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THE GREAT WRITERS

10 classic writers of the supernatural



ANTHOLOGY OF FEAR

BRAM STOKER

(1847-1912)

Although Stoker allowed himself to be overshadowed by a more flamboyant figure, he found a vicarious glory in his theatrical and fictional superheroes.

A century after his creation, the blood-sucking Count Dracula is more famous than his inventor. But in his day, Bram Stoker was a leading light of the Irish theatrical and literary scene, touching on greatness when, in his writing, he entered the forbidden, fearful regions of the supernatural.

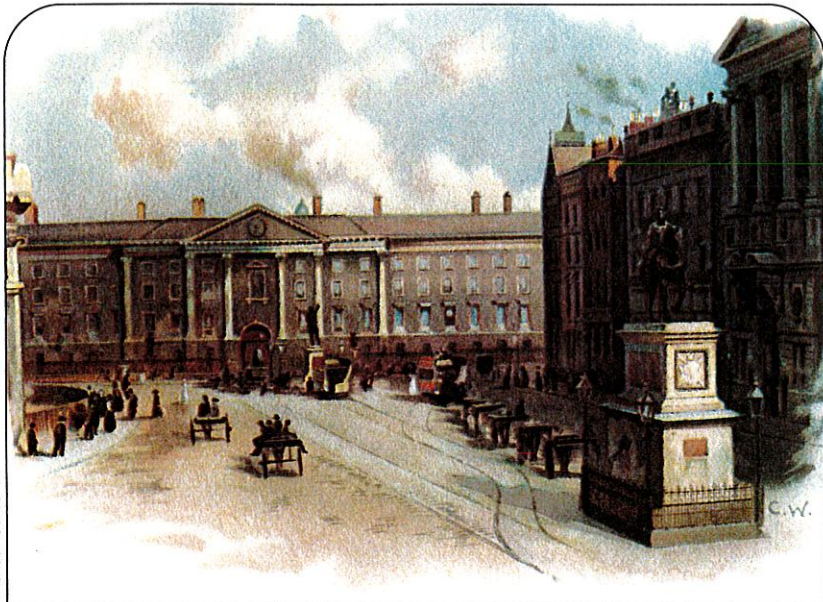
Abraham Stoker was the son of a civil servant in Dublin. An obscure ailment – possibly psychological – confined him to bed until he was

Sire of vampires

A successful son of Dublin (below), Bram Stoker (right) escaped the tedium of a civil service career through writing and the theatre. In doing so, he created the greatest horror hero of them all – Count Dracula.



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seven, but he grew into a red-headed giant of a man who distinguished himself in the sporting, social and academic life of Trinity College, Dublin.

For 13 years he worked as a clerk in the civil service, although the two great passions of his life had already crystallized: theatre and the written word. Enchanted with a performance by the actor Henry Irving, he became stage-struck and submitted unpaid dramatic criticism to the *Dublin Mail*; and he published his first horror story, *The Chain of Destiny*, as a four-part magazine serial.

Perhaps drawing partly on childhood memories of grim Irish folk-tales told to him by his mother, and partly on true-life horrors, Stoker wrote in the 1870s many more horror stories for Irish newspapers and the notorious 'penny-dreadfuls'. In 1875, Stoker's first novel appeared. Called *The Primrose Path*, it was a strange and outlandish

Behind the scenes

Protecting actor Henry Irving (right) against the mundane business of everyday life and smoothing his phenomenally successful career, Stoker worked tirelessly as Irving's manager, motivated by sheer admiration. It was despite Irving that Stoker found time to write books. His style is remarkably modern, his gruesome themes leavened by a wry wit.



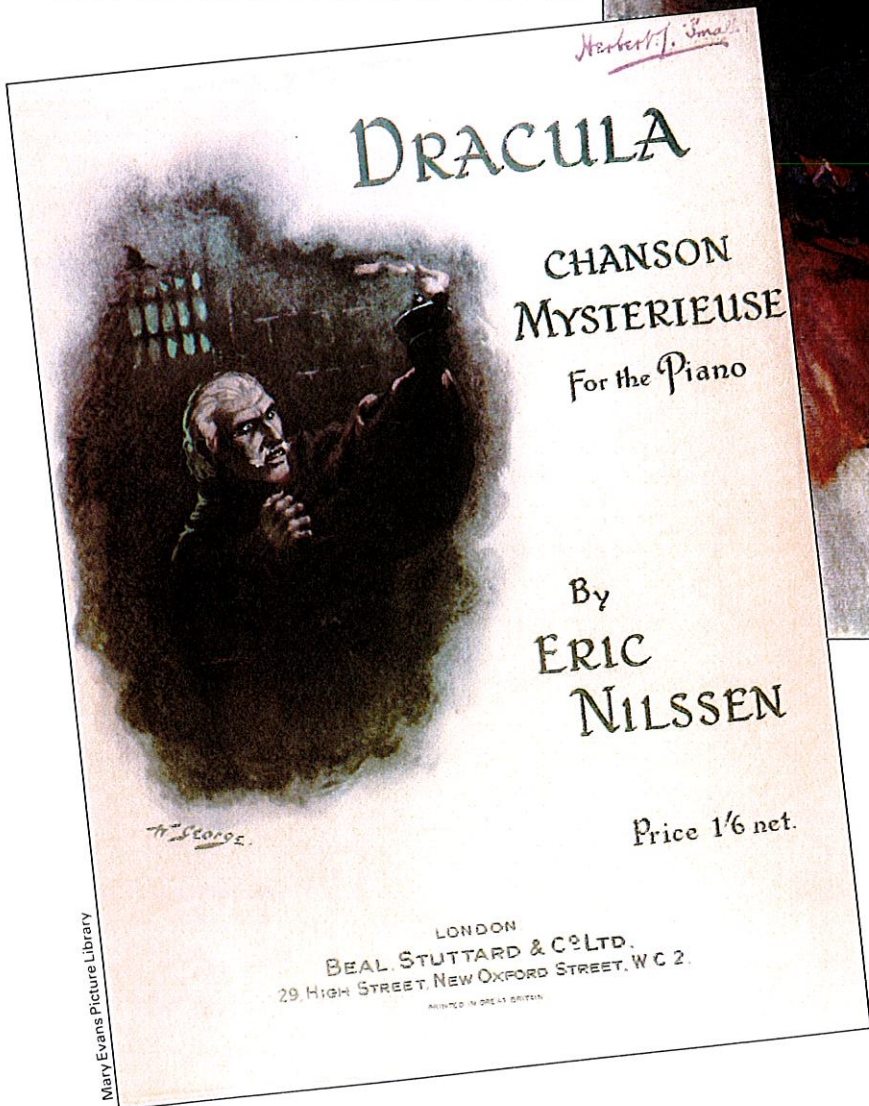
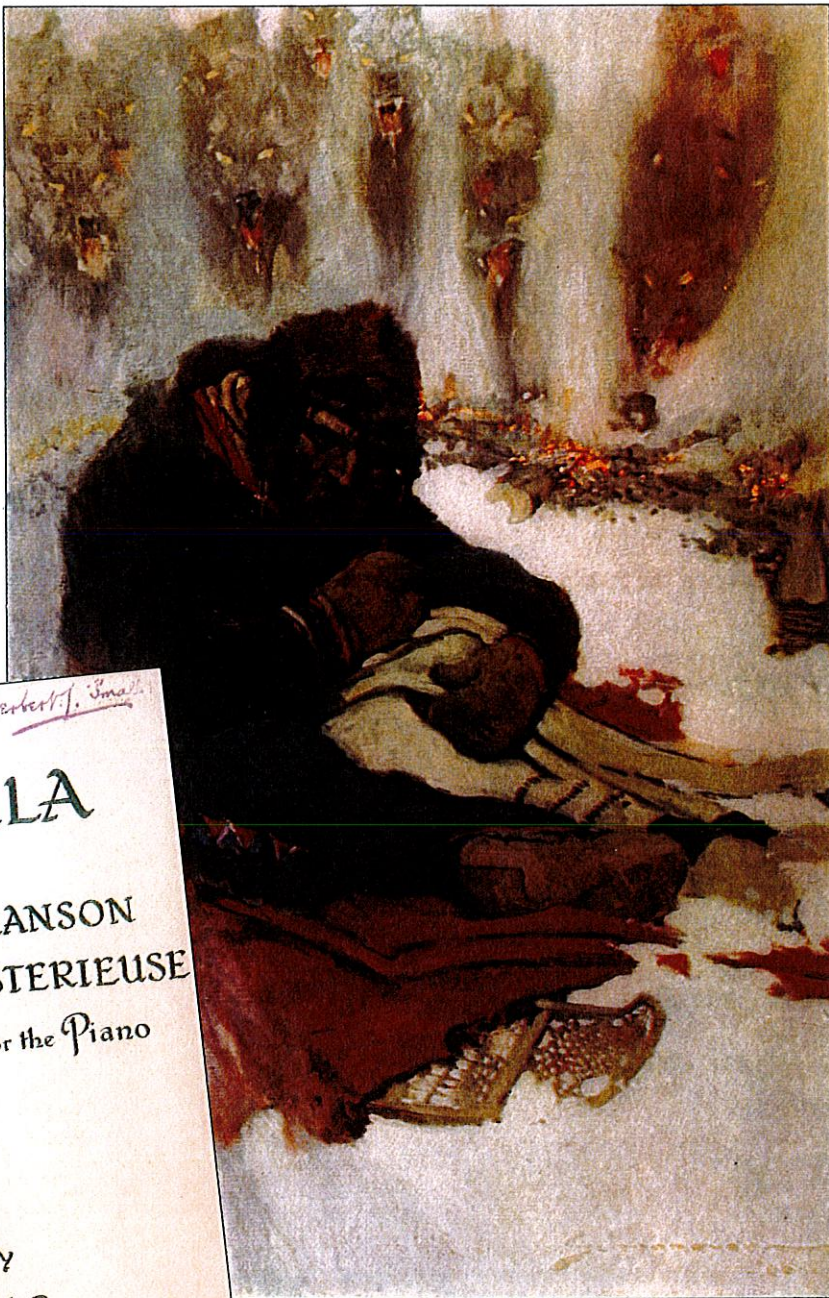
By courtesy of the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum

BRAM STOKER

fantasy about the evils of drink, ending in a mayhem of murder and death, and was serialized in the Irish magazine *The Shamrock*.

When Henry Irving returned to Dublin in 1876, Stoker's enthusiastic review of the actor's performance as Hamlet was the start of a close friendship between the two men. Two years later, when Irving took over the Lyceum Theatre, he invited Stoker to become his business manager. Stoker promptly abandoned his civil service career, brought forward his marriage to Florence Balcombe (a Pre-Raphaelite beauty who had also enraptured Oscar Wilde), and hastened to London.

Henry Irving was already regarded as the greatest actor of his time; his management of the Lyceum consolidated his fame. The Lyceum seasons and Irving's tours abroad were sensations, and in 1895 he became the first actor to be awarded a knighthood. As a result, the entire profession – never previously considered quite respectable – was regarded in a new light. Stoker's part was to manage the Lyceum and organize Irving's life so that the actor was free to concentrate on the artistic



DRACULA'S GUEST
The urbane, hospitable, malevolently charming Count Dracula has inspired films, music (left), spoofs and imitations. The original book, Dracula, is a superb piece of writing, full of pace, suspense, humour and terror.
The chapter omitted from the original and published separately under the title 'Dracula's Guest'

takes place on that most haunted date on the Central European calendar, Walpurgis Night. A reckless traveller spurns the advice of his coach-driver and goes to explore a deserted village supposedly inhabited by the Undead. A blizzard overtakes him, drives him to shelter where he would least choose, and finally overwhelms him, leaving him to the mercy of the wolves (above). . .

direction of the plays. For long periods, Stoker is reckoned to have written 50 letters a day on Irving's behalf, as well as handling the business, touring with the company, sitting with Irving into the small hours while the temperamental actor unwound, and writing his speeches for him. Although the friendship was real enough, Irving's egotism drove him to exploit Stoker shamelessly. The devoted Stoker was quite willing to be used, even if he was aware of the almost *vampiric* intensity of their interdependent relationship.

And yet Stoker, a man of phenomenal energy, managed to write books, the majority of them before Irving's death in 1905. He was a conventional Victorian: chivalrous, patriotic, sentimental and 'manly' – qualities which, however admirable, have made most of his works date. Only the supernatural and the macabre energized his imagination to the full.

Dracula (1897) is easily the best of Stoker's novels, and fully deserves its fame. Others had written vampire stories before him – notably his fellow-Irishman J. Sheridan Le Fanu. But Stoker created the classic version by means of two effective devices: he added authenticity by dividing the novel into 'documents', such as journal entries, eye-witness reports, etc.; and he transported the Count from Transylvania to Victorian England, thus domesticating his gruesome narrative.

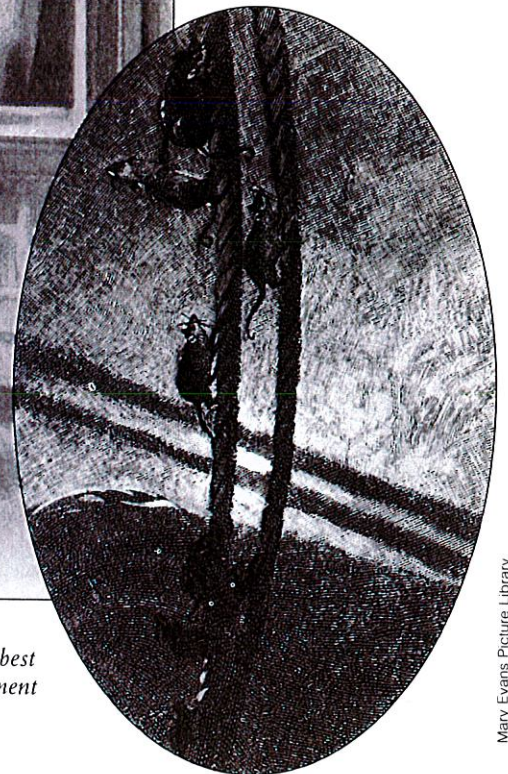
By making the story almost contemporary – the terrifying events take place between May and November 1893 – and including all these touches of realism, Stoker made his story chilling in its



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THE JUDGE'S HOUSE

Impervious to the horrors of rats and rumour, a young man rents an old decaying mansion (left) in order to work undisturbed. But even his reserves of sang-froid are tested to the limit by one monstrous rodent which climbs down from its nest by a portrait of the house's one-time owner – a hanging judge.



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Desperate attempt

All the rats in the house (right) use their best endeavours to prevent the awful denouement of this horrific tale.

THE SQUAW

Newly-weds touring Germany on their honeymoon decide to join forces with a garrulous American tourist to 'do' the castle at Nürnberg (left), where the climax of the tour is a visit to the castle torture-chamber. Their companion's playful attempts to tease a little cat have the saddest result. But a man who has survived Indian wars and all the dangers of the Wild West, can easily forget the sufferings of a cat . . .

immediacy and credibility.

Stoker's best short stories include *The Squaw* and *The Judge's House*. The highly atmospheric *Dracula's Guest* did not start life as a short story but as a chapter of *Dracula*, probably discarded because it held up the action. *Dracula* was by no means a best-seller at the time of publication: its irresistible vogue did not begin until between the two World Wars, with the stage and film adaptations that have gone on ever since.

After Henry Irving's death, Stoker fell on hard times and had to be helped with £100 from the Royal Literary Fund. A final horror novel, *The Lair of the White Worm* (1911), probably reflects, in its extreme strangeness, the progressive destruction of Stoker's faculties by the wasting, degenerative disease *locomotor ataxia*. When he died, he was a little-known literary figure – and remains so, despite the world-wide inextinguishable fame of his evil offspring.



E. Pritchett: Nürnberg/Fine Art Photographic Library