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A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

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Bram Stoker  
DRACULA

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AUTHORITATIVE TEXT

CONTEXTS

REVIEWS AND REACTIONS

DRAMATIC AND FILM VARIATIONS

CRITICISM

*Edited by*

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*and*

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While modern readers and critics of *Dracula* are transfixed by both the story's primal narrative power and its extraordinary psychosexual, sociopolitical subtexts, the novel was initially treated by reviewers as a harmless, if thrill-producing, entertainment. This seems somewhat puzzling today; Stoker, after all, published his book within a year of H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), which created a firestorm of controversy with its anxious Darwinian images of human beings blurring into animals—also a major thematic preoccupation of *Dracula*. And not a single reviewer of the time related Dracula's story of "degenerate" sexuality and blood contamination to the syphilis epidemic which cut a wide swath through 1890s London, possibly killing Stoker himself. Despite the correspondences, Victorian critics reserved their brickbats for works such as Ibsen's *Ghosts* (1882), a realistic play which dared to deal openly with the subject of venereal disease. In supernatural disguise, however, almost any "unwholesome" topic might walk freely through Victorian London, much like Dracula himself.

## THE DAILY MAIL

### Review

(June 1, 1897)

It is said of Mrs. Radcliffe<sup>1</sup> that when writing her now almost forgotten romances she shut herself up in absolute seclusion, and fed upon raw beef, in order to give her work the desired atmosphere of gloom, tragedy and terror. If one had no assurance to the contrary one might well suppose that a similar method and regimen had been adopted by Mr. Bram Stoker while writing his new novel "Dracula." In seeking for a parallel to this weird, powerful, and horrible story our mind reverts to such tales as "The Mysteries of Udolpho," "Frankenstein," "Wuthering Heights," "The Fall of the House of Usher," and "Margery [sic] of Quether."<sup>2</sup> But "Dracula" is even more appalling in its gloomy fascination than any one of these.

We started reading it early in the evening, and followed Jonathan Harker on his mission to the Carpathians with no definite conjecture as to what waited us in the castle of Dracula. When we came to the night journey over the mountain road and were chased by the wolves, which the driver, with apparently miraculous power, repelled by a mere gesture, we began to scent mystery, but were not perturbed. The first

1. Ann Radcliffe, English novelist.

2. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), novel by Ann Radcliffe; *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818), novel by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley; *Wuthering Heights* (1850), novel by Emily Brontë; "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), short story by Edgar Allan Poe; "Margery of Quether" (1892), short story by Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924), a prolific authority on religion, folklore, mythology, and the occult [*Editors*].

thrill of horrible sensation came with the discovery that the driver and the Count Dracula were one and the same person, that the count was the only human inhabitant of the castle, and that the rats, the bats, the ghosts, and the howling wolves were his familiars.

By ten o'clock the story had so fastened itself upon our attention that we could not pause even to light our pipe. At midnight the narrative had fairly got upon our nerves; a creepy terror had seized upon us, and when at length, in the early hours of the morning, we went upstairs to bed it was with the anticipation of nightmare. We listened anxiously for the sound of bats' wings against the window; we even felt at our throat in dread lest an actual vampire should have left there the two ghastly punctures which in Mr. Stoker's book attested to the hellish operations of Dracula.

The recollection of this weird and ghostly tale will doubtless haunt us for some time to come. It would be unfair to the author to divulge the plot. We therefore restrict ourselves to the statement that the eerie chapters are written and strung together with very considerable art and cunning, and also with unmistakable literary power. Tribute must also be paid to the rich imagination of which Mr. Bram Stoker here gives liberal evidence. Persons of small courage and weak nerves should confine their reading of these gruesome pages strictly to the hours between dawn and sunset.

## ATHENAEUM

### Review

(June 26, 1897)

Stories and novels appear just now in plenty stamped with a more or less genuine air of belief in the visibility of supernatural agency. The strengthening of a bygone faith in the fantastic and magical view of things in lieu of the purely material is a feature of the hour, a reaction—artificial, perhaps, rather than natural—against late tendencies in thought. Mr. Stoker is a purveyor of so many strange wares that 'Dracula' reads like a determined effort to go, as it were, "one better" than others in the same field. How far the author is himself a believer in the phenomena described is not for the reviewer to say. He can but attempt to gauge how far the general faith in witches, warlocks and vampires—supposing it to exist in any general and appreciable measure—is likely to be stimulated by this story. The vampire idea is very ancient indeed, and there are in nature, no doubt, mysterious powers to account for the vague belief in such beings. Mr. Stoker's way of presenting his matter, and still more the matter itself, are of too direct

and uncompromising a kind. They lack the essential note of awful remoteness and at the same time subtle affinity that separates while it links our humanity with unknown beings and possibilities hovering on the confines of the known world. 'Dracula' is highly sensational, but it is wanting in the constructive art as well as in the higher literary sense. It reads at times like a mere series of grotesquely incredible events; but there are better moments that show more power, though even these are never productive of the tremor such subjects evoke under the hand of a master. An immense amount of energy, a certain degree of imaginative faculty, and many ingenious and gruesome details are there. At times Mr. Stoker almost succeeds in creating the sense of possibility in impossibility; at others he merely commands an array of crude statements of incredible actions. The early part goes best, for it promises to unfold the roots of mystery and fear lying deep in human nature; but the want of skill and fancy grows more and more conspicuous. The people who band themselves together to run the vampire to earth have no real individuality or being. The German [*sic*] man of science is particularly poor, and indulges, like a German, in much weak sentiment. Still, Mr. Stoker has got together a number of "horrid details," and his object, assuming it to be ghastliness, is fairly well fulfilled. Isolated scenes and touches are probably quite uncanny enough to please those for whom they are designed.

## SPECTATOR

### Review

(July 31, 1897)

Mr. Bram Stoker gives us the impression—we may be doing him an injustice—of having deliberately laid himself out in *Dracula* to eclipse all previous efforts in the domain of the horrible,—to "go one better" than Wilkie Collins<sup>1</sup> (whose method of narration he has closely followed), Sheridan Le Fanu, and all the other professors of the flesh-creeping school. \* \* \* Its strength lies in the invention of incident, for the sentimental element is decidedly mawkish. Mr. Stoker has shown considerable ability in the use that he has made in all the available traditions of vampirology, but we think his story would have been all the more effective if he had chosen an earlier period. The up-to-dateness of the book—the phonograph diaries, typewriters, and so on—hardly fits in with the mediæval methods which ultimately secure the victory for Count Dracula's foes.

1. Author of *The Woman in White* (1860), a mystery similarly constructed from letters, diaries, and the like [Editors].

## BOOKMAN

## Review

(August 1897)

Since Wilkie Collins left us we have had no tale of mystery so liberal in manner and so closely woven. But with the intricate plot, and the methods of the narrative, the resemblance to the stories of the author of "The Woman in White" ceases; for the audacity and horror of "Dracula" are Mr. Stoker's own. A summary of the book would shock and disgust; but we must own that, though here and there in the course of the tale we hurried over things with repulsion, we read nearly the whole thing with rapt attention. It is something of a triumph for the writer that neither the improbability, nor the unnecessary number of hideous incidents recounted of the man-vampire, are long foremost on the reader's mind, but that the interest of the danger, of the complications, of the pursuit of the villain, of human skill and courage pitted against inhuman wrong and superhuman strength, rises always to the top. Keep "Dracula" out of the way of nervous children, certainly; but a grown reader, unless he be of unserviceably delicate stuff, will both shudder and enjoy from p. 35 [39], when Harker sees the Count "emerge from the window and begin to crawl down the castle wall over that dreadful abyss, *face down*, with his cloak spreading out around him like great wings."

## SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

## New Novels and Holiday Books

(December 17, 1899)†

One of the most powerful novels of the day, and one set apart by its originality of plot and treatment is "Dracula," by Bram Stoker. The author is well known in the dramatic world for his long connection with Sir Henry Irving as manager. Several years ago he wrote a weird story of Irish life, but this is his first long romance. It is a somber study of a human vampire, the Count Dracula, who uses beautiful women as his agents and compasses the death of many innocent people. Theo-

† *Dracula* was not published in America until November 1899, when Doubleday McClure published a slightly revised version of the text following the book's newspaper serialization.

phile Gautier<sup>1</sup> essayed the same subject, but his vampire, who was a priest by day and ravening wolf by night, was not half so terrible as this malignant Count with the three beautiful female devils who do his bidding. Nothing in fiction is more powerful than the scene at the killing of the vampire in Lucy's tomb or that other fearful scene at the extinction of the malign power of the Count. The story is told in such a realistic way that one actually accepts its wildest flights of fancy as real facts. It is a superb tour de force which stamps itself on the memory.

1. Influential poet and novelist of the French Romantic movement. The story referred to is "La mort amoureuse" (1836), the tale of a vampire courtesan, Clarimonda, who haunts a young priest [Editors].