

Vampirology Part 1 with Dr. Jeff Holdeman

Ologies Podcast

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Oh hey, it's the lady recording a podcast in a rental car in an airport parking lot, for real, Alie Ward. I'm here, it's Spooktober. Okay, it's Halloween week, this episode is so robust, it's so meaty and juicy it's just going to bleed into November. This is a two-parter because it's that good, so this is Part 1. I talked to this ologist for nearly two hours, and I felt like I should have paid a price of admission for the conversation, which is, I guess, what his college students do via just tuition. But I can tell you, you're in for a treat and the trick is that you get it for free, so get excited.

Now, this ologist came to my attention when someone encountered Dr. Lauren Esposito, the Scorpiology guest, and grabbed Lauren's phone and texted me from her phone to please hunt this vampire guy down. So, Miranda Mosley, I'm talking about you, you hooked it up. Well done, thank you.

Also, thank you to everyone for supporting at Patreon.com/Ologies. You support the show, and you send in your vampire questions, and I love you. You can join for as little as a dollar a month. So, thank you also to everyone wearing *Ologies* merch from OlogiesMerch.com and for supporting the show. You can do it for zero dollars just by subscribing, and rating, and reviewing, helps so much. Yamijig left a review this week that said:

You will squeal with delight and "Hhmmm" in thought almost every episode.

So, I hope you do that. You're going to do a lot of "Hmm" and a lot of "Whaaaat?"

So, vampirology came from the word vampire which may come from an old Slavic word, *vampir* or Turkish for "witch;" it's disputed. But vampirology is definitely a term, it's a word for the scholarly pursuit of this field and this guest is just one of the world's finest, a legend. No other vampirologist would do. So, he got his PhD in Slavic languages at Ohio State University and is now a senior lecturer in Slavic and Eastern European Languages and Cultures at Indiana University in Bloomington. One of the school's no-doubt most popular courses is his, *The Vampire in European and American Culture*. This episode is a wild ride. I don't know how we got him, but I love that we did. You're going to love him.

So, find a shady spot and prepare to drink in the functions of folklore, the mysteries of medicine, pale impalers, sub-tweeting Lotharios, ghost story competitions, penny dreadfuls, plagiarism, zine art, lawsuits, destruction, resurrection, social taboos, weaponized fiction, escalating monster warfare, romanticism, and propagandism, with a professor who proves not all heroes wear vampire capes, Vampirologist Dr. Jeff Holdeman.

Jeff: Hi, my name is Jeff Holdeman and I use he/him pronouns.

Alie: And we edit too, so we can stop, start. We're not live, at all. [*Alie laughs*]

Jeff: Wonderful. We are undead Alie, we are undead.

Alie: [*laughs*] Couldn't have said it better myself. I'm definitely talking to, I think, the best person in the world for an episode on vampirology. I think that would be the ology this is.

Jeff: Well, you know... I love your other podcasts where you have, you know, other great Greek-sounding names and vampirology just is a little bit too transparent. So maybe, like, fangy

bitology [*Alie laughs*] if you want to have another option there? But vampirology is completely fine.

Alie: Hemo... hemophage-ology.

Jeff: Very good, yes.

Alie: Blood eating, maybe?

Jeff: Yeah, exactly. [*Alie laughs*] Please understand that not all vampires drink blood, so they're not all hemophages.

Alie: Who doesn't? Which vampires don't drink blood? This is exciting already.

Jeff: Oh, our psychic vampires.

Alie: Oh my gosh. Okay, have you been watching- ?

Jeff: And I can tell you all about our different types of vampires as you like and stuff but I already... When you say, "Have you been watching..." I already know that you're going to ask, am I watching *What We Do in the Shadows*, with Colin Robinson? [*DJ airhorn*] Absolutely.

Alie: [*laughs*] It's so good. It's so good. So many people asked if you've been watching it. I've been watching it too and it's just... in my head, I just keep thinking, "Laszlo, Laszlo..." all day. [*woman cackles then says, "Laszlo."*] So good! So now, you are a professor in this, in Indiana. How did you come to be a lecturer? You're in the department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, correct?

Jeff: Slavic and Eastern European Languages and Cultures at Indiana University at Bloomington, yes.

Alie: At what point did that even become an option?

Jeff: So, full disclosure, my maternal grandmother was born in Transylvania, [*Alie gasps*] so the roots go back very far. But she only mentioned wolves... So, she came to the United States right before the outbreak of World War I, the last sailing of her ship. If somebody had had pink eye, I would not be talking to you right now. She came with her entire family, but she would still talk about the old country, and my mom and I actually got to go back and visit in 1999 back to her village and everything, and it was just as magical as you would expect. But she would talk about wolves at night and maybe some mentions of witches, kind of category, but no vampire talk.

It wasn't until I got to the Ohio State University to do my graduate studies, in my second year there, they called in a hatchet dean to get rid of our department and they said, "We're going to close your department," and one of my professors, Dr. Dan Collins said, "What's the problem here?" And they said, "Well, your enrolments are low in the department." And he said, "Oh, enrollments? Well, I took a vampire course at the University of Virginia with Jan Perkowski and if you want to see enrollments, I'll give you enrollments." [*Alie laughs*]

So, he developed the course based on what he had studied. Another graduate student and I were his assistants, his dual Renfields, and we got dressed up in peasant shirts. I went down to Star Sales in Columbus, Ohio and bought 144 packs of plastic vampire teeth; we made flyers, stapled the teeth to the flyer, went out, I put bite marks on my neck, and we handed out flyers for the course and got 220 students in the class the first year. [*"That's a lot."*] So, we had one of the largest classrooms on campus. It was all lecture-based and PowerPoint.

Really, I was frustrated because students were learning factoids and not really putting it together. We could give multiple choice tests but not really delve deep. So, I was like, "If I ran the zoo..." You know, I said, if I ever teach this class, I'm going to make it a boutique course, 20-student seminar, essay tests, and research projects.

Aside: And so, when he went to Indiana University in 2002, he pitched this idea and...

Jeff: And they said, "Nah, we hired you for other things."

Aside: So, fast forward half a decade.

Jeff: Five years later I started as the Faculty Director at the Global Village Living-Learning Center and they said, "Oh and by the way, you'll be teaching a seminar every semester." And I was like, "On what?" And they said, "Whatever you'd like, but it should be something international, cultural, global, something that you do." And I was like, "Aww, here it is!" And I got to then pitch my vampire course, which I taught for the first time in the fall of 2008. So, this is 2022 and this is my 15th vampire brood of students that I have this year.

Aside: Can I tell you a secret? Okay, great. Sometimes when I'm vetting guests, I check out a site called Rate My Professors, which is like Yelp but it's about college teachers, which is as terrifying as it sounds, if you're a college teacher. But thisologist's ratings are fawning and appreciative. Things like, "Jeff, a super fun guy with a great sense of humor, knows literally everything there is to know about vampires and will make sure you know it all too." People say it's one of the "Wildest classes, one of the weirdest courses they've ever taken, indescribably intriguing, prompting me to consider perspectives I'd never before encountered." So, buckle up. We have the best person in the world for this. And for the next two episodes, he is your teacher, but with no tests.

Jeff: It is everything I wanted it to be with aforementioned essay tests, and analysis projects, and class discussions, and get to see the sweat on students' faces and the embarrassment when we're talking about really personal vampire stuff.

Alie: *[laughs]* I mean, how did you become prepared to do that? There is a 60-page syllabus that you hand out, and it catalogs every reference of vampires in film, different series, in literature. How do you become acquainted with all the material that is out there?

Jeff: Alie, it's 62 pages.

Alie: *[laughs]* Okay, my bad.

Jeff: *[laughs]* When I started... Dr. Collins did such an amazing job of coming up with themes and the materials that we covered at Ohio State. When I came here, I didn't have any vampire movies. I had to go down to the video rental stores and get them to make clips for class. And so, I bought my first... It was like, I've got to get the standards, and got a couple of those, and then got a couple more. And then you know, it was in the United States during one summer and I was like, "Maybe I'll check on Amazon and eBay to see what there is." And now I have a collection of about 600 DVD titles of as many vampire movies that aren't completely terrible, from around the world. It's taken 15 years to collect all of that, and so the syllabus has continued to grow in detail.

But then also, in the resources, the references that are there as well... So, this year I added in a section on vampire-themed video games, for instance. So, it's always evolving and expanding. And of course, there are about 20 new vampire movies that come out, good vampire movies, that come out a year.

Aside: 20 vampire movies a year! We as human beings are thirsty for blood sucking.

Jeff: So, there's always room for growth there.

Alie: And now 15 years in the making, say, for you. But how many years in the making have vampires been in lore? When did they first pop up? Did it start with Vlad?

Jeff: Oh, way before him. And again, that's my countryman you're talking about so I would be kind of careful there.

Alie: [*Alie giggles*] Mr. Impaler, I'm so sorry.

Jeff: He's... yeah, it's fine.

Aside: Now, to understand movie vampires, we have to go way, way, way, way back in time and argh! This is so much history and context that you didn't know that you needed to know. It'll change Halloweens and horror movies for the rest of your life.

Jeff: It didn't happen overnight. We study, first the folkloric vampire, the vampire of central and eastern Europe, which is the type of vampire that we inherit now through various means. But we had to have a whole bunch of elements there in place. We couldn't have gotten our folkloric vampire that we know anywhere else, because we had to be in central and eastern Europe, there had to be people living in these conditions, in these rural areas, both mountains, and fields, and swamps, and short growing seasons, and long winters, and certain prevalent diseases, and religions that were in the area, pre-Christian religions, and then Christianity. We had to have Indo-Iranian dualism come up and spread among the people and slowly work its way into their belief systems and their worldviews. We had to be living in these extended families that were subsisting on farming, living year to year in these patriarchal, patrilineal social organizations of this extended family. We had to have all of those things in order to have our folkloric vampire.

Aside: PS, I googled this for us because Indo-Iranian dualism, not a phrase that I casually use. And according to a paper based on a lecture by professor Dr. Jamsheed K. Choksy at the second Indo-Iranian International Congress, it means, in the broadest strokes, just the notion of good versus evil. That, "Good cannot arise from evil, nor evil from good. Thus, it should be understood that something completely perfect in terms of goodness cannot produce evil." And vice versa. Evil shit cannot turn cool.

Alie: And where do you think the genesis itself was? When is the first recorded history of something of this nature, something that maybe creeps only in the night and is not necessarily alive but is undead? Where do you find that germ?

Jeff: Yeah, one of the problems is that the Slavs, the central and eastern Europeans didn't get writing until Christianization and so, you know, in 988 in Kievan Rus, we didn't have records before that.

Aside: Did I know what he was talking about? Of course I didn't. I've only been studying eastern European history for, like, the last 15 minutes. But yes, there was a state in eastern and northern Europe, Kievan Rus, up until about the 1200s. But in the late 900s, Vladimir the Great was like, "Enough of Paganism, I'm over it, let's do... Let's see. Islam doesn't let us drink? Let's do Christianity." And then they started using written language for religion. Before that time, a lot of history and knowledge was oral history and, yes, folklore.

Jeff: So, we reconstruct a proto vampire, which was a demon which sucked water from the clouds, causing drought, causing the crops to wither, causing people to not have food, and causing

them to wither through starvation, leading to death. Especially once we get dualism and this belief in good and evil being equal forces which have always existed, and exist now, and will always exist, and one is not going to win out over the other, and the soul is good, and the body is bad. That slowly got to take form, that formless demon which would have sucked rain from the clouds, to a being which then would suck blood from human victims, causing withering, leading to death.

Aside: Death by desiccation. Our most primal fears are losing fluids. [*“Precious bodily fluids.”*]

Jeff: So, it's the beautiful analogy, the similarity between those two things, and it translates very well into a physical manifestation, into an anthropomorphization of the unexplained phenomena that they were experiencing that's just incarnation of that 'Greed' personification.

Alie: It speaks to so many human fears. I mean, that's kind of what monsters, and lore, and myth really do, right? It's what are we afraid of and what can we learn from it? Is that the function of vampires?

Jeff: So, I would push back a little bit on that in that our modern interpretation, especially as a literary vampire, or a cinematic vampire is a kind of literary vampire, where it's by definition false, it's by definition fiction. The folkloric vampire had two functions. One, and arguably first, was a psychological function to explain certain, very specific phenomena that people were experiencing living in central and eastern Europe in a pre-modern period.

Aside: So, vampires weren't just art and entertainment with, like, a buried lesson. Folkloric vampires were the explanation.

Jeff: We get types of death, so it's not any death, it's wasting diseases. So, things which will cause people to slowly get weaker and weaker and eventually die. Tuberculosis is a really good one there, a withering disease where a strong person can suddenly get weaker and weaker and pass away. There are internal cancers that are like that as well. Now we have HIV/AIDS, which maps on beautifully to that in the modern period. COPD and rheumatoid arthritis, and multiple sclerosis, and a lot of these diseases that cause physical wasting, celiac disease, where the death certificate says, "Failure to thrive."

And then we have a whole set of birth anomalies that occur that are specifically tied to vampires, and also to werewolves, and sorcerers, and things that live in this very similar cluster of supernatural beings in central and eastern Europe. And then we have why people are mean, why people do bad things. Why do people have impulses that are uncontrolled, uncontrollable that cause trouble in our society, in our tight-knit social organization? Which could mean the death for everybody.

And then we have a whole set of phenomena, ways of death, types of death, manner of death that we have that are prohibited, that are bad, things you shouldn't be doing. And then there are all of the traits of signs after death. These are postmortem, if you find a body or you dig up a body and you see the body that's exhibiting these kinds of traits. So, you have to have people wasting away and it's like, "I think we've got a vampire here. Who recently died? When did this start? Who recently died, what were they like? Did they have this kind of taking-more-than-their-fair-share impulse in them? Maybe. How did they die? What were their parents like? What were they like in life?" Analyzing this, looking for signs until you said, "Maybe this might be the source for that."

So, rather than being an intentional source of fear, it's a psychological explanation for that and you can just kind of feel that it took form over centuries to the point where we have this

folkloric vampire which is a reanimated corpse that then feeds on the blood of those closest to them and then spreads outward.

So, with our reanimated corpse, you can reanimate a corpse in two ways. Either the soul leaves the body at death and then you're dead. What you want is for the soul to leave and leave. You want to mourn a person's death, but you don't want to wail so much that they say, "Aww, these people can't live without me, I need to come back." You need that person to go on, so there are lots of traditions about how you keep a person's soul from coming back into the body. The body is laid out in the house, you read prayers over it, and then you pull up the threshold on the door and take the coffin underneath the threshold and then put the threshold back down so that the soul can't come in the way that it came out. So, you can have a corpse reanimated by its own soul which has returned, or you can have a corpse where the soul leaves and then a demon comes in and reanimates the corpse.

Alie: Augh, just kind of like a squatter?

Jeff: Right. And then this explains, for instance, either the person who is hit on the head, loses consciousness, comes back and is never quite the same. It explains a whole lot of... Or the soul or a demon comes back in the body; we put it in the earth, and then it by its nature – again, this is a person – takes more of their fair share of alcohol, of sexual partners, of food, of things, of life force. In death, the only thing that they're missing is life force; and as we learn from movies, [*fake Slavic accent*] "The blood is the life Mr. Renfield." [*Alie laughs*] The blood is seen as being the locus of the life force.

So, that would be the only thing that a vampire in death, or in undeath, would need, and that's why they come back, and that's why they drink blood, specifically. It's really meant to be an explanation, because then, when we have a name for it, when we know what it's like, when we know how to spot the signs, when we know what to about to either keep it away from us, or if we can't keep it away from us, how to destroy it. There's that anxiety reduction that comes with having the diagnosis and suggested cures for it.

Alie: Do you think that that is part of that origin story though, in the absence of WebMD and Google, just looking for some kind of medical explanations of why someone wasted?

Jeff: Yes. And that entire set of beliefs coalesces around the vampire, but this explanation of how someone who is healthy suddenly keeps getting weaker and weaker and there's no sign, there's no physical manifestation of why they should be getting sicker, definitely that medical explanation, that pre-modern medicine interpretation of that, it's really genius. It accounts for a lot of phenomena that they were afraid of, hurt by, their communal social order was disturbed by. It definitely fits into that.

So, we talk about psychological functions of the folkloric vampire. And there's a second set of functions, and those are the sociological functions. There's the psychological explanation for unexplained phenomena surrounding people's nature and death, and then there are the prohibitions against all the things which cause disorder when you're living in an extended family and you are trying to survive from year to year. And we can kind of feel that get hijacked into what we call social control. So, people then say, "Well, if you do these things, you might become a vampire. And when you become a vampire, you're going to feed on your family, the family that you might not like all the time, but you love them, you depend upon them." And the worst thing for you to do, living in a communal society would be to feed on the rest of the community.

And that's part of why it's so difficult to explain all of this to modern Western people because we're so individualistic. All our movies and everything, it's one vampire going after one victim and we don't see that communal threat of the folkloric vampire. It's just so hard for us to understand that anyone could actually have believed in that folkloric vampire. And that's why we say, it was real, the folkloric vampire was real in the belief system of the people who held it.

Aside: So, folkloric vampires weren't just about a mysterious adversary but about community survival. And psychologists, and evolutionary biologists, and anthropologists know this is part of the human survival instinct, as noted in the 1995 paper, "The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation." It says that "Existing evidence supports the hypothesis that the need to belong is a powerful, fundamental, and extremely pervasive motivation." So yes, vampire folklore helped keep groups safe. But how does this relate to *Twilight*?

Jeff: That allows us to be descriptive about that, versus a vampire in literature or movies where it's patently, by definition, not true.

Alie: When did it go from that folklore to entertainment, and literature, and pop culture?

Jeff: So, the Industrial Revolution [*intense, dramatic voice*] killed the folkloric vampire. [*Alie laughs*] When people started moving into the cities, when that urbanization happened and they left their villages and were suddenly in cities with other people from other places, who had other beliefs. And you had structured, mandatory education, and you had access to hospitals, and emerging modern medicine, and emerging modern social organizations. In the village, the patriarch was in control, had to keep order there. What do you do if someone is a glutton, or an alcoholic, or a troublemaker, or a thief, or a murderer, when it's one of your family members? The best thing to do is to just keep them from doing those kinds of things.

When people come into the cities and do those things, and they're doing them to people who they're not related to, we then need a modern legal system to say what is right and what is wrong, and we have to have a law enforcement system that would then arrest those people, and we need a judicial system that would try those people, and we need a penile system to lock those people up and away from society. We need all of these modern, urban services and beliefs, and access to having a church on the corner as opposed to one that takes half a day to get to from where you live, where you might only go to church once a year at Easter or something.

Here, everybody is around, and everybody is from somewhere else, and then especially as generations go, people will take your belief systems and say that that's superstition. Everybody's religion is somebody else's superstition, and vice versa. The hard thing is to keep people from being judgmental about these kinds of things.

Aside: "Everybody's religion is somebody else's superstition." Augh! I find that to be a beautiful sentiment. So, the rural folkloric vampire and the newly industrializing urban environment collide around the turn of the 18th century, like the spooky life-eating creep hits it big time. I like to imagine him stepping off a bus and taking things in like someone who just moved from Iowa.

Jeff: Once we move into the cities, once we have access to modern Sciences, modern biology, modern epidemiology, as these are growing, modern psychology; modern criminal justice and criminal psychology, abnormal psychology which explained away all the psychological functions the vampire was explaining away. And then all the modern social organizations

which kept people in line... the folkloric vampire is out of a job at that point [*Alie laughs*] because they're not needed anymore. They're not needed to explain things and the threat of folkloric vampire isn't needed to keep people in line.

We can mark the end of the folkloric vampire period at the beginning of urbanization that comes along with the industrial revolution in central and eastern Europe. It takes a lot longer in central and eastern Europe versus western Europe for those effects to take place. We still have big empires – Russian empire, Austro-Hungarian empire – overseeing people but they're still very often living in rural places. And then as you get into southern Europe, as the mountains get higher, you can have isolate beliefs where that modernization isn't reaching. There are still people who hold these beliefs as part of their belief systems. They're numerically probably pretty small and they probably won't readily admit it to you, for fear of people saying that they're stupid, and uneducated, and superstitious.

Aside: Let's talk about the big novel that established vampires.

Alie: When *Dracula*, the novel, came out, was the general public, the international public... was this the first kind of depiction of it in written literature as a character, as a caricature too?

Jeff: No, so we– [*record scratch*]

Aside: No. I was very wrong about *Dracula* being the first vampire novel. I did not know what I was talking about. I mean, we're not even there yet, we're like 100 years away. This is so exciting.

Jeff: No, so right at the point where the folkloric vampire is running out of a job, starting probably by the early 1800s or so, late 1790s, we also get Romanticism that comes in. Through the 16 and 1700s, we have the Enlightenment, which is supposed to be pulling us out of the Dark Ages, out of backward thinking, out of the darkness of ignorance and showing people the light through education, through civilization, through striving for greater things. We strive, and strive, and strive, and we get to the 1790s, and at some point, people are like, "This isn't working," and we get this beautiful period of Romanticism. Not kissy-kissy romanticism, but Romanticism which has, as part of it, gothic literature.

Aside: Romanticism was emerging in Europe in the 1790s, partly inspired by the French Revolution, which we happened to discuss in the I Go France minisode and the Catacombs episode from last week. But yes, after upheaval of a monarchy, and a lot of science, and the Enlightenment, Romanticism is bending things back to art, involving these really extreme emotions, and drama, and horror, and the majesty and the power of nature.

And we will be right back to talk about this first-ever vampire novel in a quick second. But first, let's toss some cash at a worthy cause. This week, Jeff chose the Red Cross because he donates blood as often as he humanly can, every 56 days. But wait, actually... No. A few days after the interview, I got an email from Jeff saying he'd like to change the donation. He said:

I didn't see the news that you lost your father to multiple myeloma, a blood cancer, so recently. I just saw his beautiful obituary posted on your Facebook page and with tears in my eyes and in keeping with the blood theme of the episode, I would like to ask if our episode's charity could be the Multiple Myeloma Research Foundation, in his honor and memory.

Augh, Jeff, what a gem! So yes, a donation will go to Myeloma.org in Jeff Holdeman's honor, in memory of my dad, Larry P. Ward. Augh, my heart. Okay, that donation was made possible by sponsors of the show.

[Ad Break]

All right, let's get back to when the first vampire novel arose in modern fiction. The birth of the undead, coming to you now.

Jeff: And it's this rejection of the striving for enlightenment and everything, and it's a return to the fascination with the sublime, with the dark powers of nature. This is where Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley get into the picture as they're writing romantic, dark, gothic literature. We get our first short story originally in English published in 1819 called "The Vampyre," by John Polidori in England. And it is written at the same time the idea comes from this fascinating story where John Polidori is hired, he was the youngest medical student at his institution. Lord Byron hires him as his personal physician to take the grand tour of Europe and goes with Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Mary Wollstonecraft, who will then later become his wife, and her half-sister, Claire Clairmont.

Aside: So, a bunch of goth writers including the poet and heartthrob, Lord Byron. Now, Percy Bysshe Shelley was also a writer, he died tragically at 29 in a boating accident, leaving a widow, Mary. And then Claire Clairmont was Mary's stepsister and freshly preggers with Lord Byron's baby, a daughter that they would name Allegra, who, turns out, as a small child, was sent to live in a convent where she died at the age of 5. What? Oh gosh. And yes, John Polidori, Lord Byron's doctor, is also on vacation with this group of emo poets.

Jeff: And they are at this villa, and this was the year without a summer, there was a volcanic eruption, and it was cold all summer long. And they were in this villa and it's dark and cold, and rainy and they're inside and they say, "How about if we write ghost stories?" So, they'd been consuming German ghost stories that had been translated into English and they're like, "We've got some people with literary talent here. How about if we have a ghost story writing competition? Write scary stories for each other." This is when Mary Wollstonecraft creates Frankenstein.

Alie: Oh wow!

Jeff: And then this is when Lord Byron comes up with the idea for a vampire, so that's this fragment of a novel. He has an idea, doesn't like it, puts it away. Percy Bysshe Shelley is like, "I just published some stuff, I don't really want to play with this," and Claire Clairmont was there on the side. And then John Polidori, this young upstart, he was a self-made man and here's Lord Byron, you know, mad, bad, and dangerous to know, Lothario.

Aside: Lord Byron had quite a love life, let's just say. Rumor had it, he fathered a daughter with his half-sister, who at the time was married to her first cousin. But yes, Lord Byron had also recently gotten Claire impregnated even though he blew her off and barely liked her according to letters. So, he was kind of a proto fuckboy. But I guess in this case he was a Lord, he was a fucklord, all due respect.

Jeff: John Polidori, you can just feel this frustration. He's a self-made man, works really hard, gets educated. And here's this guy that has all this access to money, access to education, access to intelligence and power, and has literature as a way of reaching the people, and he still goes and does these mean things, less-than-enlightened things. And John Polidori writes this story about a skull-headed lady, and they all laugh at him. He almost gets into a duel, and he gets sent home, he goes back to England and he's like, "I'm going to write this story, I'll show you." And he writes *The Vampyre* about Lord Ruthven, and it's this characterization of Lord Byron as a vampire. [Alie gasps]

It gets published, gets misattributed as 'by Lord Byron' and Lord Byron writes back, "I wouldn't write this crap, retract this." [Alie laughs] But we get our first short story, originally in England, written at this time about a vampire. So, that's our birth of vampire literature.

Aside: Can you imagine if you publish a snarky piece of literature about someone you low-key hate and it gets popular, and then people think your hater wrote it, and then your hater just hates on it more? But anyway, thus a monster was born, the first vampire in modern literary history, which started as a little fuck you.

Jeff: So, think about that, that's 200 plus 3 years ago. So, we have 200 years of vampire literature. In 1845 to 1847, James Malcolm Rymer gives us *Varney the Vampire*. This is true pulp-fiction, I don't know if you've ever read this.

Alie: [laughs] No, it sounds fake.

Jeff: It's called the first novel, it was done in installments, and lest you poo-poo that, Dostoevsky published like that too. But sort of 8 pages or so of this story, and it really reads like a soap opera, and the beginning is very over the top.

Aside: So yes, James Malcolm Rymer's *Varney the Vampire*, was published in these installments called penny dreadfuls, which were horror and pulp books put out in these slim volumes on cheap paper and sold for a penny apiece. I found a link to the whole damn book and I'll put it up on my website. But the full title is, *Varney the Vampire: The Feast of Blood*, and it opens, "The solemn tones of an old cathedral clock have announced midnight. The air is thick and heavy, a strange deathlike stillness pervades all nature and then a storm erupts."

Anyway, the cover, I looked it up, is kind of a crude sketch of, like, a skeleton coming out of a grave, and it looks so much like a punk scene from the early '90s; I would wear this on a shirt. And the novel bills itself as, "A romance of exciting interest." And also, the cover poses the question, "Art thou a spirit of health or a goblin damned?" Which is really the best question I've ever heard because sometimes I'm jogging, I'm eating vegetables, breakfast is a smoothie, I am a spirit of health. Last night, no lie, I ate Cheetos for dinner, and I fell asleep in jean shorts, and I'm a goblin damned. I've never appreciated a dichotomy more; I might have to make merch of this.

Jeff: Romanticism has jumped the shark by this point and it's just really flowery, and over the top, and melodramatic, and everything. It also has one of the greatest endings to a novel, but because the other 450 pages are almost interminable, most people have not read that work. I think there are some threats of making shows out of it and I still haven't seen any of those.

Aside: So, that was *Varney the Vampire: The Feast of Blood*, you goblins damned.

Jeff: And then in 1872, we get Sheridan Le Fanu, with *Carmilla* and this is our first female vampire. So, he writes this novella about a female vampire. My students don't connect with *The Vampire*, my students don't connect with *Varney*, they connect with *Carmilla*, and they will say, "This is genuinely scary, this is genuinely disturbing." And the language and the style and everything are so much more approachable. But that's still 150 years old. *Carmilla* is still 150 years old.

Aside: *Carmilla* spooked people so much because first of all, it was homoerotic, which made people feel all kinds of feelings that scared them because of a repressive time. And because it was more psychological, about manipulation, and reincarnation, and trust, and betrayal. Also, in terms of ladies with ladies, must the narrative be so cursed? Sadly, the popular culture at the time didn't allow for just a more light-hearted, LGBTQ+ romcom without the plague of the

undead, which was a bummer. So, that was in 1872 and finally, 25 years after *Carmilla*, onto the main vampire event.

Jeff: And then we jump ahead to 1897, and that's when we get *Dracula*. So, we had Le Fanu and Stoker knew each other. They're both Irishmen who moved to England, to London. They knew each other, Stoker used to write theater reviews and things like that and Le Fanu was a publisher, so there was a mutual admiration society there. And Stoker takes all of those elements, *Carmilla* is *Dracula's* mother, there are so many of the vampire literary conventions that get used, that Stoker takes. And he takes things from Polidori and from Rymer as well.

Aside: So, those were the guys who wrote *The Vampyre*, loosely about Lord Byron, and *Varney the Vampire*, the penny dreadful series. It's okay, there's a lot of names, lot of vampires up in this.

Jeff: And then also, goes back into the folklore and studies up on this, and we know the sources that Stoker is accessing to create *Dracula*, and he's going to call him Count Vampire.

Alie: [*chuckles*] Ooh, that's... original.

Jeff: [*laughs*] And then he stumbles on this character from Romanian history with the name *Dracula* and that's just so perfect, it just sounds so ominous. Our word *dracu* in Romanian means "The devil." It's also the dragon that Saint George slays.

Aside: So, Saint George was a figure who slayed this village beast and saved a princess and thus, vampires kind of became the new dragons. Dragons are over... they're chuegy. Chuegy is cringe, cringe is cringe. Either way, vampires are dragons.

Alie: Does that also have a direct connection to Vlad the Impaler as well, historically?

Jeff: So, this is the time when the Turks are invading southeastern Europe and the Christians... this is orthodoxies, central and eastern Europe so this is eastern orthodoxy, and they're fighting against the Muslim Turks. So, Vlad's father belongs to the Order of the Dragon. Vlad's father would have been Dracul of the Order of the Dragon, and Vlad is the son of the person who belongs to the Order of the Dragon. Very often you'll see that Order of the Devil or something, trying to tie him into demonic kind of stuff. This is the defenders of Christianity, this is the evil slayer.

Aside: And Vlad the Impaler did not have an easy life. His father and brother were both killed by an invader, people betrayed him left and right, so much that he cleaned house and impaled a bunch of his enemies. And he was just known as a Romanian hero and a real person to not fuck with. And Bram Stoker's extensive research and notes are 100 pages long, and nowhere in there does he mention Vlad, even though Vlad the Impaler straight-up signed his name "Drakula," but with a K, which is cute. So, historians are divided there.

Alie: Did he have anything historically that did correlate to what we think of notions with vampires now? Or was it just really, like, he was a pretty badass dude, pretty scary, impaled some people, kind of a good nod?

Jeff: That's what makes Romanians so mad is that they took this national hero and made him a vampire. [*Alie laughs*] These were cruel times. He was defending Christianity, he was defending the church and his beliefs for his state, and at that point, the ends (of the stakes) justify the means. If you're going to impale somebody, if you're going to show them that you shouldn't come around here, that's a pretty graphic way of doing that.

There are some reports of, you know, maybe he was doing something nefarious, like dipping his bread in the blood of the people he'd impaled and everything. And then other people say, "Oh, that's Hungarian propaganda," trying to deface the name of this person who was otherwise defending Christianity as well. Neighbors never like each other so they're always going to talk crap about each other. [*"That's true."*]

Alie: And what about when it just took off in Hollywood cinema, in what, the early '20s? Did it just hit a new boom when it came to this new medium?

Jeff: Bram Stoker worked for Sir Henry Irving and his theater company.

Aside: Sir Henry Irving was a stage actor, side note. Sounds like kind of a dick.

Jeff: And Stoker is writing on the side as well; he's got multiple novels published. I've not read any of them other than *Dracula*, and I've read *Dracula* a whole bunch of times too because it's compelling literature. But it's very theatrical, it's very pre-cinematic. And the first thing that Stoker does, being in the theater, he writes this novel and then he has a reading of the entire novel on a stage, which then establishes copyright for the stage. [*"Smart."*]

And then later, somebody comes along, and Sir Henry Irving is like, "This is garbage. Humor him for now." He's not going to say bad things to Bram Stoker because Bram Stoker is organizing his tours of the United States and all over. And somebody says, "Actually, this would make pretty good theater." And other than, like, how do you do a ghost onstage or how do you make somebody turn into a werewolf on stage? But a vampire on stage isn't too terribly hard to do. So, we get our first theatrical treatments of *Dracula* as a stage play. And actually, Bela Lugosi is on the stage in the theater performances of this. So, he gets part of his start there in the theater.

Aside: And 25 years later, vampires just jazz-handed their way onto the silver screen.

Jeff: In 1922, the movie *Nosferatu* comes out, by Murnau; German movie, German expressionism. Everybody who has ever taken a film class has or should have watched *Nosferatu*. [*"The script girl? I'll eat her later."*] Again, that's 100 years old this year, 1922, and that was after World War I. Germany starts this mess, and then loses the war, and then has its military taken away from it, and then also has to pay reparations under the Treaty of Versailles. And Murnau feels this connection between having the life force drained out of Germany by the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles, just like a vampire.

Aside: Germany, just throwing a huge-ass pity party for itself after World War I. Germany, come on. Don't do this again.

Jeff: So, you get this novel that comes out in 1897, but they're in post-war Germany and they don't have money to pay the copyright. And so, they make changes and turn Count Dracula into Count Orlok, and they conflate some characters, and change the time, and change the place, and change the setting. Hopefully this will be enough to not violate copyright. Bram Stoker has died by then, but his wife is still alive and she's not a wealthy woman, so she sues to have the movie destroyed. And the courts say, "Yes, this is copyright violation," and all of the copies were destroyed of the movie.

Alie: Oh my gosh, I didn't know that.

Aside: Wait, what? How? I've seen this film, with the tall, gaunt, ashen ghoul, with no hair but really long nails and those sharpened beaver teeth. How did I see it?

Jeff: Except for a couple that were in some film archives. So, the *Nosferatu* that you have seen now, and hopefully you've seen the Kino International restored copy, which is beautiful, Frankenstein-stitched together from existing copies. Kino International is re-hand tinted to show daylight, and sunlight, and nighttime. It's really, truly beautiful and I hope that its 100th anniversary is going to lead to a lot of showings this fall as well. But again, you can imagine how celluloid burns so they're like, "Burn the vampire!" and destroy all these copies of the movie [laughs] but vampires always have a way of coming back. [Alie laughs]

So, just like our folkloric vampire, which could have died and disappeared, it shapeshifts into a literary device, into a metaphor, and gets picked up in the literature and then gets picked up into cinema. Because right at that time we also had the special effects of having stop animation, and slow crank, and the tinting, and intertitles and everything else. It makes really compelling film. Except it gets destroyed. And so a lot of people never get to see this movie.

Aside: By now of course, *Nosferatu* is immortal and these recent restorations are apparently just powerfully stunning; they're much more crisp, more detailed. Although, to be fair, some people prefer the grainy versions because they have kind of more of a ghostly feel, and they're fuzzier, and more amorphous. And the lead actor, Max Schreck, inhabits the role so fully in the older versions, and the new versions, but in the older ones partly because you can't make out details that could ruin the vibe, like the edges of his bald cap that you can see in the restored versions. So, sometimes the devil is in the details; sometimes less is more.

Jeff: People who take a shortcut and go to YouTube are going to find the unrestored copies because that's, of course, no longer under copyright. But the restored copies, and they're very easy to find, are truly beautiful. They have music to them and English translation intertitles and everything. It's really truly wonderful to get to see. And of course, as we're watching it in class, I'm like, "Oh! That's an image that you'll see in any film textbook. Oh! That one too! Oh, and that one too! Oh, and that one—" And there are probably 15 or 20 stills from that movie that will be in just about any film history book, or film studies book, or film storytelling book as well.

Aside: So, this print is playing all over the UK through October and November. And chances are, your town, no matter where you live, has a small cluster of cinema dorks watching *Nosferatu* around Halloween. If not, the full movie is on YouTube so you can gather your own nerd brigade to watch this once-banned *Dracula* knockoff.

So, why so many *Dracula* adaptations now? So, around 1960, the copyright for Bram Stoker's novel expired all over the world and it was fair game for night-feeding blood creeps.

Jeff: Our next big *Dracula* triumph then is 1931 with Bela Lugosi, Universal Films. Again, this is two years after the stock market crash and the Great Depression and everything, and they'd just built all these huge studios with these amazing, soaring soundstages and everything. And the theater play is okay, but you've got to do it over and over. And they're like, "Well, we've got these studios collecting cobwebs and everything, what's better than that to make a vampire movie?" So, they make *Dracula* in 1931, and there you've got Bela Lugosi in this tuxedo, and he's got his accent because we have sound by now, and he really plays this East European count. [Bela Lugosi as *Dracula*, "My blood now flows through her veins."] But think about this, this is 1931, we had a lot of nobility who came to the United States fleeing, especially after the Russian Revolution.

Aside: Just a quick side note for those of us who don't have the dates for the Russian Revolution just etched in our memories. We're talking 1917 to 1923, that's more than a

century after the French Revolution, which we touched on in the Field Trip minisode, I Go France, a few weeks ago. There's just so many revolutions, there's so little time.

Jeff: So, we have these East Europeans that are both working in factories and building skyscrapers and things like that, but also these educated people, wealthy people who are from the dark east and they're still scary, and they still practice religions that we don't know, and we put a lot of our fears into these possibly powerful people who are wealthy and educated and come from this area of the world and practice those religions. That's very different from *Nosferatu*. He looks like a rat. He's got these long, pointy ears, and a beaky nose, and there are lots of analyses about how this is very antisemitic.

Aside: So, you do not have to dig deep underground to find scholarly papers about literary and cinematic vampires and how they've been used and sometimes co-opted by antisemites. Many film and literature scholars draw parallels between vampirism, and something called blood libel, which is old and hateful slander about Jewish people needing human blood for Passover. And lies like this have fueled genocide.

And though the screenwriter for *Nosferatu* was himself Jewish, as were many of the actors and the director, F.W. Murnau was queer, the film's premiere in 1922 was attended by none other than the head of propaganda for what would become the Nazi Party, which adopted and co-opted some of the imagery and messaging of vampires in further antisemitic hate. Which, given the hatred and the awful messaging from Kanye West this week, it just feels like this horrifying resurrection of history itself.

Now, in the 2022 essay, "Bloodsuckers: Vampires, Antisemitism, and *Nosferatu* at 100," writer Noah Berlatsky also notes that the cinematic vampires tend to share the trait of wealth and writes:

A narrative that is inherent to the story of Nosferatu and other expressionist films of the time, is the threat of authoritarian and aristocratic figures seeking to take control...

Nosferatu is not a movie that welcomes me in. But Count Orlok, in the best traditions of the diaspora, refused to stay in the box the gentiles built for him.

Jeff: So, it's like there are these conditions we're living under, they're awful, and this *Nosferatu*-style vampire. So, that's our first visually stylized vampire; he's tall and skinny, he looks like death, he looks like the anthropomorphization of death. The French call him a phallambulist, a walking phallus. ["How do you do?"] [*Alie laughs*] He's very erect and has these long nails that grow throughout the movie; he'll be framed in a doorway and looks like he's in a coffin. He's got these darkened eyes, and the prosthetic nose, and these gaunt, gaunt features. As opposed to Bela Lugosi who is chubby, and you never see him run, or lift heavy boxes or anything. At most, he's carrying off the Mina Harker character and that's about it. He's not physically threatening, we have to make him threatening by shining a light on his eyes and implying that he's hypnotizing people as well.

We had this first, *Nosferatu*-type vampire and then we have the Bela Lugosi-type vampire. Except that *Nosferatu* doesn't survive in people's mental image or in the equivalent of the video stores of the time. So, the Bela Lugosi-style Dracula becomes our standard image of the vampire, the cinematic vampire.

Aside: For a while, until...

Jeff: Up until the end of World War II, and World War II ends with a nuclear bomb; man's triumph over nature and technology. And everything after that is like, the cars all of a sudden look like rocket ships, and everything is space aliens and mutants, and the supernatural vampire

doesn't have a place in that world. And true to its nature, the vampire just goes underground and waits everybody out, and then it isn't until 1958 when we get the *Horror of Dracula* with Christopher Lee who reinvents the Dracula character.

Aside: So, Christopher Lee was like a career villain, so good at it and so good at his haunting portrayal of Dracula that he played him nine times, because if the cape fits, wear it... and eat someone.

Jeff: He has an impeccable British accent, no more of this thick Hungarian accent from Bela Lugosi. And he's lean and fit, and they shoot him up, and he's tall, and he runs up the stairs two by two, and he turns into this snarling beast. [*dramatic music, "They have destroyed my servant."* *dramatic music, "They will be destroyed."*] Bela Lugosi didn't have fangs. Christopher Lee does, and he's got these red eyes, and this is our first technicolor vampire movie, so it starts out with his heavy gothic, Germanic sounding, Nazi salute music pounding, and you've got this grave of Dracula, and then this bright red blood dripping onto it. It's kind of the *Wizard of Oz* effect, "We're not in Kansas anymore," this is really red blood on this grave. And then Christopher Lee just reinvents the Dracula genre. But that's a huge shift that we get, this powerful English-speaking, really compelling, scary person who is living in our basement.

Alie: But you said he had fangs when other vampires previous to him didn't?

Jeff: Bela Lugosi did not have fangs. He had his cape!

Alie: I never realized that!

Jeff: He was buried in his cape but no fangs. And when you see the image, just Google Image, "Christopher Lee vampire transformation" and you'll see him with these blood red... I don't even know what they did to his eyes to make them so red, but this mouth of teeth and his swept-back hair, and he really looks scary. He turns from this debonair, English-speaking noble into this snarling beast.

Aside: PS, I looked up his makeup regimen for this, and augh, how I wish that Christopher Lee had done like a "Get Ready With Me: Undead Corpse Edition" video series. But instead, all I found was that he had to wear contact lenses that covered even the whites of his eyes to make them bloody red, which kind of sounds like some kind of torture that a monster would inflict.

Jeff: It's really, really amazing but the pace of the music and the videography, the shots that they have are really amazing. Again, this is not just color, but technicolor, and it was really transformational.

Alie: Is that kind of an added cinematic touch that they decided, "Let's take some artistic liberties since we've got color and we've got, you know, really great optics here. Let's add some eyes, let's add some fangs. Let's put someone in a tuxedo because it looks nice"? I know Bela Lugosi was in kind of a tuxedo but at some point, did they decide, "Mmm, let's up its game a little bit"?

Jeff: Yeah, we always talk about arms escalation in vampires. Bela Lugosi is not really very threatening. Again, he's got that hypnosis thing, that's scary to not have control over your body, to have somebody else controlling you. That is very much in the novel *Dracula*. So, Dracula has mind control over the women he's turning into vampires. That's the emergence of modern psychology and that fear of being mesmerized, being hypnotized, brainwashing, and all these kinds of things that we can hack other people's heads and that's just scary.

And then you know, he's then stronger and he runs... Christopher Lee runs faster and he's physically stronger. He can throw people around like Bela Lugosi never could. [*"You're too heavy for me."*] And our vampires just keep getting stronger, and stronger, and stronger through time, to the point where it has now gotten pretty ridiculous as to what vampires can do. [*Alie laughs*] But our theme for the course is "Every age creates the vampire that it needs." It's a quote by Nina Auerbach.

Aside: Just a quick aside, Nina Auerbach is the late University of Pennsylvania professor who taught courses on Victorian literature, and horror, and film, and culture history, and wrote the 1995 classic, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*.

Jeff. Every age creates the vampire that it needs. That time period, those people in that place, under these conditions, with this background and belief systems, or religions, or living conditions and things, creates the vampire, and these are all the features that the vampire has; from its name, to its origin story, to its attributes, to its activity patterns, the things that it does, to how you can keep it away from you, and then how you can destroy it if you need to. And all of those things develop and intensify over time. And then finally, every age creates the vampire that it needs, and that's that function that we talked about with the folkloric vampire. The folkloric vampire has a psychological function of explaining unexplainable biological natural things and has the sociological functions of social control, of keeping people from doing things which harm our social order.

And all of that stuff is still needed. We're still wondering why people do bad things, why people kill, and why people steal, and why people have drinking problems, and why people are greedy and glutinous, and all the other deadly sins that we have out there. We're still trying to understand, genetically, why people are the way they are. And then we're still looking for ways to keep people under control from doing bad things. In looking at our vampires it will tell us about the time that created that vampire.

And that word "needs" is that function of the vampire. And so, when you have a vampire type that's very popular, that then tells you about that age, about those people who need that vampire, who find it compelling. No longer do we need it to explain things that we don't have modern scientific explanations for. But now, we have explanations that still are unresolved. And having a way of showing that, that there are people out there that are like this, and that there are ways of destroying them, or keeping them at bay, or things that we maybe could do to protect ourselves from them. And if we can't protect ourselves from them, because remember they're getting stronger and stronger, then maybe at least we can spot the signs to be able to stay away from them.

Aside: Unless they're hot and drink vegan blood. I dunno. We'll discuss it next week.

Alie: Can I ask you some listener questions?

Jeff: Oh, absolutely.

Alie: They had great ones.

So yes, we all have a new favorite vampire expert. Jeff is the best, he will be back next week with all of your questions. We will discuss so many modern vampires, vampires of late, how vampires have changed, their backstories, so much else. Questions about garlic! Come back next week and you'll get that. Meanwhile, you can follow him, we'll put links to find him in the show notes, along with links to Myeloma.org.

You can find us at AlieWard.com/Ologies/Vampirology. There will be more about this episode there. We are @Ologies on Twitter and Instagram, I'm @AlieWard on both. You can support the show and submit questions for the next guests at Patreon.com/Ologies for as little as \$0.25 an episode. You can get merch at OlogiesMerch.com. Thank you so much Susan Hale for managing all of that and doing so much else. Noel Dilworth handles all of our scheduling, Erin Talbert admins the *Ologies* Podcast Facebook group with assists from Boni Dutch and Shannon Feltus. Emily White of The Wordary makes our professional transcripts and Caleb Patton bleeps them.

We have *Smologies* episodes, we just released a new one about Entomology, bugs, this week. Those are kid-friendly, short versions, they're classroom safe, barebones, they're there for you in the feed. You can also find them at AlieWard.com/Smologies. Thank you, Mercedes Maitland and Zeke Rodrigues Thomas of Mindjam Media for putting those together. Our website gets updated by Kelly R. Dwyer; she can make you a website. Nick Thorburn made the theme music. And lead editor and forever crush, Jarrett Sleeper of Mindjam Media edits these and puts them all together.

And at the very end of the episode, I tell you a secret. And right now, my secret is very, very practical. I was shooting for *Innovation Nation* for CBS today in Dearborn and I'm catching a 9:15 flight out of Detroit, and it is 8:15, I'm in a parking lot at the airport, [*whispers*] I have to pee so... bad. And I've got to go return this rental car and then I have to catch this flight and I *am* sweating, in case you're wondering. But this episode was so good! I'm really excited for next week too. Aughhh so good! Okay. [*laughs*] Hot mess. Will my life ever be normal? Will I ever be normal? Probably not but stay tuned. Okay, berbye.

Transcribed by Aveline Malek at TheWordary.com

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[Jeff Holdeman's Rate My Professors page](#)

[Eastern European state of Kievan Rus'](#)

[100 Years of 'Nosferatu,' the Vampire Movie That Won't Die](#)

[Basics on Romanticism](#)

[Nosferatu October 2022 screenings in the UK](#)

[October 28 Nosferatu screening at the Million Dollar theater in LA](#)

[Nosferatu – original version via YouTube](#)

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[World Health Organization 2021 Global Report on Ageism](#)

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Books mentioned:

["Frankenstein; Or, The Modern Prometheus"](#) by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, 1818

["The Vampyre: A Tale"](#) by John William Polidori, 1819

["Varney, The Vampyre: Or, The Feast Of Blood. A Romance"](#) by James Malcolm Rymer, 1845-47

["Carmilla"](#) by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, 1872

["Dracula"](#) by Bram Stoker, 1897

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