Dracula

A Novel

BRAM STOKER

FOREWORD BY

ELIZABETH KOSTOVA

AUTHOR OF

THE HISTORIAN

Back Bay Books / Little, Brown and Company
Hachette Book Group, USA
237 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10017
Visit our Web site at www.HachetteBookGroupUSA.com

First eBook Edition: September 2005

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

ISBN 978-0-316-02822-6

Contents

Foreword

"'I am Dracula; and I bid you welcome, Mr. Harker, to my house.'" With these words the Count presents himself to Jonathan Harker, primary hero of Bram Stoker's classic story. They have become one of the most famous self-introductions in the history of storytelling, repeated endlessly not only by a century of readers—Dracula hasn't been out of print since its first publication in England in 1897—but also by dozens of stage and film actors. It's impossible to read that sinister invitation without conjuring Bela Lugosi, Christopher Lee, or Gary Oldham, or to avoid hearing, mentally, the creak of a heavy castle door. The Dracula who invites us in is already easily recognizable, with his thin, aquiline nose, his "lofty domed forehead," and above all his "peculiarly sharp teeth; these protruded over the lips, whose remarkable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality in a man of his years." As poor Harker has yet to learn, his host is not simply a sinister nobleman but actually a four-hundred-year-old vampire.

Stoker's tale, however, has a life of its own that solidly predates the interpretations of Hollywood. In fact, one of the great delights of *Dracula* is the guilty pleasure of reading other people's letters and journals—the story is told entirely through fictional documents. The longest of these are journal entries, and the shortest are telegrams, with some tongue-in-cheek newspaper articles to leaven the mix. We get the novel's constellation of main characters through their own words and their perceptions of one another; even the villainous Dracula provides a letter. In the early sections

of the book, Stoker cleverly lets one character at a time carry the plot before he begins to alternate voices rapidly, so that we read Jonathan Harker's chilling journal of his experiences in Transylvania for a long stretch before turning to other documents. Through his journal we learn not only about his bizarre errand to Dracula's castle and the terrible reality he finds there but also about his love for his fiancée, Mina, who later becomes a focus for Dracula's evil intentions.

Then Harker's journal ends and we begin to read Mina's innocent correspondence with her friend Lucy Westenra (whose name, by the way, makes her the first line of defense of the Western world, which the ancient and mysterious "East" is about to prey upon) and Mina's own diaries. Mina wonders what is keeping Jonathan silent in Transylvania; why is there so little news from him? We, the privileged readers, the snoopers among documents, know perfectly well why, and the hunt for truth is on. Soon we find ourselves reading the journal of one of Lucy's several suitors, Dr. John Seward, whose scientific skepticism gives unfolding events a new veracity. It is Dr. Seward who first recognizes that Lucy has something more than an ordinary illness.

For roughly the first half of the book we are—frustratingly but flatteringly—always a step ahead of the characters, who have yet to realize the need to communicate with one another. Little do they know, yet, what a castle in Transylvania could have in common with a ship coming into port in Whitby, Yorkshire, or with a mental patient in London, or with a young woman's sudden return to sleepwalking. When our heroes finally begin to read one another's written records, however, they show a great deductive intelligence, sometimes even leaving the reader in the dust. The increasing alternation among documents and subplots fuels the growing suspense of the story, so that we have to resist the temptation to skip ahead to the continuation of a particular voice.

The catalyst for all this fruitful communication among characters is the mentor-hero who is called onstage in chapter 9, Dr. Abraham Van Helsing of Amsterdam. Stoker bestows on Van Helsing his own first name—and clearly intends him to be the brain of the piece. When Dr. Seward summons Van Helsing, a professor of medicine "who knows as much about obscure diseases as anyone in the world," to attend on the strange case of Lucy Westenra, Stoker is invoking a powerful tradition of science (and before

that, alchemy) that reaches back to the late Middle Ages. Holland was the setting for some of the great scientific discoveries of Western Europe, including the invention of the microscope (which Seward uses in one scene to examine Lucy's blood). For English readers, Amsterdam had the advantage of being traditionally Protestant as well. Van Helsing brings with him to London both Old World intellectual prowess and religious beliefs that Victorian English readers could sanction.

As soon as Van Helsing walks onstage, it's clear that he's going to have pride of place in the story because Stoker goes to the trouble of describing his appearance in detail; he is the only character apart from Dracula to receive this honor. In fact, Van Helsing looks remarkably like Stoker himself as he was described by his contemporaries: ". . . the head is noble, well-sized, broad, and large behind the ears. The face, clean-shaven, shows a hard, square chin, a large, resolute, mobile mouth, a good-sized nose, rather straight, but with quick, sensitive nostrils. . . . The forehead is broad and fine, rising at first almost straight and then sloping back over two bumps or ridges wide apart. . . ." From this moment, we know that it's Dracula versus Van Helsing, the "large domed forehead" of the wily fiend versus those two formidable brain bumps on the scientist's skull. In an age when Victorian England had not yet recovered from the craze for phrenology—the study of personality through ridges on the skull—these aggressive protrusions were especially reassuring. Dracula may be four hundred years old, but his opponent is equally hardheaded.

It takes Van Helsing only a brief examination of Lucy Westenra's mysterious symptoms to understand what may be at stake: "'This is no jest, but life and death, perhaps more.'" The extraordinary thing about Van Helsing is that he is not only a man of science and of faith—two potentially narrowing qualities—but also a man of remarkably open mind. "'Do you not think,'" he questions his doubting friend Seward, "'that there are things which you cannot understand, and yet which are; that some people see things that others cannot? . . . Ah, it is the fault of our science that it wants to explain all; and if it explain not, then it says nothing to explain.'" Van Helsing's willingness to look beyond both science and conventional piety is the quality that allows him to identify the attack of the vampire, to use garlic and crucifixes as well as blood transfusions in his struggle to save Lucy. He is also a man of enormous energy, humor, and compassion,

weeping, laughing, and joking in his comical but eloquent English. Stoker's intellectual hero is at least as compelling a figure as the dark prince he hunts.

Abraham Stoker was born in Dublin in 1847 to William Stoker, a civil servant at Dublin Castle, and Charlotte Stoker, a social crusader. By his own account, he was an invalid in early childhood, unable to walk until the age of seven, although in later life he never explained what his illness had been. He seems from this time to have feared death, abandonment, and the helplessness of the sickbed, themes that are abundantly reflected in *Dracula.* Stoker was born into an Ireland struggling under famine introduced by the potato blight that began in 1845, and his mysterious illness may in fact have been one of the fever epidemics that accompanied the famine. Bram's parents highly valued reading and education, using their modest means to buy books for the family library. Bram's mother told him stories: Irish folktales, but also accounts of the horrors of the cholera epidemic of her own girlhood, a devastation that arose in the East and traveled to the British Isles.

By 1863, when Stoker entered Trinity College in Dublin, he had left his illness, if not his dreamy, imaginative childhood, completely behind; an energetic six foot two and 175 pounds, he won awards at university for his athletic feats. At Trinity, he acquired two new passions—the poetry of Walt Whitman, with whom he corresponded, and the acting of Henry Irving. In 1870, Stoker became a clerk at Dublin Castle, following his father into the Irish civil service, but he left the profession in 1878 to become Henry Irving's manager. He had his first literary success of sorts in 1875 with the publication of a horror story entitled "The Chain of Destiny." Soon after becoming Irving's manager, he married Florence Balcombe and in 1879 the couple settled in London, where Stoker assisted Henry Irving in the management of the famous Lyceum Theatre. In Irving, Stoker found a sometimes tyrannical friend, a mentor, a study in creativity, and a cause to which to devote his life.

Stoker's London career brought him into contact with a number of great writers of the day, including George Bernard Shaw and Arthur Conan Doyle, and his American tours with Irving in the 1880s allowed him to meet, among others, his idol Walt Whitman. In spite of a complex and demanding career in the theater, Stoker managed considerable literary output during these decades, including *A Glimpse of America* (1886) and two novels, *The Snake's Pass* (1890) and *The Watter's Mou'* (1895).

Dracula, Stoker's third novel, was published in 1897. It was a departure from his first two in an important sense: he devoted far longer to its composition (six years), doing research in the British Library and the library in Whitby, Yorkshire (the setting in the novel for Dracula's first attack on Lucy), and plotting it carefully along the way. Stoker's research yielded an inspired name for his vampire-in-the-making; "Dracula" was the title of Vlad T̨epes̨, a prince, or *voivode*, in fifteenth-century Wallachia, a region now part of Romania. The historical Dracula was born in Transylvania and rebuilt at least one fortress there, and his name was redolent of battle with the Ottomans and torture of his own people. For the purposes of his novel, Stoker changed Dracula's family heritage and located Dracula's lands in Transylvania rather than Wallachia, but the name gave Stoker's monster a bond with history and nobility. Strikingly, in the course of his research, Stoker did not go to Eastern Europe, although he studied such works as *The Land Beyond the Forest* (1888), Englishwoman Emily Gerard's account of Transylvania and its folk superstitions, and *An Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia* by William Wilkinson (1820). One of the most astounding accomplishments of the novel is its Carpathian setting, which remains vivid to this day despite the occasional geographical error or fictionalization. Stoker evoked with skill a landscape he had never seen, including details of peasant dress, architecture, language, and terrain. *Dracula* is a testament to the power of armchair research.

The novel was an immediate critical success. Even the master of the detective story, Conan Doyle, praised Stoker's creation: "It is really wonderful how with so much exciting interest over so long a book there is never an anticlimax."