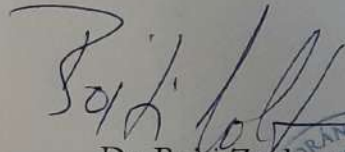




IGAZOLÁS

Jelen dokumentummal igazolom, hogy Mubashara Khan szaktanulmányát „Reading ‘The Other Side: A Breton Legend’ as a Precursor to ‘The True Story of a Vampire’ by Count Eric Stenbock” munkacímmel a vakolvasó szeklektori véleménye alapján az Anglisztika Tanszék tudományos folyóirata (*The AnaChronisT*) elfogadta publikálásra. Várható megjelenés: 2025 nyár (vol. 23).

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Reading “The Other Side: A Breton Legend” as a Precursor to “The True Story of a Vampire”

by Count Eric Stenbock

Abstract

The paper compares two short stories by Count Eric Stenbock: “The Other Side: A Breton Legend” (1893) and “The True Story of a Vampire” (1894). Both stories are relatively well-known from his oeuvre that has otherwise remained at cultural marginality. The two tales markedly embody Victorian anxieties and attitudes toward same-sex desire—a theme prevalent throughout his works—and can be read as Stenbock’s literary introspection of his sexuality. The plots share striking similarities and utilise common motifs, to the extent that “Other Side,” preceding “True Story” by a year, can be read as a precursor to it. However, the contrasts between the two tales, primarily due to Stenbock’s use of two different mythos (lycanthropy and vampirism) to conceptualise and codify (his) homosexuality, result in two differing (yet parallel) narratives. The paper, reading “Other Side” rehearsed in “True Story,” firstly seeks to examine the ways in which the two tales are similar. It then aims to investigate the (parallel) differences and Stenbock’s possible intent behind building two analogous narratives through the use of two different mythos.

Introduction

Count Stanislaus Eric Stenbock (1860–1895) is the forgotten Aesthete whom Yeats’s father deemed representative of an entire generation of men: the so-called “Hamlets of [his] age” (x). Youthful, charming, and full of promise, Stenbock indeed embodied Shakespeare’s doomed prince when his life was cut short owing to his alcoholism and opium habits; he died half-mad at the age of thirty-five, convinced that a wooden doll was his son and heir (Adams

64). John Adlard opened his monograph with his somewhat derisive conclusion to Stenbock's life and work: "he nevertheless achieved almost nothing . . . he was a sick man, a pervert and his life was short" (*The Nineties* 1). Adlard further remarked that the only reason Stenbock deserves our attention is the notable company he kept, being a remote member of Oscar Wilde's circle. Stenbock's many eccentricities—his alleged Zoöphilia, not being the least of it—appear to have cast a long shadow over his works.¹ For too long he has been barred behind judgement; shelved somewhere between the notoriety of "men of the Nineties" and his own personal quirks. Yet he did achieve something of value: three volumes of melancholic verse and a collection of short morbid tales. Though a large part of his corpus remains unstudied, the most well-known short story from his *oeuvre* very recently garnered the following remark, and rightfully so: "'The True Story of a Vampire' tells more about Victorian anxieties [regarding same-sex desire] than all of the Irish author's [Oscar Wilde's] prose works combined" (Bojti).

In June 1893, the distinctly decadent Oxford magazine *The Spirit Lamp* published "The Other Side: A Breton Legend." It was followed by the publication of *Studies of Death: Romantic Tales* (1894), a collection of short stories containing the penultimate tale "The True Story of a Vampire." Both tales share striking similarities. Perhaps the most glaring one being that each plot centres on a young boy named Gabriel. The resemblance, however, does not end with the name. Each story unfolds as something of a bildungsroman, tragically ending with the doom of one Gabriel and the death of the other. In "Other Side" Gabriel is seduced by Lilith, a wolf-woman, when she is in her human form. She takes him deep into the forest

¹ The term 'Zoöphilia,' appears in Max Nardau's *Degeneration* (1892), which Adlard borrowed to convey that Nardau had "a label ready" (*The Nineties* 45) for Stenbock's excessive love of animals, if he ever encountered him.

on the other side of the brook, where he lives with her having forgotten all else. Until one day, he chanced upon the brook that leads back to his village and begins to remember. He crosses over despite her protestation and is turned into a werewolf. In the end, he is restored to his human form, but every year for nine days Gabriel transforms into a wolf again and returns to the other side. In a similar vein of exploitative romance, Gabriel from “True Story” is infatuated with the newcomer Vardalek, a Count, piano virtuoso, and vampire who must kill the thing he loves. As a result of their interaction, Gabriel’s health slowly starts to deteriorate from an undiagnosable illness, eventually killing him. The plots are straightforward enough. Yet the queer undertones layered within these texts encourage an exceedingly meticulous dissection.

In what follows, the social context highlighting the need for a queer code and the autobiographical elements present in both tales are briefly touched upon, justifying Stenbock’s use of mythos (queer code) to understand his sexual identity (autobiographical aspect).

Queer Subtext and Autobiographical Parallels

Previous scholarship has investigated “True Story” for its queer subtext. Nineteenth century witnessed a wave of new sexological theories regarding the science of same-sex desire. But these findings, originating in German-speaking Central Europe and limited only to a scientific study, were inaccessible to English laypersons. The 1868 Hicklin Standard and the 1885 Labouchere Amendment further highlighted the necessity to rely on furtive means to have any discourse on the subject of same-sex desire. It comes as little surprise then, that fiction, especially the convenient metaphors present within gothic literature, may have

appealed to Stenbock's introspective inclinations. Zsolt Bojti covers this hypothesis in detail reading "True Story" as Stenbock's literary introspection of his (homo)sexuality in light of conflicting discourses regarding same-sex desire in the 1890s ("Believe in Vampires" 182). Brooke Cameron further points out how the criminal conviction and subsequent ostracisation of Stenbock's close friend and fellow aesthete, the Pre-Raphaelite painter Simeon Solomon, for "indecent exposure" and "attempt to commit buggery" in 1873 may have had a formative impact on Stenbock and reminded him of the necessity to use a masked vocabulary to express illicit desires (50).

Besides its queer subtext, "True Story" has also been scrutinised for autobiographical parallels. According to Arthur Symons, Stenbock "was like one of his own characters in that amazing book of his, *Studies of Death*" (90). For instance, there are similarities in the narrator Carmela's description of Vardalek and the description of Stenbock by his contemporaries; both were counts and impressive piano players, described as effeminate, fair and tall (Adlard, True Story 9). Theophile von Bodisco, a cousin who lived at Kolk with Stenbock, details his almost vampiric routine in her *Versunkene Welten (Sunken World)*:

In the morning hours Eric was all but invisible; if he did make an appearance for breakfast, he was usually very pale, and his eyes seemed almost extinguished. But during the course of the day, that would change; in the evening his eyes would sparkle almost black, and his vitality bordered on exhilaration. (qtd. in Tibet xvi–xvii)

Though Stenbock's vampire from "True Story" travelled in broad daylight by train and defied the established literary conventions of a traditional vampire (arriving at midnight on a carriage pulled by two black horses), it is worth noting that Stenbock's commitment to

the myths he employed was not limited to the page. He lived in a “bizarre, fantastic, feverish, eccentric, extravagant, morbid and perverse fashion” (Symons 89) probably because he had the “financial resources to ‘perform’ Decadence to a degree that others could only achieve vicariously in their fictions” (Machin 11). With his pet wolf and “what was most bestial and reptilian in [his] character” (Symons 91), Stenbock’s creation of a wolf-woman in “Other Side” and serpentine-figured vampire in “True Story” then seem purely the products of his “weird propensities” (90); the myths mythologising him as much as he humanised them.

The autobiographical parallels transcend personal attributes and can be found in the setting of both stories as well. According to Adlard, the realistic description of Styria in “True Story” is aligned with Baedeker’s *Austria* for 1896, and echoes Stenbock’s knowledge of the place given that his aunt had an estate there (True Story 5). Similarly, the fictional forest in “Other Side” may have equally found its inspiration in reality. The description of Stenbock’s estate in Kolk, Estonia is as follows:

The house at Kolk stood at the edge of a forest that stretched far to the east, for the estate was principally woodland. Nearby was a hillock known in Estonian and German as the Hill of Ghosts. Phantoms were said to haunt the ruined cloister of the ‘Monks of Gotland’, who had owned the land in the thirteenth century. In the midst of the forest lay an extensive marsh, crossed by several lines of wooded dunes. There were charming walks along the ‘Glint’, with views of the sea . . . a little farther were elks and wolves. (Adlard, *The Nineties* 20–21)

The typographical and supernatural features detailed above are resonant in the description of the forest in “Other Side:”

There was a forest and a village and a brook, the village was on one side of the brook, none had dared to cross to the other side. Where the village was, all was green and glad and fertile and fruitful; on the other side the trees never put forth green leaves, and a dark shadow hung over it even at noon-day, and in the night-time one could hear the wolves howling . . . one little running brook like a silver streak flowed between. (Stenbock, "Other Side" 53)

It is not entirely inconceivable then that the woodland region at Kolk, haunted by phantoms and a habitat to wolves, could have stirred the creative spirit of its imaginative host who in "Other Side" went on to write about the strange wolf howls that began with "three sharp barks and then [the wolf] lifts itself up in a long protracted wail of commingled cruelty and despair, and at last subsides into a whispered growl fraught with eternal malice."

As discussed above, the queer subtext and the autobiographical parallels that exist within these stories may surmise that Stenbock was trying to resolve a conflict in his (sexual) identity through literary introspection: "Stenbock made a genuine attempt to understand his own homosexuality in terms of traditional occultism, eventually coming to view his condition as an aspect of vampirism and lycanthropy" (King 13–14). This much has been carefully established by previous scholarships. The mystery lies in the usage of two different types of mythos and the potential justification(s), for utilising each to build two parallel narratives. This paper will first compare the similarities both storylines share, then examine the parallel differences; more specifically the two analogous mythos, lycanthropy in "Other Side" and vampirism in "True Story," concluding with the discursive possibility of reading "Other Side" as a precursor to "True Story."

The Parallel Plots

The protagonists from both stories share more than the name Gabriel. In “True Story” Gabriel has “wild, gazelle-like eyes” and hair that were “in a perpetual tangle” according to the narrator, his sister Carmela. Similarly, his namesake from “Other Side” is a “dark-haired, gazelle-eyed boy.” When it comes to their interaction with others, both boys are curiously categorised using the same analogy of a bird; “a bird fascinated by a serpent” (Gabriel fascinated by Vardalek in “True Story”) and “a rare and beautiful bird escaped from a cage . . . hacked to death by the common sparrows” (Gabriel’s treatment by his schoolfellows in “Other Side”). It is interesting to note that each description connotes a predatory aspect; Vardalek’s (the snake’s) seduction of the boy that leads to Gabriel’s death, and the schoolboys’ (common sparrows’) bullying of Gabriel from “Other Side” that marks him out as an outcast, while maintaining that both Gabriels (birds) fall prey in each case. The boys are also nearly the same age. According to Hillary Fraser, the adolescent boy, a frequent symbol in late-Victorian Aestheticism, defied sexual and gender binaries by being an “indeterminate” figure (555). As a conduit to a range of desires, the cult of the boy could partake in non-normative sexualities without any serious consequences. Both Gabriels signal the possibility—and more importantly the permissibility—of non-conforming sexuality, given neither has been disciplined into an adult gender and sexual role.

Their natures further pronounce a deeper link. Gabriel from “True Story” was “naughty,” “spoilt,” and could not be “induce[d] to put on shoes and stockings” and had a tendency to get lost in the woods. In fact, Carmela “was in terror what the Count might think of [Gabriel]” after his very first encounter with Count Vardalek where he had “suddenly burst

into the room . . . bare-legged as usual.” As for Gabriel from “Other Side,” he was “wont to wander” and “there was no knowing what he might do next.” When Gabriel went over to the other side, Mere Yvonne, his mother, “was not much surprised when Gabriel did not turn up to breakfast—he often did not, so absent minded was he.” Here again a concern for the boy’s social manners is hinted at when at the very beginning of the tale he very sincerely asks “Mere Pinquele, are you a witch too?” and is immediately reprimanded “Silence Gabriel . . . how can you say anything so wicked?” The aloof and defiant temperaments in both cases might be hinting at the boys’ non-conforming sexuality. “[True Story] reads as a cautionary tale that naughty boys will have to face the consequences of misbehaviour—in this case: a vampire. With the slight homoerotic overtone between Gabriel and Vardalek, their relationship might as well rehearse Victorian anxieties about same-sex desire” (Bojti). This may be equally applicable to “Other Side.” However, the homoerotic implication is missing in this context as the werewolf, Lilith, is a woman. The social rejection of belonging with the werewolves on the other side then becomes the consequence of non-conformity in this case. Either way, to narrate coming-of-age tales as cautionary ones deliberately draws attention to both Gabriels’ non-conforming tendencies (sexualities), which allude to Victorian anxieties around same-sex desire.

The wilder side of Gabriel’s character from “True Story” is articulated by Carmela as “strange and superhuman” or rather “praeter-human, something between the animal and the divine.” He could “run faster than any deer: spring like a squirrel to the topmost branch of a tree.” She further compares him to the “Greek idea of the faun.” This hybrid quality of being something in-between, part-human and part-animal, is just as prominent in Gabriel’s werewolf form from “Other Side,” possessing “his [own] head and face . . . but his body [had] transformed to that of a wolf.” There is ample mention of other animals or animal-like

creatures in both stories; Gabriel's menagerie of "hedgehogs, little foxes, wild rabbits, marmots, squirrels, and such like" in "True Story," and wolves, men that had the heads of wolves, wolves that had the heads of men, owls, bats, long serpentine black things, monkeys, black cats and a black ram with a human face in "Other Story." Cameron explains "Gabriel[s'] connection with animals (more so than with the humans) aligns him with another of Aestheticism's homosexual codes: pre-Christian paganism" (53). She argues that "the narrative [in "True Story"] strives for a queer code that predates—or thus eludes—Christian culture" (53). This departure from religious scripts is evidenced in "Other Story" as well, when following his visit to the forest on the other side (and thus already initiated), Gabriel responds to the priest's words "Intriobo ad altare Dei" (I will enter the altar of God) with "Qui nequiquam laetificavit juventutem meam" (Who in no way cheered my youth). The "youth" here might be referring to his newfound boyhood freedom of making an excursion into the forbidden forest on the other side—a metaphor for his recently-realised homosexuality.

Not unlike their author, the Gabriels, finding no available script for their nascent homosexual feelings in the confines of religion and society, turn to primordial modes of expression. Both boys exhibit companionability towards animals, artistic inclinations, and a receptivity towards sensory stimuli. In "True Story", besides having "extraordinary power over animals" where "[e]verything seemed to come tame to his hand," Gabriel could also "play upon every conceivable instrument" and "manufactur[e] instruments for himself out of reeds—even sticks." Later in the story, music in fact becomes the language for "the love that dare not speak its name" to express the coded desire between Gabriel and Vardalek. Gabriel from "Other Side" is equally discerning, "whose large lovely eyes dilated" listening to Mère Pinquèle tell bedtime stories. "He was less cruel and more gentle of nature than the rest" and

the boys mocked him for not joining the wolf hunt: “‘why, he wouldn't even kill a cat,’—for their one notion of excellence was slaughter.” A tipping point in the plot is when Gabriel crosses over to the other side. This streak of rebellion is owing to the “strange intoxicating perfume” of the blue flower and the nightingale’s song which filled his heart “with [a] longing for he knew not what.”² The tendency to communicate through sensory means (receptivity towards animals, music and perfumes) rather than a uniform language reflecting society’s fossilised norms and values—and not nature itself—supposes a few possibilities.

Firstly, the semantic sensibility needed to articulate same-sex desire by the end of the nineteenth century was simply not there. That is to say, a different language was needed. One that had the linguistic capacity to accommodate the conflicting coinages from the emergent field of sexology. That Stenbock should have sublimated his subject(s) to strange wildernesses, music that makes men mad, intoxicating perfumes and lost languages comes as little surprise then. These metaphors resisted easy categorisation and interpretation. But was this code a necessity of Stenbock’s times, in light of legal sanctions such as the Hicklin Standard, compelling the author to codify same-sex desire in his works, making them comprehensible only to the initiated reader? Or was the lack of clarity a reflection of Stenbock’s own uncertainty and confusion—a product of the conflicting discourses around

² The blue flower became a widely recognised symbol of romanticism, first popularised by Novalis’ fragmentary novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802), and later carried a dual meaning: “1) an optimistic search for Truth, the symbol of the World Soul, the symbol of the beautiful ideal, knighthood of the Middle Ages (based on the concept of Novalis’ ‘blue flower’); 2) a symbol of melancholy, sadness, despair, a kind of Kierkegaard’s ‘absurd faith’ in the search for a ‘blue flower’ that you will never find (coming from Eichendorff, Goethe, Platen)” (Gorbovskaya 178). The blue flower appeared in homophile literature as well, including Rimbaud’s works along with some of the names mentioned above, making it a literary symbol for the forbidden/unattainable/unfulfilled (same-sex) desire.

same-sex desire in the 1890s? Previous scholarship has addressed both, and though both hypotheses may have equal merits, Bojti very recently proposed a third explanation. By implying that Gabriel (from “True Story”) was special and gifted, the origin of all his artistic capabilities becomes intrinsic: “Vardalek’s epiphany regarding Gabriel’s musical talent appears to be hinting at the fact that Gabriel was born with an inherent quality” (Bojti). Both Gabriels assert that their creative talents, i.e. their homosexuality is an inborn quality and thus, their artistic inclinations are not (only) a response to Stenbock’s personal conflicts nor a reaction to Victorian society’s limited vocabulary around same-sex desire.

This is important to establish because both stories subtly yet carefully allude to this inborn aspect of each Gabriel’s nature. Carmela traces her brother’s creative genius back to their mother’s gypsy bloodline. To associate the boy’s musical talents and his love for animals—codes for his homosexuality—with his blood, presents them as innately occurring phenomena. Trevor Holmes remarks that Gabriel’s gypsy origins signal “a sexuality coded as unconventional, unstable, and non-normative” (177). Similarly, Gabriel from “Other Side” was different from early childhood. The villagers wondered how his mother “could have produced a son like this, with strange dreamy eyes, who was as they said “*pas comme les autres gamins*” (not like the other boys). Gabriel’s mother herself felt that he “was so unlike her that she had thought herself an object of pity to other mothers—the goose and the swan’s egg.” Though the lack of relatability to his mother differentiates this Gabriel from the one in “True Story,” who according to Carmela inherited their mother’s Gypsy character, it is still worth noting that Gabriel’s peculiarity is owing to his nature, not adulterated by anything, not even his mother’s upbringing. This makes his homosexuality as innate as Gabriel with the gypsy origins.

Moreover, the dead mother in “True Story” and the mother in “Other Side” in a way present the same maternal figure; they are unavailable. Another shared trait of the parental equation in both tales is that in each story there is only a single parent, and that too is either unrelatable or unavailable. Gabriel’s father from “True Story” was devoted to his study of recondite subjects to the extent that he did not even notice his son’s failing health until Gabriel was dying. Not very different is Gabriel’s mother from “Other Side” who did not even realise her son had gone missing for quite some time. There is no detailed mention of the other parent in either tale. This “Oedipal morbidity,” as Brian Reade puts it, is a reenactment of Stenbock’s own personal trauma of parental deprivation (38). His father died when he was just two and his mother remarried soon after, her attentions diverted in bearing and raising the six children she had with Sir Francis Mowatt. Holmes remarks “perhaps the absent mother and ineffectual father [refer] to unfettered sexuality” (176) in “True Story.” Same can be said of the parents in “Other Side” with their roles reversed.

Another curious commonality—far too curious to be dismissed as correlation—is the name Carmela in “True Story” and its near-namesake Carmeille in “Other Side.”³ Here too, as was the case with Gabriels, the resemblance does not end with the name. Carmela and Carmeille are both girls of nearly the same age as the Gabriels, and each one dotes on her Gabriel with an affection that is obsessive if not overbearing. Carmeille is one of Gabriel’s only two friends “who loved him, no one could make out why.” She befriended the boy who “sat silently apart and said no word.” Perhaps Gabriel’s friendship with her stands out owing to the treatment Gabriel receives from the rest; she stays with him as his friend and confidante when all others seem to have rejected him. When Gabriel went missing, Carmeille was inconsolable; she “sat in a corner and cried all day.” Whereas Carmela, Gabriel’s sister,

³ The names Carmela and Carmeille might point to the same source; *Carmilla* (1872) by Sheridan Le Fanu.

who is narrating the story as an old woman, reminisces “my brother was and has been the only love of my life.” She recollects that Gabriel would let his hair be combed only by her and when Gabriel’s health started to falter, Carmela was the first one to take note as she “noticed everything with regard to him.” Her adoration of her brother’s looks is almost fetishistic: “How shall I describe the grace of that lovely mouth, shaped verily ‘en arc d’amour.’ I always think of the text in the Psalm, ‘Grace is shed forth on thy lips, therefore has God blessed thee eternally’ —lips that seemed to exhale the very breath of life. Then that beautiful, lithe, living, elastic form!” After his death, out of sisterly love—or something more—Carmela devotes her life to keeping an asylum for stray animals in memory of her brother.

Finally—and perhaps unsurprisingly—the tragic fate of both Gabriels is not so different either. The doctors in “True Story” could give no explanation of Gabriel’s strange illness; he died of something undiagnosed. “[D]octors in the nineteenth century did not have the slightest idea what they were looking for when examining a patient for physiological signs of a same-sex relationship” (Bojti). The beginning of “Other Side” mentions “very wicked men who for nine days in every year are turned into wolves.” This is again repeated at the end of the tale when “for nine days a strange madness comes over [Gabriel].” Becoming a werewolf—the animal-other—or a wicked man per Mere Pinquele may be a code for Gabriel’s homosexuality. Under this view, the undiagnosable illness in “True Story” and the strange madness in “Other Side” might be abstractions in place of a concrete classification for a homogeneous homosexual persona which did not yet exist. For Stenbock to categorise both boys’ homosexuality as afflictions and cautionary tales which end in fatality of one Gabriel and the monstrous transformation of the other, is symptomatic of Stenbock’s times and his inner conflicts.

Two coming of age tales, centred around two Gabriels of the same age and same peculiar natures; possessing unique artistic sensibilities; with a friend/sister called Carmeille/Carmela; a single distant parent figure; and the sinister seduction by a werewolf/vampire; concluding with a tragic end for both Gabriels, in fact, tell one story.

The Werewolf and Vampire Mythos: Lilith and Vardalek

The two different mythos, werewolf and vampire, are figurative of the same identity in both stories. In light of conflicting sexological discourses of the 1890s, the word ‘vampire’ may be read analogous to the word ‘homosexual’ in the context of “True Story,” given the lack of established terminology for either concept (Bojti, “Believe in Vampires” 192). Lilith, the werewolf from “Other Side,” embodies the same classificatory problem as Vardalek the vampire. However, she poses a greater categorical challenge; she is a woman symbolising male same-sex desire and is a ‘vampiric’ werewolf—if there ever was one. In other words, as a precursor to “True Story,” Lilith embodies the unresolved syncretic brew that is later refined into the male homosexual vampire Vardalek.

Considering Stenbock drew from apocryphal lore for the creation of Lilith, the name is an instant reminder of Adam’s first wife, who was banished from Eden for refusing to assume the subservient position during sexual intercourse. Lilith’s defiance, especially for a role that is assigned to her female sex, may be read as a challenge to normative sexual expectations. With this view, Lilith from “Other Side” becomes symbolic of non-conforming sexualities, including homosexuality. Various other accounts vilify Lilith as the snake who later seduced Eve in the Garden of Eden to commit the original sin. Nineteenth-century

paintings in particular sensualised Lilith's serpentine form, where she is either depicted having a woman's torso and a snake's tail or is seen cavorting with a snake coiled around her body.⁴ This recalls Carmela's description of Vardalek: "His figure had something—I cannot say what—serpentine about it." Curiously this also recalls Stenbock's habit of carrying his pet snake coiled around his neck (Adlard, *The Nineties* 37). Lilith from lore inextricably links all three: her namesake werewolf from "Other Side," the serpent-vampire Vardalek from "True Story" and their author Stenbock himself.

As the ultimate archetype of the 'woman scorned,' Lilith from legend exacts her revenge upon mankind by seducing young adolescent boys, especially at nighttime when they are asleep and dreaming. Then taking advantage of their youth and inexperience, she mounts them instead, in a role-reversal of gendered sexual roles. Legends further demonised her into a primordial shape-shifting seductress and equated her sexual hunger to bloodthirst, eventually conceptualising her as the first vampire, where she appropriates the masculine prerogative of 'penetrating' with her "phallic fangs" (Boyles 15). Lilith from "Other Side" finds direct parallels with this. Though she does not bite Gabriel or suck blood as a conventional vampire would, her shape-shifting werewolf form seduces Gabriel during nighttime while he sleeps and he follows her into the forest lost in a dream-like trance. This nighttime sinister seduction of an adolescent boy also takes place in "True Story," which is discussed later. Though here it is by the male vampire Vardalek, aligning it with the actual myth of Lilith the (female) vampire.

Therefore, perhaps the most significant difference between Lilith and Vardalek—for the purposes of this discussion—is that Lilith is a woman and Vardalek a man. This

⁴ Painting for reference: *Lilith* (1887) by John Collier.

complicates the interaction each has with their respective boy-victim Gabriel. In Vardalek's case, a homoerotic interpretation of the relationship between him and Gabriel is fairly obvious. There are moments of physicality as well where Gabriel walks hand-in-hand with Vardalek and kisses him on the mouth, causing Vardalek to "shiver"—hinting at the erotic and electric aspect of sexual love. On the other hand, Lilith's and Gabriel's relationship certainly has romantic aspects, too—if not strictly erotic—disqualifying a homoerotic interpretation of the text. But if we perceive Lilith, the eternal other woman, seducing Gabriel for the purposes of taking him with her to the other side—a safe haven for sexual non-conformists—then their relationship reads as companionship (and not sexual love). This is aligned with wolf pack ethos as well—another plausible motive to explain the wolf-woman Lilith's behaviour towards Gabriel. Moreover, the only instance of physical contact between the two is devoid of any eroticism; Gabriel places a leaf on her bleeding forehead and kisses it in the hopes that "all will be well again." This view still sees Lilith as the initiator for Gabriel's latent homosexuality, but it is not towards her that his (homo)sexual desires are directed. Her seduction of Gabriel aims at getting him to join other 'others' like him—which has a parallel with apocryphal Lilith's design for humanity, where she aims to corrupt young males and turn them into her followers.

In his comparison of Sheridan Le Fanu's protagonist Carmilla with Vardalek, Adlard asserts "[t]hat Carmilla is a woman and Vardalek a man is not of much significance; the importance lies in the difference of their vampirism" (*True Story* 8). A potential rephrase of Adlard's remark could justify (or nullify) the gender differences between Lilith and Vardalek as well: that 'Lilith' is a woman and Vardalek a man is not of much significance; the importance lies in the difference of their 'mythos.' Hence, it is the vampiric and lycanthropic exploitation of Gabriel(s) that is focalised here to scrutinise the contrasts between the two

tales. Moreover, the name Gabriel appears in these two tales along with some of Stenbock's other works as well. The name Gabriel may be a potential transgendering of Stenbock's "brilliant and amusing" girl-cousin Gabriele "at whose Bavarian homes he was much happier than he ever was with his stepfather Mowatt and his stepbrothers and stepsisters" (Adlard, *True Story* 11). This further highlights Stenbock's tendency towards fluid character constructions across gender binaries.

The names Lilith and Vardalek may share historical and etymological origins. Vardalek may trace its etymological beginnings to Russian *vurdalak* ("werewolf" or "vampire") which is a variant of *volkolak*—*volkodlak*, where *volk* (in Russian) is wolf and *dlaka* (in Serbian/Slovenian) means fur/hair (Butler 237). The compounded words in Slavic folklore came to mean the one clothed in wolf's skin, or more accurately: werewolf. Given Lilith is the progenitor of all vampires yet is depicted as a werewolf in "Other Side" and Vardalek originally means werewolf in Slavic folklore yet is portrayed as a vampire in "True Story," both characters are each other's mirror images.

Another hypothesis might further trace the genesis of both characters to the same source. *The Book of Were-Wolves* (1865) by Sabine Baring-Gould—the nineteenth-century bible of folklore—is said to have influenced many gothic fiction works, including Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). Scholars have ventured that Stoker may have taken inspiration from the account of the bloody Hungarian Countess Elizabeth Bathory detailed in Baring-Gould's *Were-Wolves* to create his Count Dracula.⁵ While there are parallels in the vampiric traits

⁵ Raymond McNally in his book *Dracula was a Woman* (1983), was one of the first scholars to draw the Bathory/Dracula parallel, which he did under the assumption that never before Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) was blood ever used in literary fiction for cosmetic purposes to reverse age and maintain one's youth, so the sole inspiration for Stoker must have been Bathory's account from folklore (99). Unfortunately, he misses that "True

Bathory and Dracula share, there is no evidence to assert that Bathory served as an inspiration for Stoker's Dracula. However, Stoker was familiar with Baring-Gould's *Were-Wolves*. His notes suggest that he pulled details from two chapters of the book describing the physical features of werewolves (Frayling 342). Stoker may have applied these details to Count Dracula: "bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion . . . peculiarly sharp white teeth; these protruded over the lips . . . his ears were pale, and at the tops extremely pointed . . . there were hairs in the centre of his palm" (Stoker 17).

Although what Stoker supposedly borrows from Baring-Gould may be regarded as superficial, it is still noteworthy that one of the defining figures of nineteenth-century vampire fiction, Count Dracula, emulates werewolf myths. While this ties the cousin myths of vampirism and lycanthropy in Stoker's magnum opus, the link between these two mythos tracing their origin to Elizabeth Bathory might seem more obvious in Stenbock's case. The account of Elizabeth Bathory runs thus:

Elizabeth ----- was wont to dress well in order to please her husband, and she spent half the day over her toilet. On one occasion, a lady's-maid saw something wrong in her head-dress, and as a recompence [sic] for observing it, received such a severe box on the ears that the blood gushed from her nose, and spirted on to her mistress's face. When the blood drops were washed off her face, her skin appeared much more beautiful—whiter and more transparent on the spots where the blood had been.

Story" utilised this motif three years before Stoker did. So potentially, there is an equal probability that Stoker may have taken inspiration for Count Dracula from either Bathory's account or Stenbock's obscure short story—or both.

Elizabeth formed the resolution to bathe her face and her whole body in human blood so as to enhance her beauty. Two old women and a certain Fitzko assisted her in her undertaking. This monster used to kill the luckless victim, and the old women caught the blood, in which Elizabeth was wont to bathe at the hour of four in the morning. After the bath she appeared more beautiful than before . . .

At last her cruelty became so great, that she would stick needles into those who sat with her in a carriage, especially if they were of her own sex. One of her servant-girls she stripped naked, smeared her with honey, and so drove her out of the house.

When she was ill, and could not indulge her cruelty, she bit a person who came near her sick bed as though she were a wild beast. (Baring–Gould 115–116)

There is no evidence substantiating that Stenbock may have read Baring–Gould’s account of Bathory. Yet the parallels with the wolf-woman Lilith and the vampire Vardalek are stronger than any documented connection established in Stoker’s case. Elizabeth Bathory’s predation of virgins to drain and bathe in their blood to maintain her youth and beauty has a faint echo in Vardalek who drains young Gabriel’s life force to rejuvenate himself. It is also interesting to note that Elizabeth Bathory was a Hungarian countess and Vardalek a Hungarian count. Moreover, the homoerotic undertone in Bathory’s account is subtle yet notable as it stands out from the rest of the text: prickling needles into girls, stripping a servant girl naked and smearing her with honey. This same-sex predatory passion may find its equivalent in Vardalek’s fatal infatuation with the faun-like youth Gabriel.

Perhaps Stenbock’s alleged familiarity with the Bathory account becomes more apparent in “Other Side.” Gabriel hit the wolf-woman Lilith with a log on the head, causing

her to bleed from her forehead. He then kissed her forehead “as she had bidden him and he felt the salt taste of blood in his mouth and then he knew no more.” Bathory’s headdress and the repeated mention of Lilith’s forehead in “Other Side” evoke similar imagery. The altercation where Gabriel hit Lilith and tasted her blood also resembles how Bathory hit her lady’s-maid and came in contact with her blood. In both cases blood is significant; for Gabriel it marked his crossover to the other side—metaphor for his (homo)sexual awakening. And for Bathory the initial contact with blood rejuvenated her, unlocking her bloodlust. Gabriel’s homosexuality and Bathory’s bloodlust (conceptualised as vampirism in legends) become analogous in this view. Bojti explores how Stenbock’s “True Story” uses this analogy as well, drawing a parallel between the lack of established terminology for vampirism and the equally uncertain science of same-sex desire (“Believe in Vampires” 192). I add to his hypothesis by listing Bathory’s tale of homoerotic bloodlust as a literary precedent and another possible origin behind Stenbock’s conceptualisation of homosexuality being analogous to vampirism.

However, Stenbock’s familiarity with Baring–Gould’s account of Elizabeth Bathory remains purely conjectural as there is no direct evidence linking them. The hypothesised connection in turn is hard to trace given Stenbock fragmented the Bathory account—if he did take any inspiration from it at all—into two characters; Lilith and Vardalek. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this article, it is worth taking the view that both characters, in hypothesis, *may* share the same source of origin, permitting an anthological reading of the two tales.

Another contrast is the process of initiation in both stories. The *style hongrois*, especially its most popular genre, the *czardas*, was pathologised as nervous music in late-Victorian society. Females and homosexuals were particularly deemed susceptible to its

nervous effects which irritated the nerves, causing unhealthy pallor and exhaustion. Bojti traces how the *style hongrois*, through musical ekphrasis, became a language for the unspeakable same-sex desire in homophile literature at *fin-de-siècle*, featuring in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890/91), *Teleny; or, The Reverse of the Medal* (1893), and finally what concerns this article the most: “The True Story of a Vampire” (“Hungarian Nervous Music” 29–32). The *czardas* Vardalek plays “connects Gabriel’s gypsy origins to secreted desires that need another ‘language’ to be expressed” (Bojti, “Believe in Vampires” 188). Carmela narrates the curious bond that forms between Vardalek and Gabriel via the *style hongrois*:

After dinner my father asked him if he played the piano. He said, ‘Yes, I can a little,’ and he sat down at the piano. Then he played a Hungarian csardas [sic]—wild, rhapsodic, wonderful.

That is the music which makes men mad. He went on in the same strain.

Gabriel stood stock-still by the piano, his eyes dilated and fixed, his form quivering. At last he said very slowly, at one particular motive—for want of a better word you may call it the *relâche* of a csardas, by which I mean that point where the original quasi-slow movement begins again—‘Yes, I think I could play that.’

Then he quickly fetched his fiddle and self-made xylophone, and did, actually alternating the instruments, render the same very well indeed. (Stenbock, “True Story” 136–137)

Gabriel’s unmeditated musical performance and Vardalek’s following remark “Poor child! you have the soul of music within you” signal Gabriel’s nascent homosexuality that the vampire recognises. This is a clue for the vampire and the initiated reader that the “young boy is capable of deciphering and coding a man’s desire for a man” (Bojti, “Believe in Vampires”

188). Later in the story, Vardalek plays Chopin's nocturnes, employing the performance characteristics of the *style hongrois*, again eliciting a curious response from Gabriel who sleepwalks into Vardalek's room. Therefore, the *czardas* may be read as a code for the recognition and initiation of same-sex desire in "True Story," especially considering the cultural connotations attached with it; rendering the *style hongrois* as a language for the emergent homosexual identity. "Other Side" following in a similar fashion also utilises non-verbal ekphrastic means. Here the cultural code is that of perfume and the heightened sensory response it elicits. Similar to the trope of *czardas*, the mention of perfumes also made its way into homophile literature at the end of the nineteenth century. Though it has evaded critical attention for the most part.

Coincidentally—or perhaps causally—perfumes appear in the very same homophile literature discussed above. In *Dorian Gray* and *Teleny*, perfumes evoke carnality—adding a most definite sexual component. However, it is only in *Teleny* that heliotrope, “the-flower-become-trope for a random erotic memory” (Maxwell 267–268), is explicitly and repeatedly mentioned in the context of the same-sex relationship between Teleny and Camille, becoming symbolic of their same-sex desire. In *Dorian Gray* on the other hand, the trope of perfumes is not as forthcoming in connoting same-sex desire—and perhaps intentionally so. Bojti points out that the criticism of Wilde's ‘scented’ writing and the subsequent change of heliotrope blanc to *lilas blanc* in *Dorian Gray's* twenty-chapter version is in itself suggestive that Wilde may have initially used heliotrope to add a queer subtext for initiated readers, only to change it later to avoid an anthological reading with the ill-reputed *Teleny*, which was possibly already under works by the time *Dorian Gray* was published (*Homophilia and Hungarophilia* 72). This hushing and distancing from (in)famous same-sex symbols of the period paradoxically confirm Wilde's awareness of and contribution to

nineteenth-century queer codes. As Wilde's contemporary and part of the same literary and social scene, Stenbock may have been fully aware of these literary codes and the careful art of making the queer subtext accessible only to the receptive readers.

Using this code in “Other Side,” Gabriel’s very first venture to the forbidden other side—a key moment marking his detour from convention—is owing to the deep blue flower whose “strange intoxicating perfume reached him and fascinated him even where he stood.”⁶ His exceptional olfactory sense here may be responsible for his receptivity towards the perfume, which curiously does not attract anyone else. This is paralleled in Gabriel’s (from “True Story”) extraordinary auditory reception to Vardalek’s music. Moreover, the perfume in “Other Side” elicits a similar sensory response as the *czardas*. Gabriel mesmerised by Vardalek’s music, “stood stock-still by the piano, his eyes dilated and fixed, his form quivering.” Later as he grew closer to Vardalek, he seemed to be “gradually losing his general health and vitality . . . [and] there was a certain languor about his movements.” Eventually Gabriel came “utterly under the domination of Vardalek.” Gabriel from “Other Side” equally has his faculties compromised when he feels the “strong caress of another will flowing over him like water and clothing him with invisible hands in an impalpable garment.” After a night of keeping the blue flower on his heart, next morning Gabriel’s face appeared “deadly pale, his eyes fixed and his limbs rigid” and he “fell fainting to the floor.” As the plot proceeds, Gabriel worsens and “[l]ittle by little the flame of vitality which burned within him seemed to grow fainter and fainter, and his lithe lissom limbs waxed languorous and luxurious—yet was he ever filled with a languid content and a will not his own perpetually overshadowed him.”

⁶ The blue flower transforms into Lilith in the story, therefore the perfume of the blue flower can be taken to mean the werewolf Lilith’s scent.

It is this heightened sensory response that, according to Cameron, marks Gabriel(s) as queer within the Aesthetic tradition, modelled after Walter Pater's aesthetic principles (53). However, beyond a visibly susceptible disposition towards artistic stimuli, the deteriorating nervous condition in both cases may hint at what Richard von Krafft-Ebbing theorised as *neurasthenia sexualis*. As discussed above, the *czardas* was known to bring about such nervous effects according to nineteenth-century medical sciences. But perfume was not considered suspect from a medical point of view when it came to same-sex desire, although men who smelled good were seen to be blurring the highly gendered spheres of Victorian etiquette with their effeminate behaviour. The neuropathological illness caused by the werewolf and the vampire, shares the same symptomatology, if not the same medical diagnosis. Hence, Bojti's coinage "neuropathological" (p.?) vampire may be applied to the werewolf too, given the nature of predation in both cases is more neuropathological than conventional, that is, the vampire does not drink Gabriel's blood and the werewolf does not devour Gabriel's flesh.

It is interesting to note the effect the initiation codes, music and perfume, have on Carmela and Carmeille. Vardalek's music sounded "strange and so heart-rending" to Carmela that she fainted and was found unconscious the next morning. Carmeille on the other hand expresses instant aversion to the perfume of the blue flower:

'Oh, Gabriel what is this flower? I but touched it and I felt something strange come over me. No, no, I don't like its perfume, no there's something not quite right about it, oh, dear Gabriel, do let me throw it away,' and before he had time to answer, she cast it from her, and again all its beauty and fragrance went from it and it looked charred as though it had been burnt. (Stenbock, "Other Side" 57)

Both girls being of the same age yet opposite gender as the Gabriels, present a contrast to the boys and their reactions to the initiation codes. Not only are the girls not drawn in by the stimuli like the boys, or immune to it (as the alternative expectation would dictate), they are actively repulsed and have an adverse reaction to the music/perfume. This contradistinction presents special emphasis on both Gabriels' receptive reactions; it is Gabriel's superabundance of life that sustains Vardalek and it is Gabriel's male breast that nourishes the flower that blooms only on his heart. In fact, the narrative purpose of Carmela and Carmelle might be to record (and in Carmela's case, to report) an alternative reception/reaction—one that is unable to decode, receive, process or respond, and is instead repulsed.

Akin to neuropathology, there are other psychic elements present in both tales as well. In her analysis of Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), Lin Young views dreams as spaces of "Queer possibility" (75). She explains that the uncategorizable and contradictory vampire figure of the nineteenth century may be understood better through a dream-logic where time-space constraints are lifted. In both stories, dreams are where the pivotal action takes place. Vardalek's vampirism reaches climax in the story when his playing of the piano induces a near-hypnotic state in Gabriel who sleepwalks into Vardalek's room with a "fixed vacant expression" and an "unconscious stare." It is here for the first time that Vardalek's intentions for the boy become clear: "My darling, I fain would spare thee: but thy life is my life, and I must live, I who would rather die." Similarly, in "Other Side," Gabriel is also pulled out of his bed: "it seemed to him that he could not but follow; so he walked half-clad and bare foot as he was with eyes fixed as in a dream silently down the stairs and out into the night." This is the moment when Lilith leads him into the forest on the other side to live with her. The vampire's and the werewolf's motives only become clear when both Gabriels are

caught off-guard in the vulnerable state of being half-asleep, alone, and barely dressed during the night hours. The dreams being spaces of queer possibility, therefore, suspend not only spatio-temporal principles, but also moral principles; allowing simultaneous confession(s) of homosexuality and the vampiric/lycanthropic exploitation of Gabriel(s).

A dream-within-a-dream sequence develops when Carmela's account of her brother's trance-like state comes into question as she ponders the next morning: "[w]as it a dream after all?" Gabriel from "Other Side" is equally lost when he wakes up in the forest and thinks he is "not quite awake" and that he must be in a "dream within a dream." What the unreliable narration in both cases achieves is not only the psychic manipulation of Gabriels, but also that of the reader; we are placed in a similar position of categorical uncertainty—is it reality or a dream? This psychic conundrum extends beyond the realm of dreams in both stories.

Vardalek utilises the well-worn tradition of the vampiric ability to manipulate time by constantly rejuvenating himself through his child-victim Gabriel (Karpenko et al. 140):

"Vardalek always returned looking much older, wan, and weary. Gabriel would rush to meet him, and kiss him on the mouth. Then he gave a slight shiver: and after a little while began to look quite young again." Similarly, Lilith is capable of defying temporal realities. She convinces Gabriel to come with her to the other side by affecting familiarity: "it seemed to [Gabriel] as though he had known her all his life." Later in the story Gabriel wakes up in a house and again feels that he had always dwelt there together with Lilith. However, where Vardalek can only cheat time, Lilith can also distort spaces:

Gabriel awoke—in his own room—so it was a dream after all—but what a dreadful dream. Yes, but was it his own room? Of course there was his coat hanging over the chair—yes but—the Crucifix—where was the Crucifix . . .

]H]e would reassure himself—he would get up—he would see the grey old church with the exquisitely pointed gables bathed in the light of dawn, and presently the deep solemn bell would toll . . .

But surely this was not the light of dawn; it was liker [sic] sunset! He leapt from his small white bed, and a vague terror came over him, he trembled and had to hold on to the chair before he reached the window. No, the solemn spires of the grey church were not to be seen—he was in the depths of the forest; but in a part he had never seen before—but surely he had explored every part, it must be the ‘other side.’ (Stenbock “Other Side” 61)

This parallel existence of an alternate reality that Lilith is able to erect on the other side may be owing to her lycanthropic prowess over the forest. In folklore, the transformative shape-shifting ability of werewolves was closely tied to the forest. The forest in turn may be taken as a literary trope of transformation, complementing its shape-shifting dwellers. However, Lilith’s capacity to morph herself and her surroundings is limited when compared to Vardalek. Woods and wolves share the common characteristics of ‘unfamiliarity’ and ‘liminality’ which opposes them to familiar and domestic spaces. As a result, Lilith is forever restricted to her conspicuous personification of the myth on the other side and hunted if she crosses the threshold. Whereas, Vardalek ‘passes’ as an ordinary man, undetected, with his story ringing more ‘true.’ Had he employed literary conventions of vampirism by being heliophobic, having fangs, and drinking Gabriel’s blood, he would have been just as legendary a figure as the werewolf Lilith. Though the quality to not draw suspicion aids Vardalek’s vampiric exploits, it may also be read as a realistic portrayal of the confines of homosexual conduct; that same-sex desire must be silent, unseen and unnamed. As a result, Vardalek’s vampirism is in plain sight yet hidden from view. Whereas Lilith is walled off to

the other side, but her lair being a sanctuary for herself and others allows for expressions forbidden by society. Lilith and Vardalek are juxtaposed as the shunned outcast and the unsuspected intruder, respectively. Where Lilith is restricted to guard her space, Vardalek invariably invades others' spaces.

Legend or True Story?

In a truly Stenbock-esque fashion of nostalgia and yearning marked by temporal exploitation and repetition, this paper concludes by going to the very beginning and drawing attention to the titles of both stories. The "Other Side: A Breton Legend" is essentially a 'legend' and the "True Story of a Vampire" is a 'true story.' By referring to what kind of narrative (legend/truth) is to follow, the titles implicate a specific reading(s) from the very outset. In "Other Side," Gabriel's hybridity enables him to balance both worlds; the village and the forbidden forest, which are allegorical of his (appearance of) normative sexuality and his non-normative (homo)sexuality, respectively. This middle course, though a compromise—and an unequivocally morbid one—is still a more hopeful outcome than the one Gabriel from "True Story" suffers: he dies.

In "Other Side," homosexuality is conceptualised in a relatively kinder light, and less directly. Lilith poses no threats of the dangers of sexual love. While Gabriel also gets to experience being the 'other,' by transforming into a werewolf. The interaction with Lilith can be surmised as Gabriel's initiation that eventually leads to his self-realisation of his homosexuality where he finds the equilibrium between society's constraints and his own (homo)sexuality. In sharp contrast, Vardalek's and Gabriel's same-sex relationship is at the very centre of the plot with prominent homoerotic elements. If we take becoming a vampire

analogous to being homosexual, then Gabriel here never gets to become a vampire. Instead his initiation through Vardalek has a fatal outcome. The fulfilment of same-sex desire robs the young Gabriel of a prospective future—reflecting the sad reality of Stenbock's time.

“Other Side” can be read as a precursor to “True Story” not simply because it happened to be published a year prior.⁷ It is the conceptual linearity of the two tales that affords a chronological reading. Why one Gabriel is doomed to transform into a werewolf and the other condemned to death is significant because it conveys the shift in Stenbock's view of (his) homosexuality. For Stenbock, in legend there is yet a hopeful compromise to be achieved. Sequestered and secluded as it may be, the other side still provides an escape to express illicit desires. Whereas, if a true trajectory of a same-sex romance is to be followed in a realistic context, then Gabriel's tragic death echoes the sad truth of Stenbock's time. This view might gain further credence given Symons in his essay *A Study in the Fantastic* states the title as “The Sad Story of a Vampire” (94). Moreover, Leslie Shepard also records the title as “The Sad Story of a Vampire” (113) in *The Dracula Book of Great Vampire Stories* (1977). Whether it was a mistake on their part in both cases or they came across an urtext manuscript of “True Story” titled as “Sad Story” is unclear. Regardless, the truth of the story is an especially sad one, making the terms truth and sad interchangeable without changing the essence of the story.

⁷ Vardalek from “True Story” can be seen as a culmination of Goethe's “Erlkönig,” Stenbock's translation of the ballad, and his poem “Vampyre,” (1883) tracing the origin of “True Story” long before “Other Side” was published. This contradicts a neatly linear reading of the two tales, given “True Story” may already have been under works a decade earlier.

To conclude, both stories convey Stenbock's introspective attempts to cope with his homosexuality at the turn of the century when no homogenous script for same-sex desire had yet materialised. Stenbock's usage of myths of lycanthropy and vampirism to conceptualise homosexuality, clearly informed by his turbulent times, convey his shifting attitude towards same-sex desire. "Other Side" and "True Story," Gabriel and Gabriel, Lilith and Vardalek, Carmeille and Carmela, and the forest and Styria form a narrative continuum. "True Story" can not be (fully) read, unless it is (re-)read with the context of its literary predecessor "Other Side," and vice versa. The change from a legendary context to a realistic one, perhaps prompted by Stenbock's personal circumstances in life, and the clamouring debate of Victorian society on same-sex desire, culminate into different conclusions for both tales. Stenbock's sadder (re)conceptualisation of homosexuality in "True Story" can be explained by his failing health and an impending sense of death by the time he wrote *Studies of Death*. One of the last accounts of Stenbock is given by Ernest Rhys:

[H]e talked about a book he intended to publish, *Studies of Death*, and then about the inappropriate subject of death itself. 'Death,' said he, 'is a dirty doorway to a wonderful region where there will be no London fogs and none of the evil that trouble the poets and artists here.' (qtd. in Tibet xxxiv)

In light of Stenbock's sentiments shortly before his death, Gabriel's death in "True Story" may be read not only as the sad truth of his times, but as Stenbock's reconciliation with his approaching death and his life as a homosexual man in Victorian England. Death in "True Story" then becomes the deliverance from the bargain of monstrous transformation in "Other Side." Rather than nine days a year of that "strange madness," Gabriel has his liberating death of his beloved, Vardalek; thus with a kiss he dies.

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