History of the Vampire in Folklore, Literature, and Film

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AAAH!!! REAL VAMPIRES!

- Suspected after mass death in village - association with plagues
- Attack family first, and then spread to rest of village
- Comes at night to smother or throttle sleeper in bed
- No signs of decay on body – hair and nails have grown
- Supple limbs and fresh skin, sometimes with “Devil’s mark”
- Lack of stench
- Blood on mouth or bloated corpse (hence blood-drinking belief)
- Often suicides or those who had died violently, or engaged in “immoral” behavior
- Also people born with any physical abnormalities.

“Thanks be to God, we are by no means credulous. We avow that all the light which science can throw on this fact discovers none of the causes of it. Nevertheless, we cannot refuse to believe that to be true which is juridically attested, and by persons of probity.” — Dom Calmet, 1746
KILLING A VAMPIRE (AGAIN!)

- Head cut off, dismembered body, heart removed and burned
- Also good, old-fashioned stake through the heart (usually in conjunction with beheading or burning)
- Mouth can also be filled with garlic, an effective deterrent!
“But first, on earth as vampire sent,
Thy corse shall from its tomb be rent:
Then ghastly haunt thy native place,
And suck the blood of all thy race;
There from thy daughter, sister, wife,
At midnight drain the stream of life;
Yet loathe the banquet which perforce
Must feed thy livid living corse:
Thy victims ere they yet expire
Shall know the demon for their sire,
As cursing thee, thou cursing them,
Thy flowers are withered on the stem.”

From “The Giaour” by Lord Byron
(1813)
“We will each write a ghost story,” said Lord Byron, and his proposition was acceded to. There were four of us. The noble author began a tale, a fragment of which he printed at the end of his poem Mazeppa... Poor Polidori had some terrible idea about a skull-headed lady who was so punished for peeping through a key-hole... The illustrious poets also, annoyed by the platitude of prose, speedily relinquished their uncongenial task.”

“THE VAMPIRE” (1819)

Polidori transformed “the figure of the vampire from bestial ghoul to glamorous aristocrat….his Lord Ruthven is really the conventional rakehell or libertine with a few of the vampiric attributes grafted onto him…for Polidori, the ‘vampire story’ is conceived as a variant upon the moral tale, a tale designed principally as a warning – here, against the fascinating power of the libertinism represented by his employer Byron.”

ROBERT MORRISON AND CHRIS BALDICK, Introduction to The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre (1997)
“But never yet, in all my long career—a career extending over centuries of time—never yet have I felt the soft sensation of human pity till I looked on thee, exquisite piece of excellence. Even at the moment when the reviving fluid from the gushing fountain of your veins was warming at my heart, I pitied and I loved you. Oh, Flora! even I can now feel the pang of being what I am!...It is a condition with my hateful race, that if we can find one human heart to love us, we are free.”

- Sir Francis Varney
“CARMILLA” (1872)

“I live in your warm life, and you shall die - die
sweetly die – into mine…to die as lovers may – to die
together, so that they may live together.”

- Carmilla

ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID HENRY FRISTON
FOR *CARMILLA* (1872)

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL FITZGERALD FOR *CARMILLA* (1872)
THE REAL DRACULA,
PRINCE VLAD III OF WALLACHIA,
AKA THE IMPALER

“And at that time Dracula rested there and had the entire suburb burned. Also as the day came, early in the morning, all those whom he had taken captive, men and women, young and old children, he had impaled on the hill by the chapel and all around the hill, and under them he proceeded to eat at table and get his joy this way.”

- Translation of a German pamphlet and German woodcut, 1499
“Once there reigned in Wallachia a Prince Dracula, also known as the Impaler. This prince was very severe, but also just. He would not tolerate thieves, liars and lazy people. He did all in his power to extirpate such men from his land. Had he reigned longer he would probably have succeeded in freeing his land from such parasites and perhaps even prevented that others of that kind be born. But no such luck today!”

“Dracula was a man with grey matter in his brains and he insisted on good order in his state. Woe to any soldier he saw improperly attired, he rarely escaped with his life. He liked to see his citizens cleanly attired and looking smart. Around him, he could not tolerate anyone who floundered or was slow in his work. Whenever he noticed a libertine or a rake he lost his temper...It is just as well that Dracula does not rule our country today, for he would have had to expend many stakes, which might have eliminated from our land the innumerable drones who wither the very grass on which they sit.”

“The Gospel says that man shall earn his daily bread only through the sweat of his brow. Prince Vlad thought: ‘These men [beggars] live off the sweat of others, so they are useless to humanity. It is a form of thievery...They are worse than robbers. May such men be eradicated from my land!’”

All Romanian oral accounts translated by Radu Florescu, 1972
THE REAL BRAM STOKER’S “DRACULA” (1897)

- Mentions past as member of “a conquering race,” one who “as Voivode crossed the Danube and beat the Turk on his own ground…who, when he was beaten back, came again, and again, and again, though he had to come alone from the bloody field where his troops were being slaughtered, since he knew he alone could ultimately triumph.”

- Epistolary novel which blends modernity and archaic technology, settings, and characters

- Often read as reverse colonization narrative – foreign monster comes to colonize colonizers as vampires, but the complexity of the novel eludes simple interpretations.
COUNT DRACULA, PRINCE OF DARKNESS, AND KING OF THE MOVIES

Max Schreck as Count Orlok in “Nosferatu” (1922)

Bela Lugosi as Count Dracula in “Dracula” (1931)

Christopher Lee as Count Dracula in “Dracula” (1958)

Gary Oldman as Dracula in “Bram Stoker’s Dracula” (1992)
ALSO KING OF THE PARODIES!

Count Von Count aka The Count from “Sesame Street” (Debut 1972)

Count Chocula from General Mills Cereal (1971)

Leslie Nielsen as Count Dracula in Mel Brooks’s “Dracula: Dead and Loving It” (1995)

Adam Sandler as Count Dracula in “Hotel Transylvania” (2012)
OTHER LATE 20TH CENTURY AND EARLY 21ST CENTURY VAMPIRES

Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise as Louis and Lestat in “Interview with the Vampire” (1994)

The cast of “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” (1997-2003)

The Volturi from the “Twilight” series (2008-2012)

The cast of “The Vampire Diaries” (2009-2017)
“Our culture has turned a cold, alienating, impersonal monster obsessed with power and possession into the Byronic hero of eternal romance... All too often we have similarly humanized our own creations, our own late twentieth century vampires, given them infusions of 'good blood' to save them or turned their passionless bites into gentle 'exchanges,' forced them to anguish over moral questions, transformed them into glamorous aesthetes, sensitive lonely immortals, redemptive holy babies. Perhaps we have lost the true threat, the true violence, of Stoker's King Vampire” – Glennis Byron, Introduction to the Broadview edition of Dracula, 2006.
THE ENDURING POWER OF DRACULA

Christopher Lee in Hammer Films’ “Dracula” (1958)

“But the Count! Never did I imagine such wrath and fury, even to the demons of the pit. His eyes were positively blazing. The red light in them was lurid, as if the flames of hell-fire blazed behind them. His face was deathly pale, and the lines of it were hard like drawn wires; the thick eyebrows that met over the nose now seemed like a heaving bar of white-hot metal.” – Jonathan Harker’s Journal, Dracula by Bram Stoker, 1897
THANK YOU! QUESTIONS?