Re: Dracula Bonus Episode 4—
Queering and the Gothic

STEPHEN

Hello dear listener! I am Stephen Indrisano, your usual dialogue editor and one of the producers here on the show. We have another special bonus episode today, thanks to our Seed & Spark supporters who got us off the ground and rolling. We are joined today by Dr. Jamie Bernthal-Hooker, who is a visiting fellow at the University of Suffolk, with a background in queer theory and popular literatures. You could imagine how excited we were to get him on the program. Jamie, welcome, how are you today?

JAMIE

Hello! I'm very good, how are you?

STEPHEN

I'm excellent, thanks. Any day that I get to talk about the intersection between queer theory and literature is a good day. So you must be in a good mood A Lot of the time.

JAMIE

Oh, yes. :)

STEPHEN

So tell me a little bit about—let's start with the basics, right? Let's get some terms defined and out of the way. Uh, what makes queer theory? What is that umbrella term, and how can we kind of think about that for this conversation?

JAMIE

Ah, woah. That might be the basic, but that's honestly been a topic of *huge* debate and backstabbing and bloody violence throughout queer theory ever since it was a thing. Eh, so I guess it's not one thing. Queer theory, to me, is approaching life,

approaching texts from a perspective that is deliberately not straight and not "normal"—in inverted commas.

STEPHEN

Right. So this term, "queer"—this is something I want to get kind of on the record as early as possible—has meant a lot of things to a lot of people, and in this context are we referring to specifically sexuality or are we referring to sexuality and gender? What's the history of the term, if you don't mind kind of flagging it for us?

JAMIE

Yeah, I realized I just gave a really kind of vague answer.

STEPHEN

It's okay! It's—my favorite thing about the term is it's delightfully, deliciously vague.

JAMIE

Yes, it's very squishy and malleable.

STEPHEN

Yes!

JAMIE

So, the word "queer" is a very very old word. It's been used for centuries and centuries, and probably for the last 200 years or so it's started to be used to describe people who maybe weren't seen as straight or as typically, conventionally masculine or feminine, and it was a slur, which is why a lot of older people, even now, and a lot of people in general still don't like to use the term "queer" because it was very much a slur, and it was used to denigrate people. It literally means weird, wrong, strange, unusual. And it's really in the last 30-40 years that members of communities that have been outcast on the grounds of gender and sexuality have started embracing the word

queer—whether it's to describe their identity or as an umbrella term to describe people we might call LGBT+. So it's a wonderfully malleable term—it can mean lots of things, it can mean nothing. That's part of what—I call myself queer, and that's part of what attracts me to that, is that it resists telling you which box it's in, exactly.

STEPHEN

I feel very very similar since—it's fun, across the pond here, to have two very different people sharing a perspective, even upon first meeting. It's lovely. So let's talk about the other part of your academic background here—popular literature. So we're going from this very heady kind of identity term—let's define the other one, right? What makes something popular literature?

JAMIE

Literature that's popular! *(Stephen laughs)* So it's books that lo—sorry, I had to.

STEPHEN

All good.

JAMIE

It's books that lots of people read, but also there's a sense in popular literature of being mainstream and therefore traditionally—I'm from an academic background, and traditionally the more popular a writer is, the less worthy they're considered of study purely because they appeal to "the masses."

STEPHEN

Right.

JAMIE

The two things about me that I like are books and being queer. They're my favorite things in the world, and so obviously I smush them together in my career.

STEPHEN

Yeah! If you can do it every day, that's the *job* for sure.

JAMIE

Yeah, exactly!

STEPHEN

So you come at this specifically from the direction—we were speaking a little bit before we started recording—from the direction of detective fiction.

JAMIE

Yessss.

STEPHEN

There's a rich history of detective fiction, especially kind of alongside the Gothic tradition, and I was wondering if you could help me understand what it is about detective fiction that makes it a rich field for queer academia and queer studies?

JAMIE

Well, it's amazing because detective fiction is about good and evil, and it's about right and wrong, and it's about trying to put people and events into that binary of 'this is good/this is bad,' 'order is broken/order is restored,' and it's never as clean as that in an actual book because obviously life isn't that clean. So you have, inevitably, some conversations going on. I mean, my PhD thesis was the first sustained queer reading of Agatha Christie.

STEPHEN

Be still, my heart!

JAMIE

I know, right? And really I was just in kind of 12-year-old form throughout the whole experience—just combining my favorite things. But there was so much going on there, and very few people had really looked at such popular books from that perspective, and that's a writer a lot of people consider very, very

conventional; very, very much part of the institution. And to find a whole world of queerness in those books was a really fascinating thing. So it wasn't so much about finding LGBT characters, although you can do that, but about finding themes around identity, around what is normal, what is queer, what is outcast, what is offered—and what that says about society's attitudes to convention. So the thing about popular literature is it's always going to tap into conversations that are happening at the moment and attitudes that are happening at the moment.

STEPHEN

I want to kind of bring your specific lens to the project that we're doing today, which is this *Dracula* adaptation. And something you sparked from me that I think is really interesting is media that seeks to define good and evil. When you do your research, what are the kinds of things that you're looking for to tease apart cultural implicit standards for 'these characters are good, these characters are evil, these characters are straight, these characters are not?'

JAMIE

Okay, well that's really interesting question because a lot of the way I read popular literature—the reading is really obvious to me—I don't have to dig for it; I read it and I think, 'that is that,' and part of that's because I've learned about contexts that many of these books were written in, but part of it is just the perspective and the life experience I'm coming from. So I can see certain, what we'd call "codes," and recognize a character as being, in a way, queer, and then I'll be really shocked to kind of go online and look around and find it no one else has said it. And a lot of it's about being able to accept your reading is a completely valid one; your experiences are just as significant in what you bring to the text as the conventional readings are. And something like *Dracula*, it's amazing how long the queerness lay undiscussed in it because it's one of the queerest books I've ever read, I'd say.

STEPHEN

Let's talk a little bit about that—about the differences between a kind of personal reading and an academic reading. One of the things that has been incredibly exciting for us on the show has been that there's a massive social media following for *Dracula* at the moment, and many many of these people have grown up in an age where they have more representation in media, where they're looking for those coded characters. How do you square books that are in some way representative of an experience that is queer, but are also inherently on some level demonizing of it? In your work, in your studies, how have you come across that? How do you tease that out for yourself?

JAMIE

Context! I love context! Context is wonderful, and the author's interpretation of their own text and how they've clearly chosen to write a character or a theme doesn't have to be where the text ends. You can approach these stories, these characters, these scenes, in a way that works for you. And yeah, I don't identify with Dracula, but at the same time I acknowledge that if I'd been prancing around being my effervescent self in the end of the 19th century and someone wrote a book about me, I probably wouldn't have been cast as the romantic hero. And so it's quite useful to look at representation in those terms.

STEPHEN

I think that there's a real danger in equating identification with a villain with an act of villainy, right? And I think that in particular the Victorians were really interested in that kind of thoughtcrime idea of "what you consume is what you are," and I'm wondering if some of the reluctance to identify queerness in literature actually comes from a place of not wanting to identify queerness at all.

JAMIE

Part of it is definitely that. And, I think we're in a time now that we haven't been in before with the extent of queer representation and the availability of positive arcs for queer characters, but also this idea of revisiting stories and writing them again—often from the villain's perspective—even the rise of fan fiction to enter a story from a perspective that hasn't been highlighted before—that gives us, in a

way, an idea that that's what we do with stories, that that's what we do with literature, but it hasn't always been like that, and many people did not read until into the 20th century, necessarily, in order to identify with a character. A lot of books were like that, but in many cases it's to learn about other parts of the world when there wasn't much travel, or it's to enjoy the thrill of the horror—the central thrill of something like *Dracula*, or the deductive game of a detective story. Suddenly psychology wasn't as much of a concept in literature at that time, especially in popular fiction, and I think if it had been, I think probably Bram Stoker would have been a bit less candid in some of his descriptions in this story.

STEPHEN

One thing that we—I think that we will have hate mail if we don't address—is a conversation that you and I have had briefly off the record, which is this idea of was Bram Stoker gay? And I want this to almost be apart from the rest of our conversation because it's a very specific kind of question to ask as people reading in 2023, and I was wondering if you wouldn't mind giving me just a bullet points version of why that's kind of the wrong question to even be asked.

JAMIE

I think you know that I could rant for a long time at that, *(Stephen laughs)* so the bullet point question is a good call. The categories that we have of identity—gay straight, bi, trans—these either didn't exist or didn't mean what they mean today in the past, and so at the time, gay didn't exist. The word "homosexual" meant something different to what it means now, slightly. It would have been considered a woman's soul in a man's body.

STEPHEN

That's something that we would maybe now talk about as a way to describe the trans experience, right? It not only doesn't mean the same thing *literally*, but even like subtextually, right, contextually if I were to tell a close friend of mine, 'I think I'm living in the wrong sort of body'—that would *mean* something very different about the experience of my life versus the experience of someone's life when Bram Stoker was writing.

JAMIE

Yes, so I'm wary of going back and looking at historical figures and trying to give them a sexuality because I think at the best it can be misguided, because these categories either weren't available to them then or meant different things, and at the worst it can be dangerous, because it's giving the categories and identity labels we have now the power of being timeless and the idea that this is exactly what is completely and truly right.

STEPHEN

Yeah, there's a capital-T Truth that now we've found the right labels, and these ones will be eternal, and don't worry about the ones from 100 years ago or 200 years ago or what have you.

JAMIE

And indeed, don't worry about now people will be thinking about themselves in 100 years, which will certainly not be exactly what we're—how we're talking in this exact cultural movement. So, I find that unhelpful.

STEPHEN

Sure.

JAMIE

And also when people talk about someone like Bram Stoker—I don't know anything really about his private life because I'm not a Stoker scholar—but I see people talk about him as a closeted gay man because he married Oscar Wilde's ex, and he was friends with Oscar Wilde, and he wrote a letter to Walt Whitman which people describe as a love letter. and I'd call it a fan letter. It reduces the broad experience of being a human, and having relationships and emotions and knowing people and liking things and people—it reduces that to this identity label. And so I find it really weird that we can't see two people who might not have been conventionally masculine being friends without immediately sort of

saying A) they must have been jumping into bed together, and B) therefore they are this thing, and all of that behavior and experience that they've had means exactly this one prescriptive thing I've decided. I don't see why we need to focus on 'can we call him gay' or whatever.

STEPHEN

Well I'm glad that we touched on that because it would have been rioting in the streets. Let's move on to something else, shall we? I'm wondering if you wouldn't mind putting on a little speculation hat for me.

JAMIE

Always.

STEPHEN

We will speculate together, you and I. If you're a queer writer—either consciously or otherwise—in a period of time that is not like this one, where you don't have a reasonable expectation to reach a wide audience, how do you go about representing your experiences in the realm of subtext?

JAMIE

Oh gosh! For a lot of writers—like a lot of people—it's not a conscious choice, and often subtext is bearing interpretation: you're revealing things you're not explicitly revealing. And I'd say that there's oodles of that in *Dracula*, and one of the reasons for that is, in fact, the presence of psychology because this is published in 1897, I think, so the tail end of the Victorian period. Psychology is just taking off, we have advances in science, in medicine, we know a lot more about how things work, how people work, and we're starting to categorize people into identities. So, the pathologization of sexuality—a lot of people are surprised to learn that it's very recent. The word homosexual was coined in 1869, and around then also the word heterosexual was coined. And heterosexual meant an unnatural passion for a different sex, so it was considered a perversion and a mental illness alongside homosexual, and it was only much later that the word adapted. This society at the time is very focused on identity and what your

thoughts, what your desires mean about who you are but also what you are. The characters and the implied author throughout this text are really focused on that. They're really focused on 'what do these changes in me mean,' 'what do my strange,' um, I think he calls them 'midnight fantasies' that Jonathan Harker has about Dracula coming to visit him in bed, and which I'm sure isn't queer at all but—

STEPHEN

No, put it aside, don't think about it. We'll put it in a little box somewhere else.

JAMIE

Yes.

STEPHEN

An academic 200 years from now will pick it up and be like, 'ooh! What's in here?'

JAMIE

He wonders what these midnight fantasies he has means, and then he immediately reassures himself by reminding himself he's got a wife, which is interesting in itself.

STEPHEN

Let's talk a little bit about that context thing, right? If you are someone who is getting really into a book or, say, a series of books—whether it's Agatha Christie, or if it's Conan Doyle, or what have you—what kind of resources do you recommend for people to better understand the historical context in which these books are being written, the kinds of sociological things? Frankly, Google isn't going to cut it in a lot of these cases if you want like a nuanced understanding of sexual and gender history. What's a resource that you found has made these kinds of conversations more accessible for you?

JAMIE

Well I go and find things that interest me, but I'm weird because I like doing historical research—I like doing contextual research. With a lot of older books, you can get editions that have introductions—don't skip the introduction! Read it! It's really interesting! And then look at the people being discussed, but you can also talk to other readers online who often know things or spot things that you couldn't have known or spotted, and find things that way. Obviously I love academic writing, but I know it's not for everyone, and I think queer theory is the tool that massively helped me unlock these texts because I was reading some of the big, often intimidating, names in queer theory like Judith Butler, and Michel Foucault, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick—two of whom I love— *(Stephen laughs)* and they really did help me think about these books I was reading. They don't talk about the books, but they talk about ways of thinking and ways of reading. So when I read a passage from Judith Butler which really got me started on my whole project to queer detective fiction at the time—it was this line about how identity is created, and Judith Butler writes feminist philosophy and is considered one of the parents of queer theory. And they wrote something along the lines of, we create our identity through a series of "not-mes," identifying people who were Other and strange and wrong, and saying 'well I'm not that.' And then the next stage is abjection, which means getting rid of all the it's about ourselves that don't fit the mold we've chosen. And when I thought about identity in that sense, I started looking, in the books I was reading, at how characters define themselves—and do you know I notice something really interesting? Very few heroes in books have much discernible personality. If you think about James Bond, who's the ultimate macho straight man—he's like the ultimate hero! What do we know about him other than he's a spy who sleeps with a lot of women?

STEPHEN

I mean, he's literally a number, right?

JAMIE

Exactly, yeah! And he kills a lot of bad guys—we know so much more about the villains he encounters, and the reason we know more about them is because they're defined in a lot of detail so that we can think, 'okay the hero's not like them, therefore he's good because we know this villain is bad.

STEPHEN

Well okay, play with me in this space for a moment. Let's talk about Dracula.

JAMIE

Yes.

STEPHEN

So let's talk about the "not-me" thing.

JAMIE

Yeah.

STEPHEN

Because we've had other guests on the program who have talked about things like antisemitic tropes in vampirism, things about, you know, what were the gender roles in Victorian England, and realizing that we've put together a syllabus, which is incredible. There's several points in the book at which characters will say something along the lines of—poking fun at the idea of the New Woman.

JAMIE

Yes.

STEPHEN

And they'll say something along the lines of like, 'Well wouldn't it be fun if I could just do that? Oh but that's silly—that's not me.' Perhaps the reason that this book has taken on such a wildfire online—especially on Tumblr, which is a fairly queer social media site—is that these distinctions sometimes also highlight

that which they're trying to distance themselves from. Do you think that's a fair read?

JAMIE

Yeah, a hundred percent! Because of course characters like Lucy and perhaps especially Nina—they are examples of the New Woman, or at the very least their existence would not be written as it is without that concept of the New Woman. It's very much informed them, and then of course they have to jettison it—they have to say 'of course I'm not like that.' We see that *all* the time in real life as well—people denying something that's obviously hugely influential in what's made them—and, yeah it draws attention to it, absolutely. In a similar way, we can read a lot into what is loudly silent in the books or what is missing.

STEPHEN

Mm. How do you see that in—so, jumping forward from the Victorian—so, let's go a little bit forward in time. Let's jump up to Agatha Christie. Agatha Christie, not a Gothic author, but certainly within some of those traditions—detective fiction being something of a bedfellow.

JAMIE

The traditional view of Christie—and we might be getting off topic, I don't know, but the traditional—

STEPHEN

No please, yeah! Let's go there.

JAMIE

I can always go on about Christie.

STEPHEN

I wish you would, please.

JAMIE

The traditional view is that she didn't engage with any form of social commentary. The traditional view is that she was just writing puzzles—they were called "animated algebra"—and that there was absolutely no *literary* value in her work, and now we are seeing a much more diverse approach to her work and other examples of detective fiction, popular literature. So there is *a* reading of Christie that says that her, kind of, middle class worldview is *so* extreme that it draws attention to how silly it is, and thus potentially a reading—one thing from the queer perspective, what I find fascinating about Christie as a writer is that she uses our prejudices—or the implied reader's prejudices—against them, so she will create these stereotyped characters who are written according to available codes of what would then called "gender inversion" or queerness, and so if you ever meet a man in a 20th century novel with long artistic fingers who works in an antique shop or a woman who wears tweed and is a sports mistress, then you could guess what the author might be trying to imply. And the presentation there is to make us not trust them because they're queer. And then what Christie will do is always make them innocent and not the murderer in order to trick us as readers trying to solve the mystery, and so she uses our expectation against us and, in that way, highlights it.

STEPHEN

Well, that's interesting, too, in the context of—going back to constructing good and evil in popular literature. Because these characters are being specifically highlighted for their queer features while also being explicitly removed from the crime itself, right? They have not committed a crime; they're a red herring of this sort, which—does that inherently place them apart from evil in her stories?

JAMIE

If you subscribe to the view that the point of a mystery story is the restoration of order—they're still going at the end of the story, whereas a character we've been told to like and trust normally has been identified as bad and expunged from the narrative, so in a way it's the opposite to that form of making your identity with a

series of "not-mes" because it's pointing out bits that we've been told are good that are actually bad, so it's interrogating our initial assumptions.

STEPHEN

So how do you feel, then, about the idea that Christie was a non-political writer in some sense—that kind of traditional academic view of her body of work?

JAMIE

Oh it's rubbish.

[Both laugh.]

STEPHEN

Anything else, or just flat—?

JAMIE

It's just very silly. Yeah. It is really silly.

STEPHEN

It's so funny the confidence with which you speak about. It's not—it's like not even a debate worth having. I feel that way very often as someone who's like a hardcore horror literature person because there are certainly, I think, forms of art that we're told are inherently lesser, and isn't it funny that sometimes those are the forms that can expose us to queer ideas, to queer identities?

JAMIE

Yeah.

STEPHEN

So we've talked about detective fiction, we've talked a little bit about the Gothic—are there other forms of popular literature that you feel are really ripe for exploration in terms of queer theory?

JAMIE

Okay, here's my thought of this: When I started doing my PhD—it was about 10 years ago, I think—queer studies was quite developed, quite established, but the kind of books that were being talked about were always ones with explicit LGBT themes or characters or authors—or authors that people have said are LGBT, which is another issue—and one of the reasons I chose Agatha Christie, the best selling novelist of all time, is because I think there's queerness everywhere, and I think that in order something to have mainstream appeal, it has to be able to engage more than one type of person. And really, the idea of the completely straight and narrow—the completely "normal," if you like—doesn't exist, and the demographic that would serve, if it existed, would be vanishingly small because no one is actually normal. So, for something to have mass appeal it has to appeal to lots of different types of people, and therefore, there has to be something going on that's interesting to study, and what I don't understand is why people study the same stuff over and over again when they're not interested in it! It never occurred to me *not* to study Agatha Christie, who's probably the best writer who ever existed–sorry if you've got your faves.

STEPHEN

For every other writer, step aside.

JAMIE

I mean I once said that on a panel interview with a lot of very distinguished crime writers, and they were a little bit annoyed, I think

STEPHEN

(laughs)

I won't tell. Stays between you, me, and everyone subscribed to the podcast.

JAMIE

Perfect.

STEPHEN

No, I love that though—I think that's a very, almost hopeful, almost optimistic read of what queer studies can be because—a secret fear of mine—that I'll let you in on—for long time has been that for something to become popular, it has to be in some way really explicitly reinforcing the kinds of toxic status quos that exist in society. Like, it shouldn't surprise us when something popular in the past is in some way problematic because it wouldn't have gotten popular if it was not itself problematic, and what you've done today, for me, here, is you've flipped the coin. Said, 'yes of course, however, here's this other way you can think about it,' which is that, to become popular, you have to include the swaths of the world that are not thought of as regular.

JAMIE

Yeah. It'd be the most boring thing that's ever existed, and it wouldn't exist. I don't think straight people exist, by the way.

STEPHEN

Mm!

JAMIE

And by that I don't mean everyone's on a… Well I *do* think everyone's on a sexuality spectrum, but that's not what I mean. I'm not trying to kind of recruit everyone to my bisexual army.

STEPHEN

Okay, you can. Yeah, welcome to the Bisexual Army Podcast—we've been recruiting for a bit. We fight under the banner of Judith Butler. You've been warned about us, I assume.

JAMIE

Perfect.

[Stephen laughs.]

JAMIE

But, I don't think that so much, but I don't think straight people exist in that it's not a static idea, and it is something that is always, as you say, defined against scapegoats, against other people, and other things—it's that series of "not-mes." And, in a way, Dracula is wonderfully queer and possibly so popular because he is the ultimate Other, and I know a lot of people have probably said that already on your podcast.

STEPHEN

No, say it again, preach it to the rafters!

JAMIE

Even down to his title—so, he's *Count* Dracula. That is a form of peerage that was not available in England. The English version of a count is an earl. And, in fact, he shouldn't ever be called Count Dracula—the correct way to address him would be *Lord* Dracula. So, the reference to him as Count Dracula is a very deliberate way of emphasizing that he's Other.

STEPHEN

Yeah, I guess you would be hard-pressed to find a category in which Dracula is not made into some sort of Othered figure. Because we've talked a little bit about kind of the racial aspects; we've talked about kind of pseudo-racial religious aspects around, you know, Jewish stereotype; we've talked about the types of gender *roles* that he plays; we've talked about his labor and how he labors in his own castle, which is very against the mold for what—man, that's an interesting framework: that he's in some way kind of a societal void. Because if you added up all of the various ways in which you can define yourself against, what you end up with is a monster—in this case, the Count. What do you think it says about our culture over time that this character has transmuted so much? That we've seen the return of Count Dracula as, you know, in some ways comedic, in some ways monstrous in kind of other contexts—what should we view, as an audience, in that transformation?

JAMIE

What I think it really says is that it's—the character has tapped into something very basic in us, and it's the basic archetype characters that fit so well. And the fact that he's presented not just as an Other, but also as an attractive Other—even down to, at the very beginning, Jonathan is horrified by the paprika but still wants the recipe. You know, he's very drawn to it all.

STEPHEN

I *adore* that comparison. Spot on.

JAMIE

We all know men like that. Horrified by the paprika but still want the recipe. That kind of attractive repellent, everything we're meant to avoid-type figure will always be eternal in life, and we'll deal with it in different ways at different points of life, but also at different points of history, So, a bit like Sherlock Holmes—one of my faves—he can be many things in different contexts, and like a lot of Victorian figures, actually, it can be—or 19th century figures—can be a very enduring archetype.

STEPHEN

I was actually going to ask you to take us to that place of detection fiction—where else might a curious listener find those kinds of archetypical, really interesting characters in detective fiction?

JAMIE

Yeah, go to detective fiction! All of it! Detective fiction is inherently Gothic in its roots—its roots are in the Gothic and in parody. And you can look at writers like Edgar Allen Poe, who some say invented the modern detective story; you can look at—Wilkie Collins is one of my favorite writers when I'm in a bad mood if that makes sense? I have different writers for different moods, so when I'm in an angsty mood it's Iris Murdoch, but when I'm in a bad mood it's Wilkie Collins, and I don't know why. But he also, some say, he invented the detective novel—I would disagree, but. And then of course, Arthur Conan Doyle! Sherlock

Holmes—another creation who has been read queerly many times. Every one of those Sherlock Holmes short stories includes some sort of monstrous depiction of polite society, and it's just so much fun and so interesting. So I would definitely turn to detective stories, and one of my favorite things to do—because I have no friends—is to look at old Victorian magazines and read the short stories there, and some of them are terrible and some of them are *amazingly* terrible, and you just get this sort of feeling of the world but also these fun sensations.

STEPHEN

If there's one piece of advice our audienceship is likely to take, seeking out Victorian magazines on their own time seems pretty high on the list. Before I bring us into the homestretch, I wanted to talk a little bit more about the figure of the detective, briefly, just because it is your forte, and I was wondering if you had thoughts on why it is that detectives are so often very colorful characters and very outside of what we might think of as the norm.

JAMIE

Because it would be really boring if they were—normal people don't exist! There, there's no such—! There have been a *lot* of detectives over time—thousands of detectives in literature and probably most of them *are* considered normal characters; they just don't endure because it's boring. I mean, obviously I love Hercule Poirot, who is flamboyant, effeminate, and Belgian.

STEPHEN

That's the "B" in the LGBTQ umbrella. *(laughs)* I'm so sorry, continue.

JAMIE

Yeah, but it did become a habit. After Sherlock Holmes, it became a convention of crime writing to give your detective a quirk, and that sort of evolved into giving your detective psychological damage, which is much less fun but still actually does a similar thing because it gives them a detective methodology. Because the thing about Poirot and Miss Marple and my other favorite detective Adela Lestrange Bradley, who was created by Gladys Mitchell in *Speedy*

Death—read it. 1928. The thing about them is they're weird, and so while you remember them, and you notice them straight away, they can still slip under the radar in the world of their books because no one takes them seriously. So suspects will let down their guard and discuss freely things around them, and then the sidekick always has to be the normal one. So, if you think about Captain Hastings—I think Poirot calls him amazingly normal. Doctor Watson—I know there's an effort to reclaim Doctor Watson as some sort of genius because he… is a doctor, but I know a lot of doctors, and that doesn't make you a genius. Doctor Watson is quite stupid. That—the Watson, the stooge, always has to be a bit stupider than the average reader. The reason for that is partly so you can sort of feel better than them while you're being helped to solve the mystery but also so you don't notice them so much because they're boring. Doctor Watson couldn't hold a narrative by himself—it'd be just really really dull; Sherlock Holmes can because he's weird. I love weird.

STEPHEN

I'm hearing this fascinating parallel because I really have not done enough reading into detective stories, but I'm hearing a really fascinating parallel between detectives and monsters. So in horror theory, we talk a lot about like, what does a monster mean, why do you have a monster, and oftentimes the stories that endure are the ones that have really really interesting monsters, whether they're human or supernatural or what have you. And it feels to me like we've kind of landed here at this center point on the diagram, where as we continue to read Dracula, as hopefully people go out and go read other Gothic literature, but also go out and read some of the detective fiction that was spawned from this tradition, that we should be looking for the ways in which these characters aren't just doing interesting things for the plot, but are being interesting things in the larger societal scope.

JAMIE

Yeah, and it doesn't have to be as worthy as that. You don't have to consciously sit down after reading a book and write an essay on 'what does this tell me about the late 19th century?' But it can tell you a lot about people. You can learn a lot

about. What's the same? What attitudes were like then? And think about it in terms of what they're like now and it just gives you a bit of perspective and hopefully a bit of hope as well. Queerness has always been there and, the things that we think of in terms of our identities now are obviously definitions and ideas that weren't available in the late 19th century. But the thing we need to sort of realize is that these understandings we have of who we are, what we are, will not be common in 100 years. There'll be other ways of thinking about it then and, I mean, hopefully some things will be gone—some binaries and things will no longer be considered, but there'll be other limitations. There'll be other ways we process our identities and you can not so much look for “gay characters” or whatever in old books, unless you want to. But it's more about looking at themes, ideas and feelings, I guess—feelings, they're nice—throughout history and looking at attitudes and looking at how there's so much more going on in the world than the official version.

STEPHEN

Doctor! Jamie! Bernthal! Hooker! Thank you for coming on the program—what a way to end it out. Please, do you have anything that you'd like to plug—books that you're writing, lecture series that you'll be a part of, or just things that you want people to go check out while you have the microphone.

JAMIE

If you'd like to know more about queering Agatha Christie, I have a book that's imaginatively called Queering Agatha Christie, so check that out. Or you can—

STEPHEN

Please do.

JAMIE

—follow me on the twitters, which is @jcbernthal.

STEPHEN

Thank you so much for joining us. All of those links will be down in the show notes as well. We hope you have a wonderful day—take these nuggets and go approach your favorite popular literature; don't let anyone tell you it's not worth it! That is art that you're holding, my friend. We will see you next time with even more *Regarding Dracula.* Jamie, once again, thank you so much.

STEPHEN *(again)*

Thank you so much for tuning into that interview! It was an absolute blast to do. As usual, dialogue editing by yours truly, Stephen Indrisano. Some extra sound design by Tal Minear. This episode was produced by Ella Watts and Pacific S. Obadiah, with executive producers Stephen Indrisano, Tal Minear, and Hannah Wright. *(clears throat)* A Bloody FM production.

JAMIE

Thank you.

JAMIE

What is the point of—oh now I've lost it. AH-AH-AAAAH!

STEPHEN

That's okay. It sounded like you were—

JAMIE

I was going to say something wonderfully sort of—

STEPHEN

Yeah, it sounded like it was going to be very erudite, and, and what have you.

JAMIE

Would have perfectly crowned that moment. *(Stephen laughs)* Pithy and witty and just excellent. Amazing.

STEPHEN

Oh, it's going to break my heart to take that interaction out of this interview.

JAMIE

Put it in a blooper reel, it's fine.

STEPHEN

I'll put it at the tail end.