

2004

A Clutch of Vampires: or, An Examination of the Contemporary Dracula Texts

James Craig Holte

Follow this and additional works at: <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/dracula-studies>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), and the [Film and Media Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Holte, James Craig (2004) "A Clutch of Vampires: or, An Examination of the Contemporary Dracula Texts," *Journal of Dracula Studies*: Vol. 6: No. 1, Article 2.

DOI: 10.70013/70p7q8r9

Available at: <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/dracula-studies/vol6/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Research Commons at Kutztown University. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Dracula Studies* by an authorized editor of Research Commons at Kutztown University. For more information, please contact czerny@kutztown.edu.

A Clutch of Vampires: or, An Examination of the Contemporary *Dracula* Texts

James Craig Holte

In her insightful overview of the state of the field of *Dracula* studies, *Dracula Sense & Nonsense* (2000), Elizabeth Miller notes that

Dracula has never been out of print since its first publication by Constable in the United Kingdom in 1897. Within fifteen years, two other significant editions appeared: the first in the United States, published in 1899 by Doubleday & McClure, and another British edition (Rider) in 1912. Subsequent editions — of which there are over a hundred in English, as well as numerous translations into foreign languages — followed one or the other of these benchmark texts. (102)¹

It is not my intention to rework the ground so carefully turned over by Professor Miller. Rather, I wish to focus on a small number of the interesting paperback editions of *Dracula* available to contemporary scholars and students. Once, not so long ago, the only widely available inexpensive edition of *Dracula* available to a general audience was a Penguin edition with a forward by Columbia's Professor George Stade. I thought it a fine edition, primarily because I had studied under Professor Stade. Indeed, it is still in print and still a nice edition with a brief and insightful introduction for a general reader. With the recent increased interest in all things vampiric in general and *Dracula* in particular, numerous editions and adaptations of Stoker's novel have appeared. I will limit this discussion to an examination of those texts that scholars and teachers might find useful for their research and for the instruction of their students in undergraduate and graduate classes. As we all know, a first edition is an invaluable part of a scholar's collection, but first editions are not within the budgets of most students, or most teachers. What we choose to present to our students makes a difference, and it is my intention to examine the virtues and vices of the various vampiric volumes.

The popularity of Stoker's novel has paralleled the popularity of the vampire as an iconic figure during the last one hundred years. As we all know, recent vampire films and fictions are legion. Even the most cursory internet search will reveal over three hundred and fifty works of fiction in print with the word "Dracula" somewhere in the title, and Barnes and Noble lists over a dozen of paperback editions of *Dracula* available on line. However, documented editions of *Dracula* with extensive scholarly apparatus are fewer, and it is on these that I wish to turn my gaze.

Perhaps the first widely available documented edition of *Dracula* available was Leonard Wolf's 1973 *The Annotated Dracula*, which according to Wolf, is "an edition of Stoker's novel in which, on the belief that it is true that God hides in the details, I subjected Stoker's text to the very closest of close textual, historical, and literary critical readings" (*Dracula: The Connoisseur's Guide* 4). *The Annotated Dracula* was later reissued in 1993, in substantially different form and with illustrations by Christopher Bing, as *The Essential Dracula*. Based on the Yale University's copy of the second printing of the first edition of the text, *The Essential Dracula* was different from the editions that preceded it. Wolf included a twenty-two page introduction that placed Stoker's novel within both literary and cultural contexts, making connections to both other vampire fictions and the growing body of vampire films. Wolf also provided readers with three appendices. The first was "Dracula's Guest," subtitled by Wolf as "The Deleted Original First Chapter of *Dracula*." The second was a filmography and a list of major dramatic productions. The third was a bibliography, which Wolf admitted was a "sort of grab bag of sorts." Finally Wolf provided readers with hundreds of footnotes and illustrations. This was rich fare for readers used to simple texts with lurid covers.

¹ Miller directs readers interested in early editions of Stoker's novel to Robert Eighteen-Bisang and Gordon Melton's useful work, *Dracula: A Century of Editions, Adaptations and Translations*.

As the first of the contemporary critical editions of *Dracula*, Wolf's work was a breakthrough for its time, providing readers with a complex context within which the novel, at the time thought of by most readers as a simple gothic thriller, was situated. In one edition readers could find the text, commentary, criticism, and explanatory information. *The Essential Dracula* was, and remains, a useful edition, and my copy is full of notes and comments on Stoker's text and Wolf's observations, often representing an ongoing conversation with Wolf about the nature of the vampire and the text.

Perhaps the problem with *The Essential Dracula* is the idiosyncratic nature of the secondary material. As Wolf freely admits, the introduction, appendices, and notes are his; and as a result the scholarly apparatus provides a Wolfian reading of Stoker's novel, which is useful and interesting, but perhaps not representative of the wide range of the recent critical commentary on *Dracula*. A second problem lies in the footnotes. In his desire to illuminate the text completely, Wolf provides notes on almost everything. In Chapter One, for example, which is nineteen pages long in this edition, there are sixty five footnotes, one of which, note 34, explains that the phrase "an English Churchman" means "a member of the Church of England" (34), something I believe most readers would be able to figure out on their own. At times Wolf does not give the readers the credit they are due. Nevertheless, *The Essential Dracula* remains an important and useful edition of *Dracula*, especially for intelligent general readers with a love for the subject.

To faculty and students, the announcement of a new Norton Critical Edition was the equivalent of a papal proclamation of canonization, literally. W.W. Norton Company proudly displays the following statement on each of its critical editions, "Each Norton Critical Edition includes an authoritative text, contextual and source materials, and a wide range of interpretations — from contemporary perspectives to the most current critical theory — as well as a bibliography and, in most cases, a chronology of the author's life and work." As those of us of a certain age know, only the traditional canonical works appeared in Norton Critical Editions, and I remember when the entire list included fewer than two dozen volumes. I remember that as a graduate student I wrote for examination copies until I had all twelve original editions, the beginning of my professional library. There are now over 125 Norton Critical Editions, reflecting the expanding, or the imploding, of the canon, as well as the changing, more inclusive, nature of literary studies. Still, a Norton Critical Edition means something, and in 1997, when the Norton brought out its *Dracula*, edited by Nina Auerbach and David Skal, there was celebration throughout the community of the scholars of the night. We had arrived, big time. We were canonical.

The Auerbach/Skal *Dracula* has all the virtues of a Norton Critical Edition. Based on the original British Constable text and published in the centenary year of the original publication of Stoker's novel, the Norton edition is a text with notes, contemporary contexts, reviews and reactions, commentaries on film and dramatic interpretations, and critical commentary from a variety of perspectives. The text itself is annotated with care but without intrusive commentary. For example, in Chapter One there are 30 notes compared to the 65 that appear in *The Essential Dracula*, and all are explanatory rather than interpretive. Throughout the text the notes explain but never intrude.

Another strength of the Norton edition is the inclusion of contemporary reviews. Providing readers (teachers and students) with reader and reviewer responses from the time of the novel's publication is a most useful tool for interpretation, as is the cultural context provided by the essays on film and dramatic adaptations that are more developed and diverse than Wolf's personal observations. Finally, the variety of critical essays in the Norton edition, ranging from the gender informed criticism of Phyllis Roth's "Suddenly Sexual Women in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*" and Carol Senf's "*Dracula*: The Unseen Face in the Mirror" to the post-colonial examination of Stephen Arata's "The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonialism," provides insightful and diverse readings of *Dracula* for both teachers and students. The Norton *Dracula* is as good as most Norton Critical Editions, and better than many.

In the past decade Bedford/St. Martin's Press has introduced a new critical series aimed at the college and university market and aimed at challenging the Norton Critical Editions for the minds and hearts of English professors ordering texts for their classes. Each volume in their Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism series "reprints the text of a classic literary work together with critical essays

that examine the work while introducing readers to a variety of current theoretical perspectives” (*Dracula: Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism*). There are twenty-two Bedford Case Studies available, and more are planned. Like the Norton Critical Editions, the Bedford Critical Series provides teachers and students with reliable texts, ample notes, and useful apparatus.

The Bedford *Dracula*, edited by John Paul Riquelme, is based on the 1897 first edition of Stoker’s novel and includes annotations and appropriate apparatus. The first chapter, for example, contains nineteen annotations compared to the thirty footnotes in the Norton edition and the sixty-five in the Wolf edition. The annotations are quite adequate and often similar. Both editions, for example, identify the town of Bistritz and provide readers with brief overviews of the history and geography of Transylvania. The accompanying essays, however, have a quite different format and purpose from those in the Norton. The ten essays and two checklists in the Norton *Dracula* provide readers with commentary on Stoker’s novel from a variety of perspectives. Their primary purpose is to illuminate the text. The five essays in the Bedford *Dracula*, on the other hand, introduce readers to four contemporary critical perspective – gender criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, new historicism, and deconstruction – and provide readers with an illustrative reading of the text from the particular critical perspective. The result is a very different edition from the Norton. The primary purpose of the Bedford *Dracula* is to use the text to introduce students to contemporary critical theory, and although this difference may seem minor, it is real and one that teachers should consider carefully.

Although by providing well-documented, high quality editions of *Dracula* to the academic readers, Bedford/St. Martins and Norton would seem to be targeting the same market, and although there is a good deal of overlap, I believe the two texts are addressed to different sets of readers, and I think it is important to recognize that fact when we place our orders for multiple copies of any text, but especially one that some of us appreciate as much as *Dracula*.

Both the Norton *Dracula* and the Bedford *Dracula* are excellent editions for both teachers and students. In both editions the text of the novel is clear and well annotated, and there is enough room in the margins, barely, for notes. Both covers also stand up to repeated readings. (This may not seem a significant consideration, but if one is planning to use a paperback text more than once, it is worth considering. I have some texts in my library that exist only because of the divine intervention of duct tape). For the text only, there is little to choose between the two editions. The differences lie in the apparatus.

The Bedford/St. Martin *Dracula*, edited by John Paul Riquelme, is the perfect edition in an introductory class to either literary studies or contemporary theory. The four essays on contemporary critical perspective are instructive, and the essay using multiple perspective may provide significant insights. In fact, the descriptive sections of the essays, describing the contemporary critical perspectives, are clear, concise, and intelligently written and could be used as short introductory texts for advanced undergraduate or beginning graduate students. Providing a sound text of *Dracula*, the apparatus of the Bedford edition makes it clear that the primary focus of this text is on the nature of contemporary theory.

The Norton *Dracula*, edited by Nina Auerbach and David Skal, on the other hand, is the best available edition for classes interested in the complexities of *Dracula* as a text in its own right. Auerbach and Skal keep the focus of their edition on the novel rather than on the various critical traditions of the literary academic community, although the ten selected essays are representative of contemporary theory. Specifically, Auerbach’s essay on vampires and Skal’s comment’s on *Dracula*’s influence in the popular culture, which place the novel within larger contexts, are invaluable, as are the contemporary reviews included. The Norton edition of *Dracula* is the best text available for serious students and the one I order for my students. Most of the time.

I think it appropriate that I make a confession. There are times when I teach special undergraduate courses, the most infamous being the recurring “Horrible Honors Seminar,” which is humanities seminar in the study of the genre of horror designed for undergraduate honors students at East Carolina University known on campus, affectionately, I hope, as “Holte’s Horrors.” Despite my own advice, in that class, given the audience and the variety of readings, I assign neither the Wolf, the Norton, nor the Bedford. Rather, I order the Signet Classic *Frankenstein, Dracula, Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, three

major texts for \$6.95. There is no apparatus, no room for notes, and a bad cover. The students, however, have access to three major horror novels, and I can provide the supporting material in lectures, often borrowing from both the Norton and the Bedford (with appropriate attribution, of course). At some time I hope to have the opportunity to teach a graduate seminar in the literature of the vampire. In that course I may be tempted to use the recently published Riverside Edition of *Three Vampire Tales: Dracula, Carmilla, The Vampyre*. I can only imagine the riches of using that text in a graduate seminar of fourteen weeks of texts vampiric.

Finally, in choosing texts for our classes, “We want no proofs.” We select what is comfortable or familiar to us, and in doing so become the canonical committees that define our literary heritage by what we choose to teach and how we chose to teach it in our classes. Unlike a previous generation of scholars and teachers of the night, we are confronted by a plentitude of riches.

Works Cited

- King, Stephen, ed. *Frankenstein, Dracula, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. New York: Penguin, 1978.
- Miller, Elizabeth. *Dracula: Sense & Nonsense*. Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex, UK: Desert Island Books, 2000.
- Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. Nina Auerbach and David Skal, eds. New York: Norton, 1997.
- . *Dracula*. John Paul Riquelme, ed. Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2002.
- Williams, Anne, ed. *Three Vampire Tales: Dracula, Carmilla, The Vampyre*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003.
- Wolf, Leonard. *The Annotated Dracula*. New York: Plume, 1973.
- . *Dracula: The Connoisseur's Guide*. New York: Broadway Books, 1997.
- . *The Essential Dracula*. New York: Plume, 1993.