CHAPTER 4

MODERNITY, FABULATION, AND AMERICA IN DRACULA

The glory of this world passeth . . . I recall a brief dialogue on the Teutonic in 1889 between the Prince of Wales and a distinguished American: “Fine ship, Mr. Depew.” “Yes, Sir, Britannia rules the waves to-day.”

—Times shipping correspondent, 1899

In Anglo-Saxons, Onwards! the narrator repeatedly reminds readers that “no foot ever touched this land!” A sense of the inviolability of national space inverts the imperial trajectory of Anglo-Saxonism, recoding imperial adventures in terms of the greed of international competitors for native soil. Such a turnabout did not necessarily entail self-scrutiny: Lady Churchill writes in the opening number of The Anglo-Saxon Review that “Anglo-Saxondom is occupied with its relations to the external world. It looks outwards instead of within” (1.1: 1). On the whole, the decline of British life at home was not directly confronted in the Anglo-Saxonist narratives examined in the last chapter. Yet the difficulties of empire inevitably spurred consideration of its attendant costs, most famously, perhaps, in the “little Englander” movement spurred by the Boer War. Whatever one’s view of empire, British domestic life was increasingly perceived as vulnerable, and fears of enervation, stagnation, and even degeneration and atavism proliferated. Anglo-American discourse, correspondingly, had a different relation to this anxious terrain than to visions of a shared public sphere or forms of racial unity.
The differences between racialism and racial panic are instructive. In the previous chapter, racialism served as a disciplinary structure using tradition and a sense of world-historical destiny to legitimate domestic hierarchy. In other texts, however, fears of racial tainting and decline are intermixed with anxieties about the effects of modern economic forces upon the national culture. In the latter, America plays an ambivalent role. At once mythically shaped by the rigors of the frontier and a source of economic modernity, the prospect of American exceptionalism posed a potential threat to British hegemony. In addition, the sublimation of race as a critical category takes an additional turn: racial difference becomes negatively signified, marked by the other’s—including the American’s—embodiment of racial instincts and ideologies. The cultivated ideal becomes a source of communal values to “restore” a fabled social order poisoned by the encroachments of economic modernity and a variety of forms of the authority of the other.

While a number of popular fictions bring together the concerns of Chapters 2 and 3 by considering America’s economic modernity and racial composition, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) represents an important turn in the culturalist program this book explores. Earlier narratives locate cultivation in the practice of cultural criticism and the qualities—judgment, refinement—it endows. *Dracula* provides a particularly rich vein for describing a change in this rhetoric: texts begin to explore the agency and identity available through myths. That is, while early “culturalist” texts perform culture by revealing the indoctrination of American and domestic others, later culturalism invokes the power of mythmaking in creating a sense of mutual community otherwise lacking on the modern scene. In *Dracula*, the longing for a return to premodern social relations is assuaged, if not fulfilled, by the forging of modern narratives based around feudal values.

The novel mirrors its villain insofar as its reflection of contemporary ideology seems to shape-shift. As the hunt for Dracula runs its course, the narrative focuses less upon exposing and explaining the vampire than upon the development of the band’s sense of identity, especially the communications and hierarchies that develop within a close-knit community. Yet in the critical hunt signaled by renewed interest in the novel, critics launch bursts of silver shot at the count, each ball inscribed with key words like