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A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

Bram Stoker
DRACULA



AUTHORITATIVE TEXT
CONTEXTS
REVIEWS AND REACTIONS
DRAMATIC AND FILM VARIATIONS
CRITICISM

Edited by
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1997

W • W • NORTON & COMPANY • New York • London

Bram Stoker didn't invent the vampire in literature; the motif had a distinguished pedigree decades before his birth, beginning with Dr. John Polidori's "The Vampyre: A Tale" (1820), originally attributed to Lord Byron. Polidori was Byron's physician and travel companion; "The Vampyre" was the result of a writing contest proposed by Byron at a literary house party on Lake Geneva in 1816; the most famous product of the challenge was Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Polidori's story was first adapted to the stage in 1820 and became an opera in 1828. Actor Dion Boucicault produced his own theatrical elaboration on Polidori, called *The Vampyre: A Phantasm* (1852), which was revived in America as *The Phantom* (1856). Stoker was also influenced by James Malcom Rymer's melodramatic, nine-hundred-page "penny dreadful" *Varney the Vampyre: Or, the Feast of Blood*, originally published in installments between 1845 and 1847, as well as J. Sheridan Le Fanu's elegant vampire novella *Carmilla* (1872), which evidently gave him the initial idea of setting his novel in the district of Austria known as Styria, later changed to Transylvania. Much has been made, in recent years, of the fictional Dracula's relationship to his historical namesake, Vlad "the Impaler" Tepes, warlord of Wallachia (1431-1476). "Dracul" means devil or dragon, and "Dracula" refers to such a creature's offspring. But Stoker himself never visited Transylvania and seems to have limited his library research on Tepes to a single volume by William Wilkinson, *An Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia: with Various Political Observations Related to Them* (1820), which briefly mentions Vlad's exploits. It is entirely possible that Stoker never knew of Vlad's sobriquet "the Impaler" and intended no specific connection between the ruler's favorite method of dispatching enemies via the wooden stake and the traditional method of destroying, or at least immobilizing, vampires. Though Vlad was indeed bloodthirsty, there is no evidence connecting him to any folklore tradition of vampirism. Therefore, the following selection of contextual pieces will focus on literary rather than historical antecedents and on Stoker's methods of devising his plot. Also included is the short story "Dracula's Guest" (1914), an abandoned opening chapter to *Dracula* published posthumously by Stoker's widow.

EMILY GERARD

From Transylvanian Superstitions†

(1885)

[Stoker gleaned his primary information on Transylvania folklore from Emily de Laszowska Gerard's 1885 essay "Transylvanian Superstitions," later incorporated into her two-volume book *The Land Beyond the Forest* (1888). Gerard, also a novelist, was married to a Hungarian cavalry commander and lived for two years in Transylvania, giving her research a first-hand immediacy.]

† From *The Nineteenth Century*, July 1885, pp. 128-44.

* * *

Transylvania might well be termed the land of superstition, for nowhere else does this curious crooked plant of delusion flourish as persistently and in such bewildering variety. It would almost seem as though the whole species of demons, pixies, witches, and hobgoblins, driven from the rest of Europe by the wand of science, had taken refuge within this mountain rampart, well aware that here they would find secure lurking-places, whence they might defy their persecutors yet awhile.

There are many reasons why these fabulous beings should retain an abnormally firm hold on the soil of these parts; and looking at the matter closely we find here no less than three separate sources of superstition.

First, there is what may be called the indigenous superstition of the country, the scenery of which is peculiarly adapted to serve as background to all sorts of supernatural beings and monsters. There are innumerable caverns, whose mysterious depths seem made to harbour whole legions of evil spirits: forest glades fit only for fairy folk on moonlight nights, solitary lakes which instinctively call up visions of water sprites; golden treasures lying hidden in mountain chasms, all of which have gradually insinuated themselves into the minds of the oldest inhabitants, the Roumenians, and influenced their way of thinking, so that these people, by nature imaginative and poetically inclined, have built up for themselves out of the surrounding materials a whole code of fanciful superstition, to which they adhere as closely as to their religion itself.

Secondly, there is here the imported superstition! that is to say, the old German customs and beliefs brought hither seven hundred years ago by the Saxon colonists from their native land, and like many other things, preserved here in greater perfection than in the original country.

Thirdly, there is the wandering superstition of the gypsy tribes, themselves a race of fortune-tellers and witches, whose ambulating caravans cover the country as with a network, and whose less vagrant members fill up the suburbs of towns and villages.

Of course all these various sorts of superstition have twined and intermingled, acted and reacted upon each other, until in many cases it is a difficult matter to determine the exact parentage of some particular belief or custom; but in a general way the three sources I have named may be admitted as a rough sort of classification in dealing with the principal superstitions afloat in Transylvania.

There is on this subject no truer saying than that of Grimm, to the effect that 'superstition in all its manifold varieties constitutes a sort of

religion, applicable to the common household necessities of daily life,'¹ and as such, particular forms of superstition may very well serve as guide to the characters and habits of the particular nation in which they are prevalent.

The spirit of evil (or, not to put too fine a point upon it, the devil) plays a conspicuous part in the Roumenian code of superstition, and such designations as the Gregynia Drakuluj (devil's garden), the Gania Drakuluj (devil's mountain), Yadu Drakuluj (devil's hell or abyss), & c, & c, which we frequently find attached to rocks, caverns, or heights, attest the fact that these people believe themselves to be surrounded on all sides by a whole legion of evil spirits.

The devils are furthermore assisted by witches and dragons, and to all of these dangerous beings are ascribed peculiar powers on particular days and at certain places.

Perhaps the most important day in the year is St George's, the 23rd of April (corresponds to our 5th of May), the eve of which is still frequently kept by occult meetings taking place at night in lonely caverns or within ruined walls, and where all the ceremonies usual to the celebration of a witches' Sabbath are put into practice.

The feast itself is the great day to beware of witches, to counteract whose influence square-cut blocks of green turf are placed in front of each door and window.² This is supposed effectually to bar their entrance to the house or stables, but for still greater safety it is usual here for the peasants to keep watch all night by the sleeping cattle.

This same night is the best for finding treasures, and many people spend it in wandering about the hills trying to probe the earth for the gold it contains. Vain and futile as such researches usually are, yet they have in this country a somewhat greater semblance of reason than in most other parts, for perhaps nowhere else have so many successive nations been forced to secrete their riches in flying from an enemy, to say nothing of the numerous veins of undiscovered gold and silver which must be seaming the country in all directions. Not a year passes without bringing to light some earthen jar containing old Dacian coins, or golden ornaments of Roman origin, and all such discoveries serve to feed and keep up the national superstition.

In the night of St George's Day (so say the legends) all these treasures begin to burn, or, to speak in mystic language, to 'bloom' in the bosom of the earth, and the light they give forth, described as a bluish flame resembling the colour of lighted spirits of wine, serves to guide favoured mortals to their place of concealment. The conditions to the successful

1. 'Der Aberglaube in seiner Mannigfaltigkeit bildet gewissermassen eine Religion für den ganzen niederen Hausbedarf.' [Jakob Ludwig Karl Grimm (1785-1863) and Wilhelm Karl Grimm (1786-1859), German folklorists—Editors.]

2. This is also usual in Poland, Moldavia and the Bukowina.

raising of such a treasure are manifold, and difficult of accomplishment. In the first place, it is by no means easy for a common mortal who has not been born on a Sunday nor at midday when the bells are ringing, to hit upon a treasure at all. If he does, however, catch sight of a flame such as I have described, he must quickly stick a knife through the swaddling rags of his right foot,³ and then throw the knife in the direction of the flame he has seen. If two people are together during this discovery they must not on any account break silence till the treasure is removed, neither is it allowed to fill up the hole from which anything has been taken, for that would induce a speedy death. Another important feature to be noted is that the lights seen before midnight on St George's Day, denote treasures kept by benevolent spirits, while those which appear at a later hour are unquestionably of a pernicious nature.

* * *

There are two sorts of vampires—living and dead. The living vampire is in general the illegitimate offspring of two illegitimate persons, but even a flawless pedigree will not ensure anyone against the intrusion of a vampire into his family vault, since every person killed by a *nosferatu*⁴ becomes likewise a vampire after death, and will continue to suck the blood of other innocent people till the spirit has been exorcised, either by opening the grave of the person suspected and driving a stake through the corpse, or firing a pistol shot into the coffin. In very obstinate cases it is further recommended to cut off the head and replace it in the coffin with the mouth filled with garlic, or to extract the heart and burn it, strewing the ashes over the grave.

That such remedies are often resorted to, even in our enlightened days, is a well-attested fact, and there are probably few Roumenian villages where such has not taken place within the memory of the inhabitants.

First cousin to the vampire, the long exploded were-wolf of the Germans is here to be found, lingering yet under the name of the *Prikolitsch*. Sometimes it is a dog instead of a wolf, whose form a man has taken either voluntarily or as penance for his sins. In one of the villages a story is still told (and believed) of such a man, who driving home from church on Sunday with his wife, suddenly felt that the time for his transformation had come. He therefore gave over the reins to her, and stepped aside into the bushes, where, murmuring the mystic formula, he turned three somersaults over a ditch. Soon after this the woman, waiting in vain for her husband, was attacked by a furious dog, which rushed, barking, out of the bushes and succeeded in biting her

3. The Roumenian peasant does not wear shoes or stockings, but has his feet swaddled up in linen rags, which are kept in their place by a rough sandal made of a flat piece of leather.

4. The word *nosferatu* appears in no Romanian or Hungarian dictionary, nor in any standard text on Eastern European folklore available to Gerard. It is possible she mistook a usage of the Romanian adjective *nesuferit* ("plaguesome") in connection with vampires and inadvertently coined the now familiar term [Editors].

severely, as well as tearing her dress. When, an hour later, this woman reached home alone she was met by her husband, who advanced smiling to meet her, but between his teeth she caught sight of the shreds of her dress which had been bitten out by the dog, and the horror of the discovery caused her to faint away.

Another man used gravely to assert that for more than five years he had gone about in the form of a wolf, leading on a troop of these animals, until a hunter, in striking off his head, restored him to his natural shape.

A French traveller relates an instance of a harmless botanist who, while collecting herbs on a hillside in a crouching attitude, was observed by some peasants at a distance and taken for a wolf. Before they had time to reach him, however, he had risen to his feet and disclosed himself in the form of a man; but this, in the minds of the Roumenians, who now regarded him as an aggravated case of wolf, was but additional motive for attacking him. They were quite sure that he must be a *Prikolitsch*, for only such could change his shape in such an unaccountable manner, and in another minute they were all in full cry after the wretched victim of science, who might have fared badly indeed, had he not happened to gain a carriage on the high road before his pursuers came up.

We do not require to go far for the explanation of the extraordinary tenacity of life of the were-wolf legend in a country like Transylvania, where real wolves still abound. Every winter here brings fresh proof of the boldness and cunning of these terrible animals, whose attacks on flocks and farms are often conducted with a skill which would do honour to a human intellect. Sometimes a whole village is kept in trepidation for weeks together by some particularly audacious leader of a flock of wolves, to whom the peasants not unnaturally attribute a more than animal nature, and one may safely prophesy that so long as the real wolf continues to haunt the Transylvanian forests, so long will his spectre brother survive in the minds of the inhabitants.

* * *

JAMES MALCOLM RYMER

From Varney the Vampire: Or, The Feast of Blood†

(1845-47)

[First published in book form the year of Bram Stoker's birth, Rymer's "penny-dreadful" serial (so-called because individual installments were typ-

† *From Varney the Vampire: Or, The Feast of Blood* (London: E. Lloyd, 1847) 842-43. Published anonymously, *Varney* was originally believed to be the work of the Victorian popular writer Thomas Peskett Prest, though recent scholarship accepts Rymer as the more likely author.