



The Vampire by Edvard Munch.

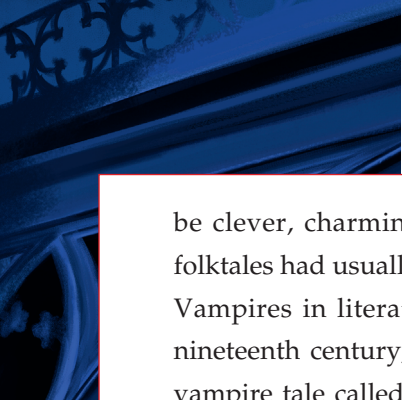
Vampires *in literature and films*

Legends and folktales about vampires have fascinated people for centuries and continue to do so today. In the 18th century authors started writing about vampires and the terrible things they did.

Vampires in literature

One of the first times vampires were mentioned in literature was in the short German poem *The Vampire* (1748) by Heinrich Ossenfelder. A later German poem about vampires was *The Bride of Corinth* (1797) by Goethe, about a young woman who returns from the grave to look for the man she loves.

The figure of the vampire first appeared in English nineteenth-century literature with the publication of John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819). Polidori's protagonist, Lord Ruthven, is the first vampire to



be clever, charming and attractive. The vampires of legends and folktales had usually been ugly, frightening creatures.

Vampires in literature were beginning to be popular in the early nineteenth century, and in 1872 Sheridan Le Fanu ¹ wrote a classic vampire tale called *Carmilla*, in which the protagonist was a female vampire. It is interesting to note that Sheridan Le Fanu was Bram Stoker's editor when Stoker was working as a theater critic, and Le Fanu's vampire tale probably inspired Stoker to write *Dracula*.

The Irish writer Bram Stoker was very interested in vampires and the occult. ² He researched the history and culture of Transylvania and became familiar with Vlad Tepes III, the cruel fifteenth-century prince of Wallachia (see the dossier on Vlad Tepes, pages 46-47). Stoker chose Vlad Tepes III as the model for his fictional vampire.

When Bram Stoker wrote his masterpiece *Dracula* in 1897, he opened the door to all kinds of vampire literature. He probably did not imagine that his character, Count Dracula the vampire, would become world famous. *Dracula* mixes elements of mystery, love, sex, blood and death, but other themes, such as the role of women in Victorian culture, passions and the fear of death and the dead, are also examined in the novel.

Vampires in films

The vampire is one of the most prominent figures of classic horror films. *Dracula* has been a major character in more films than any other except for Sherlock Holmes. Many early films were either based on the novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker or stories similar to it. In 1922 the silent German film *Nosferatu*, directed by F. Murnau,

1. **Le Fanu** : pronunciation [ˈLefənjuː].

2. **occult** : supernatural and magic forces.



Scene from the film *Nosferatu the Vampire* (1922) directed by Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau.

featured the first film presentation of Dracula. Murnau did not get permission to use the same names that were used in Stoker's novel, so he had to change them and other parts of the story. The film was a huge success because people were actually able to see Dracula interpreted on the screen.

In 1931, Universal Studios in Hollywood produced the first talking film about Dracula starring the famous Hungarian actor Bela Lugosi as Count Dracula; it was a big hit.³ Lugosi's interpretation of Count Dracula was excellent.

In 1958 the British film *Dracula*, starring Christopher Lee, was another great success and it was followed by seven sequels. In the 1970s several other films and television series featuring vampires

3. **big hit** : colloquial expression that means a huge success.



Scene from the film *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) directed by Francis Ford Coppola.

were very popular; some of them were simply horror movies of bad quality.

Bram Stoker's Dracula (1992), an excellent film produced and directed by Francis Ford Coppola, starring Keanu Reeves, Gary Oldman, Winona Ryder and Anthony Hopkins, was a great box office hit and won three Oscars. It is considered the best film about Dracula ever produced.

It is interesting to see how the interpretations of the actors, the photography, the costumes and the settings have changed through the years, but the basic themes of evil, seduction, terror and the dark underworld remain the same.

This film begins with the tragic story of Vlad Tepes, who returns home after fighting the Crusades and finds that his wife has

committed suicide. He is desperate because he loved her very much and he decides to become a vampire.

The 1931 version of the film, instead, begins with Mr Renfield, the real estate agent⁴ who goes to Transylvania to sell a property to Count Dracula; the background history of Vlad Tepes is not presented. The 1931 version does not have a soundtrack,⁵ except for a few notes from Tchaikovsky's ballet *Swan Lake*, while in Coppola's version the famous British singer Annie Lennox wrote and sang *Love Song for a Vampire* as part of the film's soundtrack.

Interview with the Vampire is a 1994 film inspired by Anne Rice's novel with the same name. It was directed by Neil Jordan and starred Tom Cruise, Brad Pitt and Antonio Banderas; it was another very popular vampire film.

1 Comprehension check

Answer these questions.

- 1 What was the German poem *The Bride of Corinth* about?
- 2 Who was the first English writer to write about a vampire?
- 3 How was Lord Ruthven different from legendary vampires?
- 4 Who did Bram Stoker choose as the model for Count Dracula?
- 5 What themes are examined in Stoker's novel?
- 6 Why was the 1922 German film *Nosferatu* important?
- 7 Who was Bela Lugosi?
- 8 How was the 1931 film version of *Dracula* different from the 1992 film version?

4. **real estate agent** : a person who sells homes.

5. **soundtrack** : music that accompanies a film.