

**Movie:** Dracula (1931)

**Synopsis:** On May 6, 1816, Mary Godwin, Percy Shelley, Lord Byron, Claire Clairmont, and a young physician named John William Polidori rented a villa in Coligny, Switzerland. This summer meeting produced two of the most eminent characters in English literature. An “incessant rain” confined the group in the house for days, which spawned discussions on varied topics, including galvanism and the reanimation of dead matter. The company also amused themselves by reading German ghost stories, prompting Byron to suggest they each write their own supernatural tale. Shortly after, the iconic monsters from Frankenstein (Shelley) and The Vampire, a Tale (Polidori) were conceived.

### **How it relates to the field of psychiatry**

Inspired by Lord Byron’s Fragment of a Novel (1819), Polidori’s novella introduces the mysterious Lord Ruthven and his interludes with Aubrey around Europe. In Greece, Ruthven is mortally wounded when the pair is attacked by bandits. Before he dies, Ruthven makes Aubrey swear an oath that he will not mention his death for a year and a day. Aubrey returns to London and is astounded when Ruthven reappears, seemingly unharmed.

Aubrey soon realizes that everyone whom Ruthven meets ends up suffering. Aubrey’s discovery exposes Ruthven’s deceitfulness as evidenced by his repeated lying and "conning" others for personal pleasure. As he seduces Aubrey’s sister, Aubrey is rendered helpless when Ruthven reminds him of his oath. Ruthven and Aubrey’s sister are engaged to marry on the day the oath ends. Just before he dies, Aubrey writes a letter to his sister revealing Ruthven’s history, but it does not arrive before the wedding vows. On the wedding night, the new bride is discovered dead, having been drained of her blood, with Ruthven having mysteriously vanished.

*Vlad III, Prince of Wallachia: Reckless Disregard for Safety; Lack of Remorse*

Texts such as An Extraordinary and Shocking History of a Great Berserker Called Prince Dracula served as inspiration for Abraham “Bram” Stoker’s Dracula. Stoker’s working papers for Dracula were discovered in the Rosenbach Museum in Philadelphia, confirming that he knew about the existence of the “Voivode Dracula,” with Stoker subsequently changing his vampire-creation’s original name, "Count Wampyr," to “Dracula” after reading An Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia.

In 1389, Mehmed II sent 10,000 cavalry to defeat Vlad III when Vlad refused to pay “jizya” (tax) to the sultan. Passing through a narrow pass north of Giurgiu, Vlad launched a surprise attack, surrounding the Turks and capturing thousands. Vlad’s military tactics serve to teach trainees that, whereas not all violence rises to the level of antisocial personality, even in times of war, it is by no means necessary that “combatants exhibit abnormalities of personality.” Such is the case with Vlad III, who, upon impaling thousands of the Sultan’s men on wooden stakes,

became known as "Vlad the Impaler." In Stoker's novel, this battle is referenced by Van Helsing when describing Count Dracula: "He must, indeed, have been that Voivode Dracula who won his name against the Turk, over the great river on the very frontier of Turkey-land."

Count Dracula is a merging of Polidori's mysterious Lord Ruthven and Vlad the Impaler; a fictional model of Antisocial Personality Disorder defined as a total disregard for and violation of others' rights.

**Key Words:** vampire, John Polidori, Lord Ruthven, Count Dracula, Bram Stoker, Antisocial Personality Disorder, Vlad the Impaler

Anthony Tobia, MD. Copyright © 2016 Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. [tobiaat@rwjms.rutgers.edu](mailto:tobiaat@rwjms.rutgers.edu) All rights reserved.