

## Chapter Twenty-Three

# Killing Time

### *Dracula and Social Discoordination*

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In Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Count Dracula first appears as an old man holding an antique silver lamp, standing at the door to a crumbling castle filled with moth-eaten furniture and ancient gold coins. He is fascinated by modern life, so much so that he reads English law books and up-to-date Bradshaw railroad guides and is planning a move to London.<sup>2</sup> But he is also a vampire, a supernatural creature who appears in mist and moonlight, who slips through cracks, and who can turn himself into a bat, a wolf, and fog. Dracula also has the power to put humans in a mental fog so that they lose track of the date and time. "He cannot think of time yet," the wife of Dracula's first victim laments, nursing him to health after a close escape from the vampire's lair. "At first he mixes up not only the month, but the year."<sup>3</sup>

Scholars have long read the fictional Count Dracula as embodying a real, debilitating contemporary threat to the moral and cultural health of the West (specifically Victorian England): perverse sexuality, feminism, racial degeneration, colonialism, and monopoly capitalism.<sup>4</sup> This essay examines the vampire's threat to *economic* health, specifically, his disruption of new civil timekeeping standards and the danger this poses for modern commerce.<sup>5</sup> Britain's economic prosperity in the nineteenth century was largely dependent on the adoption of international standards such as Greenwich Mean Time and the universal day, which ensured smooth coordination for trade, legal transactions, railroad travel, and mail delivery. Dracula, whose powers are governed by the sun and the moon rather than clocks and calendars, works to destabilize social coordination. His objective is not only literally to "fatten on the blood of the living,"<sup>6</sup> but also more broadly to suck the lifeblood of a thriving commercial economy at the dawn of a global age. Under

Dracula's spell, humans forget the time, becoming listless, unproductive, and indifferent to social convention. At heart, the fundamental battle in Stoker's *Dracula* is a death struggle between standard time as an institutional basis for world markets and planetary time governing a primitive, superstitious existence.

### DRACULA IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The story of *Dracula*, most readers will recall, is about an old-world vampire, Count Dracula, who desires to live in England. "I long to go through the crowded streets of your mighty London, to be in the midst of the whirl and rush of humanity, to share its life, its change, its death, and all that makes it what it is,"<sup>7</sup> he explains to Jonathan Harker, a young solicitor sent by his British firm to Castle Dracula in Transylvania to finalize the purchase of residential property in London. But it must be an old home, the count tells Jonathan: "to live in a new house would kill me."<sup>8</sup> He has acquired books and directories on customs, law, shipping, and transportation routes that he exploits to transport boxes of his native soil (in which he must sleep every night) to England. Dracula and his crates arrive at the Yorkshire port of Whitby, where he wreaks havoc across the countryside, killing animals and humans on his journey to London. He infects a beautiful young woman who becomes a vampire. A group of young, modern professionals—a lawyer, two doctors, a gentleman, a stenographer, and a rich American—organizes themselves to kill the female vampire and chase Dracula out of England and back to his castle, where they slay him in his coffin at sunset.

Stoker's novel is composed of a series of dated journal entries, letters, captains' logs, newspaper articles, and other records, all in strict chronological order.<sup>9</sup> On his journey to Transylvania, Jonathan Harker writes to his fiancée Mina about his travels and Castle Dracula. Mina writes to her girlhood friend, the beautiful Lucy Westenra, about Jonathan. Lucy writes to Mina about her three beaux: Arthur Holmwood, a young aristocrat; Quincey Morris, a Texan; and Dr. John Seward, head of a lunatic asylum. The captain of the Russian ship *Demeter*, laden with boxes of Transylvanian soil, writes in his log of fearful happenings at night. Newspapers in England chronicle a ship crashing ashore, wolf sightings, and a series of midnight murders. Mina writes in her diary about Lucy's sleepwalking. Seward writes to his old professor, Abraham Van Helsing, in Amsterdam, for help identifying strange bite marks on Lucy's neck. And so on.

To follow Stoker's tale, readers need a basic understanding of date- and timekeeping systems, particularly standard time (based on Greenwich Mean Time) and the Gregorian calendar, the standard temporal reference framework of the modern world.<sup>10</sup> Standard time concepts such as units of time

(seconds, minutes, hours), along with time reckoning and dating frameworks (clocks and calendars), are now so widely accepted that they seem inevitable, but it was not always so. The universal authority of these systems is essential to the plot of *Dracula*, which alternates between modern time specificity and the fog of temporal uncertainty that surrounds Count Dracula.

Clearly, institutional time and date agreement is essential to legal and commercial transactions as well as for certain aspects of social intercourse. A simple agreement as to when the day begins allows events to be assigned to a particular date without confusion. For some cultures, the new day begins at sunset; for others, dawn; for others, midnight. The adoption of universal rules for marking and measuring time is just one example of the need for agreed-upon standards to coordinate behavior—a need that became increasingly relevant in the nineteenth century. Expanding trade and commerce encouraged the adoption of national standards for weights, measures, typewriter keyboards, railway track gauges, and traffic lights, for example.

The economic function of standards is to coordinate behavior in ways that maximize benefits for all parties and minimize loss from mismatched expectations. In the language of game theory, a standard is a solution to a *coordination game*. One simple example of a coordination game is the choice of which side of the road to drive on. In principle, the choice of left or right doesn't matter. What matters crucially is that everyone in a given region makes the same choice; if they do not, wrecks will occur.

There are cases, however, where some standards are considered to be objectively better than others. The metric system is often deemed superior to the English system of weights and measures because it's easier to learn. A society that has adopted an inferior system (perhaps by historical accident or because the standard had once been superior) may oppose calls to switch to a better system. Standard switching nearly always generates confusion, transition costs, and psychological resistance.

Arguably, that was precisely the situation with respect to time conventions in the nineteenth century. In 1897, when *Dracula* first appeared, the notion of a standard time was still very new in Britain. For most of history, people kept local time, marked by sundials and tolled by church bells. But the advent of modern commerce made local time an inferior standard, which gradually gave way to superior—that is, more universal—standards that allowed coordination over greater distances. After the development of the mechanical clock in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, clock towers were introduced in cities around Europe to standardize the workday and regulate sessions of municipal courts, assemblies, and university lectures; hourglasses soon joined smaller mechanical clocks in schools and homes.<sup>11</sup> Minute hands became widely used in the eighteenth century. The expansion of postal routes and railway lines necessitated national (and soon international) time standards and timetables. Railway companies, recognizing the need for a stan-

dard time, as networks of tracks and lines were shared by dozens of railway companies with their own schedules, adopted an industry standard, Railway Time, in 1840. Greenwich Mean Time (based on time measured in the Greenwich Observatory, situated on the Greenwich meridian, zero degrees longitude) replaced Railway Time for British railways in 1847. In 1859, Big Ben was installed in London, tolling Greenwich time and encouraging watches to be set to national time. In 1880, Greenwich Mean Time became legal time in Britain. In 1884 the International Meridian Conference in Washington, D.C., recommended that all countries adopt Universal Time (with Greenwich as prime meridian) and the universal twenty-four-hour day, to begin at midnight. Of particular relevance to Dracula's story, two of the delegations voting "no" to this resolution were Austria-Hungary and Turkey, on either side of Transylvania, both of which backed a resolution starting the day at noon.<sup>12</sup>

The calendar too was not fully standard across Europe in Bram Stoker's lifetime. The Gregorian calendar had been in use by Roman Catholic countries in Western Europe since the sixteenth century, while the Eastern Orthodox regions of Eastern Europe, including the regions surrounding Transylvania, still followed the Julian calendar. Instituted by Julius Caesar in 45 BCE, the Julian calendar, adopted as the basis of the official church calendar at the Council of Nicaea in 325, had slowly drifted away from its biblical, seasonal, and astronomical footings. In 725, the English monk Bede observed in his treatise "The Reckoning of Time" (*De temporum ratione*) that the vernal equinox (a crucial variable for fixing the date of Easter) was becoming irreconcilable with the calendar. By the fifteenth century, the vernal equinox had drifted eleven days, falling on March 10 instead of March 21. In 1583 Pope Gregory XIII authorized a new calendar that would fix the vernal equinox on March 21. The Gregorian calendar was adopted almost immediately in Italy, Portugal, Spain, Poland, Luxembourg, France, Belgium, Austria, Catholic Germany, Catholic Switzerland, and Catholic Holland. Hungary followed in 1587.

The adoption of the Gregorian calendar by Protestant nations took more than a century. Elizabethan England, newly split from the Catholic Church, was initially wary; Protestant Germany rejected it out of hand. "We do not recognize this Lycurgus (or rather Draco, whose laws were said to be written in blood)," wrote James Heerbrand, a professor of theology at Tübingen in 1584; "we do not recognize this legislator, this calendar-maker, just as we do not hear the shepherd of the flock of the Lord, but a howling wolf."<sup>13</sup> A serious concern for adoption of the reformed calendar was the loss of ten days (which would grow to eleven by 1700, when Germany, Denmark, and Switzerland made the transition).<sup>14</sup> Merchants, tradesmen, astronomers, and scientists in England repeatedly advocated for unification of the calendar with the Continent, but internal political and theological disputes delayed



change. Gradually, economic and scientific interests eclipsed theological concerns.<sup>15</sup> Finally, in 1752, Great Britain and her colonies (including America) adopted the “new style” calendar with a mandate that Wednesday, September 2, would be followed by Thursday, September 14, and that the new year would begin on January 1.<sup>16</sup>

Clearly, calendar agreement across Europe would facilitate trade and communication among nations via shared terms and a standard temporal framework. But countries and regions following the Eastern Orthodox Church, including Romania, did not adopt the new calendar until 1918.<sup>17</sup> At the time Stoker was writing *Dracula*, Transylvania, on the border of Romania and Hungary, had been caught between two competing calendars for centuries.

### DRACULA AND TIME/DATE CONFUSION

Stoker’s novel depicts the new expectations for promptness and efficiency that were established by unified time standards and a common calendar in Britain and most of Western Europe but not the East. Jonathan Harker’s first journal entry—the opening lines of *Dracula*—reads: “Left Munich at 8.35 p.m. on 1st May, arriving in Vienna early next morning; should have arrived at 6.46 but train was an hour late.”<sup>18</sup> The next day, entering the region of Transylvania, Harker notes: “After rushing to the station at 7:30 I had to sit in the carriage for more than an hour before we began to move. It seems to me that the further East you go the more unpunctual are the trains.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Transylvania was not party to British time protocols.

Stoker’s novel also depicts the region’s calendar confusion. In Jonathan Harker’s second diary entry, an old woman accosts him on his way to Castle Dracula to ask, hysterically, “Do you know what day it is?” Harker replies that it is the fourth of May.

“Oh yes! I know that, I know that! But do you know what day it is?” On my saying that I did not understand, she went on:

“It is the eve of St. George’s Day. Do you not know that tonight, when the clock strikes midnight, all the evil things in the world will have full sway? Do you know where you are going, and what you are going to?”<sup>20</sup>

The misunderstanding here is significant: The feast of St. George is celebrated on April 23 under both the Julian and Gregorian calendars. The old woman’s claim that it is St. George’s Day indicates that she is using the Julian calendar: April 23 is exactly eleven days behind May 4.

Recent scholarship suggests that dating discrepancies may have provoked popular belief in the undead throughout Eastern Europe. Consider that a person who died on April 1 and was buried on April 3 under the Julian

calendar could be remembered strolling about by a Gregorian calendar follower on, say, April 7 (March 28 under the Julian calendar). Citing Dom Augustin Calmet, author of a 1746 French study of Eastern European vampire infestations, Gabriel Ronay writes that in Catholic Poland, "the first reports of un-dead people returning from the grave came from the eastern territories taken from Orthodox Muscovy. . . . In the occupied lands conquering Catholicism and crusading Orthodoxy found themselves in enforced physical contact for the first time," and rumors of "dead men who, while already in their graves, are lustful" soon followed.<sup>21</sup> The majority of vampire sightings were in border areas, where both the Julian and Gregorian calendars were in use. While Dracula's origins are left vague in Stoker's novel, it is clear that he emerges at a time and in a place (late medieval Transylvania) where there was little agreement about the date and time. Stoker had taken careful notes on the brutal history of Moldavia, Wallachia, and Transylvania, particularly the centuries of bloody battles over religion and rule, and comprehended the mischief of calendar conflict.<sup>22</sup>

Count Dracula has a complex relationship with modern calendar and timekeeping systems. In part, he is indifferent to them: he is immortal and unconcerned with his age or eventual death. His activities are regulated by celestial cycles rather than by social convention. Yet in his castle, after keeping Jonathan Harker up all night talking of business, Dracula knows to seek pardon for his unorthodox hours when he disappears at sunrise. Dracula appreciates the utility of shipping and railway schedules and uses these networks to transport his soil overseas without mishap, but he creates uncertainty for his own advantage. Under Dracula's influence, Jonathan forgets to wind his watch. Dracula compels Jonathan to postdate letters, puzzling his correspondents before Dracula sets sail for England, leaving the lawyer imprisoned in the castle. In these respects, Dracula exploits modern time conventions to manipulate and control humans. For four months, Jonathan never notes the time of day in his journal until he escapes and is nursed to health by Mina. He has no sense of modern time, though he observes the sun's movements and keeps a running chronology of passing days.

Dracula's presence on the sea journey to England likewise provokes temporal bewilderment. The captain of the Russian ship *Demeter*, transporting Dracula and fifty boxes of Transylvanian soil to England, uncharacteristically falters in timekeeping. The captain notes the exact time in his log on July 11 ("Under way at 4 p.m.") and July 16 ("Took larboard watch eight bells last night"), but for the rest of the trip (through his death soon after August 4) he only mentions natural time:

28 July.—Four days in hell, knocking about in a sort of maelstrom, and the wind a tempest. No sleep for any one. Men all worn out. Hardly know how to set a watch, since no one fit to go on. . . .

2 August, midnight.—Woke up from few minutes sleep by hearing a cry, seemingly outside my port. Could see nothing in fog. Rushed on deck, and ran against mate. Tells me he heard cry and ran, but no sign of man on watch. One more gone. Lord, help us! . . .

4 August.—Still fog, which the sunrise cannot pierce, I know there is sunrise because I am a sailor, why else I know not. I dared not go below, I dared not leave the helm, so here all night I stayed, and in the dimness of the night I saw it, Him!<sup>23</sup>

Quite deliberately and literally, Dracula brings the fog of time confusion with him to England.

Dracula fully understands, however, that British compliance with standards and laws will ensure that his legal and commercial transactions will be carried out. The unmanned ship, her dead captain lashed to the helm, crashes safely into gravel in the port of Whitby at high tide. A black dog (the vampire, temporarily transformed) leaps off and disappears. But as Dracula clearly anticipated, his cargo is safe: the local officials of the Board of Trade are “most exacting in seeing that every compliance has been made with existing regulations.”<sup>24</sup> The Coast Guard, first to board, cannot claim rights of salvage from what seems to be a derelict craft.<sup>25</sup> The boxes of soil are duly sent to a Whitby solicitor named on the manifest, who takes possession and forwards the crates to London.

*Dracula's* concern with time coordination is also manifested by the vampire's arrival in Whitby, symbolically threatening Britain's first calendar agreement, which, according to the monk Bede, brought civic peace to the nation. Whitby was the site of the first major European calendar conference held in 664 to resolve the problem about the date of Easter in Britain, when two practices of settling the date, Ionan (or Celtic) and Roman (Julian), were both in use.<sup>26</sup> Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (731) emphasizes the role of the bishop Wilfrid, who advocated a coordinated worldwide celebration of the Resurrection:

[As is] practiced in Africa, Asia, Egypt, Greece, and all the world, wherever the church of Christ is spread abroad, through several nations and tongues, at one and the same time; except only these and their accomplices in obstinacy, I mean the Picts and the Britons, who foolishly, in these two remote islands of the world, and only in part even of them, oppose all the rest of the universe.<sup>27</sup>

Bede suggests that synchronizing the British celebration of Easter with Rome and the world had unified and coordinated the nation, preventing the tribal bloodshed of earlier eras.<sup>28</sup> A thorough researcher, Stoker knew well Whitby's role in the history of global calendar coordination and the danger that Dracula's arrival here would signify.

## THE POWER OF STANDARD TIME

Ultimately, Dracula's natural time constraints become his undoing. A vampire's power wanes with the rising of the sun. Dracula can transform himself from a human-looking figure into an animal or into mist only at midnight, at sunrise, or at sunset exactly. He can pass running water only at the ebb or the flood of the tide. These are natural, not socially coordinated, time rules. Dracula's alienation from social convention becomes a weakness when he is not in his own realm but in England, where his enemies organize a coordinated effort to find and destroy his Transylvanian soil. Dracula must return home to survive.

Dracula's failure to make a permanent home in London suggests that Stoker sees time coordination as key to the nation's social and economic advancement and time confusion as a threat to continued progress. Stoker was not alone in his concern: late Victorian fiction is filled with anxiety about the British race and culture falling into decline.<sup>29</sup> If, as Charles Darwin asserted, man came from apes, then man could slip back into savagery. Thus strict social rules and modern codes of behavior must be followed to prevent decay and degeneracy. Stoker's vampire provokes in his victims unpunctuality and nocturnal behavior: neither one a Victorian virtue. The danger Dracula poses is the danger of market destabilization and social dissolution—a transformation of British modernity into Transylvanian backwardness.

Time notations in *Dracula* indicate whether humans or vampires are in control. When the time is given in natural rather than social terms (sunrise, sunset, moonrise, evening, the sound of the cock crowing), Dracula is growing in power and individual human characters are in danger. When a person looks at his or her watch, notes the hourly time, notes the time of trains or the tolling of bells, or coordinates with others, Dracula's power is waning. The novel signals the death of Lucy Westenra, Dracula's third English victim, by her disregard of timekeeping protocols. Mina grounds her early journal entries in exact time (e.g., "the clock struck six," "the clock has just struck nine"). But after Dracula lands on British soil, Mina notes only noon, night, and sunset. Dr. Seward, whose lunatic asylum is adjacent to Dracula's London residence, generally records clock time scrupulously, but after an inmate, Renfield, falls under Dracula's power, Seward lapses into noon, moonrise, and sunrise, as does Van Helsing. A telegram summoning Dr. Seward to Lucy's bedside is tragically delayed, leaving her unprotected at night. Lucy dies and is transformed into a vampire.

Lucy's friends rally by turning individual memories into calendar events; journals and documents are put into chronological order, enabling a clear assessment of Dracula's activities. Their growing power is indicated by time specificity, such as Mina's note to Van Helsing:

I have this moment, whilst writing, had a wire from Jonathan, saying that he leaves by the 6:25 tonight from Launceston and will be here at 10:18, so that I shall have no fear tonight. Will you, therefore, instead of lunching with us, please come to breakfast at eight o'clock, if this be not too early for you? You can get away, if you are in a hurry, by the 10:30 train, which will bring you to Paddington by 2:35.<sup>30</sup>

The team begins meeting regularly.<sup>31</sup> The paper trail of the consignment of goods (boxes of soil) to various sites in London is followed. All but one is found and purified. Dracula flees back to Transylvania by sea and land, pursued by Van Helsing and his team, as John Seward's diary details:

"When does the next train start for Galatz? [Van Helsing]

"At 6:30 tomorrow morning!" [Mina]

"How on earth do you know?" [Quincey Morris]

"You forget . . . that I am the train fiend." [Mina]

"Wonderful woman . . . Now let us organize." [Van Helsing] "Arthur, go to the train and get the tickets . . . Jonathan, go to the agent of the ship and get from him letters to the agent in Galatz, with authority to search the ship just as it was here. Morris Quincey, you see the Vice-Consul, and get his aid with the fellow in Galatz and all he can do to make our way smooth, so that no times be lost when over the Danube. John will stay with Madam Mina and me, and we shall consult . . . it will not matter when the sun set."<sup>32</sup>

Coordination pays off: knowing the train timetables, the authorizing environment of the transportation network, and the vampire's limitations, the heroes are able to overtake Dracula just in time. Lying powerless in his coffin, he is stabbed in the heart, outside his castle, at sunset.

## TIME AND ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION

The Marxist critic Franco Moretti famously reads *Dracula* as representing the danger of monopoly capitalism, a reading that seems unwarranted given Dracula's disruptive effect on commerce and his indifference to government support. Nineteenth-century Britain had shown itself to be an agent of economic growth via its promotion of standard time, a crucial institutional basis for market creation. Sensibly, Dracula does not provoke temporal confusion in his agents—actors in the coordination game of international trade—while transactions that are important to his plans are ongoing. However, key figures in Dracula's purchase of property and transport of goods die after completion of their tasks: the captain of the *Demeter* (arrives dead in Whitby), his legal advisor and estate agent Peter Hawkins (dies suddenly), and Romanian shipping agent Petrof Skinsky (found with his throat torn open). Moretti argues that: "like capital, Dracula is impelled towards a continuous growth,

an unlimited expansion of his domain: accumulation is inherent in his nature."<sup>33</sup> But expansion of Dracula's domain would require a certain kind of corporate organization—establishing a network of business associates, for instance—of which Dracula seems incapable beyond the execution of a single transaction. Even the vampires he creates are not partners.<sup>34</sup> Expansion is impossible; accumulation of anything—power, gold—is limited by his inability to put together a reliable management team.

Global timekeeping is universal, communitarian, official, and mechanical. Dracula, governed by natural cycles, can only occasionally be party to this social contract. He will never be modern. Nineteenth-century opponents of standard time argued for the importance of local control and the health benefits of "natural" cycles and against globalized "machine time." Yet Dracula's disruption of clock time is cast as decadent and atavistic rather than pastoral or Romantic. Stoker's novel promotes modern British industriousness broadly by its scrupulous attention to the importance of chronology and time conventions. The Count cannot violate the rules that regulate his behavior; he cannot adapt to the new conventions and standards of the modern age. Wounded and alone in his coffin, his body turns to dust.