Bram Stoker

Introduction

“I am Dracula, and I bid you welcome...” -Bram Stoker, *Dracula*

Created By: Sarah Griebel, Alison McDaniel, Kelly McInerney, Chris Schafer

Portrait

Bram Stoker
Biography

Bram (Abraham) Stoker was born November 8, 1847 in Clontarf, Ireland to Charlotte Mathilda Blake Thornely and Abraham Stoker. He had six siblings: 4 brothers & 2 sisters. During his childhood, he suffered from chronic illnesses that would restrict him to his bed. He attended Trinity College in 1864 to study mathematics and graduated with honors in 1870. While enrolled in college he was president of the Philosophical Society. After college, he joined the Irish Civil Service with Dublin Castle.

Before becoming manager of London's Lyceum Theatre in 1878, Stoker had developed a close friendship with the actor Sir Henry Irving. Additionally in 1878, he married Florence Balcombe and a year later in 1879 they had a son, Irving Noel Thornley Stoker. The family later settled in London to take up his position as business manager of the Lyceum Theatre. He continued to be manager at the Lyceum Theater, traveling with theater group in Europe and North America, while also publishing short stories and novels. He died 20 April 1912 in London from unknown causes, though sometimes considered due to strokes or syphilis.

http://www.online-literature.com/stoker/
http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/stoker.bio.html

Literary Works

- The Necessity for Political Honesty (1872)
- The Chain of Destiny (1875)
- The Duties of Clerks of Petty Sessions in Ireland (1879)
- Under the Sunset (1882)
- Lecture: A Glimpse of America (1885)
- The Snake's Pass (1890)
- The Watter's Mou (1894)
- The Shoulder of Shasta (1895)
- Dracula (1897)
- Miss Betty (1898)
- Snowbound: The Record of a Theatrical Touring Party (1899)
- The Mystery of the Sea (1902)
- The Jewel of Seven Stars (1903)
- The Man (1905)
- Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving (1906)
- Lady Aithyne (1908)
- The Lady of the Shroud (1909)
- Famous Imposters (1910)
- The Lair of the White Worm (1911)
Resources and Links

1. **Shadow of the Vampire: Understanding the Transformations of an Icon in Popular Culture**
   A look back at the history of the character of Count Dracula and his role as an icon in pop culture.

2. **Dracula as Totemic Monster: Lacan, Freud, Oedipus, and History**
   A psychoanalytic look at Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and the Oedipal complex in the novel.

3. **The Invisible Giant, Dracula, and Disease**
   A critical essay on the view of vampires as a representation of Victorian fear and anxiety of impurity as brought about by disease.

4. **Productive Fear: Labor, Sexuality, and Mimicry in Bram Stoker’s Dracula**
   A critical essay on the character of Dracula as a more modern view of intelligence and power and not as a primitive man, or one characterized as being an ‘Other’.

Additional Materials

**The Bram Stoker Memorial Association**

**Vlad the Impaler**
This site goes into great detail over the history of Vladimir the Impaler. In addition to discussing Vlad’s history, the author of this site goes to great lengths to explain the important differences between Bram Stoker’s Count Dracula and the legendary man who butchered his people. This site also provides information on the Order of the Dragon, to which Dracula belonged, and the unknown mysteries that exist in Vlad’s history within Romania. The site also features some portraits and woodblock prints of Vlad and certain events in Vlad’s history.

**The Official Bran Castle Website**
The official site of Bran Castle provides the interesting histories of the castle itself and of Vlad the Impaler. In addition to the information, it also has a wonderful collection of photographs and cards of not only the castle but of the royal family who once inhabited it.

**Infamous Lady: Elizabeth Bathory**
This site provides decent and well-researched information over Elizabeth Bathory, who is sometimes considered as the actual inspiration for Bram Stoker’s Dracula rather than Vlad the Impaler.
### Topics for Discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How was <em>Dracula</em> received when it was first published?</strong> Did women see it as an inhibitor to feminism? How were proponents of the Age of Enlightenment affected? How did the church view Stoker’s work?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Why has <em>Dracula</em> stood the test of time?</strong> What is it about <em>Dracula</em> that makes it a quintessential Gothic novel?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What was Stoker’s perspective on the New Woman?</strong> How does he portray this viewpoint effectively through the novel? What are the differences between Mina and Lucy and why are they included? How does Stoker compare and contrast the female vampires to the other women of the novel?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How did Stoker alter the folklorish Vampire image through his creation of Count Dracula?</strong> Why did Stoker change vampires from the zombie-like monsters of folklore to the more aristocratic form that we know them to be today? What was the importance of this change in the context of the time that Stoker was writing the novel? In what ways is Count Dracula different from older incarnations of the vampire? How does he retain some of their qualities?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How has the idea and portrayal of Count Dracula changed since its publication?</strong> Are there any certain qualities or characteristics that have consistently been a part of his image? Have modern adaptations of Dracula himself as well as vampires as a whole (i.e. <em>Twilight</em>, Anne Rice novels, etc.) affected the way this novel and its characters are viewed today?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Would Count Dracula or vampires themselves be as effective of villains without the sexual and sensual connotation of their attacks?</strong> Was the idea of blood contamination during these “attacks” an attempt to respond to the outbreak of syphilis that was running rampant in London during this time?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How does Stoker describe foreigners in the novel?</strong> Are there any qualities or characteristics inherent to all those considered “outsiders” of London?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Form is Content

"His eyebrows were very massive, almost meeting over the nose, and with bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion. The mouth, so far as I could see it under the heavy moustache, was fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth; these protruded over the lips, whose remarkable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality in a man of his years." (p. 23)

This description of Dracula is quite far from the Romantic portrayal of the monster, as has been seen in modern adaptations of the book. With the words “massive” and “bushy” to illustrate Dracula’s hair and a “cruel-looking mouth”, Stoker paints a rather unflattering picture of the vampire. Additionally, he states that his white teeth “protruded over the lips”, giving the ageless man an extraordinarily odd - not to mention evil - appearance. This imagery also reverts to a more animalistic and barbaric description of a man and in essence masculinity as a whole. This in depth account of Count Dracula’s physical features is seemingly the exact opposite of men who were characteristically more effeminate like those belonging to the Decadent Movement in the Victorian era in which this novel was written.

“There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips.” (p. 42)

This illustrates the dichotomy of feelings inside Jonathan Harker at the first sight of the female vampires. Stoker sets him up as a Victorian man with traditional values like monogamy, but Harker cannot completely repress his sexual desire for these sexually aggressive women. He says he has a “longing” that is simultaneous with his “deadly fear” of these women, who evoke such a response because they bring up his repressed desires to be openly sexual. This illustrates that sexual repression was not simply a problem for women at this time; it was also a source of anxiety for men.

“He laughed till he cried, and I had to draw down the blinds lest anyone should see us and misjudge; and then he cried till he laughed again; and laughed and cried together, just as a woman does. I tried to be stern with him, as one is to a woman under the circumstances; but it had no effect. Men and women are so different in manifestations of nervous strength or weakness!” (p. 157)

Dr. Seward speaks here of Van Helsing’s breakdown at Lucy’s death, judging him negatively for having emotions that resemble a woman’s. He implies that men and women are different in the way that they are expected to respond to emotionally difficult situations. Van Helsing’s apparent mental breakdown is compared to a woman’s expected response to a trauma, insinuating that women can only respond to stressful situations with an excessive amount of emotion and for a man to do the same is seen as culturally taboo.

“--good women, whose lives and whose truths may make good lesson for the children that are to be.” (p. 166)
Van Helsing seems to insinuate that women are meant to provide the morals for their children, and even that a woman’s role is in child-raising. This goes hand in hand with the Victorian view that women are expected to be the caregivers as well as moral compass for the children. Their role in society is completely encompassed in making “good lessons” for their children. The book’s lack of the mention of the expectations of what it means to be a “good father” implies that the men were not restricted to merely define themselves as fathers as the women were bound to their maternal expectations.

"With a careless motion, she flung to the ground, callous as a devil, the child that up to now she had clutched strenuously to her breast, growling over it as a dog growls over a bone." (p. 188)

Stoker shows the vampire woman as the opposite of the good mother. This expands on the aforementioned idea that Victorian women were expected to be the vision of maternal love and care. The idea that Lucy, as a vampire, was “careless” and “callous as a devil” as well as the fact that she was physically abusive to the child shows that the female vampire was the furthest thing from maternal. Additionally, the inclusion of “growling over it as a dog growls over a bone” alludes to the idea that the female vampire was much more carnal in nature and desire not only for food but in terms of sexuality as well.

"She has a man's brain -- a brain that a man should have were he much gifted -- and woman's heart." (p. 207)

Van Helsing is using the Victorian idea that men and women have physically different brains to say that Mina has the best of both worlds, because she possesses a brain that is partly male. This quote expounds on the fact that Mina was seen by all of the male characters in the novel as the epitomy of what a woman could be. She was inherently smart but at the same time she catered to Jonathan’s needs before her own, the latter of which was synonymous of an ideal Victorian woman.

"But there are things old and new which must not be contemplate by men’s eyes, because they know -or think they know- some things which other men have told them. Ah, it is the fault of our science that it wants to explain it all; and if it explain not, then it says there is nothing to explain." (p. 171)

In this exchange Van Helsing is attempting to make John Seward open up to the idea of the existence of vampires, despite its apparent ludicrousness. This highlights Stoker’s overshadowing theme that reason and science have actually served to inhibit man during this time, telling them that if one cannot explain something then it simply does not exist. This seems to come from a fear that reason could be used to blot out religion - if one cannot prove that God exists, who is to say that He does? Here, Van Helsing tries to explain that reason must sometimes give way to pure faith; that is, one must be able to broaden one’s mind enough to believe that anything is possible.

"Whether it is the old lady’s fear, or the many ghostly traditions of this place, or the crucifix itself, I do not know, but I am not feeling nearly as easy in my mind as usual." (p. 13)

Jonathan is writing this piece in his journal while he is waiting for his coach to take him to Count Dracula’s castle. Through recent interactions with the villagers who are aware of Dracula and the mystery surrounding him Jonathan is becoming more aware that there is more to The Count than he had previously thought. This is also an example of Stoker’s habitual usage of foreshadowing throughout Dracula. In the chapters leading up to Jonathan’s first interaction with Dracula the reader becomes aware that there is more to this man than meets the eye.

Additionally, the quotation serves as a good example of the gothic tone that overlays the novel. With the mention of “ghostly traditions”, Stoker brings up the idea of the occult and dark mysticism, and the idea of the crucifix as an element of protection causes the reader to see religion as a force against evil. Finally, the quote leaves Jonathan in a distinctly fearful state of mind, an ominous ending that sends a chill up the reader’s spine.

"Once there appeared a strange optical effect: when he stood between me and the flame he did not obstruct it, for I could see its ghostly figure all the same. This startled me, but as the effect was only momentary, I took it that my eyes deceived me straining through the darkness. Then for a time there were no blue flames, and we sped onwards through the gloom, with the howling of the wolves around us, as though they were following in a moving circle." (p. 19)

This again highlights the Gothic tone that pervades throughout the novel. The usage of words such as “ghostly”, “gloom” and just the overall tone of this passage seem to elude to a sense of darkness. The quote ends again in an ominous way, leaving Jonathan and the Count surrounded by a pack of wild beasts in the middle of a haunted forest, with the supernatural effect being that the wolves seem to be able to be everywhere at once. The idea of the supernatural is moreover shown by the apparent translucence of the Count, as Jonathan points out at the beginning: “when he [the Count] stood between me and the flame he did not obstruct it”, implying that Dracula had become some entity that was non-human.
Film Clips

Trailer of *Bud Abbott and Lou Costello Meet Frankenstein*

*Betty Boop Meets Dracula*

The movie *Bud Abbott and Lou Costello Meet Frankenstein* and the short *Betty Boop Meets Dracula* both show how Count Dracula has been expanded beyond the novel to a more contemporary look, especially for the audiences of the 1930's and 1940's, portraying Count Dracula in a more comedic light outside of the context from the 1931 *Dracula*.

Clip from *Sesame Street* featuring the Count and the Cookie Monster

This Sesame Street video demonstrates how Count Dracula has even been expanded to being suitable for young children and even to serve as a teacher for Sesame Street’s young audience. Even with this change of being family friendly, the Count still retains many of the qualities that contemporary viewers associate with Count Dracula due to Bela Lugosi’s influential interpretation of the character.

Trailer for *Isle of the Dead*

*Isle of the Dead*, while it may not look like a vampire movie, is in fact a vampire movie. The supposed vampire in this movie is of the older variety, specifically the Greek vrykolakas who is sometimes interpreted as a cross of the zombie-vampire and werewolf with a rejuvenated look of life despite being dead. This movie shows that despite Dracula’s influence on modern interpretations of vampires, there are still some modern works that focus on the older incarnations of vampires.

Trailer for the 1931 film *Dracula*

Trailer for the 1958 film *Horror of Dracula*

Trailer for the 1992 film *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*

Another Trailer for the 1992 film *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*

Music Video: *Love Song for a Vampire* by Annie Lennox

These trailers, including the music video, all show how our ideas of Dracula have changed throughout the existence of feature length film history and how they reflect on interpretations of Count Dracula have been changed to the context of the times. The 1931 film relied more on the viewer’s imagination to express a sense of horror, where Count Dracula retains some of his aristocratic charm but is mostly a ghoul throughout most of the movie. In *Horror of Dracula*, Count Dracula is merely reduced to the blood-lusting monster that many modern B-movie interpretations pick up on as the definition of Count Dracula, retaining none of his aristocratic charm and brilliance. *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*, however, uses many themes from the novel and includes a few snippets from the historical Vlad the Impaler’s history, but borrows most of its story from previous Dracula movies, particularly the romantic plot between Mina and Dracula. The romanticism in vampirism is further developed from Annie Lennox’s song made for *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*. 
Image Gallery

All images courtesy of Wikimedia Commons