Level 1 Second Place Winner

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If you are a fan of Halloween, chances are you've heard of what a vampire is. Vampires are fanged creatures that prey on humans for their blood. Vampires can do all types of things. They can control minds, morph into bats or wolves, and they cannot see themselves in a mirror. But like most creatures, vampires have weaknesses. They can’t eat garlic and sunlight weakens their powers (history.com).

There are many different stories about vampires. You can find stories about vampires from all around the world. There are stories about vampires in ancient Persia and Mesopotamia, China, and India. There are even stories about bloodsucking creatures from Africa and the Aztecs (bittergrounds.com). But the heart of vampire lore comes from Romania. However, the most famous story about vampires is *Dracula,* by the Irish author Bram Stoker.

*Dracula* was published in 1897 and it became very popular. From 1922 to today, it has been made into many movies and television shows. It has even been adapted into a play and a musical. The novel follows the story of a lawyer named Jonathon Harker who travels into the Carpathian Mountains of Romania to complete a real estate transaction. When he makes his way to his client’s castle, he meets his client, Count Dracula, and soon realizes that he is a prisoner there.

Back in England, Harker’sfiance, Mina Murray, is deeply worried about him. She has not heard from Harker in months, and her friend Lucy is acting strangely and not even her fiance, Dr. John Seward, can explain her condition. And yet nobody suspects the ancient evil they are about to face in England (Stoker, *Dracula*).

*Dracula* became a very popular book within the year it was published and it has been known as a masterpiece of Victorian-era Gothic Literature. Yet, where did Bram Stoker get the inspiration for this wonderful book? The Carpathian Mountains range across Central Europe where countries such as Hungary and Ukraine reside. But the Carpathian Mountains also range across Romania, the heart of all vampire lore, so it is safe to assume that the book takes place there.

Many people believe that Bram Stoker took inspiration from a man named Vlad the Impaler. Vlad the Impaler was the King of Wallachia, Romania during the 15th century. He is most famous for his cruelty. He is often described as cruel because he would torture and kill citizens of his kingdom and use their blood for his own personal use (Lundin, historythings.com). In fact, Vlad the Impaler’s father was actually named Vlad Dracul. It is possible that Bram Stoker got the name Dracula from the name Vlad Dracul, which translates to “devil” or possibly “dragon” (Lallanilla, nbcnews.com).

However, we know that Bram Stoker was born in Ireland. Is it possible that he got his inspiration somewhere from Irish folklore? Well, there are some stories that could have been used as inspiration for his characters. When Bram Stoker was a young child, he was often confined to his bed because of an unknown illness he had up until he was seven years old. While sick in his bed, Bram Stoker’s mother would tell him stories of Irish folklore (bramstokerestate.com). Some of the stories Bram’s mother told him could have possibly been an inspiration for *Dracula* or his other books.

One story from Irish folklore tells the story of a Celtic Chieftain named Abhartach. Abhartach was a tyrant who ruled the town of Slaghtaverty, Ireland. He was feared by many of the townspeople so they decided to kill him. They sent a neighboring chieftain named Cathain to kill him. Cathain was successful and buried him standing up. However, Abhartach rose from the dead and demanded a bowl of blood from the wrists of his subjects (Sheeran, bbc.com/news).

Cathain tried to kill Abhartach again but was unsuccessful, and Abhartach demanded another bowl of blood from his subjects. Later, Cathain got advice from a Christian saint on how to kill Abhartach. The saint told him to kill him with a stake of yew wood and to bury him upside down so he would not rise from the dead again. This attempt was successful and that ends the story of Abhartach (Sheeran, bbc.com/com).

So, it is possible that Bram Stoker got inspiration from this story. Yet, what else did he take inspiration from? Well, let’s look into one of the characters from *Dracula*, Lucy Westerna. The name Westerna is a very unusual name, so where did Bram Stoker get the inspiration for it? In Monaghan, Ireland, there is a sculpture inside a church. The church is the St. Patrick's Church of Ireland and the sculpture inside is called “The Parting Glance.” The sculpture depicts a woman on her deathbed while her husband is being restrained due to how distraught he is. The sculpture is dedicated to a woman named Mary Ann Westerna. It is possible that Bram Stoker had gone to the church, passed by this sculpture, and found the surname to one of his future characters (Sheeran, bbc.com/news).

Even though many people believe that *Dracula* was inspired by Vlad The Impaler, it is very possible that Bram Stoker got inspiration from tales of Irish folklore. Like the tale of Abhartach, the vampire tyrant. However, it is still possible that he didn’t get inspiration from either of these tales. He could’ve read books about vampires from other authors and possibly have studied the other vampire tales from other cultures. What do you think Bram Stoker took inspiration from to write his most famous novel?

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