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London with its Teeming Millions

Stoker is almost as ambivalent about England as he is about mothers. ‘London with its teeming millions’ is what Count Dracula hopes he will be able to prey on when he leaves his Transylvanian crypt. When Stoker left Dublin for London in 1878, he entered a world which offered him many more opportunities. Certainly Stoker’s work, and particularly his early work, registers a distinct sense of frustration with Ireland as a small and indeed cramping arena, as when we read in *The Snake’s Pass* of how the priest tells Phelim Joyce that he should be thankful because he has ‘such a boy as Eugene, winnin’ name and credit, and perhaps fame to come, even in England itself’ (*SP*: 41), or that

At Dublin Mr. Caicy met me, as agreed; and together we went to various courts, chambers, offices, and banks – completing the purchase with all the endless official formalities and eccentricities habitual to a country whose administration has traditionally adopted and adapted every possible development of all belonging to red-tape.

(*SP*: 191)

Similarly in *Famous Impostors* we read in relation to the Perkin Warbeck episode that ‘It cannot be denied that the Irish people were in this matter as unstable as they were swift in their judgments’ (*FI*: 14), while Andrew Smith points to the importance in Stoker’s fiction of his ‘view that Ireland would benefit, economically, by becoming part of Britain although crucially it would not have to
surrender its own cultural history'; as Mrs O’Brien says of the earl of Athlyne in Lady Athlyne, ‘An Irishman! God be thanked he is. But me Lady, av it’ll plaze ye betther he’s an Englishman too, an’ a Welshman an’ a Scotchman as well!’ (LA: 13). The Snake’s Pass also shows an acute awareness of the kind of language all too often used by the English about the Irish, when Moynahan says ‘He’s a nagur, anyhow – Black Murdock the Gombeen – bloody end to him!’ (TSP: 196). Taken together with the earlier discussion about how Norah is dark but not a ‘nigger’ (STP: 101), this illustrates only too clearly Stoker’s awareness of how dangerously volatile and floating the concept of negritude could be, and how easily it could be affixed to the Irish. Although ‘Stoker’s cousin John Dillon proclaimed that the Irish deserved Home Rule “because we are white men”’, in 1895 Lord Salisbury, then Prime Minister, openly compared the Irish to Hottentots in their incapacity for self-rule, and the phrase ‘the Niggers of Europe’ was all too often applied to them.

Under such pressure as this, a form of self-deprecating humour might well seem to the only possible gambit. Arthur Conan Doyle, a friend of Stoker’s who was also of Irish origin, resorted to self-parody in his short story ‘The Fiend of the Cooperage’ in which two Irishmen, Severall and Walker, are the only white men on a distant island:

‘What do we do?’ said the Doctor, when I had begun asking questions in my turn. ‘Our business keeps us pretty busy, and in our leisure time we talk politics.’

‘Yes, by the special mercy of Providence Severall is a rank Radical, and I am a good stiff Unionist, and we talk Home Rule for two solid hours every evening.’

Stoker, too, sometimes registers a clear sense of the Irish as comic, as when he records how Lady Wilde greeted a woman whom Stoker had introduced to her as ‘half English and half Irish’ with ‘Your English half is as welcome as your Irish bottom’.5 However, he also had a persistent sense of national identity, and the two impulses did not always sit easily together. After all, as David Glover notes, ‘to be a “believer” in physiognomy who was also Irish, let alone a “believer” in Irish Home Rule – no matter how “philosophical” – was to find oneself torn by a contradictory set of allegiances’.6 In