DRACULA

BY STEVEN DIETZ FROM THE NOVEL BY BRAM STOKER

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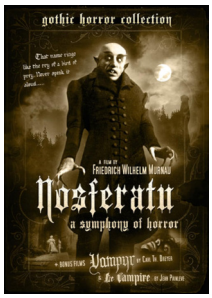
VAMPIRES
THEN AND NOW

This play is based on the novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker. But Stoker's novel is not the source of vampire mythology, it begins far before. See if you can match the mythology to its source:

A. Blood Drinking, restless spirits called the Ekimmu	1. Ancient China
B. Shape-shifting entities called Lamiae and Empusae that lured travelers in the night to feed from their life source	2. Ancient Philippines
C. Creatures, called Jiangshi, stiffened by rigor mortis, that drain the qi of the living	3. Mesopotamia
D. A self-segmenting, winged creature called the Manananggal that hunts at night	4. Ancient Rome

Key: A-3, B-4, C-1, D-2



MODERN STORIES

Since the invention of movies, the stories of the vampire have evolved:

Cinematic Horror (1920s–1970s): F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) showed the vampire as a rodent-like plague, while Bela Lugosi (1931) and Christopher Lee (1958) made Count Dracula an iconic, cape-wearing aristocrat.

Sympathetic & Tragic Anti-Heroes (1970s–1990s): Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles* humanized vampires, exploring immortal solitude, morality, and desire. Shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* used vampires as metaphors for adolescent angst.

21st-Century Re-imaginings: Modern pop culture spans romantic fantasy (*Twilight*), sleek action (*Underworld, Blade*), and dark satire (*What We Do in the Shadows*).

Which version of the vampire myth is most intriguing to you? Which aspects of the vampire do you see in this adaptation?

THE STAGE

THEATRICALITY

THE INTRODUCTION

Steven Dietz begins his adaptation by grounding the vampire myth directly into live theatre. In his Playwright's Note, he says that Bram Stoker spent over twenty-five years as the business manager for the legendary Victorian actor Henry Irving. Dietz honors this history by opening the play with a prologue: Renfield sits downstage in a tux, sipping wine, directly addressing the audience about Bram Stoker's life as a theatre critic and storyteller.

THE CINEMATIC FLOW

Dietz doesn't want realistic scene changes, instead asking for rapid and cinematic flow from one scene to the next. The script utilizes simultaneous staging and rapid cross-cutting to connect three distinct geographical hubs at once:

- **Transylvania:** Harker's imprisonment in Castle Dracula.
- **London:** Lucy and Mina's domestic bedchambers.
- **The Asylum**: Renfield's cell and Dr. Seward's quarters.

LETTERS INTO ACTION

Stoker's original novel is written entirely through personal letters, shorthand journals, telegrams, and newspaper clippings. Dietz translates this structure onto the stage by making physical documents the engine of the plot:

- **Journals as Relics:** Harker's shorthand journal is physically bound with a blue ribbon, carried across Europe, and opened on stage to unlock memories and shift time.
- **Hypnosis as Scene Transition:** Hypnotic trances act as structural bridges, allowing characters like Mina to map Dracula's movement across the sea in real time through shared blood memory.
- **The Audience as Detective:** Because the characters deliberately withhold secrets from one another out of propriety or protection, the structure hands the objective truth to the audience first, forcing them to piece together the transcontinental puzzle before the protagonists do.

Below is a quote from the original novel. How would you stage it if you were adapting the novel yourself?

"I saw the Count come out from the window and crawl down the castle wall over that dreadful abyss, face down with his cloak spreading out around him like great wings. At first I could not believe my eyes. I thought it was some trick of the moonlight, some weird effect of shadow and light. But I kept looking, and it could be no delusion. I saw the fingers and toes grasp the corners of the stones, worn clear of the mortar by the stress of years, and by thus using every projection and inequality move downwards with considerable speed, just as a lizard moves along a wall." —Chapter 3

Consider the following:

What would the characters in the scene say?

How would Dracula descend safely?

What would the set look like?

A PORTRAIT OF DRACULA

Below are some descriptions of Count Dracula from different sources. In the mirror, draw what you think Dracula looks like.

"Within, stood a tall old man, clean shaved save for a long white moustache, and clad in black from head to foot, without a single speck of colour about him anywhere."
—Original Novel

"His face was a strong—a very strong—aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils... His eyebrows were very massive, almost meeting over the nose, and with bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion... The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor."
—Original Novel

"Strange to say, there were hairs in the centre of the palm. The nails were long and fine, and cut to a sharp point."
—Original Novel

"Dracula. Much older now. His hair long, grey and wild. A pallid complexion to his face. Long, yellowed fingernails, dangerously sharp." —Dietz stage adaptation (1995)

"Count Orlok... a tall, emaciated figure with a completely bald head, pointed ears, prominent rat-like front incisors, and long, clawed fingers." —Dracula film (1931)

"A tall, gaunt, old man wrapped in a regal crimson robe... His skin is translucent, his hair a white waterfall down his back, his eyes burning red embers."
—from Francis Ford Coppola's film (1992)

AFTER YOU WATCH...
How does this production's Dracula match your drawing?

FANGS

THE ART OF ADAPTATION

Adapting a novel like Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is no small feat. When adapting a novel from the page to the stage, many things need to be considered:

- Novels have hundreds of pages with which to make characters and events come alive, stage adaptations have only a couple of hours.
- Novels have paragraphs of descriptions, the stage has to show everything visually and through dialogue.
- Novels can make anything happen, they are bound only by imagination, on the stage effects and actions have to be possible and safe.

BEFORE YOU WATCH...

Think of a novel that you know well...

What would it look like as a play on stage?

- *Which character would you focus on in a stage adaptation?*
- *Which events would you keep? Which would you cut?*
- *What moments from the novel would be difficult to put on stage?*

AFTER YOU WATCH...

You are about to watch the stage adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, adapted by Steven Dietz. Other than the Narrative Structure, as you watch, can you identify what is different between the novel and the stage adaptation?

ELEMENT	BRAM STOKER ORIGINAL NOVEL (1897)	STEVEN DIETZ STAGE ADAPTATION (1995)
Narrative Structure	Written entirely in an epistolary format using letters, personal diary entries, shorthand journals, telegrams, and newspaper clippings	*Retains the epistolary framework through characters reading shorthand journals and letters aloud, but transforms it into overlapping spoken dialogue, cross-cutting scenes, and direct-to-audience monologues*
Renfield	Serves as an asylum inmate obsessed with consuming life (flies, spiders, birds) who acts as Dracula's telepathic herald.	
Lucy's Suitors	Features three active suitors who propose to Lucy Westenra: Arthur Holmwood (Lord Godalming), Quincey Morris, and Dr. John Seward	
Vampire Rules	Establishes core rules: Dracula must sleep in native soil, requires explicit invitation to enter a home, lacks a reflection, shape-shifts into mist/animals, and is repelled by crucifixes, garlic, and holy wafers.	
Secrecy	Characters keep private journals and withhold traumatic experiences from one another out of propriety and protection, delaying their realization of Dracula's threat.	
Mina's Ending	Mina is forced to feed on Dracula's blood and undergoes hypnosis to track him back to Transylvania, where Harker and Morris deal the fatal blows.	

THE LETTERS

EPISTOLARY FORMS

The original Bram Stoker novel contains no narrator. It is constructed entirely out of letters, shorthand diaries, telegrams, and newspaper clippings.

Merriam-Webster defines epistolary as something related to or contained within a letter, or a composition consisting of a series of letters. It is derived from the term epistle, which refers to a letter written to a particular person or group.

A modern way to think about epistolary novels is telling a story through your favorite messaging app.

Use the chat bubbles to the right to try to tell a story via text messages between two people. Can you tell a whole story in 10 messages?

Nima Rakhshanifar (Harker) and Scott Coopwood (Dracula). Photo by Kevin Berne.

SOURCES

The Eyes

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