

## DRACULA

Published in 1897 by Irish writer Bram Stoker, the novel *Dracula*, translated into many languages including Irish, has never been out of print. The figure of Count Dracula has dominated twentieth-century culture, and the novel has inspired over 700 films. It is astonishing that a single novel should have become such a phenomenon.

Bram Stoker did not invent the vampire. Vampires appear in the folklore and legends of many cultures dating back to ancient times. Interest in vampires within the English-speaking world can be traced back to 1732, when the word *vampyre* first appeared in this language. The occasion was a wave of vampire sightings reported and documented in several parts of Central and Eastern Europe and eventually reported in the British press.

The attention given to vampirism coincided with a rising interest in Gothic literature, first in Germany and later (during the last decades of the eighteenth century) in England, where Gothic writers soon adopted the vampire. The first in English literature to do so were poets, but the most important contribution came from an unlikely source: Lord Byron's personal physician, John Polidori. He wrote the first piece of vampire fiction in the English language.

Interest in vampire literature continued through the nineteenth century with the appearance of several short stories and novels, but it was *Dracula* that became the yardstick for future vampires. Bram Stoker combined several of the elements of early vampire fiction with the results of research into vampire folklore—and added a few of his own. Although Stoker had never visited Transylvania, his descriptions of that enchantingly beautiful Eastern European region are astonishingly vivid. Because of his novel and the proliferation of *Dracula* movies, the *Dracula* myth became firmly established.

What about the name *Dracula*? Contrary to popular opinion, Bram Stoker knew very little about the real *Dracula*. All we know for sure is that he found the name *Dracula* in an obscure history book he borrowed from the public library in the English seaside resort of Whitby where he was spending a summer vacation in 1890. He was already working on a vampire novel, and had even selected a name for his Count: *Vampyr*. Then he saw the name *Dracula* with a footnote that suggested it came from a Romanian word for *devil*. As this suited Stoker's conception of his vampire, he appropriated the name, and *Dracula* became a vampire. However, Stoker did not live long enough to see the tremendous success of his novel. The book that made Bram Stoker famous has eclipsed Stoker himself and become undisputedly the world's eternal Gothic novel.

What is it about the vampire in general and about Count *Dracula* in particular that continues to fascinate? There is no simple answer, as the appeal goes across the whole spectrum of human interest. For some it is the seductive element, for others it is the connection with the dark side of our natures. The vampire symbolizes for many the breaking of taboos, the challenge of authority, the fine line between power and passion, and the search for immortality and eternal youth. While Stoker's *Dracula* was the embodiment of evil, late 20<sup>th</sup> century vampires have become more ambivalent creatures, a clear reflection of the disappearing line between good and evil in our increasingly secularized world.

(Adapted from several sources)

*sighting*: observació, vista / observación, vista

*yardstick*: model, patró / modelo, patrón

*Gothic novel*: novel·la gòtica (novel·la que conté elements romàntics i de terror) / novela gòtica (novela que contiene elementos románticos y de terror)

*embodiment*: encarnació, representació concreta d'una cosa / encarnación, representación concreta de una cosa

PART ONE: READING COMPREHENSION

Choose the best answer.

[0,5 points each correct answer]

1. *Dracula*, the novel, was first written in...
  - a) English.
  - b) Romanian.
  - c) Irish.
  
2. Who brought interest in vampires to England?
  - a) Lord Byron's physician.
  - b) Ireland's politicians travelling to the continent.
  - c) British popular newspapers.
  
3. Who wrote the first vampire novel in English?
  - a) Lord Byron.
  - b) Bram Stoker.
  - c) John Polidori.
  
4. Only one of the following statements is true according to the text. Which one?
  - a) Stoker became very rich after publishing *Dracula*.
  - b) Stoker wrote three other famous Gothic novels.
  - c) Stoker was unfamiliar with the actual details of a vampire's real life.
  
5. Only one of the following statements is true according to the text. Which one?
  - a) The novel combines ancient vampire stories with other components.
  - b) The novel has inspired many film directors and song composers.
  - c) Transylvania was a legendary country in the South of Europe.
  
6. Where did Bram Stoker find the name *Dracula*?
  - a) He looked it up in a Romanian encyclopedia.
  - b) He found it in a poem by chance.
  - c) He found it in an old history book.
  
7. What is the main reason why *Dracula* still attracts so many people?
  - a) Because of a whole combination of elements, each of which fascinates humans.
  - b) Mainly because of the seductive nature of the main character in the book.
  - c) One reason predominates: the myth of eternal youth that *Dracula* so well represents.
  
8. Which of these options is true according to the text?
  - a) *Dracula* is the biggest selling novel in the world and is the only novel that has always been constantly reprinted.
  - b) *Dracula's* phenomenal influence on the world of the arts and the performing arts is simply incalculable.
  - c) Although it has inspired (and continues to inspire) countless creative works, critics consider *Dracula* poor writing.