Level 2 Second Place

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Far out in the dark castle halls in Transylvania, Count Dracula once paced his halls through the passages of Bram Stoker’s novel. However, few know that this famous vampire has his roots in Irish culture. Many arguments support the notion that *Dracula* was based off of Gaelic folklore. Although Bram Stoker did not invent the idea of vampires, he inspired a culture surrounding monsters. Bram Stoker’s early life and influence with Irish myths and legends led to his writing one of the most renowned horror books, *Dracula*, of all time.

Bram Stoker is famously remembered as the father of the horror genre, but the concept of vampires was around since the first Greek myths. Even the earliest cultures had traditions and legends with vampire creatures playing a dark and malevolent role. In the 17th and 18th centuries particularly, vampirism spread through countries like wildfire. Often, Slavic, and Russian hierarchy rode out “vampire hunting.” (Carney) In Greece, those with red hair were superstitiously believed to be vampiric and could be killed. (O’Hara) Romania, however, was home to the blood drinkers. It is deemed vampires were so heavily entwined in the Romanian, or Transylvanian, culture because of its incredibly superstitious views, war heavy history, and Gypsy Roma culture. Similarly, a medical condition, porphyria, added to the fear. This disease caused the sufferers to develop pale skin; a sensitivity to sunlight; receding gums, which made a person’s teeth appear larger; and anemia. During this time period, the cure for anemia was to drink animal blood. The superstitious vampire culture of the West played a significant role in Stoker’s creation of *Dracula*.

Abraham “Bram” Stoker’s early life drastically impacted his writing later on. Born on November 8, 1847, in Clontarf, Dublin, Ireland, Bram was the third of seven children. As a child, he was sickly and could neither stand nor walk until the age of seven. Historians have found it unclear what illness he suffered from. A common practice in the 1840s was bloodletting. It is probable doctors administered this practice on young Bram. Could these memories have impacted his bloodsucking vampiric imaginations? Charlotte Blake, Stoker’s mother, lived from 1818 to 1901. She, likewise, influenced his young mind. Having grown up during the Irish Potato famine, there were many horrific memories instilled in her mind. Charlotte re-counted harrowing tales of skeletal people or the “living dead.” (O’Hara) Interestingly, the first draft of *Dracula* Bram titled “The Undead.” Other tales Bram’s mother recounted included people being buried alive during the cholera epidemic. Between Bram Stoker’s child illness and the gruesome tales from his mother, his mind dwelt on blood suckers and death from an early age.

Bram Stoker began his public career at Trinity College, Dublin, eventually working with the famous actor Sir Henry Irving. This paved his way to greatness. At Trinity, Stoker became a prominent athlete specifically in soccer. After college, he married Florence Balcombe and began working for a Civil Service at Dublin Castle. At the end of 10 years, he moved to London with Florence and met Irving, Stoker’s idol at the time. From 1878 to 1905 (Irving’s death) Stoker acted as his manager. Over the course of their partnership, Stoker wrote some 50 letters for Sir Henry Irving and accompanied him on his tours to America. Sir Irving also helped Stoker become actor-manager of the Lyceum Theater in West End, London. It is Sir Irving whom many people believe Stoker based Dracula’s characteristics on. (Smith) In 1905, after 27 years of working together, Henry Irving died, and Stoker wrote *Personal Reminiscence of Henry Irving* in his honor. Henry Irving and Stoker’s public life led him to fame and incited his imagination and influencing the future penning of *Dracula*.

More than Stoker’s early life encounters, Irish myths impacted his construction of *Dracula*. In Gaelic legend, the Sídhe are supernatural fairy people who live in a parallel world. They drank human or animal blood to live. Another story tells of a malicious dwarf named Abhartach from Derry in Northern Ireland. One tale tells that Abhartach was killed by a neighboring chieftain, O’Kane. After the dwarf was buried, he rose from the dead terrorizing both clans’ subjects and drinking the victims’ blood. He was titled “Neamh-mairbh” or “Walking dead.” O’Kane sought out the advice of a Druid, and the next time he killed Abhartach, he buried the evil dwarf upside down and piled thistles, thorns, and a boulder a top his tomb. If the boulder is removed Abhartach will rise again, so foretells the old saying. (O’Hara) These tales of legend and gore clearly played a part in Stoker’s writing of *Dracula*.

There are many debates on where Bram Stoker derived the name and character Dracula from. A folklorist, Owen Harding, believed it has Irish origins. (O’Hara) In Gaelic, Dreach-fhoula (drac-fula) means “bad (tainted) blood.” Dun Dreach-Foula (Castle of Tainted Blood) is a castle in Ireland supposedly inhabited by the Sídhe. Some scholars ruminate Dracula’s character was based off of the Romanian Prince Vlad III the Impaler. In the Wallachian language the word Dracula means devil. Dracula is most likely derived from Irish roots, observing Bram Stoker’s influence.

Although Count Dracula’s castle is in Romania, Bram Stoker based it off of one closer to his home. Many believe this castle was inspired by Dracula Castle, Dublin, Ireland; however, this is not so. The original idea is from Slains Castle, in Scotland, which Bram once visited. It was the Mansion and home of the Hay Earls of Errol family, being built in the 16th century. (*The Castles of* Scotland) Even though Stoker’s inspiration was in Scotland, the memorial is Dublin. Until its unfortunate closer, the Dracula Castle hosted tours of its crawling, spinning corridors, attempting to frighten even the most audacious visitors. The magnificent memorial to Dracula castle is in Ireland; however, Bram’s original inspiration was in Scotland.

Today, Bram Stoker is one of the most famous horror authors in the world. In 1912, Stoker died of a stroke, and his ashes were buried in Golders Green, London. (O’Hara) At the time of his death, people remembered him best for his renowned work with Sir Henry Irving. Though, that would quickly change. Dracula did not become famous until years after Stoker’s death, but it has made a lasting influence on Western culture. Many movies, books, stage productions, and TV shows exploded into popularity, basing their stories off the count from Transylvania. *Twilight, Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* and *Hotel Transylvania* all included vampires to name just a handful. An entire vampire culture began, rooted in *Dracula*. Although at his death it was not noticed, Bram Stoker continues to drastically inspire Western culture*.*

The book that sculpted Western horror culture began with Irish legends and myths transformed by Bram Stoker into *Dracula*. Although outwardly, *Dracula* is the tale of a Transylvanian vampire, there are more buried connections associating him to the blood (or land) suckers from the Irish Potato Famine. For the Irish, this transforms *Dracula* into a personal story filled with legends and culture. The story would also become universally famous, leaving a mark on Irish, English, and American culture, paving the way for modern vampire excitement.

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