

PROLOGUE

Folklorists, like vampires, are doomed to a dual existence. Vampires are both dead and alive; folklorists are both participants and observers. I was introduced to this dualism in the classroom of the late Wayland Hand, the personification of a gentleman and scholar. Impeccably attired in a jacket and tie, he looked a bit out of place at UCLA in the late '60s. Every first-year graduate student in the Folklore & Mythology Program was required to take Wayland's class in folklore bibliography. Each classroom session began with a mimeographed annotated bibliography on the topic of the day. Wayland would go down the list, discussing each volume—its genesis, contents, relative merits and demerits, and where it fit into the world of folklore scholarship. Often he would relate obscure anecdotes about the authors. Sounds deadly, does it? It wasn't, because Wayland not only *knew* the lore, he *treasured* it. When he spoke of Pertinacious Kobolds and other mischievous spirits, they became distinct beings with personalities.

My epiphany came the day Wayland told us about the disappearance of giants from Europe. This was not a rapid, catastrophic event like the extinction of the dinosaurs. It was, rather, a more lengthy demise with the final death blow administered by the Industrial Revolution. As Wayland talked about the giants, I noticed that he stopped looking at us, and his eyes seemed to focus somewhere beyond the windowless walls of our Bunche Hall classroom. His voice, naturally soft, grew softer. He spoke about how Christians stigmatized the giants as devils, in league with Satan. He described how industry's widening circle

of smoke and clamor finally pushed the giants from their homes. His voice dropped to a near whisper, and I'm sure I saw tears well up, as he described how the giants shrank, deeper and deeper into the forests and caves. Demonized, and no longer able to find refuge, the giants vanished. When Wayland concluded, it dawned on me that he wasn't talking only about giants no longer appearing in the *folklore record*. He was describing the *extinction of a species*. I thought, this is incredible: Wayland Hand, a meticulous, reasoning scholar—a *professional folklorist*—actually believes in giants.

Some introspection led me to conclude that those two words—professional folklorist—embody opposing perspectives. “Folklore” suggests the stuff of youthful play and fantasy (though I and other folklorists take issue with this narrow view), while “professional” is what grown-ups aspire to become—capable, proper and, above all, rational. All professional folklorists are to be found somewhere, perhaps wavering, along this continuum. Dualism is reflected in our principal technique for acquiring primary data, “participant-observation.” We interact with “informants” (an unfortunate term) and join in their activities to learn and understand from the insider's point of view. But, at the same time, we are interpreting these experiences through the lens of folklore theory. We are simultaneously part of, yet apart from, what we study.

The use of the term “vampire” also reflects the insider/outsider duality. Insiders, the New England families and communities involved, never used the term. Following the vampire trail, I discovered that a vampire is much more complicated and interesting than simply a corpse who returns from the grave to suck the blood of the living. When I, or anyone else, refers to a corpse that was exhumed as a “vampire,” it is good to keep an open mind.

I've grown to accept my two folklorist personae, and I've given them names. Dr. Killjoy Rational III is the observer/scholar. His title indicates his credentials and standing in the academic community; the suffix “III” suggests his intellectual descent, linking

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him to a longstanding tradition of scholarship. Killjoy's rationality often keeps impulsiveness at bay. On the other hand, Mike (who is, I like to believe, the natural me) is willing to suspend his disbelief because he wants to participate wholeheartedly, without reservation—sometimes without premeditation. He tends to be open and trusting, perhaps naive at times.

The vampire journey that fills this book was undertaken, interpreted, and written by both Mike and Dr. Rational, frequently in perfect harmony, occasionally not. Even when their presence is unacknowledged, you can be sure that they both are on the page, engaging in an ongoing dialogue. Wayland Hand did not set me out on the vampire trail—that was done by another remarkable man, Everett Peck, who lives on the opposite coast. But Wayland gave me the wherewithal to follow the trail, and the courage and wisdom to allow Mike to accompany Dr. Rational.

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