

Nineteenth Season

TENNESSEE REPERTORY THEATRE

David Grapes, Producing Artistic Director

Presented by

Bank of America



WORLD PREMIERE PRODUCTION

DRACULA

THE CASE OF THE SILVER SCREAM

Conceived by David Grapes & adapted for the stage by
Robert Neblett from the novel by Bram Stoker

Director

David Grapes**

Scenic Design

Gary C. Hoff

Lighting Design

Phillip Franck***

Properties Master

Steven Lepley

Dramaturg

Robert Neblett

Costume Design

Barbara Pope***

Original Composition/Sound Design

Darin F. Karnes

Production Stage Manager

Liz Stephens*

Additional Music

Vince di Mura & Michael Ayers

ssdc
The Director and Choreographer are members of
the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers
an independent national union.

* Member of Actors' Equity Association
**Member Society of Directors & Choreographers
***United Scenic Artist



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Dracula: The Case of the Silver Scream

Notes from the Playwright

Vampire lore is almost as old as civilization itself, with some stories about these supernatural creatures dating back as far as 2,000 B.C., to the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh and even the Jewish Talmud. Classical Greece and ancient India have a strong tradition of vampire myths in their literature as well, and many of our modern assumptions about these monsters derive directly from these sources. But it was not until the Romantic period of English literature in the early nineteenth century that the vampire as we know him (or her) today began to take shape as a mysterious, seductive creature of the night who feeds on our desires as well as our blood. Because the vampire can be found in such a wide variety of cultural settings dating back over 4,000 years, there are many variants on the legend, some of which are unfamiliar to a contemporary audience and others which are simply contradictory.

In some mythologies, the vampire is more akin to a zombie or werewolf: a creature raised from the dead that feeds on the flesh of humans with animalistic ferocity. In others, the vampire is merely a tormented corpse that has been separated from its soul, wandering the earth searching for relief from its existential condition. Some even take a Poe-like twist, and the vampire is the victim of premature burial who wreaks revenge on those who condemned him to his fate. But the greatest discrepancies occur when determining the most effective methods to destroy a vampire. In some stories, the first rays of dawn are enough to ignite the undead flesh of this wraith, instantly reducing him to a smol-

dering pile of ashes. In other versions, the process is more intricate: drive a stake made from a branch of the wild rose through the monster's heart, sprinkling the body with holy water, then filling its mouth with garlic, decapitating it, and finally laying the remains in a consecrated grave. One of the most significant contributions that the author Anne Rice has made to the horror genre is to reject all preconceived notions about vampire lore in the composition of her *Vampire Chronicles*. In fact, much of the immense popularity of her fiction is based upon her unique supposition that the vast majority of vampire lore is mere superstition. Holy water, garlic, and even crucifixes and sunlight are scoffed at as ineffectual deterrents for her ultra-hip children of the "savage garden." In fact, one of her earliest vampire characters regularly seeks solace in a Catholic chapel because of its serenity, unscathed by the Christian iconography that adorns its walls.

Undoubtedly, the greatest influence on modern conceptions of the vampire myth is Bram Stoker's 1897 "penny-dreadful" novel, *Dracula*. Although most people would consider themselves knowledgeable about this most infamous vampire character, it is a much smaller percentage that has actually read the original novel and is familiar with the specific details of its plot. Many of the most commonly-held beliefs about Dracula and the undead world of the vampire are derived from a 1924 stage adaptation by Hamilton Deane and John Balderston, which was subsequently the basis for Tod Brownin's landmark film from 1931, which catapulted Bela Lugosi into stardom as the archetypal Count.

Stoker added a historical twist to his vampire tale in order to lend it an air of authenticity by connecting his title character to the infamous medieval Romanian prince Vlad Tepes (or "Vlad the Impaler," as he was commonly known). But we must remember that Stoker was no historian or occultist. Although he dabbled in many disciplines, including the publication of several Gothic suspense novels, he was the personal assistant to one of the nineteenth century's greatest actors - Henry Irving. (As a side note, Stoker wrote *Dracula* with Irving in mind to portray the horrific Count on stage.) Therefore, although he researched many existing vampire traditions, like many writers since, he combined them in the format that was most convenient for his novel's plot, rather than remaining truly faithful to any one branch of paranormal study.

Within the past twenty years, the vampire legend has experienced an explosive resurgence, thanks to pop culture phenomena such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel*, and the novels of Anne Rice, just to name a few. Sensing this rise in popularity, David Grapes approached me in early 2003 to assist him in adapting this work for the stage. But he felt that, since *Dracula* has become such a recognizable part of our popular culture, he wanted to take the liberty of putting a new spin on the novel by employing the film noir style in order to emphasize the book's suspense and Bram Stoker's own fondness for mystery stories. In order to play with the cinematic conventions of noir style, we have immersed our characters in the studio system of 1940s Hollywood, replete with caustic film critics, egomaniacal directors, wide-eyed ingénues, and even our own hard-boiled private eye.

The film noir style of the 1940s and 1950s is derived from the Expressionistic cinema style developed by experimental filmmakers in Europe in the 1930s. This style explored the emotional impact made on an audience by exaggerating the contrast between light and darkness to emphasize the world of shadows that lurks underneath the surface of "normal" society. Film noir was adopted by American directors and writers to create movies with a sense of heightened suspense, most often following the seediest cases from the files of hard-boiled detectives like Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe. The standard cast of noir characters includes a helpless damsel-in-distress who turns out to be a wolf in sheep's clothing, a man wrongfully accused of a crime he didn't commit, the disreputable low-life from the underground who turns out to be not such a bad guy after all, and the classic vamp (a seductive woman who looks like trouble and usually is).

It is interesting to note that the emergence of pulp fiction which introduced Americans to the world of hard-boiled detectives and their adventures in the seedy criminal underbelly of society coincides with the emergence of the horror genre, best identified with such serials as *Weird Tales* and *Tales from the Crypt*. So it is only natural that in our play these two worlds should collide and engage each other in the ultimate battle between good and evil. So, in essence, what you are witnessing on stage is a clash between these two distinct literary traditions, each complete with its own system of symbols and conventions.

- Robert L. Neblett