



In the final scene of Hammer Films' *The Horror of Dracula* (1958), Dracula (Christopher Lee) disintegrates in the sunlight before a cross fashioned from two candelabra by Van Helsing (Peter Cushing). (Universal Pictures. Photo The Bettmann Archive)

# A Clutch of VAMPIRES

These Being Among the Best  
from History and Literature

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about the men who recorded or wrote them and the circumstances in which they did so, plus illustrations showing how artists working in various media have treated the vampire and related themes. Such a book seems timely. Today there is extraordinary interest in the occult and the unnatural—including the undead. A general anthology of vampire literature appeared in 1963; and articles about my research on the historical Dracula appeared in the *New York Times* as early as 1969, possibly helping to spark the veritable Dracula Renaissance that has marked the early 1970s. For whatever reason, in 1972, after years of neglect, Dracula was the subject of four new books. At the same time there appeared "a natural history of vampires." Also, both Lippincott and Addison-Wesley began publishing monster tales for children during the 1970s.

None of these books, however, was composed with the same intentions as mine. As far as I know this is the first anthology in English to present such a diversity of vampirana. It is my hope that it may help inspire a full-scale investigation into the lore and lure of the "walking dead."

Some minds, of course, may question whether serious study of the subject of vampires is worthwhile—whether it would in fact result in much ado about nothing more than a character from a nineteenth-century novel and the films that it has inspired. However, long before 1897, when Bram Stoker published his thrilling *Dracula*, other men were preoccupied with vampires. To be precise, the notion of the vampire reaches back into primeval history.

The term "vampire" itself is fairly new, having come into common usage during the eighteenth century, that so-called Age of Reason. Linguistic authorities differ over the origin of the word. For example, F. Miklosich, an eminent scholar of Slavic languages, claims that "vampire" derives from *uber*, the Turkish word for witch. But undoubtedly the source of "vampire" is the Hungarian word *vampir*.

Several authors have recently put forth the thesis that vam-

pires are products of Christian civilization, overlooking the fact that in societies removed both in time and space from Christianity some concept of the vampire appeared; a single example is pre-Christian Mexico.

In its basic form, the vampire concept contains one or more of the following elements: association with night, a capacity for change into another physical shape, and a desire for human blood. Now for a brief look at the varied history of this creature called a "vampire"—a horror which evolved from primitive forms into the familiar Transylvanian count in a black cape, and which is still evolving.

According to an ancient Semitic myth, Lilith, or Lilith, was the first woman on earth. In the Talmud, the book of Jewish civil and canonical law, Lilith was in fact Adam's first wife. Her ultimate role, however, was that of a night-roaming monster. In an



This popular medieval amulet was used during childbirth to protect mother and child against an attack by Lilith. (Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, Cleveland, World, 1939)



argument with Adam over who was the better, Lilith refused to concede Adam's superiority. Thus she disobeyed him and angrily left him, though three angels, Sanvi, Sansanvi, and Semangelaf, tried to convince her to stay. Because of her disobedience, Lilith's children were killed. Eve then came into the picture and bore Adam children. Extremely jealous, Lilith tried to kill Eve's children. Since all succeeding generations were considered to be Eve's children, humans had to defend themselves against further onslaughts by the night-roaming Lilith. Small children especially were in danger from her, and one means of protection was the wearing of amulets, preferably ones bearing the names of the three angels who had tried to persuade Lilith to stay with Adam.

Images of Lilith—or Lamia, Lamme, and Lamashto, as she was also called—were included in Babylonian carvings. In Assyria there were incantations to ward off her evil influence. It is also known that like the old god Proteus, Lilith could assume many animal forms.

When we encounter Lamia in Greek mythology, she has had children by Zeus. And now it is Hera, wife of Zeus, who succumbs to jealousy. She drives Lamia mad and kills her children as well. To avenge herself Lamia goes about endeavoring to kill as many children as she can. She also drinks their blood and eats their flesh. Once beautiful, she has become ugly.

In later mythology Lamia is said to devour handsome young men as well as children. In the post-classical period Lamia is mixed up with vampires, especially in the Balkans. Closely related to Lamia and vampires are the Greek *striges*—demonic night-birds which steal children from their cradles, eat their flesh, and drink their blood.

Lilith was only one of many vampiric ancestors. Accounts of creatures who drank human blood are also traceable to the ancient Chaldeans, Assyrians, and Babylonians. And from ancient Armenia derive tales of the mountain spirit Dashnavar, which sapped the blood from the foot-soles of travelers until they died.

Later folklore, this time in Europe, not only includes references to vampires but also describes ways and means of coping with them. Centuries ago in Ireland the common people were so in dread of what they called "red-bloodsuckers" that they piled stones upon the graves of their dead in order to prevent vampires from coming out—just as other men have used gravestones to keep ghosts of corpses from rising up. Moreover, it is still said in Ireland that the newly buried dead can become active again at the New Year, rising out of their coffins, and causing their victims' blood to boil and flow.

In Serbia, Greece, and Normandy, among other places, was the belief that persons who were werewolves in life would become vampires after death. When the Norman French came upon a grave which seemed suspect, they would dig up the body, cut off its head, and throw the body into the sea or a river.

In Dalmatia, bodies suspected of becoming vampires were wounded so that they could not become "walking dead." In the Philippines, the feet of a dangerous corpse were slit for the same reason. In Burma, the corpse's toes were tied to the thumbs.

In Transylvania, the belief in vampires became so entrenched that precise details about their origin, attributes, and practices evolved. Heinrich von Wlislocki, writing in 1893 about the customs of the Transylvanian Saxons, stated: "The Nosferatu [undead; vampire] not only sucks blood of sleeping people, but also does mischief as an Incubus or Succubus. The Nosferatu is the still-born, illegitimate child of two people who are similarly illegitimate. It is hardly put under the earth before it awakes to life and leaves its grave never to return. It visits people by night in the form of a black cat, a black dog, a beetle, a butterfly, or even a simple straw. When its sex is male, it visits women; when female, men. With young people it indulges in sexual orgies until they get ill and die from exhaustion. In this case it also appears in the form of a pretty girl or a handsome youth, while the victim lies half awake and submits without resistance. It often happens





In this scene from Felix Murnau's film *Nosferatu* (1922), Max Schreck portrays Count Orlock (Dracula) on board a ship arriving in Bremen with a cargo of coffins. (The Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive)

that women are impregnated by this creature and bear children who can be recognized by their ugliness and by their having hair all over their bodies. They then become witches. . . . The *Nosferatu* appears to bridegrooms and brides and makes them impotent and sterile."

Among the horrors found in the folklore of the South Slavs is a creature named Mara, who, once she has tasted the blood of a living man, falls in love with him and must return night after night to torment him. In "nightmare," the element "mare" may be related to the vampire-like Mara.

As for the New World, a minor discovery was made there in the sixteenth century which would profoundly affect the visual image of the Old World vampire. While in Mexico, Cortes and his followers encountered blood-sucking bats, a species peculiar to Central and South America. Associating these animals with the blood-sucking horrors described in myth and folklore, Cortes called them "vampire bats." From this ultimately evolved the fiction-and-film image of the vampire: a figure wearing a great black cape (reminiscent of bat wings) who flies through the night.

The United States has contributed its share of historical vampirana. In Connecticut in 1854, the *Norwich Courier* told of an incident at Jewett, near Norwich, in which the townspeople exhumed the bodies of two brothers who were believed to be feeding on the living. Another account, tracing back to 1874, relates that in the village of Placedale, Rhode Island, a Mr. William Rose dug up the body of his daughter and burned her heart, believing that she was draining off the vitality of her immediate survivors. And in Chicago in 1876, Dr. Dyer, a noted physician, reported that the relatives of a woman who had died of consumption had dug up her corpse and burned her lungs since the deceased was thought to be drawing family and friends into the grave with her.

Various diseases may lie at the root of many historical cases of vampirism, including pernicious anemia, cancer, and tuberculosis. Especially the disease porphyria seems to lurk behind