill as “friends of our mutual friend, Henry Irving.”

Irving and Cody no doubt found each other useful. Irving was a slender, pale man, his appearance ill-suited to the commanding stage roles he so enjoyed. Consorting with Cody reinforced his position as a masculine and authoritative figure. By befriending Irving, an actor who had received unprecedented elite and royal patronage (William Gladstone offered to make Irving the first actor to receive a knighthood in 1883), Cody found entree to English society and validation for the cultural message of his own educational exposition, the culmination of a strategy for enhancing his own myth that he had been developing for at least a decade. Their companionship in certain ways embodied the busy exchange of cultural statements across the Atlantic that typified this and later periods. Americans sought out actors like Irving (whose fame in America was almost as great as in Britain) to provide elements of high culture that seemed weak or absent in much of the United States, and to reassure themselves by appreciating “highbrow” theater that they possessed at least as much potential for cultural development as Europeans. English people drew on frontier spectacles and myth for their own complicated reasons, not least of which was a need for reassurance about their own racial and political destinies.

With the arrival of the Wild West show in London in 1887, Cody took his cowboys and Indians to see Henry Irving in a play at the Lyceum. As stunning as the stage performance was, the real show was this Wild West appearance in the audience. This was a vintage Buffalo Bill moment, when an ordinary activity became a performance imbued with mythic significance. The Wild Westerners’ costumed visit to the Lyceum highlighted the achievements of American civilization in making the progress from rude and savage origins to this apex of Western culture,

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20 “Henry Irving in America,” The Era (September 11, 1886): 19; “The ‘Wild West’ Show,” The Era (September 18, 1886): 10; Russell, Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill, 328; Sell and Weybright, Buffalo Bill and the Wild West, 151.


22 Belford, Bram Stoker, 71.

THE TWO GREAT WESTERN SHOWMEN.

Henry: "Yes, Bill, nobody knows better than I the value of the 'puff preliminary.'"

Bill: "Henry, you've made business boom for me over here, and I guess I'll do you the same good turn when I get back among the boys."

Cartoonists lampooned the public friendship of Buffalo Bill Cody and Britain's leading Shakespearean actor, Henry Irving. Illustrated Bits (May 21, 1887): 3.
premier theater in London. Seating Red Shirt, “chief” of the show Indians, and Buck Taylor, “King of the Cowboys,” in the Royal Box suggested the “natural nobility” of the cowboys and Indians, and simultaneously validated the royal traditions of England as springing from a warlike and “natural” past. Irving exploited the event to full effect, inviting cowboys, Indians, and Cody onstage after the show, thereby becoming one of their manly company for a moment. Upon their departure, crowds jammed the streets to watch.24

Through the early summer of 1887, even a cursory reader of society columns could track their movements together. At Cody’s invitation, the actor attended a special showing of the Wild West show before its public opening. He returned for opening day, too, and thereafter, for the entire 1887 season, had a private box at the Wild West arena. He hosted dinner parties for Cody at his own Lyceum’s Beefsteak Room and escorted him to other social engagements. As in New York, invitations to Buffalo Bill frequently mentioned Irving as a mutual acquaintance, and an autographed photo of the American would remain in Irving’s possession until the day he died.25

But Irving did more than associate himself with Cody in social circles. He spent so much time promoting the Wild West show that newspapers attributed its commercial success to him, the actor serving as a kind of highbrow analog to the mass advertising of the show’s colorful, ubiquitous posters. “Mr. Irving, the tragedian, and Mr. Partington, the bill-poster, have each contributed to make Mr. Cody, alias ‘Buffalo Bill,’ the most talked about man in London.”26 Cartoons in the penny press depicted them together, with Irving as Cody’s patron, or advance agent.27 Inseparable and distinctive as they seemed to be in the public eye, humorists exploited the paradoxical friendship by making them interchangeable. Comics referred to Irving as a “great western showman” who would soon transform himself into a “Texan cow-boy” in order to attract Queen Victoria to one of his performances the way she had been lured out to see the Wild West show. Stoker himself saved a clipping from *Punch* magazine alleging that Cody would shortly take over the part of Mephistopheles in *Faust* (which Cody, his Indians, and cowboys had watched at the Lyceum).28

In May, after watching the official opening of the Wild West show, Irving

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26 “American Exhibition and Wild West Show,” 11.

27 *Illustrated Bits*, no. 113 (March 26, 1887): 7; (May 21, 1887): 3; also see “Buffalo Bill’s Show,” *Penny Illustrated Paper* (April 23, 1887): 262; *Penny Illustrated Paper* (May 7, 1887): 290; *The Entr’acte*, May 28, 1887, clipping in Papers of Henry Irving and Ellen Terry, Reel 21, Item 52/31.

28 “Texan cow-boy” is in *Illustrated Bits*, no. 122 (May 28, 1887): 4; Cody as Faust in “Waiting Verification,” *Punch*, May 7, 1887, clipping in Papers of Henry Irving and Ellen Terry, Reel 21, Item 52/19.
congratulated Cody on his London debut. “No one rejoices more than I do at your business success which may ever continue.” Apologizing for being “tied to the stake here day and night,” Irving offered to “drive you into the country in the company of a few good friends, of which I am, I shall be proud to call myself one.”

All this time, Stoker watched the actor’s relationship with the frontiersman closely. He treated all of Irving’s friendships with a mixture of suspicion, envy, and resignation, and since he was as much Irving’s social secretary as theater manager, he perhaps knew more about his employer’s affection for Cody than anybody but Irving himself. Twenty years later, the manager looked back on the season when Buffalo Bill “struck London . . . like a planet,” and recalled how he and Irving together drove the American to Oatlands Park, where the roads were thronged with a fortuitous, ready-made audience of people. Cody sat on the box beside the actor John Lawrence Toole and Irving. “The grouping took the public taste,” wrote Stoker, “and we swept along always to an accompaniment of admiring wonder, sometimes to an accompaniment of cheers.”

For the next few years, Cody and Irving were found together at surprising times, and in such degree that they seemed to shadow one another. The English actor made a special trip to Bristol in 1891 to meet Cody—with his usual retinue of Sioux Indians—at the Bristol train station. That same year, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West and Irving’s Macbeth overlapped in Glasgow. When Irving was feted at Glasgow’s Pen and Pencil Club, who should appear for the dinner but William Cody, who himself became the subject of a drunken, patriotic homage by an expatriate American with the temerity to toast the frontiersman during Irving’s party.

Stoker had his own relationship with Cody, although like all of the manager’s social bonds that were mediated through Irving, it paled in contrast to his employer’s high-profile companionship with the American. Stoker requested—and received—souvenir photographs of Cody in 1887, as well as a complimentary season ticket to the Wild West show when it returned to London in 1892. He received Cody’s requests for theater tickets on the American’s business card, and from his business partner Nate Salsbury he received gifts, “beautiful Indian arrows which I shall always value,” in 1893.

Hints of Stoker’s perceptions of Cody survive in other places. In the early 1890s, as Dracula progressed, Stoker wrote other gothic stories, including one about an American frontiersman (like Cody, from Nebraska) who is crushed in an iron maiden by a vengeful black cat at a castle in Germany. The frontier figure was so useful to the author that he resurrected him as the Texan vampire hunter Quincey Morris, in Dracula.
The author explored themes of the American West further with a western novel, his only work set on the American frontier. Published in 1895, The Shoulder of Shasta features an Englishwoman, Esse, who takes a tour of California. She falls in love with an American frontiersman bearing the memorable if unfortunate name of Grizzly Dick. But what stands out, for anyone who knows Stoker’s social context in the 1890s, is how very familiar Grizzly Dick is. His hair flows down over his shoulders, he wears embroidered buckskins, and in a singular oddity, this hunter’s daily wardrobe includes high black boots with Mexican spurs. At one point, a man in the novel compares him to Buffalo Bill Cody, a rather unsubtle hint of the character’s inspiration, for Dick’s outfit is almost a point-for-point description of Cody’s costume in his most famous photographs from the 1887 London season.35

It is a singular story in other ways. In a genre characterized by frontier heroes who save white womanhood from the clutches of wilderness savagery—wild animals, Indians, and bandits—Esse falls in love with Grizzly Dick after she saves him from a bear. He is oblivious to her affections, and she pines away for him, growing weak and deathly pale after her return to San Francisco. Her salvation arrives in the form of a strapping English artist named Reginald (he might as well have been called Bram; Stoker was proud of his physique, and his athleticism) who becomes her new love interest and her fiancé. Her health returns as she forgets all about Dick.

The climax comes when Dick, through a miscommunication, receives an invitation to Esse’s party in San Francisco. Dick abandons his buckskin for silk. He arrives a fop, his hair professionally curled beyond recognition, desperately trying to fit into urban society. He makes the transition from frontier to high society, like Cody did, but he does what Cody would not, adopting the dress of his social betters. He has become a fool. Insulted by snobby guests, he pulls his Bowie knife. Then, humiliated at his loss of control and horrified that he has drawn a weapon in the company of ladies, he hurls the knife down, where the blade plunges into the floorboards. None of the men present are strong enough to remove it except for Reginald, who presents it to Grizzly Dick as a gesture of friendship. In the ambivalent ending, Dick is persuaded to put his old clothes on, and he returns to the wilderness, while Esse and Reginald are left happily to marry.

If the novel is a flirtation with the American frontier, it also suggests the frontier is best left alone and frontiersmen best left out there. In this light romance, it is the English artist-gentleman, Reginald, who embodies the right balance of manly power and gentility. The frontiersman is comical when he is not dangerous, and perhaps his greatest threat is the unreasoning, extreme infatuation he inspires in English womanhood, which causes Esse to wane before she is rescued by the cultured, manly, and very English hero. In fact, Esse’s malady—her pallor, her listlessness, her loss of weight, her increasing detachment, and her inability to think about anything other than the mountain man—mimics the one that strikes the doomed

Plains of America,” n.p., M Cody Box 6 Misc., DPL—WHR; Cody to Stoker, n.d., Brotherton Collection, Leeds University. For connection of “The Squaw” to Quincy Morris, see Leatherdale, Dracula, 130; Belford, Bram Stoker, 178.

Lucy Westenra after her visit from a frontier hunter who provokes an all-consuming passion in Stoker's next, and most famous, novel.36

The Shoulder of Shasta appeared in October of 1895. Less than two years later, the same publisher issued Dracula, the novel Stoker had been crafting for seven years.37 It was by far his most ambitious work. In his fiction, Stoker had been exploring questions about frontiers and borders for the previous four years. But, speculating on the origins of Dracula, we could do worse than to revisit that coaching party in 1887. It was summer, the coach path winding through the trees. The spontaneous cheers for the men on the box must have seemed as natural as the setting, and perhaps made Stoker ponder—as he often did—the sources of celebrity and its dark power. Perhaps the impromptu performance of these divergent geniuses side by side—Cody in all his unassuming genuineness and Irving in all his imperious assumptions—germinated in Stoker the seed of his Dracula tale. To be sure, the powerful tension between the virtuous frontier hero and the decadent life-draining monster would occupy center stage in his novel.

The American who sat with Henry Irving and Bram Stoker on the coach trip through Oatlands Park that day surprised practically everyone, not least himself, with his sudden fame. Indeed, it would have been hard to imagine a more unlikely biography for a London celebrity. Understanding how Cody came to be the sensation of the United Kingdom in 1887 returns us from biography to cultural context, shedding considerable light on the racial messages of his show and their striking correspondence with crucial themes in the novel Dracula.

He was born William Frederick Cody, in Iowa, in 1846. His parents, middle-class farmers, soon moved the family to Kansas, where their son Will became a boyhood horse drover and, as he matured, a buffalo hunter, Union Army private, and cavalry scout in the Plains Indian Wars of the 1860s and 1870s. In the main, he followed the same career paths as hundreds of other young men of the Plains in this period. He showed promise as a military scout, but otherwise there was nothing extraordinary about him.

What changed the trajectory of Cody’s life was his discovery by the dime novelist Ned Buntline in 1869, when the Kansan was twenty-three years old. That year, Buntline authored a highly imaginative “biography” titled “Buffalo Bill, King of the Bordermen” for a New York press. Cody’s true genius—self-promotion and an ability to connect his real life to public longings—quickly surfaced. His subsequent rise as a fixture of dime novels was rapid. By the early 1870s, when still in his mid-twenties, he was scouting for the army on the Plains during the summer (he won the Congressional Medal of Honor for valor in the war against the Sioux and Cheyenne in 1872) and playing himself in biographical stage plays in New York, Chicago, and other eastern cities during the fall and winter. His easy interweaving

37 Richard Dalby, “Bibliographic Note,” 6, and Johnson, “Introduction,” 10, both in Stoker, Shoulder of Shasta.
of truth and fiction saw his star rise until he became the premier embodiment of American frontier mythology with the creation of his Wild West show in 1883.38

In brief, Cody sought to enlarge the spectacle of frontier drama he had performed on the stage for over a decade, and thereby move western theater from its decidedly “lownbrow” status as cheap melodrama to full-fledged mythic spectacle and “highbrow” family entertainment.39 The Wild West was conceived as an “exposition” (he refused to call it a show) for the education of audiences about the American frontier past. The ease with which this show appealed to English racial fears owes something to the way Cody designed it as a response to analogous American anxieties.40 In Cody’s hands, the frontier became the setting for a constant race contest, a Social Darwinist crucible of American whiteness, where the destiny of Anglo-Saxon North America was shored up against the implicit decay of the cities, the industrial revolution, new immigration from southern and eastern Europe, and a host of other ill-defined threats and pervasive cultural fears.41 In its many variations over its thirty-three-year history, the Wild West show always consisted of a series of dramatic “action tableaux” meant to reprise real historical events, or processes, performed alongside feats of skill and racial competition. Between and among narrative scenes of racial conflict—the “Attack on the Deadwood Stage,” the “Attack on an Emigrant Train”—were displays of riding, shooting, and roping skill, and also foot and horse races between whites, Mexicans, Indians, and, later on, Filipinos, Arabs, and others.

The competitions in the Wild West show were not fixed; any participant might win. But occasional victories by Mexicans and Indians were countered by the superiority of white Americans in the show’s premier technological achievement, shooting.42 Annie Oakley might compete against Johnny Baker, “the boy marksman,” but never would a white shooter have to hold her or his own against an Indian or Mexican rifleman. In the show’s version of frontier history, Anglo-Americans would remain supreme in part because they alone controlled modern weaponry, the technological supremacy undergirding their racial—“natural”—superiority.

Although historians have been preoccupied by the show’s reenactments of Custer’s Last Fight (as it was known then), these were in fact rare, and were not

38 The authoritative biography of Cody is Russell, Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill. See also Nellie Snyder Yost, Buffalo Bill: His Family, Friends, Fame, Failures, and Fortunes (Chicago, 1979); Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation, 63–87; Richard White, “Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill,” in Grossman, Frontier in American Culture; Sell and Weybright, Buffalo Bill and the Wild West; Joseph G. Rosa and Robin May, Buffalo Bill and His Wild West: A Pictorial Biography (Lawrence, Kans., 1989); Joy S. Kasson, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History (New York, 2000).

39 For the growing divide between highbrow and lowbrow culture in this period, see Lawrence W. Levine, Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America (Cambridge, Mass., 1988).


41 Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation, 63–87.

42 Richard W. Etulain notes the dominant theme of competition in the Wild West show but not its racial implications; Telling Western Stories: From Buffalo Bill to Larry McMurtry (Albuquerque, N.Mex., 1999), 16.
performed in London in 1887. The usual climactic scene for the Wild West show was the “Attack on the Settler’s Cabin,” featuring a white family—most visibly, a white woman—whose rape and destruction by Indians was narrowly averted by the timely arrival of Buffalo Bill and the cowboys. Coming as it did after the Emigrant Train act, in which white emigrant families with wagons full of household goods were saved from Indian attack, the show contained strong suggestions of (white) families in peril and (white) families saved. By making the salvation of the home its paramount message, the show implied that racial propagation—itself the sign of racial vigor—would go to those who secured the frontier for their families. Cody’s drama thus made the Social Darwinist contest between races the center of North American and world history. Simultaneously, it discounted and elided issues of class conflict. Bourgeoning class tensions in industrial cities could be glossed over by an appeal to a mythic, natural past of racial conflict in which class simply did not figure.

Cody had many ways of symbolizing the natural origins of American racial power, but his manipulation of the centaur image is particularly telling. The centaur, the mythical creature that marks the boundary between culture and nature, was in many ways the perfect vehicle for an exposition of frontier life, in part because of its implications for sex and regeneration. The centaur’s hybridity—the upper body of a man with the body of a stallion—highlighted its virility. A popular symbol of American horsemanship in the nineteenth century, the show’s publicists hailed the star cowboy, Buck Taylor, as “the Centaur Ranchman of the Plains” as early as the first year of the show’s existence. Thereafter, the centaur icon became ever more attached to the show. London publications referred to the Wild West show as a gathering of “Transatlantic Centaurs,” and even before Cody’s arrival in London, Punch magazine hailed him as “The Coming Centaur.” Such publicity was effective, in part because it symbolically connected the virility of Cody and his cowboys—those “manly and muscular heroes of the saddle and the lasso”—to the show’s pervasive horsemanship, from the Indian attack on the Deadwood stagecoach to Cody’s own signature act—blasting amber balls from the air with a rifle while riding at top speed around the show arena. After Cody died in 1917, E. E. Cummings recalled the seamless meld between man, mount, and weapon:

Buffalo Bill’s defunct
who used to
ride a watersmooth-silver
stallion

43 See programs for these and other years in the Denver Public Library, Western History Room, M Cody Programs, and at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. For composition of the show in London, see “The Queen in London: Visit to Westminster and the American Exhibition,” Daily Telegraph (London), May 12, 1887, clipping in Annie Oakley Scrapbook, BBHC; and “Programme of Exhibition before the Queen,” 1887, in Souvenir Album of the Visit of Her Majesty Queen Victoria to the American Exhibition (London, 1887), copy in BBHC.

44 “The Wild West Show,” The Era, May 14, 1887, clipping in Annie Oakley Scrapbook, 1887–1925, BBHC.

45 Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation, 88–122.

and break onetwothreefourfive pigeonsjustlike that

Jesus

he was a handsome man.47

The centaur was but one of many monsters, real and imagined, and mostly malevolent, to invade London in the 1880s. In 1885, two years before the Wild West show made its debut, William T. Stead caused a major political and social scandal with his “Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon,” an exposé of child prostitution in London in which he depicted the bestial sexuality of the professional class as a minotaur. In 1886, Robert Louis Stevenson electrified the literary world with his portrayal of a doctor caught between his longing for knowledge and his bodily lust in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The year after Cody’s departure, in 1888, mutilated bodies of prostitutes marked the trail of Jack the Ripper, and newspaper coverage of the murders served as a powerful reminder to London women of the dangers of public life and the supposed safety of the home. Indeed, coverage of the Ripper murders resonated with the imagery of Cody’s own “Attack on the Settler’s Cabin,” wherein a woman is saved from certain debasement only by the shelter of her home and the courage of armed white men.48

Cody’s monstrous fusion of horse and man arrived in London to announce the triumph of Anglo-American culture, the glories of Western imperial power, and the regeneration of the white race through frontier conflict and technological progress. If the image of Buffalo Bill as Winchester-toting centaur heightened Cody’s masculine image in particular—“Jesus he was a handsome man”—it did so in part by connecting that image to a progressive narrative of white Americans as people (Cody himself) who sprung from nature (the horse) to master technology (the repeating rifle). Throughout the performances, wilderness—animals and Indians—continually fell away before the advance of the American centaur, his settlements, and his technological prowess.

English enthusiasm for the Wild West show stemmed in no small measure from its depiction of an English diaspora racially restored by the frontier. In this sense, the show’s success expressed a gathering transatlantic conviction that the English and Americans were part of a shared “race empire” of Anglo-Saxon expansion. Indeed, while historians have explored connections between the Wild West show and the frontier thesis of Frederick Jackson Turner, Cody’s extravaganza is more obviously connected to Anglo-Saxonism, which was the most popular historical explanation for America’s frontier success in the 1890s. Anglo-Saxonists conflated race and culture, so that the origins of liberal democracy, constitutional monarchy, representative government, and most other venerable English and American traditions were derived from racial characteristics of ancient tribes—Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Vikings—formed under oak trees in the German forests.


According to the theory, these racial attributes hardened in battle with racial inferiors—Romans, Picts, and Celts—during a long process of westward expansion, and were cultivated and preserved from continental decay in the Western bastion of the British Isles, and later, in the United States. By 1887, enthusiasm for such notions had reached near-hysterical proportions. Theories about the common Germanic origins of British and Anglo-American culture and institutions dominated historical writing and reverberated in packed lecture halls on both sides of the Atlantic. To most observers in Britain, the Wild West show was a dramatic reenactment of Anglo-Saxon triumph.49

Anglo-Saxonism was, of course, a variant of Aryanism, a theory of westering race history in which Germanic peoples, the Teutons, originated as the Aryans on the high plateaus of Asia, whence they migrated west over the millennia. The variations, contradictions, and ramifications of Aryanism did not preclude its appeal, on both sides of the Atlantic. Americans, from Walt Whitman to General Arthur McArthur (1845–1912), endorsed it as history.50 In Britain, in the very summer that Buffalo Bill’s show received rave reviews in London newspapers, the Aryan myth was still proving useful as a rationale for empire in India, with columnists reinscribing the now-hoary notion that the Raj constituted England’s return to the land of her Asian origins, “charged with conveying Western ideas to the race from whom our civilization came.”51

Bram Stoker himself turned to Aryanists for crucial background details of Count Dracula’s ancestors. And Dracula, like many of his other novels, was informed by a popular Anglo-Saxonist tradition that British and Americans were descended


from ancient Viking raiders, the berserkers. These invocations of mythic race history suggested connections to the American frontier myth; Aryanism and Anglo-Saxonism were coeval with the development of American frontier mythology, and in many respects they were relatives. In all these myths, the racial energies of white people aged in the East and renewed themselves through bloody encounters with barbarians in the West. The tale of Aryans passing from Asia to Europe and in the process becoming Britons was as analogous as it was prefigurative to the story of Britons migrating west and becoming Americans.

But, as much as Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show seemed to resonate with these myths of race origin and race strength, it was simultaneously troubling for audiences concerned about racial decay. On the one hand, the show enhanced the sense of racial kinship between the United States and Britain, so that The Times, for example, could intone on the day of its departure, “The Americans and the English are of one stock.” In this vein, columnists suggested that English manhood could take lessons from Cody’s cowboys. On the other hand, such musings themselves often called into question the racial viability of the English. Race, in the nineteenth century, was inherited through blood but subject to change by new environments. “Of one stock” they may once have been, but were the two nations still of the same race? Or had the frontier experience so altered the Americans that they had become something different? To see cowboys like Buck Taylor and Dick Dolson

52 Stoker was acquainted with premier Aryanists of his day, including F. Max Müller and Armenius Vambery. For Müller, see Frayling, Vampyres, 343; Clemens Ruthner, “Bloodsuckers with Teutonic Tongues: The German-Speaking World and the Origins of Dracula,” in Elizabeth Miller, ed., Dracula: The Shade and the Shadow (Westcliff-on-Sea, 1998), 60–61. For Vambery, see Stoker, Dracula, Hindle, ed., 509, 518, n. 125; Belford, Bram Stoker, 260. For Anglo-Saxonism: Quiney Morris is hailed as “a moral Viking” in the pages of Dracula, and Harold An Wolf, the English hero of Stoker’s 1905 novel, The Man, finds that sea voyages in stormy weather revive “the old Berserker spirit.” Stoker endorsed the theories of the period’s most popular Anglo-Saxonists, John Fiske and Edward Freeman, in Stoker, Glimpse of America, 30–31. For Viking fixations in Britain, see Poliakov, Aryan Myth, 39; Andrew Wawn, The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-Century Britain (Rochester, N.Y., 2000); Paul C. Sinding, The Northmen (New York, 1880), 19–20; William Hughes, Beyond Dracula: Bram Stoker’s Fiction and Its Cultural Context (New York, 2000), 100. To Stoker, racial alliance could mitigate racial decay. Thus in his novels Lady Athlyne, The Mystery of the Sea, The Lady of the Shroud, The Man, and in Dracula, we find Stoker’s English, German, American, and Dutch characters reenergizing their flagging bloodlines through infusions of “pioneer blood”—often Viking blood—from racial relatives. Hughes, Beyond Dracula, 59. Stoker’s beliefs in the advantages of miscegenation between “the right races” were in keeping with contemporary racial thought, which held that race mixing among purest Aryan descendants was one way of ensuring the continued viability of Aryan civilization. Thus the English themselves were a mix of Viking, Celt, and other white races, as were the Americans in the works of Frederick Jackson Turner and Theodore Roosevelt. Bederman, Manliness and Civilization, 179; Roosevelt, Winning of the West, 1: 23; Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” 47, rpt. in John Mack Faragher, ed., Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner (New Haven, Conn., 1994), 31–60.


55 George W. Stocking, Jr., Victorian Anthropology (New York, 1987), 64, 106; Anderson, Race and Rapprochement, 67; Bederman, Manliness and Civilization, 179; Roosevelt, Winning of the West, 1: 23. Even before Stoker began writing Dracula, his thought about Americans was informed by a sense that the American environment had formed them into a new race. In his 1886 essay, A Glimpse of America, he outlined the “social conditions” that brought about “distinct methods of race development,” making Americans a more inventive and energetic race than the British. Stoker, Glimpse of America, 12–23, 47–48.
“amongst a group of self-complacent little City clerks it might be imagined that the individuals belonged to separate species.” In 1888, the Metropolitan Police began their search for suspects in the Jack the Ripper murders by interrogating political radicals and racial minorities whose barbarous instincts might have incited the crimes. Beginning with socialists, “Asiatics,” and Greek Gypsies, they moved on to three of Cody’s own, “persons calling themselves Cowboys who belonged to the American Exhibition” who had stayed behind in London, and whose racial identity was questionable enough to earn them a place on this list of potential savages.

The conspicuous growth of American cultural and economic power conjured notions of British decline, which only enhanced such anxieties about the American race. By the early 1880s, such a flood of American investors, tourists, and entertainers had inundated Britain that critics began to fulminate about the “American Invasion.” Cody’s popularity brought these concerns to a head, particularly in the show business world, where theater owners and managers, among them Bram Stoker, read commentary about the threat of competition from American shows.

Cody’s sex appeal made the leap from these cultural concerns to issues of biology, or race, that much easier, for the spectacle of an “invader” who was irresistible to English womanhood easily reinforced fears of English racial decline. At least one columnist compared him to Jung Bahadur, a Nepalese warrior prince whose visit to London in the 1850s included an affair with an Englishwoman, a scandalous event long remembered in bawdy songs at late night supper clubs. According to R. D. Blumenfeld, a London journalist, Cody in his London apartment was “embarrassed by an overwhelming mass of flowers which come hourly from hosts of female admirers.” When Bram Stoker received a note from Cody via a young woman, written on the American’s calling card, requesting two seats at the Lyceum for one “lovely little actress,” the manager did not have to wonder who would be sitting in the second seat. The attraction of numerous women to Buffalo Bill’s show and to his table—and presumably his bed—was threatening to English people concerned that racially degenerate Englishmen no longer captured the fancies of Englishwomen. In a humorous penny press verse in 1887, an anonymous woman admirer celebrates Cody as “Nature’s perfected touch in form and grace.” Lamenting that her male compatriots do not wear clothes like Cody’s, she pulls back from this last appreciation as she realizes:

56 “The Wild West Show,” The Era, April 23, 1887, in Johnny Baker Scrapbook, DPL–WHR.
57 Stephen Knight, Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution (London, 1976), 59; also see Tom A. Cullen, When London Walked in Terror (Boston, 1965), 106.
Buffalo Bill Meets Dracula

Even before the sensation of London, the Wild West show in 1887 cultural critics were commenting about "the American Invasion," the surge of American entertainers, financiers, and tourists in Britain. This satirical 1886 cartoon was clipped and saved by Bram Stoker himself. Bram Stoker Papers, Microfilm Reel 51, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford-upon-Avon.
But, 'tis the MAN we lack—not costume. Place
Yours on the usual product of the race
And see how soon 'twould look absurd and vain,
And tailors' art be welcomed back again.

As if to reemphasize the point, the verses were followed by a brief essay on the great opportunity awaiting “the genius who invents a male bathing dress that will not give away the fact that the wearer is bow-legged, cross-eyed, knock-kneed, flat-footed, and hump-backed.”

Degeneration theory was always a province of the “respectable classes,” a way of ascribing biological causes to subversive social change. That Cody should become an icon for those classes is perhaps not surprising, and they made an almost exclusive claim to Cody’s associations. As one writer commented on the show’s opening, “Such a vast concourse of the cream—or it may be as well to say the creme de la creme—of society is seldom seen at any function.” For an aristocracy spiraling downward in power, wealth, and influence, beset by demands for power sharing from their social inferiors, the show’s implicit teaching that history’s most important contests were between races, not classes, must have seemed reassuring.

Aristocratic enthusiasm was tempered, though, by the nagging anxiety behind the fanfare, a warning refrain about American expansion and eagerness for combat so much on display in “Wild” West Brompton south of Hyde Park. “The Buffalo Bill furor is becoming ridiculous,” wrote one editorialist. Granting that Cody was a better showman than even P. T. Barnum, the writer asked, “But are these credentials sufficient to justify an outburst of fashionable fetish worship?” Lord Charles Beresford came in for particular criticism, for having “given the Yankee showman a mount on the box-seat of his drag at the Coaching Club meet. Noblesse oblige; there is a want of congruity in the companionship of an illustrious British officer who fills an important position in the Government with a gentleman chiefly famed as an adroit scalper of Red Indians.” This critique might be read as a reminder to the upper classes not to go slumming with arriviste Americans, but it contained more than a hint of fear about American—and particularly Cody’s—intentions and even racial identity, and it resonated with cultural concerns about the American Invasion. For these critics, the public adoration of Buffalo Bill recalled events seven years earlier, when the Zulu king Cetewayo was feted by the upper classes in London shortly after leading his armies to stunning victories over British forces in South Africa. The glittering public image of the Yankee frontiersman was shadowed by the disgraceful memory. Before worshiping at the “shrine” of

63 Illustrated Bits, no. 127 (July 9, 1887): 3.
64 Arata, Fictions of Loss, 2–3.
65 Untitled clipping, The Sunday Chronicle, July 24, 1887, in Annie Oakley Scrapbook, 1887–1925, BBHC.
Buffalo Bill, “London society should remember the shame which subsequently fell upon it for its adoration of the black miscreant.”

In this sense, the Wild West show sharpened older concerns about the danger of a war with Americans, a preoccupation of English politicians for much of the nineteenth century, when the British and Americans clashed over the Oregon Question, the Southern secession, fishing rights, and a host of other issues. Anxieties about war found official sanction in the proposal to create a permanent court of arbitration to resolve future differences between the United States and the United Kingdom. The first meeting to discuss the idea took place at the American Exhibition of 1887. Indeed, it was timed to coincide with the closing of the Wild West show in November, so that *The Times* could observe, “Civilization itself consents to march onward in the train of Buffalo Bill.” In endorsing the court of arbitration proposal, *The Times* summed up the simultaneous adoration and fear that the Wild West show inspired. Crediting Cody for “bringing America and England nearer together,” the newspaper also warned that a serious quarrel between England and the United States would be almost worse than a civil war,” a judgment likely shared by the audiences who witnessed the American love of gunplay and combat in Cody’s arena.

London audiences of the Wild West show were thus caught in an ongoing double-take. The “creme de la creme” cheered for the regeneration of the Anglo-Saxon race on the American frontier. But the shouts were punctuated with furtive glances at these armed, aggressive, and racially vigorous visitors to—or invaders of—an England on a downhill slide. Thus a cloud of anxiety hovered, the bright spectacle of frontier energy and victory dimming now and again amidst a drifting fog of worries about expanding slums, the restless colonies, the declining industrial position of the country, themselves all symptomatic of England’s precipitous racial degeneration.

How might this history shed light on Quincey Morris, the American character Stoker penned in *Dracula*, and on the novel’s larger meaning? As distinctive as Cody’s show and Stoker’s classic might seem at first, even a cursory reading of the novel suggests the many ways in which the American frontier is bound up in it. Stoker’s gothic world expressed much of the admiration and fear that English audiences felt for Buffalo Bill, and for Americans generally, through a conflation of frontiers east and west, European and American, a vast borderland of race origin and race war that is the story’s true context.

On the surface, *Dracula* is a conventional tale of female vulnerability and male gallantry. The action begins with a young Englishman, Jonathan Harker, traveling

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70 *The Times*, November 1, 1887, in “Letters and Invitations, 1887–8,” BBHC.
to Transylvania to meet the count after his law firm has been commissioned to buy property for the aristocrat in London. The count is of course a vampire, although his guest does not realize this. He traps Harker in the castle and turns him over to his three minions, female vampires who live in the castle’s recesses. Harker escapes and returns home, but Dracula has already left for London, where he plans to use his newly purchased properties as bases for his forays into England. There he will suck the blood of Englishwomen and reduce the country to his domain.

He prevails first upon Lucy Westenra, a wealthy young woman who is a friend of Mina Harker, Jonathan’s wife, and engaged to young Lord Godalming. But Jonathan has glimpsed the count in London, and together he and Mina join forces with Abraham Van Helsing, an elderly Dutch doctor, Dr. John Seward, who runs a mental asylum, his friend Lord Godalming, and Quincey Morris, the colorful Texan.

After turning Lucy into a vampire—whom the protagonists skewer with a huge wooden stake—Dracula bites Mina and forces her to suck his blood while she is in bed with her unconscious husband. Desperate to save Mina from becoming a vampire, Harker and his friends pursue the count back to Transylvania, where they arrest and reverse Mina’s transformation by killing Dracula just before he reaches his castle.

It is not difficult to imagine how Stoker might have drawn on Cody’s popularity to enhance his fictional drama had he wanted to. The bite of Count Dracula constitutes a variety of “abduction” and rape of white women. Since much of Buffalo Bill’s heroic persona was connected to redeeming women captured by savages, and given the fabulous plots into which fiction writers inserted him, it is not too outlandish to imagine Nature’s Nobleman arriving to do battle with the Lord of the Un-Dead in an effort to rescue the virtuous Mina from impending “vampirehood.” We can easily picture what Cody’s role in such an adventure would be. Joining the novel’s small party of protagonists, Buffalo Bill would race across Europe to intercept the count, “to cut him off at the pass” before he reached his stronghold. He would ensure the party was stocked up on rifles, and lead scouting expeditions to reconnoiter the territory. Dashing to the final confrontation in the Transylvanian twilight, he would dispatch the count’s Romany troops and deal the death blow to the vampire, plunging his knife—not a wooden stake or a European dagger but a frontiersman’s Bowie knife—into Dracula’s dark heart.

The irony of my imagined plot is obvious for anyone who has read Dracula: change the name of Buffalo Bill to Quincey Morris, and you have the novel’s climax. As the experienced hunting guide, it is the American, Morris, who deploys the posse’s forces at critical moments. As they prepare to chase the count across Europe, Morris is the one who advises them to stock up on rifles, Winchesters in fact, the very brand that had Cody’s exclusive endorsement. (The only advertisement in his 1887 London show program was for Winchester rifles.) He arrives with the others just in time to battle Dracula at the Borgo Pass, with the dire castle in sight. When Dracula dies in the novel, it is not with a stake through his heart but

71 In the original notes for the novel, Stoker intended the pose to carry a Maxim Gun, but he changed it to the American weapon. See Bram Stoker, “Dracula” MS, p. 34b, Rosenbach Museum, Philadelphia. For the Winchester in the Wild West show, see “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West, From the Plains of America,” 1887, M Cody Box 6, DPL–WHR; and the longer 1887 program including its ad for Winchester guns, in “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West,” 1887 program, DPL–WHR.
Morris's Bowie knife. Critics have long pondered Stoker's purpose in creating Morris, the weakest and most peripheral of the three youthful male characters who battle Count Dracula. Equally puzzling is his death. Morris is the only one to die in the struggle with the vampire, and it is his death—not Dracula’s—that closes the novel’s action.72

All this is still more intriguing when we revisit Morris's odd, recurring inabilities, or duplicities. Indeed, although it goes unnoticed by the others in the novel, right up until the moment he stabs the villainous Dracula, Quincey Morris is practically malevolent. In shooting at a bat he takes to be the count, he nearly kills others in the party. Instead of pursuing the count forcefully at one critical juncture, he hides among the trees and loses him. When the count is surrounded in his house in Piccadilly, Morris is to guard the window to prevent his escape, but the count escapes anyway—through the window. Were they in league together? Lucy dies and turns into a vampire immediately after receiving a transfusion from Morris. He is the first character in the book to utter the word “vampire”—indeed, he diagnoses Lucy—and he is the only one to have had exposure to vampire bats, in Argentina, where they killed his horse. Might he himself have been infected? In the original draft of his novel, Stoker had Morris traveling to Transylvania alone, and at another point he was to enter Dr. Seward’s office in the company of the count.73 What was his role meant to be in the original draft? And what are we to make of his numerous missteps in pursuit of the vampire?

One of the more provocative and thoughtful arguments of recent years, and now a consensus among critics, posits that Morris is a secret vampire. In this reading, his character expresses Stoker's ambivalence about the American ascent to world power in the 1890s. Some see Morris as a dark allusion to the parasitic threat of American capital; others point out that if the novel Dracula is concerned with the displacement of racially decaying people by the racially vigorous, then the real danger to England in 1897 comes not from Eastern Europe but from the Americans, represented by Morris.74 In a sense, Stoker is caught in the ongoing double-take of British audiences at the Wild West show, expressing adulation for Americans on the one hand (“If America can go on breeding men like that, she will be a power in the world indeed,” says one character of Quincey Morris) and the fear of their regenerative and military power on the other, a fear that finds some resolution in Morris's death at the novel’s end.75

Clearly, William Cody was the inspiration for Quincey Morris. Indeed, the similarities between the fictional character and the historical Cody are extensive and go far beyond their predilection for Winchesters. Both are hunters (something they share with Dracula himself), and both have been hunting guides to the aristocracy. During the 1870s, Cody led numerous dignitaries on Plains buffalo hunts, including Prince Alexis of Russia and various British aristocrats. These hunts

72 Leatherdale, Dracula, 129–36.
73 Moretti, Signs Taken for Wonders, 84–96; Leatherdale, Dracula, 130–31; Stoker, “Dracula” MS, Rosenbach Museum.
74 Moretti, Signs Taken for Wonders, 84–96, Arata, Fictions of Loss, 129.
75 Stoker, Dracula, Hindle, ed., 225.
formed a large part of Cody’s biographical publicity in England, where he was far and away the most famous hunting guide of the period.76

Morris’s origins as a Texan are, I suspect, an attempt to locate him “out west” more than anything specific. But they call to mind the 1887 joke about Irving becoming a “Texan cow-boy” to gain an audience with the queen; furthermore, as we have already seen, the earlier version of the character, in the short story “The Squaw,” hailed from Cody’s home state of Nebraska.77 Finally and most important, by the time Stoker began to write Dracula in the 1890s, the ubiquity of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show would have made it practically impossible for Stoker to conjure up a western character without thinking of Buffalo Bill.

But if Morris is drawn from Cody, Count Dracula has a good deal in common with him, too. For starters, he is not just a frontiersman but a frontier hero. As Van Helsing informs the vampire hunters, Dracula “won his name against the Turk,” across the Danube “on the very frontier of Turkey-land,” where he consistently showed himself to be “the cleverest and the most cunning, as well as the bravest” of Transylvania’s sons.78

After generations of studying American frontier ideology, historians would do well to move beyond Frederick Jackson Turner’s lumping of European frontier concepts into a single notion of “a fortified boundary line running through dense populations.” In the 1890s, complex European ideas connected race, culture, and national borders. Nations were thought to be roughly contiguous with patterns of racial settlement, and their frontiers were profoundly racial boundaries.79 In this connection, the Wild West show served as a kind of allegory for European politics. Articles about “frontier tensions” between, for example, Germany and France, appeared alongside reviews of the show.80

Indeed, Stoker’s use of frontier rhetoric to describe Transylvania was not new. In Britain, southeastern Europe was the locus of the “Eastern Question,” the debate over how best to secure a region criss-crossed by racial frontiers, constantly threatening war and the empire’s hold on India. Transylvania was a lynchpin of the Balkans, and in the travel books that Stoker researched it had many similarities to Cody’s version of the American West. Its racially segmented, mutually hostile


78 Stoker, Dracula, Hindle, ed., 309.


Romanies, Magyars, and Saxons were analogous to Cody’s Indians, Mexicans, and white cowboys. Like the peoples of the American West, they ranged between primitivism and civilization, struggling to carve life from the wilderness amid continuous race war. Ultimately, the eastern frontier could almost be the American West in the novel, with Gypsies as its Indians, treacherous and “almost outside all law,” Slovaks dressed in “high boots” and “big cowboy hats,” and the West European posse heading off the frontier villain at the East European pass.81

And the closer we look, the more familiar its principal frontier figure becomes. Like the Americans and the British, Dracula’s kin, the Szekelys, are descended from Vikings, who in Dracula’s words, “bore down from Iceland the fighting spirit which Thor and Wodin gave them,” to stand guard for centuries along “the frontier of Turkey-land.”82 As he recounts their seemingly endless wars, Dracula invokes the heroism of his ancestors. Only later do we discover he is in fact talking about his own, centuries-old, exploits in the third person. Dracula “again and again brought his forces over the great river into Turkeyland; . . . when he was beaten back, [he] came again, and again, and again, though he had to come alone from the bloody field where his troops were being slaughtered, since he knew that he alone could ultimately triumph.”83

If we step back from this tale for a moment and consider Stoker’s fictional Eastern frontiersman in comparison to the most famous frontiersman of the 1890s, the oppositions place them in a near-perfect counterpoint. Dracula is the centuries-old warrior hero in the East, defending Western civilization’s first frontier with non-Christian peoples in Transylvania, “the land beyond the forest.” Cody is the hero of the Indian wars in the West, those epic conflicts between “Christian America” and savage paganism that so darkened America’s “land beyond the forests,” the Great Plains.

More than this, each of these figures embodies the entire frontier history of his people: Dracula as the eternal warrior from a frontier of ceaseless war (his insatiable appetite for blood mimicking the bloodthirst and stagnation of the Balkan frontier), Cody “the representative man of the frontiersman of the past,”

81 Transylvania was well known to the English public from newspaper coverage about the “Eastern Question,” the issue of how Britain should respond to the endemic racial strife of the Carpathians. Arata, Fictions of Loss, 113. For the wilderness, see a book that Stoker consulted in his research for Dracula: A Fellow of the Carpathian Society, “Magyarland”: Being the Narrative of Our Travels through the Highlands and Lowlands of Hungary, 2 vols. (London, 1881), esp. 1: 25–27. Some commentators even suggested colonizing this Eastern frontier zone like the Western, settling English farmers there to secure the region and improve its economy. Andrew F. Crosse, Round about the Carpathians (Edinburgh, 1878), esp. 197–98, but also 141–42, 156, 229, 287, 352–53. Racial segmentation and race strife were characteristics of Transylvania in the works Stoker consulted: E. C. Johnson, On the Track of the Crescent: Erratic Notes from the Piraeus to Pesh (London, 1885), 149; Emily Gerard, The Land beyond the Forest: Facts, Figures, and Fancies from Transylvania, 2 vols. (London, 1888), 2: 86–87, 112–13. That Stoker himself was aware of the resonances between Transylvania and the American West explains the liberal interchange of Eastern and Western clichés in his notes, and in the final draft of his vampire novel. Originally, the tale included chapters titled “On the Track, Texan in Transylvania,” in which Quincey Morris scouted out enemy territory (much like Cody in Indian country) and “Vigilante Committee, Necktie Party,” to describe the moment in which the posse plots the count’s demise. Tellingly, in his notes, Stoker frequently pairs the word “Transylvania” with “Texas” or “the Texan,” as if the two frontiers of East and West were somehow inseparable, or interchangeable. Stoker, “Dracula” MS., Rosenbach Museum. Stoker, Dracula, Hindle, ed., 9, 59.

82 Stoker, Dracula, Hindle, ed., 42–43.

83 Stoker, Dracula, Hindle, ed., 43.
hunter, rancher, and most important, warrior (his having “passed through every stage of border life” embodying the regenerative and progressive powers of the American frontier). Stoker’s monster is not just from the frontier. Like Buffalo Bill, he is the frontier. He retains the powers of a badly twisted nature, so that where Mary Shelley’s creature in Frankenstein threatened to reproduce himself and destroy humanity, Dracula, like the frontier itself, threatens to transform humanity into a different set of beings altogether.

As much as these old soldiers share a frontier history, each also faces a profoundly uneasy future, in which the racial coherence they represent threatens to evaporate. Both arrive in London to announce that the frontier wars are over, the great racial conflicts gone, and with them have gone not only the struggles that generated them but also the Darwinian contests that made their races great. Programs for the Wild West show simultaneously invoke the frontier world that birthed the Americans and its imminent vanishing. The racial conflicts of the ancient and frontier past are now giving way to a white-dominated nation-state.

Count Dracula also longs for a golden age of racial conflict. After regaling Jonathan Harker with his family’s martial heritage, the count waxes nostalgic. “Those warlike days are over. Blood is too precious a thing in these days of dishonourable peace; and the glories of the great races are as a tale that is told.” Not surprisingly, perhaps, as the great European empires quash the old ethnic wars on the frontier, Dracula, the eternal frontier warrior, seeks to quench his bloodthirst on the weak, effeminate capital of Western Europe, London.

Here, the dread lord of Transylvania is a through-the-looking-glass version of Buffalo Bill. Like the American, Dracula comes to London announcing the closure of a racial frontier, and he, too, is possessed of a racial supremacy hardened in frontier battle with racial others. But he is a frontier warrior gone horribly wrong, the vanguard of Western culture turned against the home civilization and in full regression. Count Dracula is Buffalo Bill Cody, inverted.

The depth, range, and consistency of these inversions is striking, and we have room to consider only a few. “Nature’s Nobleman” was youthful, from common origins but rendered supreme through his encounters with nature. Dracula is ancient, aristocratic, and decidedly “not of nature.” Cody the centaur embodied a narrative of progress from nature to technology. Dracula the vampire embodies a narrative without regeneration or progress, and in fact his recurrent morphing into wolves, bats, or clouds of dust suggests his devolutionary nature. Unlike the sharpshooting Americans of the Wild West show who avail themselves of the most modern weaponry, Dracula never resorts to machine supremacy for racial renewal. His is a constant atavism, a return to the most basic and crude of beings, substances, and appetites that mocks the advancements of modern civilization.

But Dracula is no mere villain to Cody’s hero. It is, rather, as if his evil powers represent Cody’s strengths and virtues carried to unprecedented extremes. Cody’s

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84 Buffalo Bill’s Wild West program, 1885 (Hartford, Conn., 1885); “every phase of border life” is in “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West, From the Plains of America,” 1887, M Cody Box 6, DPL-WHR. Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation, 75–76.
86 Stoker, Dracula, Hindle, ed., 43.
87 The quotation is from the character of Dr. Van Helsing. Stoker, Dracula, Hindle, ed., 308.
martial abilities, his long military career, his facility with manipulating nature and particularly animals all have their dark counterpart in Dracula, the ages-old frontier hero who can become an animal at will. Even Dracula’s inability to die, his un-deadness, seems to be a distorted echo of Buffalo Bill’s frontier life, particularly his exploits in the Indian wars. In the accounts of his military commanders—liberally excerpted in show programs and publicity—Cody’s remarkable talents as tracker, fighter, and strategist were charged with a legendary, practically superhuman endurance. In the esteem of General Carr, “Mr. Cody seemed never to tire and was always ready to go, in the darkest night, or the worst weather, and usually volunteered.”

The sleeplessness of Buffalo Bill and the restlessness of westerners, so prevalent in the enormous energy on display in the Wild West show, rendered the frontier a place of eternal watchfulness, where, in the words of one London columnist, “constant vigilance is the price of existence.”

And “constant vigilance” is the essence of Dracula’s curse, for as the centuries-old border guardian, Dracula himself has become an eternal sentry, unable to sleep, to rest, to die. As he puts it, his has been the “endless duty of the frontier guard, for, as the Turks say, ‘water sleeps, and enemy is sleepless.’”

Dracula was created by unceasing war, by a frontier that went one step further than Cody’s in refusing to close. So long as it remained open, so, too, must the eyes of its heroic border guardian. As we learn in the novel, Dracula was once a man. But his passion for victory over the hated Other, itself a characteristic of the racial frontier, led him to a Faustian bargain. In exchange for learning the dark arts that allow him finally to vanquish the Turk, he became the deathless vampire, the eternal warrior.

Seen in this light, the young career of the American begins to look like a pale version of Dracula’s early days. We might say that to be Buffalo Bill in the war against the Turks is to become Dracula.

Like his application of frontier tropes to Transylvania, Stoker’s many inversions of the frontier myth were in keeping with older gothic traditions. In the words of one scholar, “the mingled apprehension and aspiration” of the New England Puritans became the starting point for both the progressive frontier myth of later generations and its gothic horrors. Put another way, regressive gothic literature inverts progressive New World expectations: the Christian errand into the wilderness becomes the traveler’s ordeal, the city on a hill becomes the castle ruin (also on a hill) into which the traveler stumbles in the hour of dark need, and the climactic moment of the frontier saga, the removal of wilderness savages by the bearers of light, becomes in its gothic counterpart the transformation of the pilgrim into a monster.

In the end, Stoker conceived a vampire world that drew comprehensively on contemporary frontier myth to create a fully realized inversion.

88 Buffalo Bill’s Wild West program, 1893, 6, 18.
89 The Era, April 23, 1887, clipping in Johnny Baker Scrapbook, DPL–WHR.
90 Stoker, Dracula, Hindle, ed., 42–43.
92 David Mogen, “Wilderness, Metamorphosis, and Millennium: Gothic Apocalypse from the Puritans to the Cyberpunks,” in Frontier Gothic: Terror and Wonder at the Frontier in American Literature, David Mogen, Scott P. Sanders, and Joanne B. Karpinski, eds. (Rutherford, N.J., 1993), 94.
a gothic nightmare that stands in close counterpoint to Cody’s frontier dream of the 1890s.

It would have been difficult for Stoker to restrain himself from the racial implications of that inversion. Since the beginning of the American experiment, various writers had speculated that Americans were racially degraded by historic and often familial ties to Indians and Africans, relations that were themselves symptomatic of licentious back-country freedom and North America’s remoteness from European sources of whiteness. Mexicans, a constant reminder of the frontier’s potential for “unfit amalgamation” of Europeans and Indians, were the largest minority presence in the U.S. Southwest in the 1870s (and a major component of Cody’s show, too). In the 1890s, the threat of frontier miscegenation still preoccupied apologists for the American conquest of the Southwest and California, and ultimately it played a large part in restraining U.S. expansion across the Pacific, particularly in the Philippines. 95

Thus it is not surprising to find that racial ambiguities swirl around both the novel’s frontiersmen. The doomed Lucy compares Quincy Morris to Othello, a curious reference for an infatuated white girl to apply to her ostensibly white suitor. 96 And where Morris suggests Stoker’s suspicions about New World frontiersmen, it is Count Dracula who embodies his deepest fears about Americans and the fate of the Anglo-Saxon race. Just as Cody resembled King Cetewayo and Jung Bahadur in the barbs of his critics, so Dracula is revealed as the embodiment of racial ambivalence, the descendant not only of Vikings but of their enemies, the Huns of Attila, “whose blood is in these veins,” as the count tells Jonathan Harker. 97 Scion of Asiatic and Teutonic lineages, not just Berserker but Hun-Berserker, Count Dracula is a racial hybrid, defying the categories that the frontier line itself purports to demarcate, subverting the civilization that is maintained by blood purity and in defense of which the frontier line is drawn.

Like those who worried that Americans might be too close to non-white peoples, to the frontier, to remain white, the novel Dracula depicts the frontier as the near edge of a racial transformation that threatens British civilization. In Stoker’s vision, miscegenation leads to the replacement of weaker races by the stronger, to the triumph of the frontiersman over the metropole. 98 The racial frontier is thus key to understanding the real danger of the count, to seeing the monster who is in fact


97 At the time Stoker wrote Dracula, the Huns were still recalled as Asiatic barbarians who invaded the West. “Hun,” Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary (New York, 1971), 3993.

either absent or invisible for much of the book. What makes him so very dangerous is that he has a lust for blood befitting a frontier warrior, and that good people cannot tell he is a monster. The source of these talents is the too permeable frontier line, that too fragile division between light-skinned civilizeds and dark-skinned savages, whose congenital race hatreds can give way without notice to interracial sex. Thus he is a savage, a dark-hearted villain, and yet he is wrapped in skin so white that he seems to be “without a single speck of color about him anywhere.” Not red, or brown, or yellow, he is “of extraordinary pallor.”

99 The most deadly monster to emerge from the frontier is neither an Indian nor a Turk. He appears as a very white man but is in fact a frontier miscegenate from the ancient past, able to extend his “vampire race” through his own desire. Unless the novel’s protagonists stop this embodiment of the frontier, he is the vision of their racial future.

The westering race myth is in this sense the deeper context of the novel, its genetic bed. Derived from Europe’s mythic race frontiers, the war between westering Vikings and Asiatic Huns, Dracula is not just some relic of another country’s barbaric heritage but an inverted race hero who comes straight out of the Anglo-Saxon past. Far to the east, Dracula’s kin began the westward progression of Teutonic civilization that Morris is completing. Thus the centaur and the vampire are not mere symbolic opposites. Rather, Dracula and Quincey Morris, or Dracula and Buffalo Bill, mark the beginning and ending of a mythic drama: the epic birth of Western civilization.

This interpretation explains the curious ending in which the American’s death, not Dracula’s, signals the climax. The killing of the two race frontiersmen, one from the East—the land of the past—and the other from the West—the land of the future—terminates the thirst for blood and the threat of race mixture that the ancient race wars bequeathed to the English, the virtuous sons of the Berserkers. In the capable and dispassionate hands of the bourgeois and racially pure Englishmen who return Mina to England, the nation can become modern and yet remain progressive and free. Away from the racial frontier, there is still hope for blood purity, restrained passion, and enduring civilization.

The novel thus mimics social evolutionary scholarship of the period in utilizing the frontier as both a historical and predictive tool. To social evolutionists, the frontier line was, among other things, a purported division between primitive and modern. By looking from metropole to frontier, cosmopolitans could locate “primitives” and say, “They are what we once were.”

100 Stoker suggests that Morris is what Dracula once was, and Dracula is what Morris will become. The relief at the novel’s conclusion, where Dracula turns to dust and Morris lies buried, flows in part from this final resolution of the vampire’s curse, which itself stems from a frontier that remains open for too long, warping the race that wins it.

Where Cody trafficked in nostalgia for frontiers and race wars, the novel Dracula, among all its other messages, conveys a warning about them. Perhaps the frontier wars were glorious, Stoker says, but the closure of the frontier is not all for the worse. The frontier is where Dracula comes from, where the dark desires of his

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100 Stocking, Victorian Anthropology, 169–79; Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis is perhaps the clearest example. Turner, “Significance of the Frontier in American History.”
eternal longings were cloaked in a white skin. It whet his bloodthirst, fired his blood passion, and before that, begat the blood mixing that in turn begat him. Frontiers that do not close bring consummate blood-letting. Frontier wars that do not end require Faustian bargains. They nurture vampires.

Given that the novel *Dracula* plays on pervasive fears of race weakness, Stoker’s reliance on myths of race origin for his tale’s deep historical context is understandable. Since those myths were characterized by the centrality of frontier warfare, his resort to frontier settings, frontier tropes, and frontier warriors to carry the tale makes a great deal of sense. That he drew on the most famous Anglo-Saxon frontier hero of his day, Buffalo Bill Cody, as an inspiration for his fictional frontiersmen, Count Dracula and Quincey Morris, is hardly surprising, particularly given his obsession with his benefactor’s social life and Irving’s close attachment to Cody during the years of Stoker’s work on the novel. The combination of popular doubts about Cody’s racial identity combined with his physical beauty, his “irresistibility,” his military prowess, his ability to master savages and savage nature suggests that the novel *Dracula* is a fantasy of the ambivalences that made Buffalo Bill such a figure of power and fascination in late nineteenth-century London, played out on the dark side.

As an artistic statement, the novel exceeds its origins to become much more than the sum of its parts. Until Stoker’s time, most literary vampires were women. For most of the nineteenth century, from John Polidori’s *The Vampyre* (1819) to J. Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872), they were Eastern, sexy, and very thirsty. In making his vampire a masculine figure, a frontier warrior spawned from a mythic collision of races in the ancient past and out to conquer London, Stoker both inverted Buffalo Bill and imitated his method. As Buffalo Bill had done with the Wild West, Stoker connected his “show,” his monster, to the origins of Europe, and his mission to a widely perceived crisis, racial degeneration. The result was to suggest that the ancient vampire is profoundly entangled in the modern English world.

As much as Cody embodied a frontier myth of individual achievement and redemption, the noisy triumphalism of that myth was a counterpoint to its own dark baggage: the lurking fear of the frontier as a place of racial monstrosity and moral decay. Cody’s frontier centaur symbolized the transformative power of the frontier, the way that going West, and conquering, could potentially make of Americans something new, something more free, and powerful. The vampire was Bram Stoker’s dark vision of the same frontier transformation, the shifting of Self into Other, the loss of will and restraint before a new self that was soulless, consuming, and irresistible.

The connections between Cody and Count Dracula suggest how very plastic the frontier mythology of the Wild West show could be for cultural commentators and artists in the countries it visited. The myth of the American frontier became a touchstone for understanding other national histories and contemporary crises. But they also suggest how much the Wild West show itself borrowed from European traditions of race, empire, and warfare to weave its New World spectacle into Old

101 See the chart in Frayling, *Vampyres*, 42–63.
World epic. The progressive dream of Cody’s show provided fertile ground for cultural consideration of its darker counterpart, the fear of frontier monstrosity and decay that had long preoccupied Europeans and Americans alike. Thus Cody’s appeal to myths of centaurs and race wars as the birthing process of nations found resonance in European concerns with racial degeneration and cultural decline, nowhere better evidenced than in the use of the frontier myth by Bram Stoker, England’s greatest gothic novelist.

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