Navigating "Extremistan"

Tracing the Factors Behind the Divergent Cultural Longevity of Dracula and The Beetle

Stefan Veleski
veleski@phil.muni.cz

Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University

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General introduction

- Literary doppelgängers
  - Published in the same year
  - Same genre—"Imperial" Gothic [2]/invasion novels
  - Similarly regarded by contemporary critics — not as "elevated horror" or "serious" literature
  - Neither book on the radar of scholarly criticism until the 1980s

- *The Beetle* more successful upon publication, and probably maintained an edge by the 1920s (some even claim late 1920s).
Present day popularity and prestige of the two novels

1. Distribution of present day popularity

2. Distribution of present day popularity (log)

3. Distribution of present day academic prestige

4. Distribution of present day academic prestige (log)
The position of the novels on the "Canonicity/Popularity" spectrum

$R = 0.75, p < 0.0000000000000022$
New outlook on canonicity

- Canonicity $\Rightarrow$ **Cultural longevity**
- Collective memory and attention [3]
- Clash between the opposed processes of:
  - Decay of collective memory and attention [4]
  - Cumulative advantage, Matthew effect, preferential attachment [6, 1]
- Maintenance of unbroken chains of cultural transmission
"Extremistan" and "Mediocristan"


Possible factors for the divergent longevity of *Dracula* and *The Beetle*

- Early discrepancy because of ads/promotion/publisher clout, later repaired by objective quality?
- Overreliance on a topic of contemporary cultural interest, that did not work for subsequent generations of readers?
- Generic/tropical blurriness — difficulty to engrain itself in certain generic and tropical traditions?
- Differences of emotional valence (negativity bias)?
- Film adaptations contributing to cumulative advantage?
Discrepancy of advertisement and promotion?

- Publishers of *The Beetle*
  - Skeffington (1897-1907)
  - T. Fisher Unwin (1907-1917)
  - Putnam (1917-?)

- Publishers of *Dracula*
  - Archibald Constable and Co. (1897-1912)
  - William Rider and Son (1912-?)

- No visible difference in breadth and intensity of promotion
### Late Victorian interest in Egyptology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>F.A.D.</td>
<td>The Pharaohs of the West</td>
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<td>1900</td>
<td>Edward Arthur Haggard</td>
<td>The Kiss of Isis</td>
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<td>1900</td>
<td>James Bagnall Stubbs</td>
<td>The Order of Isis</td>
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<td>1899</td>
<td>Ellsworth Douglass</td>
<td>Pharaoh’s Broker</td>
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<td>1899</td>
<td>Guy Boothby</td>
<td>Pharos the Egyptian</td>
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<td>1899</td>
<td>E. Livingston Prescott</td>
<td>Illusion</td>
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<td>1899</td>
<td>George Alfred Henty</td>
<td>At Aboukir and Acre</td>
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<td>1898</td>
<td>Clive Holland</td>
<td>An Egyptian Coquette</td>
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<td>1898</td>
<td>Henry Richard Savage</td>
<td>In the Shadow of the Pyramids</td>
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<td>1897</td>
<td>Charles Henry Butcher</td>
<td>Armenosa of Egypt</td>
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<td>1897</td>
<td>St. George Henry Rathborne</td>
<td>Masked in Mystery</td>
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<td>1895</td>
<td>Headon Hill</td>
<td>His Egyptian Wife</td>
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<td>1894</td>
<td>S. R. Crockett</td>
<td>The Raiders</td>
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Generic/tropical blurriness of *The Beetle*?
High emotional valence as a transmission blocker?

Possible factors

Generic/tropical blurriness

$R = -0.087, p = 0.038$

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Adaptations as cumulative advantage
Adaptations as cumulative advantage
Fissure in the chain?

THE BEETLE.

London, Dec. 15.

Necos, the High Priest .......... Fred Morgan
The Priestess of Isis .......... Leal Douglas
Paul Lessingham .......... Hebden Foster
Sidney Atherton .......... Fred Reade
Richard Holt .......... Rolfe Leslie
Dora Greyling .......... Maudie Dunham
Marjorie Lindon .......... Nancy Benyon

Although much advertised and adapted from the famous sensational novel by Richard Marsh, “The Beetle,” with all its occultism, black magic and mysticism, fails to be anything more than a production of the most mediocre type.

The very things that grip in the novel fail to get anything but laughs when on the screen. For instance, the High Priestess, reincarnated in the form of a loathsome beetle, is represented by a pantomime “prop,” which does anything but inspire the horror hoped for, but it will create more merriment than most screen comedies.

Many of the trick effects are excellent, but the staging is bad. The scene in the temple that should be the big thing is merely an ornate stage “set.” The best scenes are those taken among the sand dunes.

The production has also been careless, the temple being blown to bits by a bomb, the fuse of which the avenger neglected to light. When the temple crashes into ruins the big lamps still hang, presumably fixed to the sky, and burn brightly. The fine performance given by the leading man is all but ruined by his having a huge fishtail provided for him and a costume such as we generally associate with Ali Baba in “The Forty Thieves.”

The acting is worthy of a better subject. Fred Morgan as “Necos” gives a fine performance, although, sadly handicapped by his absurd costume; Hebden Foster as “Lessingham” and Fred Reade as “Atherton” are alike excellent; and a clever little character study comes from Ralph Leslie as “Holt,” and other minor male parts are well played. Leal Douglas is a handsome High Priestess; Maudie Dunham is good as “Dora,” and the same applies to Nancy Benyon as “Marjorie.”

The producing company (Barker Motion Play Productions) is one of the oldest in England and there is no excuse for the tentativeness of the feature, which throughout is marred by staginess, and never for a moment is any atmosphere of uncanny mystery conveyed.

I. P. O.
Conclusion

- No evidence for significant differences in advertisement and promotion in early editions
- Egypt-related topics do not appear to be "transmission blockers"
- Generic bluriness could have contributed to early success, might have been a "transmission blocker" later on; failure to latch onto established tropes possible factor
- High emotional valence not a factor in this particular case
- Film adaptations crucial, poor adaptability of *The Beetle* possible "transmission blocker"


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Bibliography II


