

Carlos Williams, become pretentious and stultifying. He points to the opening lines of a poem by Phillip Booth: "On the far side/of the storm/window." The break is used as a trick to interrupt the flow of the poem and call attention to the cleverness of its author.

Are there any antidotes to the workshop syndrome? Dooley knows that little can be

done about the larger cultural trends and smaller academic imperatives that foster mediocrity. But he does have a few hints for budding McPoets. Avoid obvious clichés, such as the "adjective noun of noun" formula. Read lots of poetry, especially verse written by dead poets, whose work was never dulled by a workshop. And *feel* something.

## Bloodsuckers

"The Real Vampire" by Paul Barber, in *Natural History* (Oct. 1990), American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th St., New York, N.Y. 10024.

To most people, the "typical" vampire would be a tuxedoed gentleman with over-developed canines and a predilection for nighttime activities. But this is the vampire of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), based on a Walachian prince named Vlad Tepes. In the actual folklore of Walachia (part of present-day Romania) the *vampir* had more humble origins.

The Slavic revenant (literally, one who returns from the dead) was usually a peasant. "Victims" of vampires described their attackers as bloated figures with ruddy skin, having long fingernails and stubby beards. In the 1730s, an outbreak of vampire attacks in the Serbian village of Medvegia prompted a group of Austrian physicians to investigate. In the harsh light of modern forensics, writes Barber, a research associate at UCLA's Fowler Museum of Cultural History, the evidence for vampires included in such accounts as their *Visum et Repertum* (Seen and Discovered) seems to vanish.

Much of the hysteria in Medvegia during the 1730s was fueled by memories of Arnold Paole, a suspected vampire. When they had exhumed Paole's body years earlier, the villagers told the Austrians, they had found that his corpse was "undecayed, and that fresh blood had flowed from his eyes, nose, mouth, and ears." They also saw that "the old nails on his hands and feet, along with the skin, had fallen off, and that new ones had grown." Convinced that Paole was a vampire, they had driven a stake through his heart, "whereby he gave an audible groan and bled copiously."

Scholars once simply dismissed such accounts, but Barber says they contain some telling details. The condition of Paole's corpse, which suggested to the villagers some kind of continuing life, actually exhibits classic signs of decomposition. Nails fall off after death; the "new nails" probably were the glossy "nail beds" underneath. Burial slows the rate of flesh decomposition, and even copious bleeding from corpses is natural. What of Paole's groan? Merely the compression of chest air through the larynx, forced out by the driving stake. The bloating mentioned in many accounts was due to an accumulation of gases, not to gorging on blood.

But how to explain the victims' certainty that they had been attacked by a vampire? In the case that brought the Austrians to Medvegia, a woman named Stanacka had awakened from her sleep "with a terrible cry . . . and complained that she had been throttled by [a man] who had died nine weeks earlier." After suffering from chest pains for three days, Stanacka died. Barber believes that the attack was nothing more than a nightmare. The peasants' willingness to believe Stanacka was natural, since the record suggests that an epidemic, beyond their ability to comprehend or cure, was sweeping the area. It probably was the epidemic that claimed her life, too, but to the peasants, Stanacka's death was proof enough that she had been the victim of a vampire. No doubt it gave them some solace to personify the agent of their troubles. At least a vampire can be dispatched with a stake through the heart.