



Bram Stoker

Bram Stoker and *Dracula*

Bram Stoker (1847-1912) was the business manager of the Lyceum Theatre in London, which was owned by the actor, Sir Henry Irving. Stoker also served as Irving's personal secretary. He was a novelist in his free time.

Dracula (1897) is Stoker's most famous novel and it established many of the conventions about vampires which continue in literature and film to this day (Vampires drink human blood and can turn people into vampires by forcing them to drink their blood, vampires cannot endure sunlight, fear the cross and holy water, hate garlic and wolfsbane, etc.). The novel was only mildly successful when it was published and didn't make Stoker much money. In fact, when Stoker died in 1912, he was so poor that his widow sold the notes he had made for *Dracula* at an auction for only two English pounds! Yet, the novel had many loyal fans one of whom was the young German film director, F.W. Murnau, who attempted to buy the rights to *Dracula* from Stoker's widow. It is unclear why Mrs. Stoker refused to sell Murnau the rights to the novel. She might have had strong anti-German feelings (World War One had ended only three years earlier) or it might have been impossible for Murnau to meet her price because of the German hyper-inflation of the time, which made German currency almost worthless.

F.W. Murnau “borrowed” (stole) the story in all but name. He called his film *Nosferatu* instead of *Dracula* and named the vampire Count Orlock, but this fooled no one. Mrs. Stoker sued Murnau for copyright infringement and won. The court ordered all copies of the film destroyed. However, one copy of the film had already been distributed overseas and it is from this single copy that all other copies of the film derive. The irony of Murnau’s theft of the story is that because of the court case the film became famous; once audiences saw the film they became curious about the novel. The real success of the novel, *Dracula*, began because of the controversy over the film *Nosferatu!*



Florence Balcome Stoker

Because of renewed interest in the novel, the playwright Hamilton Deane bought the rights to the story from Stoker’s widow in 1924 and released the stage play *Dracula* which was very successful in England over the next three years. The play was rewritten In 1927 by John L. Balderston and then toured the United States.