



## Finding out why Bram Stoker Wrote Dracula

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**Abstract**— The paper entitled 'Finding Out Why Bram Stoker Wrote 'Dracula' is actually a research work inspired by the circumstances surrounding the publication of the book. The article proposes to find out what inspired Bram Stoker to write a novel of the stature of 'Dracula'. Reading through several manuscripts, journals and online materials one can conclude that Bram Stoker took a lot of trouble to publish his work. He researched widely and went to a lot of places before finally deciding on the location, characters and plot of 'Dracula'. A peep into his biography, his friends and influences has also been provided in the paper. Besides, his readings are also referred to. There is a detail about how the first hundred pages went missing, how and where they were ultimately found and how they were again republished. There is a look into the Journal entries of Jonathan Harker, the main character in the novel as well. These entries corroborate the findings of Bram Stoker about the legend called 'Dracula' and the true elements in the book as per the stories or folk lores read by him.

**Keywords**— Devil, Dracula, Harker's journal, Icelandic, Wallachian

### I. INTRODUCTION

The chill that the presence of Count Dracula inspires can be experienced only if one reads the description of Bram Stoker of him. The shimmering speckles of light that herald the coming of the three bloody sisters, the Castle itself, the coffins laden with earth...all these make us wonder about what could possibly have inspired the writer of the novel. Biographically, we are aware of the fact that Bram Stoker was born in Dublin, Ireland, on November 8, 1847 and that he was the third son of seven children. As a child he was sickly and bedridden but Stoker eventually grew to well over six feet in height and became athletic and muscular, having a head of thick, red hair. He is referred to by biographer Farson as a "red-haired giant."<sup>1</sup> Coming to his novel *Dracula* we find that he dedicated it to one of his close friends, Hall Caine, who was also a novelist. A very interesting fact worth being noted here is that few people know that the "dear friend Hommy-Beg" of the dedication is Hall Caine, "Hommy-Beg" being an affectionate childhood nickname for Caine, which means "little Tommy."

The author whom he most admired was Walt Whitman, whose controversial book of poetry, *Leaves of Grass*, Stoker publically defended. In 1876, when Stoker was twenty-nine years old, he met the famous and talented actor Henry Irving, a meeting which became of great value to both men since Stoker and Irving became close friends. Stoker soon became the actor-manager of Irving's theatre. Since Stoker held the position for twenty-seven long years (1878 to October 1905) without taking a break, it is apparent that he must have enjoyed the position.

In 1878, Stoker married Florence Balcombe, who had had the choice of marrying either Bram Stoker or Oscar Wilde. At the time, Stoker was thirty-one years old, Wilde only twenty-four. Stoker and Wilde remained friends, however, and Stoker was admitted into Wilde's literary circle. During his life Bram Stoker met many leading artistic and prominent figures of his day; in addition to Oscar Wilde, he had close associations with Arthur Conan Doyle, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Mark Twain and once he even met Theodore Roosevelt. Bram Stoker's son and only child, Noel, was born in 1879 and in 1882 Stoker published his first substantial literary effort, *Under the Sunset*, a collection of tales for children. His first novel, a romance

entitled *The Snake's Pass*, was published in 1890. Then, written over a period of several years, beginning in 1890, Stoker's masterpiece, *Dracula*, was published by Archibald Constable in 1897.

During his recovery from a stroke which occurred soon after Irving's death, Stoker wrote a book of non-fiction which he called *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving* (1906), a volume about both the famous English actor and Stoker himself. Meanwhile, Stoker had earlier published *The Mystery of the Sea*, in 1902, and he produced another romantic novel, *The Man* in 1905. Both novels make an interesting reading primarily for their examination of the roles of women in society as well as for Stoker's characterization of women.

After *Dracula*, his novels of mystery and horror include *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903), a tale of adventure and romance set in Egypt, *The Lady of the Shroud* (1909), and *The Lair of the White Worm* (1911), both of which are interesting novels and deserve more than a passing glance, though they are nowhere close to *Dracula*. Some of Stoker's short tales of horror, particularly *Dracula's Guest* an episode cut from the final version of *Dracula* as well as *The Judge's House* are very good and well worth reading.

Regardless of which novel Stoker himself considered his best, *Dracula* remains his most popular work, and it has inspired countless adaptations and plays, novels and movies as well as comic books. Critical analyses and psychological interpretations of *Dracula* abound.

In his last years, Stoker's health declined rapidly, and the cause of his death, though clouded by mystery, has generated some substantial amount of discussion. His biographers have been reticent to discuss it. Recently, though, Daniel Farson, Stoker's grandnephew, in his biography, cites Stoker's death certificate, which has as the cause of death the medical phrase *Locomotor Ataxy* — also called *Tabes Dorsalis* — known in those days as general paralysis of the insane, which implies, therefore, that Stoker had contracted syphilis, presumably around the turn of the century, and died of it. Stoker died on April 20, 1912, at the age of sixty-four.

From what we read in Harker's journal, it is clear that the young lawyer is a very logical, organized sort of man. Clearly, Stoker is setting up his protagonist as a very rational individual; in this way, the horror of the melodrama which will occur later will be encountered by a man who will try to combat it with common sense and logic. As a result, the terror of Stoker's narrative will become heightened and will seem more believable and less excessively hysterical. Had Stoker chosen a nervous, emotional type of man for his hero, his gothic melodrama would have become, or could have become laughable.

However by the carefully calculated way in which Stoker indicates and unravels the mystery of Count Dracula, he achieves a mastery over his subject matter that mitigates the raw horror and instead intensifies each chapter's sense of anxiety and portentous dread.

One of the first devices that Stoker uses to let us know that Harker is sensible and rational (in addition to the fact that he is a lawyer) is by having Harker recall in his journal that he spent quite a bit of time prior to his journey in the British Museum; there, he read as much as he could about the provinces through which he would be travelling (provinces originally occupied by Attila and the Huns); Harker tried his best to locate the exact locality of Castle Dracula, but unfortunately, he was not able to pinpoint the location precisely, because the castle is located in one of the "wildest and least known portions of Europe." Yet even this ominously mysterious fact does not worry Harker unduly; because he is able to use his smattering of German, he is enjoying his adventuresome trip — thus far — and his notes become more minutely descriptive and confessional as he continues; the purpose for recording as much as he can, he says, is so that he can later refresh his memory when he is telling his fiancée, Mina, about the journey.

One of the first clues in Harker's journal that suggests to us something about the terror that will soon commence concerns Harker's reaction to Transylvania itself. He notes that "every known superstition in the world is gathered into the horseshoe of the Carpathians"; he also records, again matter-of-factly, the minor annoyance of his having had "all sorts of queer dreams" recently; in addition, he heard a "dog howling all night under [his] window." He wonders, rather naively, if perhaps it was the excessive paprika in the chicken casserole which he ate for dinner that could have been responsible for his bad dreams.

*"There are mysteries that man can only guess at which age by age may only solve in part."*<sup>2</sup> — Bram Stoker

In the summer of 1890, a 45-year-old Bram Stoker entered the Subscription Library in Whitby, England, and requested a specific title — *The Accounts of Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia* by William Wilkinson. This wasn't a title found readily on the shelves or typically made available to the general public. The library didn't even make it known they possessed the rare book. Access was only granted to those who asked for it. Patrons handled the title only under the watchful eye of the librarian, and it was returned to its resting place the moment business concluded. Upon receipt of the book, Stoker didn't read it cover to cover or browse the text — he opened the pages to a specific section, made notes in his journal, and returned it to the librarian.

He stopped next at the Whitby Museum, where he reviewed a series of maps and pieced together a route beginning in the heart of London and ending upon a mountaintop deep within the wilds of Romania — a latitude and longitude previously noted in his journal and confirmed again this very day. From the museum, Bram then made his way to Whitby Harbor where he spoke to several members of the Royal Coast Guard. They provided details of a sailing vessel, the *Dmitri*, that ran aground a few years earlier on the beach inside the protective harbor with only a handful of the remaining crew alive. The ship, which originated in Varna, an eastern European port, was carrying a mysterious cargo — crates of earth. While investigating the damaged ship, rescue workers reported seeing a large black dog, consistent with a Yorkshire myth of a beast known as Barghest, escape from the hull of the ship and run up the 199 steps from Tate Sands beach into the graveyard of St. Mary's Church. Stoker looked up at the church, at Whitby Abbey looming beside it on the cliff. In his mind's eye, he pictured the dark chamber at the top of the central tower.

Dracula in Wallachian language means DEVIL. Wallachians were accustomed to give it as a surname to any person who rendered himself conspicuous either by courage, cruel actions, or cunning. Four months earlier, at a dinner at the Beefsteak Club of the Lyceum Theater in London, Bram Stoker's friend Arminius Vambery told him of the book, told him what to look for and told him to visit the library in Whitby. The final piece of a decades-old puzzle, a story, slowly taking shape. On another page of his notes, the name Count Wampyr had recently been crossed out, replaced with Count Dracula and to Bram, it all made sense now. For fans of the novel *Dracula*, the information above takes on a familiar note. We all know the name. There's the graveyard, the Abbey, the dog, and of course, the ship which was called *The Demeter* not *Dmitri* in the book but in real life it was *Dmitri*. And there sure was a "real life." Bram had found a blurry place between fact and fiction and that surely put a smile on his face.

When Bram Stoker wrote his iconic novel, the original preface, which was published in *Makt Myrkanna*, the Icelandic version of the story, included this passage: *I am quite convinced that there is no doubt whatever that the events here described really took place, however unbelievable and incomprehensible they might appear at first sight. And I am further convinced that they must always remain to some extent incomprehensible.* <sup>3</sup>

He went on to claim that many of the characters in his novel were real people: *All the people who have willingly — or unwillingly — played a part in this remarkable story are known generally and well respected. Both Jonathan Harker and his wife (who is a woman of character) and Dr. Seward are my friends and have been so for many years, and I have never doubted that they were telling the truth...*<sup>4</sup>

Bram Stoker did not intend for *Dracula* to serve as fiction but as a warning of a very real evil, a childhood nightmare all too real. Worried of the impact of presenting such a story as true, his editor, Otto Kyllman, of Archibald Constable & Company, returned the manuscript with a single word of his own: *No*. He went on to explain that London was still recovering from a spate of horrible murders in Whitechapel — and with the killer still on the loose, they couldn't publish such a story without running the risk of generating mass panic. Changes would need to be made. Factual elements would need to come out, and it would be published as fiction or not at all.

When the novel was finally released on May 26, 1897, the first 101 pages had been cut, numerous alterations had been made to the text, and the epilogue had been shortened, changing Dracula's ultimate fate as well as that of his castle. Tens of thousands of words had vanished. Bram's message, once concise and clear, had blurred between the remaining lines. In the 1980s, the original *Dracula* manuscript was discovered in a barn in rural northwestern Pennsylvania. Nobody knows how it made its way across the Atlantic. That manuscript, now owned by Microsoft cofounder Paul Allen, begins on page 102. Jonathan Harker's journey on a train, once thought to be the beginning of the story, was actually in the thick of it. This raises a question: what was on the first 101 pages? What was considered too real, too frightening, for publication?

## II. CONCLUSION

Bram Stoker left breadcrumbs; you need only know where to look. Some of those clues were discovered in a recently translated first edition of *Dracula* from Iceland titled *Makt Myrkanna*, or *Power of Darkness*. Within that first edition, Bram left not only his original preface intact, but parts of his original story — outside the reach of his U.K. publisher. More can be found within the short story *Dracula's Guest*, now known to have been excised from the original text. Then there were his notes, his journals, other first editions worldwide. Unable to tell his story as a whole, he spread it out where, much like his famous vampire,

it never died, only slept, waited for the appropriate time.

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