

Hey Hans!

Thanks again for the PDF. I absolutely love this literary mystery.

I'm using the Introduction for source information, as well as the Foreword and Afterword. I'm also getting in contact with Ásgeir Jónsson. Here are some questions I'm hoping you can get back to me as soon as possible (I know you're very busy and in the Philippines).

1. What got you interested in the differences between the English and Icelandic versions of the text?

In 2013, I was writing an article for the *Journal of Dracula Studies*, about Stoker's claim that all events described in *Dracula* would be authentic. Although the story obviously deals with supernatural topics, Bram added a whole layer of geographical and historical details to make it seem factual. At the same time, he was concealing his most essential references, such as the lifetime identity of Count Dracula and the true location of his castle. I deciphered both in 2012 and now I intended to describe this "paradox of fact and fiction" in my new article. The preface to *Makt Myrkranna* is Bram's most elaborate statement on the veracity of his story, so I looked for the Icelandic text of this foreword to crosscheck it against the translation published by Richard Dalby in 1986. But while doing so, I stumbled over the rest of the Icelandic edition as well and found it had been serialized in Valdimar Ásmundsson's newspaper *Fjallkonan*, starting in January 1900. I examined some paragraphs and discovered that they depicted events that don't occur in *Dracula*. In Iceland, Úlfhildur Dágsdóttir and Ásgeir Jónsson had already noted that *Makt Myrkranna* was no ordinary translation, but outside of Iceland, both the serialization and the modified plot were completely unknown to literary scholars.

2. How was the translation process of translating back to English? Did you work with a team? Did you need to research contextual or colloquial uses of Icelandic around 1900?

I am not sure if there ever was an English original text; I rather suspect that Valdimar worked from a draft or from notes supplied by Stoker and filled in many details or even plot turns himself. For me, the translation was a real challenge, as I did not know Icelandic and the text produced by Google translator was hardly understandable. I managed to find 25 Icelandic volunteers, so I split the text in 25 small parts and had each participant work through a fragment of my first translation draft. After they had returned their comments to me, I edited the whole text once more—and then there was another round. Still, there were dozens of open questions left, especially where Valdimar had used expressions not in use anymore today. During the process, I learned Icelandic and could solve most of these issues by cross-checking with other Icelandic texts from the 19th century. It was quite a puzzle and without help, I never would have managed. But the final decisions remained with me, to make sure that the result was consistent.

3. Why do you think, if Bram was involved in the changes, that there are such dramatic differences in the text—especially the first part?

I think that some modifications must come from Stoker himself while other changes were made by Valdimar. After I published a first report on the text differences in February 2014, some *Dracula* scholars proposed that Stoker might have used the Icelandic publication as a vehicle to launch a more radical version of *Dracula* that had been rejected by the British publishing industry: more political and with more erotic candidness. But personally, I doubt that Stoker was responsible for the nude scenes in *Powers of Darkness*, for example. We know that he strongly opposed sexually flavoured descriptions in fiction; in 1908, he even wrote in favour of censorship. Intriguing is that Stoker in the preface mentions Dr. Seward as a reliable witness and a good friend, in the present tense. But in the novel, Seward turns mad and dies soon after. From this, I conclude that Bram Stoker was not familiar with all details of the Icelandic version.

4. The idea of the Count's main goal being to overthrow European democracies rather than personal sustenance seems like a substantial change in theme. Do you think that was affected by the change in market or was there something in the English market at the time that would have made BramStoker wary to produce such a narrative? (Or conversely, something in the Icelandic market that made governmental conspiracy stories seem sellable?)

In *Makt Myrkranna*, the Austrian ambassador in London is portrayed as the Count's criminal accomplice, while the French ambassador's wife is enjoying amorous affairs in aristocratic circles. Such a story might have been frowned upon in London, especially as Stoker and his employer, the actor Henry Irving, in their Lyceum Theatre hosted the elite of the British Empire. In Iceland, such a plot certainly would have met less resistance. But again, we do not know for sure who was responsible for it. Fact is that Valdimar was interested in Anarchism and in his newspaper sharply protested against the way the suspects of the Haymarket Riot in Chicago had been treated. Although in *Makt Myrkranna*, the Count hopes to establish an elitist tyranny, he also sympathizes with Anarchist actions. So maybe these ideas originate from Valdimar, not from Bram Stoker.

5. Valdimar's wife Bríet was one of the first women's rights activist in Iceland, concerned about the same issues (voting and pay) as Bram's mother Charlotte in Ireland. Does the fact that physical revulsion towards intimacy is removed from the Icelandic text suggest that this change is Valdimar's work more than Bram's (considering similar themes of revulsion occurring in later work by Stoker)?

Yes, that is very well possible. As you mention, around 1900 the feminist movement fought for better education and pay, and for women's voting rights. A feminist critique of male-dominated sexuality was only developed in the 1970's and later. In Victorian England, art and literature produced by men still portrayed sexually active women as dangerous temptresses—exactly this image we find in Stoker's description of the three vampire women and of Lucy. Valdimar, on the other hand, had a less cramped attitude. In an article on the USA, he made an ironic remark about prudish American laws prohibiting a man to do his laundry and dry his

underwear in a place where an unsuspecting woman might see it. He also noted that American bigotry hampered mothers from breastfeeding their babies in public. Valdimar supported Bríet in her feminist activities but did not demonize sexuality in the way Bram Stoker did.

6. How strong do you think the literary connection between *Dracula* and Icelandic folklore is?

In *Dracula*, we find references to the *berserker* warriors known from Nordic sagas and the Count reports that his Szekler race had inherited its fighting spirit from the Icelanders. Strangely enough, in *Makt Myrkranna* these references do not occur. Instead, the Icelandic text mentions the saga of the Elven Queen, compares strong men to trolls, reports on grave mound fires known from Norse myths, etc. Some of these references are so subtle that only someone familiar with the Icelandic sagas is able to detect them. As Valdimar was Iceland's most foremost expert on such medieval texts, I suspect that he was the one who inserted such elements.

That's all I have so far. I hope you're having a great day and I'm excited to hear back from you.

--York Underwood