



Discussion Questions: *Shadowplay*

“Words, Words, Words” Book Club—October 2022

1. What are your first impressions of the novel? If asked, what would you say this novel is about?
2. Were you familiar with *Dracula* before reading this story? What echoes of Stoker’s plot did you notice? If you weren’t familiar with *Dracula*, did you feel something was lacking or does the story stand on its own?
3. The relationships between Bram Stoker, Ellen Terry, and Henry Irving are shown as passionate and tempestuous. What did you make of their interactions? How do they compare with Stoker’s other relationships, particularly with his wife?
4. Stoker was relatively unknown in his time whereas Ellen Terry and Henry Irving were huge stars. Now, the reverse could be said. Why do you think that is? What does it say about the nature of fame and celebrity?
5. The novel shifts in narratives and forms, mirroring the epistolary nature of *Dracula*. What did you think of this format? What does it say about the reliability of the various narrators? Did you read Stoker’s sections as true?
6. Throughout the novel we are shown glimpses of Shakespearean performance, speaking to the style and theatrical methods of the time. What has changed in performance since then?
7. Why do you think O’Connor chose to include Oscar Wilde in the way that he did?
8. Shakespeare wrote plays at a time when they were thought as disposable art, and it is only through their publication that we have preserved them through time. Conversely, Stoker’s *Dracula* needed to be performed as a play to gain a copyright. How important is the format of something in determining its worth? What are contemporary examples of these shifts?
9. O’Connor imagines Stoker engaging in late night walks through the city during the same period as Jack the Ripper’s “Autumn of Terror.” What connections is he making between the killer and author?
10. On page 134, Ellen Terry says “You see, acting is not a matter of pretending to be someone else but finding the other person in oneself and then putting her on view,” recalling the “second self” of the epigraph. What examples of second or secret selves do you see in the characters? Which do you find to be the truest self of each, or is it ever shown?