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Blood Will Tell: Anti-Semitism and Vampires in British Popular Culture, 1875-1914

Abstract: This article explores the ways in which Bram Stoker's characterization of Dracula exposes Britain's anti-Semitic anxieties during the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. The article delves into Britain's debates over immigration, racial degeneration, and the feared reverse colonization of Britain. In Stoker's novel, Dracula is symbolically presented as "Jewish," when he enacts blood libels by preying on children and taking blood from Christians. Dracula, as a metonym of stereotypes for Judaism, threatens Britain's racial makeup by mixing his blood with his victims, and transforming some of his victims into vampires. In a larger cultural sense, *Dracula* serves as a metaphor for the dangers immigrant Jews posed to Britain during this tumultuous period.

[1] The unjustified hatred of Jews and Judaism has a long and ongoing history, predating even Christian society. One form of this prejudice involves the portrayal of Jews as monsters, a process that enabled some to rationalize and justify their persecution. Of all the demons that inhabited the imagination of fin-de-siècle Britain, none is as closely affiliated with Jews as the vampire (Trachtenberg, 6). Connected both literally and figuratively by their association with blood, the construction of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* can be seen as a metaphor for anti-Semitic anxieties in Britain at the turn of the twentieth century.¹

[2] According to common folklore, vampires keep themselves alive by killing others and drinking their blood. The vampire was known to be a godless creature, a type of Antichrist, who fears all emblems of Christianity (Leatherdale, 22, 24). Christian folklore connects the Jews with death and blood as well. The author of the Gospel of Matthew depicts the Jews as saying "His blood be on us, and on our children," presumably acknowledging their complicity in the crucifixion of Jesus (27:25). Aside from being held responsible for the Crucifixion, Jews were charged with preventing the Second Coming due to their stubborn refusal to acknowledge Christ's divinity, and were even accused of harboring an Antichrist who would try to take over the world (Trachtenberg, 34). Beginning in the Middle Ages, Jews were portrayed as black magicians who worshiped the Devil. They supposedly spoke and wrote in secret languages that those around them could not understand, but which were actually Hebrew and later, Yiddish (Carlebach, 120,

122; Grayzel, 30, 32; Gilman "Self Hatred," 24, 60).² Jews were charged with possessing an evil eye of great power, and accused of stabbing communion wafers, making them bleed in an effort to re-enact the Crucifixion (Trachtenberg, 70, 109, 111, 114).³

[3] Blood, however, is what connects Jews and vampires most strongly, because Jews were closely associated with the blood libel accusation. The first recorded incident took place in Britain, upon the death of a child, William of Norwich, in 1144 (Holmes, Anti-Semitism, 7; Panitz, 37). Theobald, a monk who had converted from Judaism, accused the Jewish community of killing William for his blood. Over the next half century, blood libel charges spread throughout Britain, and then to the Continent (Holmes, "Ritual Murder," 101; Trachtenberg, 135). At first their accusers claimed that Jews killed Christian children as a way to re-enact the Crucifixion, although this motivation gave way gradually to the troubling belief that Jews required Christian blood for the rituals of Passover (Trachtenberg, 131, 135).

[4] Blood libel accusations died out in Western Europe during the sixteenth century, but resurfaced again in Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century. The peak years of these accusations were from 1880 until the eve of the First World War. From the trial at Tisza-Eszlar in 1882 to the trial of Mendel Beilis in 1911, accusations about blood libels were highly publicized all over the world. Although it seemed that Jews had few friends during this period, the British press came staunchly to their defense. This did not mean, however, that the country that had originated the blood libel in the twelfth century had outgrown its superstitions by the nineteenth century, a fact that becomes obvious when one looks closely at the media treatment of a series of grisly murders in London at the end of the nineteenth century (Langmuir, 318; Holmes, Anti-Semitism, 54; Holmes, "Ritual Murder," 103-4).

[5] In the fall of 1888, the East End of London was terrorized by the murders committed by Jack the Ripper. Jack's victims were not merely murdered, but disemboweled as well, suggesting the handiwork of a skilled butcher. The public's knowledge that Jews required ritual slaughterers for their Kosher meat, coupled with the setting of the murders in the East End, where the majority of London's Jewish community lived, led to the logical but politically dangerous conclusion that Jack the Ripper might in fact be Jewish. Jews were already embroiled in controversy over the way they practiced ritual slaughter. It had become standard to stun animals before killing them, which Jewish law prohibited. Proponents of stunning argued that killing animals the way Kosher butchers did fostered insensitivity and brutality in men ~ as was perhaps being demonstrated by Jack (Judd, 123-4). At a time when Jews in Eastern Europe were accused of ritual murders, even enlightened England was willing to believe that its Jews were bloodthirsty killers (Gilman, Jew's Body, 112; Walkowitz, 199; Strack, 153).

[6] Jack's supposed description, printed in the newspapers (Fig 1.), was: "dark beard and moustache, dark jacket and trousers, black felt hat, [and] spoke with a foreign accent." When newspapers printed an imagined portrait of Jack, however, they included an extra trait; a stereotypically Jewish, hooked nose (Gilman, Jew's Body, 113, 115). A high proportion of the suspects interrogated by police were members of the Jewish community and as a result, several anti-Jewish riots broke out in the East End at this time (Gilman, Jew's Body, 113). As if even he didn't want to be associated with Judaism, Jack the Ripper finally wrote to Scotland Yard that he was "not a butcher...not a Yid/ Nor yet a foreign skipper,/ But your own lighthearted friend,/ Yours truly, Jack the Ripper" (Gilman, Jew's Body, 113; Zanger, 36).



Figure 1

Taken from Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (Routledge: London, 1991), 115.

[7] Whereas Jack the Ripper was a real, embodied killer, assumed by many to be a sort of Jewish “vampire” and “butcher,” Bram Stoker's *Dracula* drew on a whole host of literary and artistic traditions that supported the ghastly accusation that Jews were in fact vampiric societal parasites. Metaphors based on blood and vampires were prevalent in contemporary British fiction during the fin-de-siècle period, many authors drawing upon aspects of the Antichrist and blood libel accusations that dogged the Jews throughout the Middle Ages. The twin images of the Jew and the vampire are visible in characters and books such as the mesmerist Svengali of du Maurier's *Trilby*, whose power to control the heroine verges on the diabolical, and who could be viewed as a direct descendent of the Christian's nightmare Jew of the Middle Ages.

[8] One of the original illustrations of *Trilby* depicts Svengali controlling a hypnotized Trilby who is singing at his command (Fig. 2) (Rosenberg, 235).⁴ Trilby stands on stage, raised above everyone, and her attitude, standing with her hands clasped behind her, is one of servitude, even of torture. The illustration suggests that Trilby is a Christ figure being crucified by Svengali. Du Maurier's contemporaries were sensitive to the medieval qualities of Svengali's character as well. In stage productions of *Trilby*, the actor Max Beerbohm, playing Svengali, based his depiction of du Maurier's villain on old representations of the devil. The theater critic William Archer commented that Beerbohm's Svengali was “lineally descended from the Devil of the Miracle Plays” (Pick, *Svengali's Web*, 12).

[9] Other characters represent further anti-Semitic stereotypes: Melmotte of Anthony Trollope's The Way We Live Now represents the Jew as financial parasite, “fed with the blood of widows and children,” and Constantine Schaubert of Guy Thorne's When it Was Dark represents the modern Antichrist whose attempts to repudiate Jesus and Christianity nearly unleash Armageddon (Trollope, 61; Thorne, 330; Robinson, 147, 151). It is in Stoker's Dracula, however, that the image of the Jew as vampire and the anti-Semitic anxieties of Britain at the turn of the twentieth century combine so seamlessly and so compellingly. For Count Dracula is not a medieval monster, but a metaphor for modernity and British anti-Semitism.

19



Figure 2

Taken from George du Maurier, Trilby, 1894 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 211.

[10] The fundamental connection between Jews and vampires is blood, specifically blood libels. These form an underlying theme in Dracula. Aside from the attacks on the two heroines, Lucy and Mina, Stoker's vampires are only shown attacking children. Gentile (non-Jewish) children were nearly always the victims featured in blood libels, from the time of William of Norwich in 1144, to that of Mendel Beilis in 1911.

The first time the reader observes Count Dracula return from hunting, he carries “a half-smothered child” in a bag, which he proceeds to share with his three vampire wives (Stoker, 53). When Lucy becomes a vampire, her victims are also children. Before the protagonists manage to subdue and stake her, they surprise her as she is drinking from a “fair-haired child” (Stoker, 256). Clearly Stoker is aware of the anti-Semitic claims made against Jews during this period, and capitalizes upon them in his presentation of the monstrous and bloodthirsty Dracula.

[11] Even without blood libel accusations and religious persecution, however, Britons held many anxieties and prejudices about Jews. These fears were exacerbated when the Jewish population more than doubled in the last quarter of the nineteenth century due to immigration from Eastern Europe (Alderman, 110-11). This wave of immigrants arrived during Britain’s Great Depression, and they were typically depicted by the press as paupers, robbing Britons of their jobs by agreeing to work for lower wages (Webb, 374). According to these embittered journalists, in taking jobs, money, food, and housing away from native Britons, Jews were not only viewed as competitors, but as parasites, metaphorical vampires who lived by draining away economic opportunities rather than blood.

[12] Stoker’s Count Dracula, likewise, is not merely taken from the legends of the Middle Ages or the superstitions of Eastern Europe. He embodies the problems of the late nineteenth century in Britain, beginning with the wave of immigrants pouring in from Eastern Europe. In fact, Dracula embodies both the newer, alien immigrants and the more acculturated immigrants of previous generations. Count Dracula arrives from Transylvania, described as a backward and superstitious country. Yet, he also bears a striking resemblance to the older, German immigrants, displaying many Western European attributes – cultured manners, organization, and punctuality (Arata, 637). Like all immigrants, Dracula endeavors to integrate into his host society through careful study of its language and customs (Malchow, 138; Arata, 634). On first meeting Harker, Dracula’s greatest concern is to discover whether his degree of mastery of English and his pronunciation would brand him a foreigner in England (Stoker, 28-9).

[13] However, Dracula’s origins are explicitly East European. In contrast to the older, wealthier, and more acculturated German immigrants, immigrant Jews from Eastern Europe were often poor and frequently accused of lacking hygienic habits, and of having smelly, poorly kept dwellings. When the heroes break into Dracula’s London house, they complain that “the place smell[ed]...vilely.... [making it plain] that the Count had been using the place pretty freely” (Stoker, 356).

[14] Richer, more established Jews were viewed as parasites for reasons that differed from those associated with the recent immigrants. Detractors accused them of using their wealth in order to gain control of the government and to acquire positions of power. Over the course of the century, the British aristocracy had been losing its wealth and power (Cannadine, 16). The barons of industry and commerce, which included Jewish bankers and businessmen, were able to imitate the lifestyles of aristocrats, including ownership of vast estates and comfortable country homes (Cannadine, 28; Webb, 372). Jewish millionaires found it increasingly easy to become knighted, and ennobled Jews were prominent at the court of Edward VII (Holmes, Anti-Semitism, 87, 109). The aristocracy had been regarded as central to British identity, established traditions, and power in government. When Jews achieved such high rank, others felt threatened and lashed out against them. In 1891, one newspaper, the Labor Leader, referred to the banking family, the Rothschilds, as “leeches [that] have for years hung on with distended suckers to the body politic of Europe” (Holmes, Anti-Semitism, 83). According to the reporter, the Rothschilds and other wealthy Jews like them were draining Britain of her wealth and prestige, and rendering her unable to maintain her position on the world stage. Clearly, despite their general support of Jews, British newspapers were also still inclined to publish prejudiced charges that echoed more literal charges of the blood libel in past centuries.

[15] Count Dracula is a faithful embodiment of the caricature of Jews as greedy and parasitic, placing money above all else. Despite his supernatural abilities, Dracula is an essentially commercial character. His first action of the book (while still disguised as a coachman) is to mark the sites of buried treasure. His next is to go over deeds of purchase and other business matters with Harker, in Transylvania representing Dracula's solicitors in Britain (Zanger, 41). While dining at Castle Dracula, Harker notes that "the table service is of gold," an ostentatious show of wealth similar to those which Jewish bankers and nouveaux riches were accused (Stoker, 27). When Harker explores the castle, he finds a room filled with "a great heap of gold...of all kinds, Roman, and British, and Austrian, and Hungarian, and Greek[,] and Turkish" (Stoker, 63). Like the modern Jewish financier, Dracula does business and reaps profit from all over the world.

[16] The most significant scene, however, comes towards the end of the novel. In it, the heroes have cornered Dracula, and Harker lunges at him with a knife. Not stabbed,

The [knife's] point just cut the cloth of [Dracula's] coat, making a wide gap whence a bundle of bank-notes and a stream of gold fell out.... The next instant, with a sinuous dive he swept under Harker's arm..., and, grasping a handful of the money from the floor, dashed across the room (Stoker, 364).

This demonstration of putting the preservation of one's money on par with the preservation of one's life shows that stereotypes regarding Jews and their money were alive and well in the late nineteenth century, and enacted in the fictional character of Dracula, making them seem truly monstrous.

[17] Angry observers who believed that Jews had taken over the country's finances felt that they had taken over the country's political future as well. One contemporary newspaper warned that "with the scepter of finance the Jew also dominates the politics of the world.... guiding the religious and moral movements in society in our day, and...forging [our] chains" (Holmes, Anti-Semitism, 64). A powerful example of the paranoia that gripped some people's assumptions about Jewish political leadership is the case of Benjamin Disraeli. Although baptized at the age of thirteen, Benjamin Disraeli's peers regarded him as a Jew (Feldman, 78; Holmes, Anti-Semitism, 10). A political cartoon taken from the humor periodical *Punch* (Fig. 3) portrayed him as Fagin, the notorious Jewish villain from Dickens' Oliver Twist, exercising power dishonestly and corrupting those around him. Moreover, observers drew on old, anti-Semitic accusations, and ascribed Medieval, occult powers to Disraeli, explaining his success in

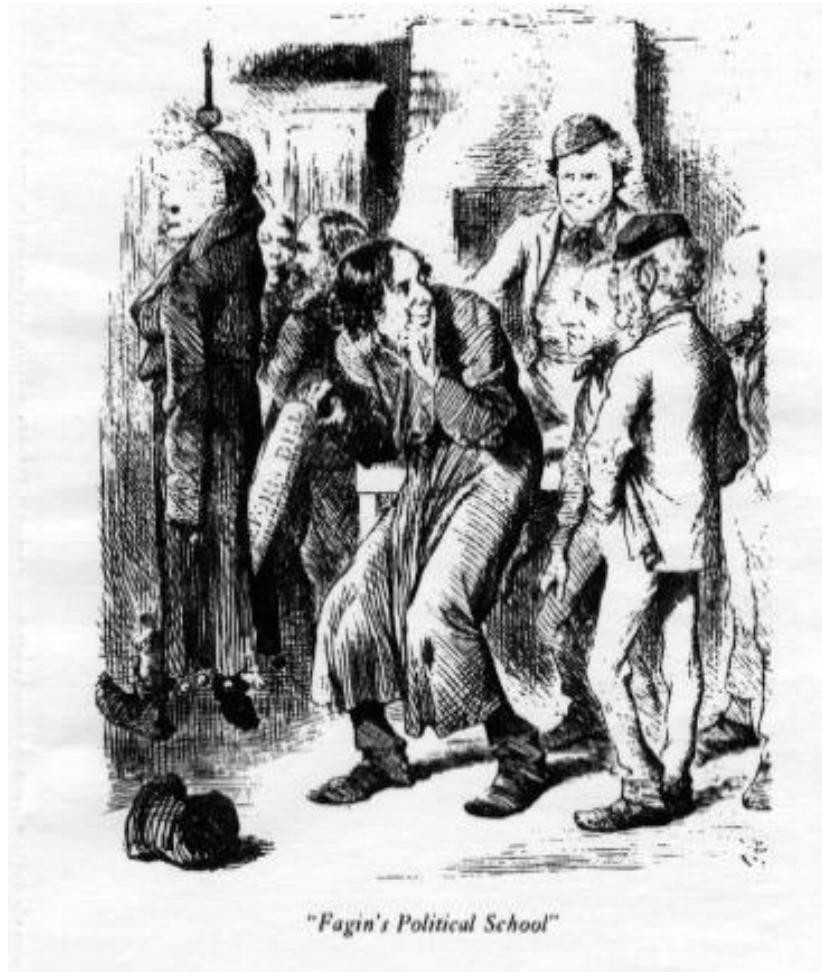


Figure 3

Taken from *Punch*, November 9th, 1867

politics through magic and satanic power (Pick, *Svengali's Web*, 130-31). As Prime Minister in the late 1870s, he was accused of siding against the Russians in the Ottoman crisis and potentially threatening Britons with a war, solely in order to satisfy Jewish ambition and avenge Russia's ill treatment of the Jews (Lipman, 37).

[18] These fears of divided loyalty were compounded by the growing economic and political competition with Germany. Could the British trust the loyalty of their Jewish citizens, established or recent? The new immigrants were rootless and the established ones mostly had roots in Germany. Would their business and political interests, their supposed thirst for wealth and power lead them to betray Britain if Germany offered them sufficient incentives? Anti-Semites saw Jews, many of whom had relatives in Germany, as a fifth column for the Kaiser (Holmes, *Anti-Semitism*, 71-2).

[19] Anti-alienists feared that Jews would entertain loyalties towards countries other than Britain. Anti-Semitic thinkers were convinced that, whether as immigrants or international financiers, Jews were bound to have allies all over the world, as rich and powerful as themselves, who would help in furthering schemes for their personal benefit rather than the good of the nation. This nightmare certainly comes true with Stoker's representation of Dracula as a symbol for supposed Jewish greed and self-interest. Dracula places his loyalty wherever it suits his convenience; speaking both German and English as easily as his native

tongue (Stoker, 16, 23). Dracula has the skills necessary to join forces with Germany, England's chief rival, if he so wishes. In fact, when fleeing Britain, Dracula enlists the aid of a German Jew named Hildesheim, "a Hebrew of rather the Adelphi Theater type, with a nose like a sheep" who must naturally be bribed in order to aid Stoker's heroes (Stoker, 413). Tellingly, the one overtly Jewish character in the novel is neither British nor on the side of the heroes, reinforcing the anti-Semitic charge that Jews cannot be counted upon to give help solely to aid the national interest, regardless of personal and pecuniary gain.

[20] Jews continued to be demonized by their host country, but because of the legacy of the Age of Enlightenment and the ascendancy of rationality and the sciences, the paradigms had shifted. Rationalizations for persecution rested increasingly on science rather than religion. Instead of worshipping the devil and performing black magic, Jews were vilified for their blood, the supposed locus of race and heredity (Barzun, 8-9). In the eyes of fin-de-siècle scientists, blood type dictated everything from physical attributes to personality types and capacity for moral judgment. According to the tenets of Social Darwinism, one's blood type determined one's future, making it impossible to escape poverty, crime, or immorality through education or changes in circumstances (Pick, Faces of Degeneration, 109).

[21] An offshoot of this thinking, known as criminal anthropology, became extremely well known in the 1870s, when one of its founders, the Italian Cesare Lombroso, popularized the idea that criminals could be recognized by certain physical characteristics (Barzun, 116-17). These physical markings included the shape of the skull, the ears, and noses "like the beak of a bird of prey;" and chillingly, also the stereotypical Jewish nose seen on the imagined sketch of Jack the Ripper (Leatherdale, 211).

[22] The nose, with its implications of criminal proclivity, was only one of a host of negative physical attributes ascribed to Jews. They were portrayed as flat-footed, physically weak, and disease-ridden (Gainer, 128). This meant to their accusers that Jews themselves were not only incapable of contributing to the wider, British society, but that they also posed a threat to the physical health of the population at large. This was another characteristic they shared with the vampire, whose other name, "nosferatu," means "plague carrier" (Leatherdale, 22).

[23] Count Dracula's nose, "a very strong...aquiline [nose], with [a] high bridge and peculiarly arched nostrils," labeled constantly throughout the book as hooked or "beaky" is simultaneously stereotypically Jewish and criminal, like that in the imagined picture of Jack the Ripper (Stoker, 25, 215). Mina Harker herself declares that Dracula is a "criminal and of criminal type. Nordau and Lombroso would so classify him" (Stoker, 403). In fact, Stoker's description of the Count's hooked nose, bushy eyebrows, pointed ears, sharp teeth, and ugly fingers might have been taken straight out of Lombroso's book Criminal Man (Leatherdale, 211).

[24] What Britons feared most was that their Jewish citizens were contributing to the degeneration of the nation. The Boer War had proven to be a watershed in both scientific and anti-Semitic thought. A large proportion of volunteers for the Boer War were rejected because their weight, height, and health proved to be substandard. The war itself had, moreover, proved to be harder to win than anticipated. The experience of the Boer War seemed to indicate that Britain was in danger of degenerating into a nation that could no longer compete on the imperial and international stages; both intrinsic to British prestige, and it seemed convenient to blame the Jews.

[25] Arguments began to appear that it was essential for Britain to build up a racially fit citizenry capable of fighting for the Empire. According to these arguments, Jews, with their apparent reputation for weakness and disease, could not contribute to this pool of citizen-soldiers (Greenslade, 183). Furthermore, some argued, they could very possibly pull healthy Britons down with them. This was the troubling specter of

miscegenation, of combining inferior blood with racially pure blood to produce a vitiated, degenerate populace. This fear made Jews appear to be biological “vampires” as well as economic and power parasites. The argument went that either Jews could infect and debilitate people outright – as the vampire preys upon and kills his victims, or they could mingle with the populace and miscegenate (mix bloods) and bring about degeneration – as the vampire mixes his blood with that of his victim to increase the population of vampires. In a world that seemed modern in so many ways, such claims suggest an almost medieval superstition.

[26] What makes Dracula such a rich document for scholars is the fact that it is a modern story with a modern setting (Halberstam, 248). Only a small part of the action takes place in remote, timeless Transylvania; the rest is set in metropolitan London, the capital of Britain, and by implication, the center of modern culture (Senf, 93). Half of the heroes are professionals – two doctors and one lawyer, while even Jonathan’s wife Mina can both use a typewriter and write shorthand (Daly, 30). It is their modernity and belief in science that allows them to defeat Dracula; for example, he cannot read stenography, the shorthand writing in which several of the characters communicate (Kittler, 152).

[27] Dracula poses a scientific threat in the eyes of the heroes, namely, the threat of instigating the degeneration of Britain, where, “perhaps, for centuries to come he might, amongst its teeming millions...create a new and ever-widening circle of semi-demons” (Stoker, 67). Science, however, also allows the heroes to categorize and subsequently defeat Dracula. The protagonists are firm believers in criminal anthropology.

[28] Once Dracula has been reduced to science, he can be vanquished scientifically. Stoker’s language is very suggestive. His heroes “sterilize” Dracula’s coffins of native soil with communion wafers in order to prevent him from finding refuge during the day (Stoker, 354). Next, they travel back to Transylvania to destroy Dracula’s castle, the source of the vampire infestation. They do to the Count what Social Darwinists advocated doing to hereditary criminals – sterilization through applied eugenics (Kittler, 165). All of the evil and danger suggested by fears about alien immigrants, as embodied by Dracula, are chased out of England and destroyed (Halberstam, 255). In the words of one reviewer, Dracula is “exterminated” (Senf, 60-1).

[29] At the time of publication in 1897, Count Dracula was only one in a long line of fictional vampires. However, Dracula differed from his earlier ancestors in some important ways. As described in Gordon Melton’s encyclopedia of vampires in myth, literature, and film, from Polidori’s Lord Ruthven in 1819, to Rymer’s Varney the Vampire in the 1840s, to Le Fanu’s Carmilla in 1872, whatever their menace, vampires had typically belonged to the social circles they preyed upon; no worse than a local, decadent aristocrat. Varney’s origins in particular are explicitly British (Melton, 94, 537, 749).

[30] Count Dracula, on the other hand, does not belong to the society he threatens. He is an outsider, specifically an immigrant from Eastern Europe just when large numbers of Eastern European Jews were arriving on England’s shores (Arata, 627). Christian iconography had not been emphasized in vampire fiction earlier in the century. Crucifixes and communion wafers, however, figure prominently in combating Dracula, at a time when a religious community that did not embrace Christianity – the Jews – was on the rise (Zanger, 39-40). Dracula embodied the alien, parasitical Jew who inhabited the imaginations of British businessmen and eugenicists, and who was expelled and effectively barred from re-entering Britain, as the Aliens Act of 1905 would bar Jews from emigrating in less than a decade.

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¹ The equation of vampires and anti-Semitism, especially as it relates to Dracula, is not found very often among scholars, but I am not the first person to have written on this topic. I wish to pay tribute to Judith Halberstam's article "Technologies of Monstrosity," Jules Zanger's "A Sympathetic Vibration," Stephen Arata's "The Occidental Tourist," and Timothy Beal's Religion and its Monsters. These scholars have served as pioneers in exploring the connections between Stoker's text and the prejudices and anxieties of his contemporaries, such as degeneration, immigration, blood libels, and stereotypes on the Jews' relation to money as well as their appearance. In addition to these issues, Beal's book explores the Biblical overtones with which the heroes of Stoker's novel contend with Dracula and his blood-related transgressions, taken from both the Old and New Testaments. I have tried to make my own contribution to the field, by delving into these subjects in greater depth, as well as by branching into related topics such as miscegenation, and fears of German political and economic hegemony.

² Anything secret, mysterious, and unknown was potentially dangerous and threatening. It was common for converts to "divulge" the secrets of Judaism from their expert position of having been privy to, among other things, the secret language of Jews. In 13th century France, the Talmud was ordered to be burned publicly, the idea being partially to deprive the Jews of their magical power by destroying their books.

³ This occurred before, but particularly after, the doctrine of transubstantiation was established in 1215, petering out in the 16th century.

⁴ Du Maurier had been an artist for the popular magazine Punch for many years before becoming an author, and he illustrated his books himself.