

DRACULA

PLAY GUIDE | 2019



A Contemporary Theatre



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Notes on *DRACULA*

by Dramaturg Julieta Vitullo, PhD

There are infinite entry points to *Dracula* because vampires provide such a rich myth, without a doubt one of the most powerful and prevalent myths in modern literature and film, but also one that ties back to much older stories and very primal fears ingrained in human consciousness, with a tradition that is even older than Bram Stoker's novel.



Published in 1897, Stoker's *Dracula* has been in print ever since. Bram Stoker was born in Ireland and raised in an Anglo-Irish tradition. He experienced the transition from a traditional (Victorian) world to a modern one. The novel was written while scientific and technological discoveries were speeding up the belief in progress, and changing social norms challenged the traditional ways. It is interesting to note this context as Stoker's *Dracula* explores themes of science, religion, the role of women in society, and ideas about romance and sexuality.

I think Steven Dietz's play adaptation picks up on something that is present in the novel, which is that the female character of Mina is intellectually sophisticated and can often outsmart the men, especially her husband. At the same time, there's a force that fights against that kind of social progress, which is the force of the past, where superstitions rule and wolves lurk in the shadows of civilization, not bound to morality, only to survival.

Critic David Glover says the appeal of vampire stories depend "upon a confusion of temporalities in which ancient folktales, medieval legends, and modern obsessions may all be instantaneously present, coalescing with horrifying effect." And that was the critical consensus when the novel came out: it frightened the readers. In fact, Stoker didn't intend for *Dracula* to serve as fiction initially but as a warning of a very real evil, an all too real nightmare (his editor said no way.)

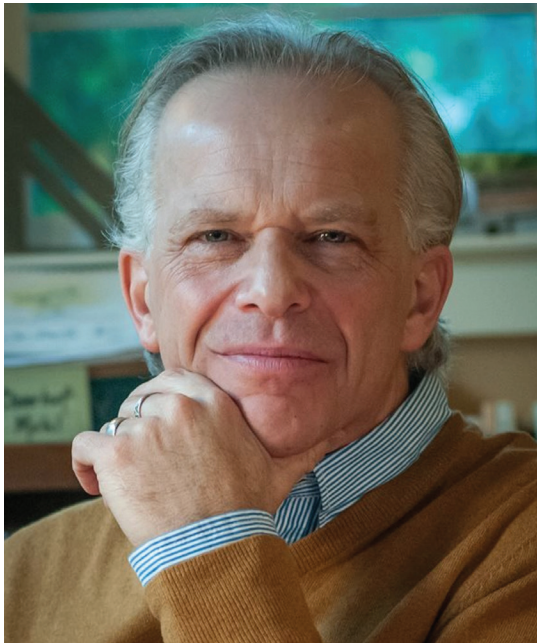
That still so many hundreds or thousands of stories later (between films, shows, books, musicals, video games, etc.,) we are still so captivated by vampires is a testament to our fascination with the monstrous and the deviant.

SYNOPSIS



Dracula by Steven Dietz closely follows the source material of the Bram Stoker novel. The novel tells the story of Dracula's attempt to move from Transylvania to England so that he may find new blood and spread the undead curse. The lead characters in the play work to piece together Dracula's identity and make a valiant attempt to stop him from taking new victims

THE PLAYWRIGHT



Steven Dietz's thirty-plus plays and adaptations have been seen at over one hundred regional theatres in the United States, as well as Off-Broadway. International productions have been seen in over twenty countries, including recently in Brazil, Thailand, South Africa, Estonia, and Iran. His work has been translated into a dozen languages.

Recent world premieres include *Bloomsday* (Steinberg New Play Award Citation); *This Random World* (Humana Festival of New American Plays); *Rancho Mirage* (Edgerton New Play Award), and *On Clover Road* (NNPN "rolling world premiere").

His interlocking plays for adult and youth audiences (*The Great Beyond* and *The Ghost of Splinter Cove*) premiered in Charlotte, NC, in 2019. His latest thriller, *How a Boy Falls*, will premiere at Northlight Theatre, Chicago, in 2020.

A two-time winner of the Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays Award (Fiction, *Still Life with Iris*), Dietz is also a two-time finalist for the American Theatre Critic's Steinberg New Play Award (*Last of the Boys*, *Becky's New Car*). He received the PEN USA West Award in Drama for *Lonely Planet*, and the Edgar Award® for Drama for *Sherlock Holmes: The Final Adventure*.

Other widely produced plays and adaptations include *Yankee Tavern*, *Private Eyes*, *Dracula*, *Jackie & Me*, *American la Ronde*, *Inventing van Gogh*, *God's Country*, and *The Nina Variations*.

Currently a Dramatists Guild "Traveling Master," Dietz teaches workshops in playwriting, story-making, and collaboration across the U.S. He and his wife, playwright Allison Gregory, divide their time between Seattle and Austin.

A brief history of Steven's adaptation of *Dracula*:

The first version of Steven Dietz's adaptation of *Dracula* was commissioned by, and received its premiere at, the Arizona Theatre Company (David Ira Goldstein, Artistic Director), in Tucson, Arizona, on March 31, 1995. The new version at hand, *Dracula (Mina's Quest)*, was commissioned by ACT Theatre in Seattle. The original version included the character of Professor Van Helsing, who plays a key role in the novel. Van Helsing is notably not a character in the version playing at ACT Theatre in 2019. In the "Playwright's Note" included in his first version of his play, Steven Dietz writes that the strength of his adaptation lies in its ability to approach the monster literally and not metaphorically.



"There will be plenty of good, scary fun, but also some compelling thoughts about the conflicts between faith and science, desire and fantasy, and the intellectual and sexual empowerment of women in a male-dominated society. Dietz shows us that Stoker's novel wasn't just a pot-boiler, and that part of its continued hold on the imagination of millions is that we recognize our own preoccupations amongst Victorian melodramatics."

—John Langs, Artistic Director of ACT Theatre and Director of DRACULA

BRAM STOKER'S BIOGRAPHY



Abraham or 'Bram' Stoker is best known today for being the author of the classic horror novel *Dracula* (1897). The story of a vampire struggling to catch victims in his native superstition-ridden Transylvania who relocates to England in search of less wary prey.

However, in his heyday of late Victorian England, Stoker was more famous as the business manager and general factotum of the actor Henry Irving at London's Lyceum Theatre. Stoker held this position for over twenty years and despite a heavy work schedule, which sometimes lasted up to eighteen hours a day, managed to write seventeen books including twelve novels. Born in Ireland in 1847

Stoker would be eclipsed both in life and in death.

Life lost in the shadow of Irving and death in the shadow of Count Dracula. Today he strikes a rather tragic figure who was under appreciated in his time and ignorant, even cheated, of his posthumous literary success. Stoker deserves to be placed alongside Poe, Le Fanu, and Lovecraft in the pantheon of horror fiction.

www.bramstokerdracula.co.uk

WAS DRACULA A REAL PERSON?

For decades, one of the most contentious debates among Dracula scholars was over the source of Stoker's vampire. Did Stoker base his Dracula on the historical Vlad the Impaler? How much did he know about Central European folktales of vampires and how much did he just make up? For a long time, it was believed that he drew inspiration from historical accounts of the 15th-century Romanian prince Vlad Tepes, or Vlad the Impaler, born in Transylvania as the second son of the nobleman Vlad II Dracul.

History.com describes Vlad the Impaler as follows:



"As the ruler of Walachia (now part of Romania), Vlad Tepes became notorious for the brutal tactics he employed against his enemies, including torture, mutilation and mass murder... His preferred method was impalement, or driving a wooden stake through their bodies and leaving them to die of exposure. During his campaign against Ottoman invaders in 1462, Vlad reportedly had as many as 20,000 victims impaled on the banks of the Danube. Some particularly gruesome accounts claimed that Vlad liked to dine among the impaled bodies of his victims, and would even

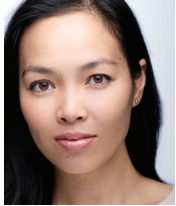
dip his bread into their blood. These gory details, as well as his legally adopted name (Dracula) and his birthplace of Transylvania, have convinced many scholars that Vlad the Impaler provided partial inspiration for Stoker's famous vampire."

However, when Stoker's notes were discovered in a library in Philadelphia in 1972, scholar Elizabeth Miller studied the notes and concluded that there's zero evidence of this connection. According to Miller, Stoker found the name Dracula in a book called *Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia* (1820), which he borrowed from the Whitby Public Library. This book teaches that "Dracula" means devil in the Wallachia language.

Beyond the scholarship around Bram Stoker's novel, Dracula continues to be tied to Vlad the Impaler.

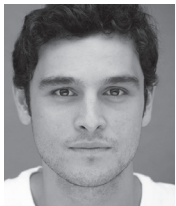
CHARACTERS OF DRACULA

Below is a guide to the characters of *DRACULA*



Mina (played by Khanh Doan)

A young woman in her early twenties, engaged to Jonathan Harker, and the object of Dracula's prey. She's an intelligent woman who solves all the mysteries in the story.



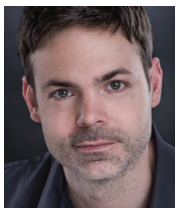
Jonathan Harker (played by Arjun Pande)

Mina's fiancé. He's a solicitor away on business in Transylvania when the play begins.



Lucy (played by Claudine Mboligikpelani Nako)

Mina's closest friend. Her tendency to sleep-walk makes her easy prey to Dracula.



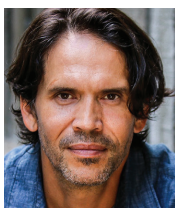
Dr. John Seward (played by Avery Clark)

One of Lucy's suitors and the head of a lunatic asylum. He's experienced in hypnosis and dream interpretation.



Renfield (played by Basil Harris)

A madman at Seward's asylum whose will is dominated by Dracula.



Count Dracula (played by Brandon O'Neill)

A strange and mysterious aristocrat from Transylvania. A shape shifter. A legend.

VAMPIRE BEHAVIOR AND RULES

There are as many traits of vampires as there are vampire stories. Below are some common characteristics.

- **Outcasts and loners**

Vampires tend to be outcasts of some sort. They might be full of resentment and/or thirsty for revenge. They might also be lusty and alluring to prey who become curious.



- **Night visits**

Vampires visit humans in night visions or dreams that establish an unbreakable, psychic connection between them.

*Helen Chandler and Bela Lugosi
in Dracula, 1931.*

- **Physical attributes**

Vampire beauty and attractiveness can change depending on how much blood they've sucked (like in Stoker's novel or in the play). They might be ordinary looking when not attacking and ugly when ready to attack. Vampires also tend to smell.

- **Reproduction**

As time passes for victims of vampires, they get weaker and unable to resist the temptation of biting others. In this way, vampires preserve themselves while they preserve their species.

- **Weakened by sunlight**



Nosferatu from a classic silent horror movie from the German expressionist era.

Sunlight tends to be intolerable or fatal for folktale vampires. In Medieval times, a condition called porphyria –which causes sensitivity to light, paleness, skin rashes, and other symptoms, including a craving for iron rich food and meats – was known as “vampire disease.” Another disease that may have fueled the imagination on vampires centuries ago is pellagra, in which people experience sensitivity to light, dehydration, and a corpse-like look.

- **Repelled by garlic**

This goes back to Transylvanian folklore but, again, has a scientific basis since garlic is a natural antiseptic that can protect from the disease spread by the dead in the times of the plague.

- **Partial or no reflection**

In some stories, vampires don't reflect in mirrors. Likewise, they may not appear in film after being recorded. There are a few things about mirrors that could be the origin of this trait: 1) Mirrors used to be believed to reflect souls, and vampires are soulless. 2) It is considered bad luck to break a mirror because one's soul breaks with it. 3) Mirrors were covered after someone died to prevent souls from being captured.

- **Beast-like**

Vampires often take the form of a beast and visit their victims at night. They can turn into wolves or bats or have powers over different animals.

- **Need an invitation**

In order to lure or attack their victims in their homes, vampires need to be invited in.

GLOSSARY & THEMES

Blood transfusions in the late 19th century

Blood transfusions are executed twice in the play. As far as it's documented in the West, interest in blood transfusions started in the 17th century. Early physicians didn't understand the biological properties of blood but they recognized it as having valuable, albeit mysterious, qualities. The first transfusions were performed from animal to animal, and from animal to humans—the latter with disastrous results. Early transfusions were also used to treat mental illness. Due to many deaths resulting from these procedures, the French parliament made transfusion a criminal act, the Royal Society in London abandoned its research on the subject, and Pope Innocent XI banned the procedure in 1679. The concept of transfusion fell out of popularity, only to resurface again in the 19th century.

The first human-to-human blood transfusion was performed in 1818 as a means to help patients who suffered from postpartum hemorrhage. However, the problem of blood clotting in transfusion was hard to solve and it wasn't until 1915 that sodium citrate was used as an anticoagulant. The rest of the century would bring an increase in scientific advances involving blood and blood transfusions.



Depiction of a direct blood transfusion in the 19th century.

Death

Is Lucy dead or alive when Seward feels the coldness of her hand and finds no pulse on her wrist? If she's dead, how can she speak to him a few moments later? Traditional methods of determining death in the nineteenth century weren't always reliable. Horrifying stories (both real and rumored) of presumed corpses destroying coffin lids proliferated for centuries, especially in the wake of the cholera epidemics in the 18th century. Some became the basis for vampire legends and others fueled the fear of premature burials.


Catholic Eucharist

In this sacrament performed in Catholic mass, it is believed that Jesus Christ is present in the appearance of bread and wine. According to the Catholic faith, these two elements become Christ's actual flesh and blood through the mystery of what is called transubstantiation. The presence of this theme in the play is twofold: literally, as the holy sacrament that will seal the commitment of Mina and Harker to one another ("On our wedding day we shall place the holy wafer of God's own body on our tongue. Drink the wine of his own blood"); and figuratively, as Dracula is the anti-Christ whose promise of eternal life is brought about by the ingestion of actual human blood.

Harker: "You don't partake?" Dracula: "Of wine? No. Not of wine."

*Dracula to Mina: "Blood of my blood, flesh of my flesh, kin to my kin...
my beautiful, bountiful wine-press."*

Literary critic D. Bruno Starrs argues that the novel is full of Catholic allegory and suggests that Stoker, an Irishman, may have been cautiously promoting Catholicism to Christian Protestants through his work. The novel doesn't mention religions by name, but one might assume that both Harker and Seward are English Protestants. In the play, Harker dismisses the Catholic rosary given by the old woman upon his arrival in Transylvania (in the novel, he explicitly does so because he's been taught those things are idolatrous).



According to Starrs, “While the... Protestant woman Lucy is destroyed by Dracula, middle class Mina, with her Irish maiden name Murray and her Irish connections, survives.” In the end, Starrs suggests, both men embrace Catholic symbols and ideas, essentially converting to Catholicism. Starrs writes, “by the end of the book Harker no longer sees crucifixes, rosary beads, and holy wafers as idolatrous and Seward admits to experiencing ‘a mighty power fly along my arm’ when he confronts Dracula with a cross.”

Gothic literature

A type of romance very popular between the 1760s and the 1820s. Its influence is present in horror and ghost stories beyond that time, through the present. Playwright Steven Dietz uses the following stylistic marks of the gothic in his play:

- The spaces evoked are wild and desolate landscapes, dark forests, ruined buildings.
- The story switches from the busy activity of the city to an isolated place full of legends and far from civilization.
- Two naïve young ladies talk about love before a tale of horror and evil interrupts their peace.
- The story is clearly intended to chill the spine.





Hypnosis

At the start of the 19th century, hypnosis was as a fringe activity associated with quacks, but by the time *Dracula* was written, it had become a mainstream medical technique. Practitioners of hypnotism followed theories developed by German doctor Franz Mesmer on natural energy transference between animated and inanimate objects (“animal magnetism”) in the 18th century. Today, and in the world of the play, “mesmerism” is used as a synonym of “hypnosis”.

Science and faith

There’s an ongoing debate among the characters on the issue of science and rational thinking versus faith and superstition:


Mina: “To believe in the unbelievable. That is the essence of faith. To accept the things which cannot be – which cannot, yet, be proved.”

Mina and Dr. Seward: “Have you no faith, Dr. Seward,” “Of course I do. Faith in what I can see – what my mind can know – what my mind can hold.”

Mina: “Dare to have faith, Dr. Seward.”

Seward: “The universe must be understood through science. Not through miracles, or random events, or divine intervention. Observation and evidence must be prized above all.”

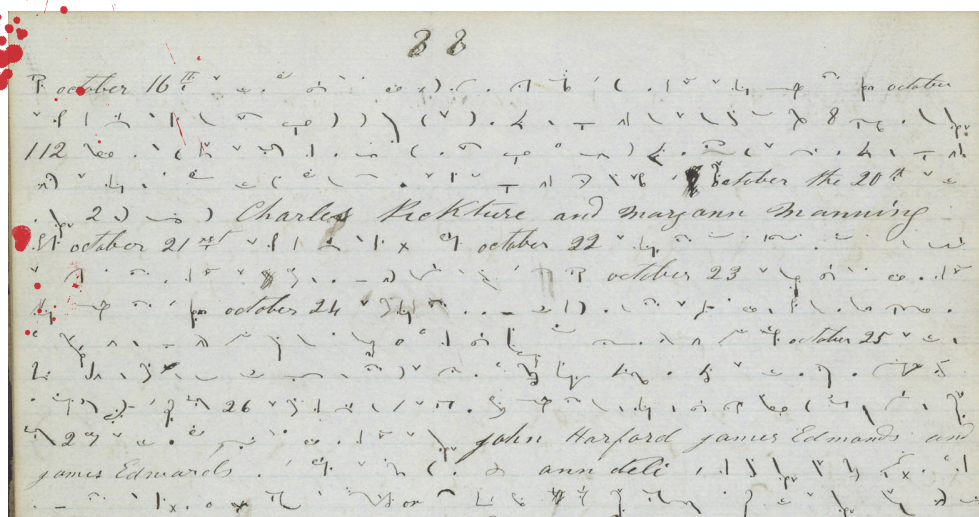
Mina: “With a steadfast belief in science. A fierce reliance on faith, and the avid hope that there remains in us light enough to dispel the darkness... we now pledge our whole selves.”



Shorthand

"A method of rapid writing by means of abbreviations and symbols, used especially for taking dictation. The major systems of shorthand are those devised in 1837 by Sir Isaac Pitman and in 1888 by John R. Gregg (1867–1948)."

(Oxford Dictionary).



An example of Pitman's shorthand.

Transylvania



A historical region in central Romania, known for medieval towns, mountainous borders, the Carpathian mountain range, and castles like Bran Castle, a Gothic fortress that has long been associated with the legend of Dracula, although Stoker's notes about his novel (found in 1972) disprove the connection. "Transylvania" first appeared in

a Medieval Latin document as *ultra silvam*, meaning "beyond the forest." In the play, Harker conveys an English ethnocentrism, claiming that Transylvania is "one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe."

DESIGNS FOR THE PRODUCTION



INVERTED SKETCH -
WHITE STRING OVER FORM

FROM SKETCHBOOK: MASK AND PUPPET

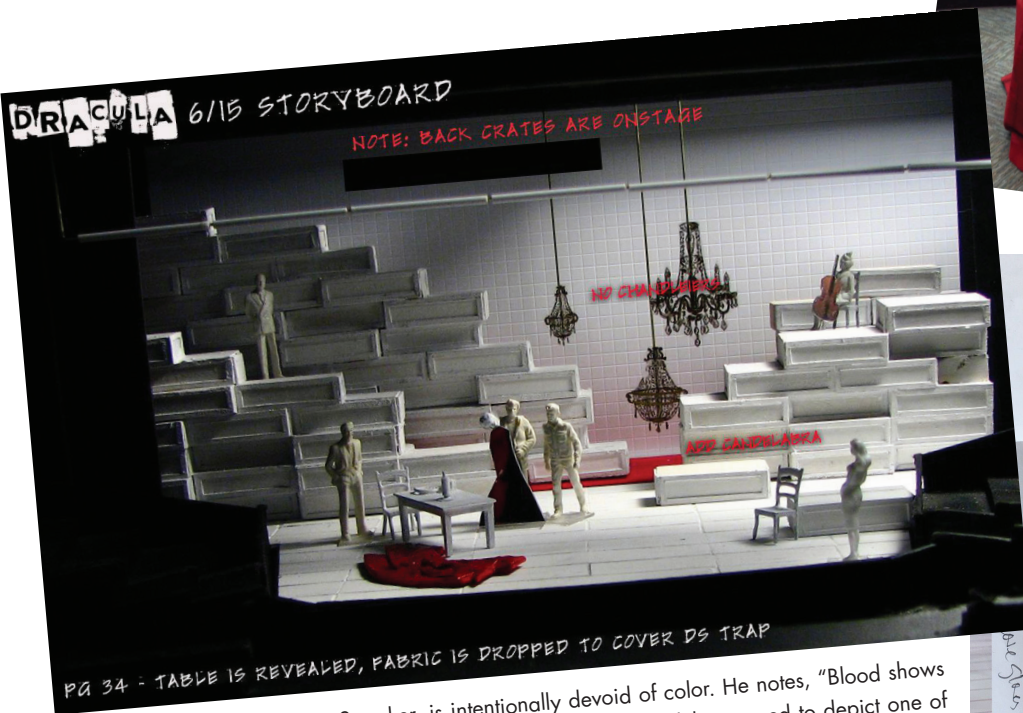


In Director John Langs production of the play, actors at time play part of an ensemble that is telling the story of Dracula. Here, we see actor Claudine Mboligikpelani Nako trying on one of the ritualistic robes you will see in the play.

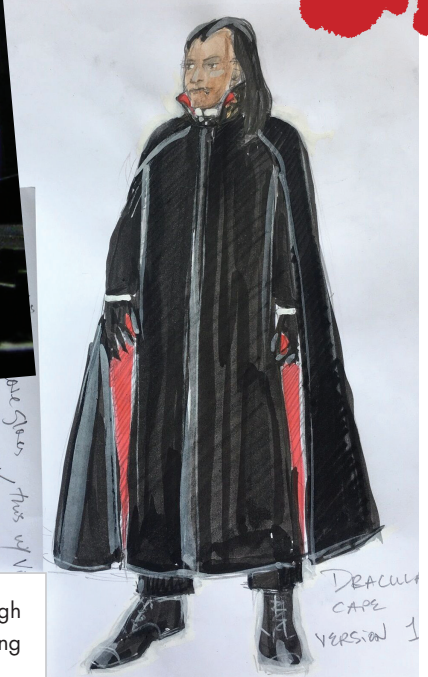


SPOILER ALERT!

Because Dracula is a shape shifter in the story, his figure is represented in different ways onstage - including as a puppet.



The set design, by Matthew Smucker, is intentionally devoid of color. He notes, "Blood shows up really well on a white set." Here you can see Matthew's model arranged to depict one of the scenes in the play.



DRACULA Costume Designer Deb Trout's rough sketch of a costume worn by the actor playing Dracula in other scenes.

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