Vampire

from Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable

A fabulous being, supposed to be the ghost of a heretic, criminal or the like, who returned from the grave in the guise of a monstrous bat to suck the blood of sleeping persons who usually became vampires themselves. The only way to destroy them was to drive a stake through their body. The superstition is essentially Slavonic, from a word related to Russian *upyr*, 'vampire'.

*But first, on earth as Vampire sent,*

*Thy corse shall from its tomb be rent:*

*Then ghastly haunt thy native place*

*And suck the blood of all thy race.*

Lord Byron: The Giaour 1813

The word is also applied to someone who preys on their fellows, a 'bloodsucker'.

One of the classic horror stories, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), centres on vampirism (see also *FIRST LINES IN FICTION*). The Dracula of Transylvanian legend appears to originate from Vlad IV of Wallachia (1430-76), known as Vlad Țepeș (Vlad the Impaler), although he was not a vampire. It is suggested that Stoker's Count Dracula was a composite figure derived from Vlad the Impaler and the Countess Báthori (d.1614), who was arrested in 1610 for murdering some 650 girls. It was her habit to wash in the blood of her young victims in order to maintain her skin in a youthful condition. The name comes from Vlad's membership of the Order of the Dragon, although *dracul* in Romanian strictly speaking means 'the Devil'.

Count Dracula was originally brought to the screen thinly disguised as NOSFERATU, but his first appearance under his own name was in 1931, played with sinister Hungarian suavity by Bela Lugosi. Many other film versions followed, notably the Hammer series featuring Christopher Lee as the Count, beginning with *Dracula* (1958).

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MLA