



The Gothic Science of “Dracula”: A Literary Seminar Series

February 8 and 22 at The College of Physicians of Philadelphia and Mütter Museum

March 8 and 22 at The Rosenbach Museum and Library

Bram Stoker’s novel features more than just blood-sucking monsters and dark imaginings. Stoker was fascinated by the science of his day and his characters use scientific concepts and technology to battle Count Dracula. Vampire folklore itself was always guided by forensic science to explain belief in the Undead. In this four-evening course led jointly by the Mütter Museum and the Rosenbach Museum & Library, we’ll explore the intersection of science and literature, through the lens of *Dracula*. At the Mütter, we’ll learn how exhumed bodies were identified as vampires and examine how science blended with the occult in the 19th century. At the Rosenbach, using first editions of the novel and Bram Stoker’s own manuscript notes, we’ll analyze how science was incorporated into the book and what this means for how vampires developed in the years since *Dracula* was published.

Class 1: Medicine and the Occult

Feb 8, 2023

6:30-8:30pm

In this class, we will examine the character of Dr. Abraham Van Helsing, who occupies a space between 19th century scientific empiricism and the supernatural magic of the occult. We will explore some historical books, including Herbals, which recorded healing properties and folklore of plants, and the *Malleus Maleficarum*, a tome on identifying and stamping out witchcraft and sorcery. We will also look at volumes by Paracelsus, an early physician who dabbled in the occult, and see how Victorians revived his teachings and other occult medicine in the late 19th century.

Reading: “The Vampire,” by H. S. Olcott, reprinted from *The Theosophist*, Vol XII, 1891

<https://www.levir.com.br/theosophy/Vampire.htm>

Class 2: Dracula and the Incorruptible Body

Feb 22, 2023

6:30-8:30pm

Vampire panics seized parts of New England throughout the 1800s, leading townspeople to dig up the corpses of loved ones, neighbors, and family members. What were they looking for when they pried open the coffins? In this session, we'll explore taphonomy, the science of bodily decomposition, discuss how natural biological phenomena were interpreted as signs of vampirism in the dead, and look at a 19th century autopsy kit. We will also discuss how a common disease likely spurred the vampire panics, how embalming practices may have fed into the myth, how our cultural ideas around vampires have changed, and what citizens did to secure the graves of those thought to be vampires.

Reading: "*Dracula*," *Undertakers, and the Embalmed Corpse*, Jani Scandura, Indiana University Press. See attached PDF on the registration page.

Class 3: Stoker's Research

March 8, 2023

6:30-8:30pm

Bram Stoker's Notes for *Dracula* comprise over a 100 pages of outlines, early plot ideas, and research notes, compiled by the author over the seven years he developed and wrote his most famous novel. We'll examine these notes and see how characters, plot, and themes changed over time and also see how Stoker creates a kind of taxonomy for the folkloric vampire, making it both a real threat to his contemporary world, but also establishing it as a monster for the ages.

Reading: Please read *Dracula* in its entirety before the first meeting. Any edition will do, as we'll refer frequently to it during our meetings. If you are looking for a reliable text, Norton has just published a second Critical Edition of *Dracula*, edited by John Edgar Browning and David J Skal (Norton, 2021, ISBN 0393679209)

Class 4: Stoker's Science

March 22, 2023

6:30-8:30pm

Stoker's novel is suffused with references to late 19th Century scientific theory and technology. In some ways, *Dracula* can be seen as a battle between belief systems of the past in a battle with modernity. In this final session, we'll examine how Stoker has incorporated science and technology into a novel and how his characters use it to fight monsters and also see how this has become a hallmark for many vampire stories that followed.

About the instructors

For The College of Physicians of Philadelphia and Mütter Museum

Meredith Sellers is an artist, writer, and educator living and working in Philadelphia. She works as the Arts and Accessibility Programs Coordinator at the Mütter Museum and College of Physicians of Philadelphia, where she develops cross-disciplinary arts curricula and accessible programs. She has co-curated several exhibits at the Mütter, including *Dracula and the Incorruptible Body*, *Cabinet of Curiosity: Can a Vaccine Turn You Into a Cow?*, and *Marie Curie at the Mütter*. She has lectured at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Tyler School of Art at Temple University, Moore College of Art, and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. An editor for *Title Magazine*, a Fellow of the Flaherty Film Seminar, and a participant in the Art Writers' Workshop through the Andy Warhol Foundation, her writing has appeared in publications including *Hyperallergic*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *American Craft Magazine*, *ArtsJournal*, *Pelican Bomb*, *The Artblog*, and ICA Philadelphia's *Notes*. She received her BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art and her MFA from the University of Pennsylvania.

Amanda McCall is an educator and history of medicine enthusiast, living and working in Philadelphia, PA. She works as the Museum Educator at the Mütter Museum and The College of Physicians of Philadelphia, where she is responsible for conducting lessons that explore the realm of science, health, and medicine. She has co-curated several exhibits at the Mütter, including *Dracula and the Incorruptible Body*, and *Marie Curie at the Mütter*. She received her BS in biology from The University of Dayton.

For the Rosenbach Museum and Library

Edward G. Pettit is the Sunstein Senior Manager of Public Programs at the Rosenbach. In 2020, he hosted [Sundays with Dracula](#), a live 28 week series exploring Stoker's novel chapter-by-chapter. This series was followed by Sundays with *Frankenstein* and Sundays with *Jane Eyre*. Most recently Pettit was Master of Ceremonies for the Rosenbach's Dracuthon, a marathon reading of Stoker's novel. He continues his vampiric interest in his personal life as a consulting editor for the *Dracula Beyond Stoker* magazine.