

1-1-2015

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Recommended Citation

Ronald S Green and Mary Green. "Correspondences between the Count and the Stranger" *Dracula and Philosophy: Dying to Know*, edited by Nicolas Michaud and Janelle Pötzsch, Chicago: Open Court (2015) p. 235 - 245. ISBN: 9780812698909

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Correspondences between the Count and the Stranger

MARY GREEN AND RONALD S. GREEN

Jonathan Harker's Journal

I have finally taken this collection of letters and diary entries from my vault so that whosoever dares might examine them. I could hardly ask anyone, even if I so wished, to accept them as proofs of the heretical exchange they document. These correspondences between the malevolent Count and a "Monsieur Meursault" reveal much more than the casual eye might perceive.

In particular, Meursault's letters express the conviction that any effort by *any* person to find meaning in life or death is ultimately doomed to failure. It is left to the reader to decide if this view is in line with the horrid life of the Count, as Meursault expresses. But if such is found to be true, may God show us all his mercy. For this suggests there may be a new Nosferatu amongst us even now, an archfiend who once again threatens to suck the founding beliefs from the heart of genteel society. I have collected the letters here, as well as two others that seem relevant, and, yet, they seem to make no sense . . . Perhaps a wiser man than I can decipher their meaning.

Letter, Count Dracula to M. Meursault

Monsieur Meursault,

I am writing as you come recommended to me personally by my long-standing attendant, R.M. Renfield. At my

request, he researched the best shipping firms for my unique needs and interviewed proprietors accordingly. You see, I intend to purchase a home on the Mediterranean and must make firm arrangements to ship fifty important boxes with cargo that is dear to me. Mister Renfield has discovered that your company so routinely ships such goods that there is always a stack of freight invoices on your desk. Upon further interview, your boss insisted that I write to you directly as you are in a particular position to address certain fears I have, not only about the shipment but also concerning the details of my upcoming relocation. Your superior also guaranteed that you are extremely neutral in business affairs and indeed in all matters. With his assurance and recommendation, I will rely on you wholly without dread of betrayal of my endeavors to any living soul.

Although I have read much on the subject of French culture, I am certain that it is not enough for me to fit in seamlessly so that no one should suspect in any way that I am a foreigner. To do so, I realize that I must not only perfect my ability to exhibit the intricacies of your language, but also to inhale the charming aroma of your philosophy. Normally, I would insist that you vacation in my castle while this is to be accomplished, entirely at my expense, of course. However, such arrangements fell into corruption the last time I made them for purchasing a new home in a foreign land. Therefore, I ask this time that you will not disdain to honor my request to exchange a few correspondences. Please, be my friend and I will welcome you into my new home soon enough.

Forgive me for being forward under the assumption that you will not find this request absurd but will be agreeable to be in my service, since it is the duty of your employment. I am particularly interested in learning from you the thoughts and feelings of your people. Specifically, if it is not an inconvenience, I would like to know your beliefs about God or gods, your ideas about patriotism and society, and yes, your very feelings about love. I know these questions are horribly personal and I apologize, since we are strangers. But perhaps it is our

mutual estrangement that will allow you to indulge me in this.

Truly your friend,

Dracula

Letter, M. Meursault to Count Dracula

Count Dracula,

I have no objection to being your friend, for the question of friendship means nothing. I should inform you now, since you are thinking of moving to the Mediterranean, that the weather is sometimes quite unbearably hot. The sky is often a blaze of light and the sun feels like it is beating down on your head. I suppose it is as good as it would be anywhere else though, such as Paris, where I used to live. Paris is a dingy sort of town, to my mind, masses of pigeons and dark courtyards. And the people have washed-out white faces (*The Stranger*, p. 54). As to the question of how to blend in with the people, since you asked, I guess what you should do is just nod your head at them. Personally, I find it easiest to not say anything at all, for usually I have nothing to say. I don't think it matters either way. As for one's identity as a stranger or an insider, I'm not really sure what to say for that as well. I don't think about it. I guess when I look in the mirror, I don't see anything.

As for my religion, of course I have wished there were an afterlife. Everybody has that wish at times. But such a yearning has no more importance than wishing to be rich, or to swim very fast, or to have a better-shaped mouth. It was in the same order of things (p. 150). I have grown tired of searching for meaning in this meaningless world, though I'm not sure I can help it. I know life is all-empty, devoid of meaning, yet still I try to understand it in those terms. So, it boils down to life just being one long task, unlikely to produce any pay-off of any kind. I think this would be the sentiment of all people, if they thought rationally enough. But I don't really know. It doesn't seem to matter either way and it certainly does not to me.

Love is just as frivolous. I am now engaged to be married to one Marie Cardona. Though I had no inclination either way, she asked if I would marry her and I told her I wouldn't mind. Pressing me further, she asked if I loved her. As with the matter of friendship, I told her that the question meant nothing, but that I supposed I didn't. I only agreed to marry her to please her. When she remarked that marriage was a serious matter, I answered with "No." She said she wondered if she really loved me or not. I, of course, couldn't enlighten her as to that. So I must give the same sort of answer to you, and tell you that I cannot enlighten you on matters of love either.

As to shipping your cartons, I'm sure this company can handle it about as well as can be expected.

Meursault

Letter, Count Dracula to M. Meursault

Monsieur Meursault,

Thank you for your admonition about the heat on the Mediterranean. I too have a bit of an aversion to direct sunlight. As for the situation you mention concerning the mirror, my friend, I find in it a quandary as well. But which of our situations is the most wretched: looking in the mirror and seeing no body or seeing there a physical presence void of purpose? For when you related to me your dispassion for your existence I thought, "Ah, sir, you dwellers in the city cannot enter into the feelings of the hunter" (*Dracula*, Chapter 2). Like you, I too have been indicted for being incapable of love. But unlike you, I do love, perhaps too strongly for the tastes of some. For this, it is no exaggeration to say, I have induced horror in genteel society for ages.

Indeed I feel your outlook on life is grim and bleak, which carries much sentiment when scripted by these hands. But I wonder if yours is not the understandable perspective of one who has suffered defeat in war. I myself, being the conqueror and victor time and again,

live by a different set of metaphors. My soil has been fertilized by the decayed corpses of the Maygar, the Lombard, The Avar, the Bulgar, and the Turk, all of whom received the bloody sword upon trying to invade. Fools, fools! Of old, my countrymen and women, the aged and children too, waited on cliff tops for foreign trespassers, sending an avalanche of rocks down to crush their bones to earth. Had any been left to search for fallen allies, none could be found, so completely had their bodies merged with the soil. When I think of the blood of many brave races, who fought as lions fight, flowing through myself, my veins throb, knowing no limits, as if it will forever keep me alive. But forgive me, I sometimes become most invigorated when thinking of this.

I thank you for your advice about fitting into your society by nodding and saying nothing. I have a friend, however, about whom I ask your counsel as to how he should behave when visiting your country. My friend, it has been said, is as strong as twenty men. He is more cunning than an ordinary mortal, for his intellect has grown with the ages. He is called a brute and more than a brute; he is said to be a devil in his callousness. Such is the potency of his will that he can direct the elements, the storm, the fog, and the thunder. He can also command rats, owls, bats, and wolfs. I have also heard it said, "He can do all these things, yet he is not free. Nay, he is even more prisoner than the slave of the galley, than the madman in his cell. He cannot go where he likes, he who is not of nature has yet to obey some of nature's laws, why we know not. He may not enter anywhere at the first, unless there be some one of the household who bid him to come, though afterwards he can come as he pleases. His power ceases, as does that of all evil things, at the coming of the day" (Chapter 18). If even a portion of these things were true, what should my friend do to pass yet unnoticed in your land? It is his curse that he must continue to strive each night to survive being utterly different from his fellow beings, a most ghastly fate.

Very affably yours,

Dracula

Letter, M. Meursault to Count Dracula

Count Dracula,

I have experienced a great change in myself since I last wrote, although no one else is likely to see it. Do you know I actually yelled at the chaplain today in cries of anger and cries of joy for his certainties that are not worth as much as a one hair on a woman's head?

I am presently writing you from my cell in the county jail. I have been sentenced to death in a trial that was more about judging my character in the eyes of social expectations, that is, parading my unwillingness to pretend I felt things in the way the world deems fit, than it was about the murder I carelessly committed. I suspect you can relate to this in some way. Do not think my situation is so grisly, however, for as I was being questioned during the trial, I came to think about the human condition. Then, at dawn, as the time of execution drew nearer, I had my life-changing revelation and at that moment transitioned from a life of indifference to one of acceptance. I realize in saying this that it must seem to you a fine distinction, but I assure you it is a monumental one that you of all people might appreciate. That's why I have taken a moment of my last of such, now freed from the drudge of workdays and my related obligations to you, to write this fragment of explanation.

When you described the situation of your "friend" in your last letter, I surmised that you were likely speaking of yourself. If so, your words tell of an understanding that the great tasks fate has placed in your charge, are in fact rationally impossible. That is, you know that you cannot continue to uphold your hereditary position as a noble boyar indefinitely, for the time of feudalism has passed to modernity, which has usurped the values you hold dear. Foremost, the nightly struggle you narrated, which is no less than an effort for immortality, is doomed to failure. At the same time, by your own admission, you are bound to the fate like, as you say, a prisoner.

Let me interject something of my revelation here. Although your situation is as grand as that of any

absurd hero (and please trust this is my highest compliment as I will explain below), it is also emblematic of the wider human condition. By this I mean that all people have only one meaningful decision to make in life, regardless of status or epoch, that is, whether to commit suicide or not. If the person chooses to not commit suicide, then he or she has chosen to live a meaningless life and is responsible for the consequences of that decision. This part of my revelation is fairly easy to see. However, you are in a particular position to appreciate the weight of the second part of my equation fully. That is, all absolutes are rationally impossible, yet people continue to believe in them in their longing for meaning. This irrationality may be called faith, "To believe in things that you cannot." I heard once of an American who so defined faith, "that faculty which enables us to believe things which we know to be untrue" (*Dracula*, Chapter 14). All of those absolute matters held before us, God, love, immortality, are all impossible or at least impossible to know, yet we continue to live as if they were possible.

In this, life is absurd and you are a remarkably absurd hero who exemplifies for the rest of humanity, the only way we can find a little piece of freedom: by accepting the absurdity of the human condition and choosing to live with it rather than commit suicide. We're all elected by the same fate, death, and everyone is equally privileged in this with the ability to accept the condition as it is or not. The realization of this reality is why I have moved from indifference to acceptance, why I have yelled at the chaplain rather than remained apathetic as before. Now there remains for me the further hope that on the day of my execution there should be a huge crowd of spectators and that they should greet me with howls of execration (*The Stranger*, p. 154). That would be a grand confirmation that I did not live by their absolutes but continued to speak only the truth to the end of my days.

In closing, as I march with readiness toward execution, I congratulate you on achieving the status of the legendary absurd heroes, joining the ranks of those other giants of literature: Don Juan, Don Quixote, and Sisyphus. Like you, the last was considered the wisest

among us, the one who put Death in chains. Perhaps also like you, all absurd heroes share three traits: they reject suicide as an option, they reject help from a higher power, whether one exists or not, and they accept life as despairingly absurd.

Yours even in death,

Meursault

Letter, Count Dracula to M. Meursault

Monsieur Meursault,

I hope this letter reaches you before your untimely demise. I find it a desecration that healthy blood must be shed in such a wasteful way.

Allow me to express my gratitude to you, though admittedly mixed, for your charitable evaluation of me as one of your heroes along the lines of Don Juan, Don Quixote, and the Sisyphus fellow. You have correctly surmised that I was referring to myself when previously writing of "a friend." It is also true as you say that I share with your heroes two of the three major traits you suggest of the absurd creature: the rejection of suicide as an option and the rejection of help from a higher power. But the third trait, acceptance of life as despairingly absurd, I categorically reject.

Forgive me, my friend, but your philosophy of the absurd rings to the points of my ears as the words of a desperate man knowing he is at the end of his days, hoping to convince himself that in the life he has squandered by being barren of both love and hatred he might yet find a slight taste of happiness in the very realization of its meaninglessness. Such a philosophy would likely appeal to those who have been ravaged by war. But I am, as you know, the victor in countless campaigns and the active conqueror of those who have sought to take what I have built and more often tried to destroy me out of fear for what they imagine I am. In this I am also free of the imperialism of Western European philosophical traditions, which I have beaten back and impaled on sharp-

ened stakes. I am from Transylvania. Our ways are not your ways nor are our worldviews your worldviews. There are many things you would find strange here.

Although I have disagreed with you, I have done so only meekly and only in contention of the suggestion that I am endowed with the third characteristic of an absurd hero. I am of the sanguine belief that if you were at liberty to act more widely on your newfound engagement with life, you too might come to join me in my nocturnal hunts. Perhaps in those expeditions you would have come to experience, as I have, that lust is only one characteristic of love and not its entirety, just as sex is only one characteristic of lust. As it is, I can but offer this small voice of variance to the howls of execration from the crowd that will give you serenity in the moment before death.

Yours in all sincerity,

Dracula

P.S., May you also rest in peace knowing that I will take eternal care of Mademoiselle Cardona.

Note

It has been years now since the swift blade of the guillotine glistened in the sunlight that Monsieur Meursault so hated, as it fell toward his stretched and restrained neck. Who would have imagined a World War would claim over fifty-two million lives, that horror and holocaust would spread the popularity of absurdism and existentialism in art, theatre, and philosophy due to a questioning of the individual's effectualness in swimming the turbulent tides of the social ocean?

In the case that you see Albert Camus's philosophy of the absurd as less a blessing in the cause of overcoming despondency and more a curse for perpetuating it, let the following be known to posterity, for I have now grown much older than Professor Van Helsing was during our fateful venture in Transylvania, so I now leave the matter in the hands of the youth. The professor recorded

precise instructions for killing the vampires among us. They must be followed exactly, for as he warned, "The Nosferatu do not die like the bees when they sting once. He is only stronger, and being stronger, have yet more power to work evil" (*Dracula*, Chapter 18). I now repeat this as it is most important in the present. The vampire must first be impaled through the heart with a wooden stake and then beheaded with a silver blade. Only these two in exact combination are effective. Which of our absurd heroes was dealt the blow that would banish him from our world? And, has anyone noticed that only forty-nine of the fifty boxes of Transylvanian earth have been found to date? As I think of this now, I cannot help but wonder what treasure is hidden beneath that blue flame, the fiftieth box or *The Stranger*.

Make haste, you vampire hunters, for the dead travel fast!

Jonathan Harker

**Appendix: Other Excerpts Found Folded in
with Harker's Journal**

From Sisyphus's Diary:

Dear Diary,

Stubbed my toe six more times today. Divine beings aren't caving on their oath to see me eternally rolling this rock up the mountain. Keeps rolling back down over and over. Guess that's the price for scorning the gods, hating death, and having a passion for life. So, here we go again.

Heard Camus cast me as an "absurd hero" or something like that. Says people can never find happiness if they keep looking for it by trying to escape the absurdity of their condition. Sees me as exemplifying the acceptance of that condition every time I start back down the mountain to get the rock. May be true. But if you ask me, the real absurdity is that he thinks I've found happiness by accepting this rubble. Oh, my aching back!

Note from Vampira

AAAIIIIIEEEE!!!

Screaming relaxes me so. I have been quite unsettled since reading these eerie epistles. When I read Monsieur Meursault's dreadfully lifeless responses to the Master's requests in these letters of the poison pen, well, I rolled over in my grave! What I need is a Vampira cocktail to settle my nerves. It'll not only settle them, it will petrify them. A Vampira cocktail. You like it? It hates you.¹

¹ The first sentence and the last five in this paragraph are quoted from *The Vampira Show*, which aired on ABC television in 1954.