Level 2 First Place

Abigail Lambert

Dracula is arguably the most famous vampire to appear in literature, but he is definitely not the first. *Carmilla* written by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu was written twenty-six years before Bram Stoker wrote Dracula. Carmilla was still not the first vampire to appear in literature. Fifty- three years before Carmilla there was Vampyre by John Polidori. All this to say Bram Stoker’s Dracula was the most famed, but why? All stories were based on Irish lore or historical figures or both, so why does Dracula appear in countless horror stories far after the original story written by Bram Stoker.

Dracula is believed to be based on Vlad III Dracula, more commonly known as Vlad the Impaler. Vlad was a ruler of Walachia which is now Romania and Moldova. Vlad was known as Vlad the Impaler because he would impale his enemies on stakes in the ground and just leave them to die. Vlad died in 1476 but his actions lived on throughout history. It’s a curiosity that he was even a ruler of Walachia. His father was assassinated and he had to campaign his way onto the throne. Even then he was deposed after a mere two months. After eight years of struggling for the throne, Vlad finally gains the throne and starts his reign of terror. Could Dracula really be based on this guy?

Bram Stoker did mention the name Dracula in his notes but didn’t have any notes on the actions of Dracula. It’s said that Bram Stoker met with the historian Hermann Bamberger who could have told Stoker about Vlad and his methodical killing, but there are no official accounts of them talking. Yet the murderous wave of Vlad and Dracula seem too similar to disregard that Vlad was likely a big inspiration to Bram Stoker while writing his novel Dracula. Still there are other people Stoker could have gotten the idea from for Dracula, or should I say characters in history.

There was lore of blood sucking creatures in Ireland before Bram Stoker produced the story of Dracula. A prime example of this is the story of King Abhartach. He was a terror to the people of Ireland when he was alive but even more so when he was undead. King Abhartach suspected his wife to be cheating on him, so he climbed out of a window to go check on her, but he slipped and fell to his death. After the town’s people celebrated, they buried him improperly. The next day to everyone’s surprise King Abhartach was there demanding blood to drink. Fear of punishment drove the people to follow his commands. When a man named Cathran heard of this, he slayed the supposed to be dead king and the king again was buried the same way as before. Another wave of shock came when King Abhartach was there the next day once more demanding blood, the people followed his commands. Cathran once again slayed him, and they buried him. When he was there the next day, Cathran sought help from a saint who told him to plunge a wooden sword into the king’s heart, bury him upside down, and lay a stone so heavy Abhartach cannot move it. The reason for this is because you cannot kill those who have already died, so they had to make it impossible for Abhartach to rise. Stoker could have definitely gotten a few ideas from this, since his own character Dracula was stabbed through the heart in order to free his spirit from his undead body.

Bram Stoker was not as famous of an author as he is now. He was well known for being Sir Henry Irving’s manager and going with him on tours, while his literary works at the time did not inspire many around the globe to write their own horror stories yet. Stoker grew up in Ireland and only started to write fiction in his later years of life. Before this, his writing remained in newspapers and handbooks. Bram Stoker wrote many fiction novels before his death, but none brought in as much satisfaction to the population. Most importantly, we’re not talking about those other novels, we’re talking about his novel Dracula.

Dracula is an Irish tall tale based off on myths, historical figures, and the own thoughts of Bram Stoker. Dracula inspired movies, tv series, and more novels based off of the character. The literary work of Dracula has warped reality and fantasy like no other horror novel before or after it’s time. Overall, Dracula has been and will always affect the horror genre and characters in the future. It inspired the creation of characters like Draculaura in a popular tv show, Monster High, and we have Bram Stoker to thank for the Twilight series. Thanks to Stokers character Dracula, vampires are common knowledge to people all over the world.

Resources Page

Eldridge, A. (2022, November 5). vampire. Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/topic/vampire.

Luebering, J. (2022, October 23). Bram Stoker. Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bram-Stoker

Osborne-Bartucca, Kristen. “Carmilla Summary”. GradeSaver, 1 April 2020 Web. 25 October 2022. https://www.gradesaver.com/carmilla/study-guide/summary

**Pallardy, R. (2022, October 21). Vlad the Impaler. Encyclopedia Britannica.** https://www.britannica.com/biography/Vlad-the-Impaler**.**

Pallardy, R. (2022, August 17). Elizabeth Báthory. Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Elizabeth-Bathory.

Shelley, M., Polidori, J., Shelley, P. B., & Byron, G. (2011, November 13). *The Geneva* Collection Frankenstein by Mary Shelley the Vampyre, by John Polidori.

Sheridan Le Fanu, Joseph (1872). Carmilla.

Stoker, B. (1993). *Dracula*. Wordsworth Editions.