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Anger at Dracula claims

Once again you have made our town look daft.

The story headlined “Castle the latest to lay claim to Dracula tale” – as if there have been many such claims.

And why wheel out the parrot-squawk opinions of Dorothy Clegg, or Leslie Brown, or, most totally ignorant of a very ignorant trio, Graham Taylor?

If it's about fishing ask a fisherman. If it is about medicine ask a doctor. If it is about literature, scholarship or culture, ask a cultured scholar.

The Irishman Bram Stoker was transfixed by the stage, but merely dabbled in literature. He wrote what we would call thrillers.

Only one was a success.

He in fact spent his life as the manager of the greatest Victorian actor of his time, Sir Henry Irving.

Stoker was an assiduous diarist and prolific letter writer.

In 1968 the biography of Bram Stoker was published. The author had complete access to Stoker's diaries and correspondence.

These were lent to him by Stoker's only son Noel.

Cruden Bay was Stoker's favourite place.

It was where he wanted to die. The evidence is incontrovertible. Stoker had been reading Polidori's gothic novel *The Vampyre*.

Stoker conceived his novel and its plot while holidaying at Cruden Bay and based the count's castle on Slains Castle.

All this is mentioned in diaries and letters, so we know the dates. He then set one of the scenes of his novel in Whitby, a place he had often visited with Sir Henry Irving. Incidentally, the ‘cult of Gothery’ as we know it started not 100 years ago, but in 1986ish.

So all you professional Whitby-ites grow up. And if you don't know what you are talking about, shut up.

Patrick Edward Maclaren Hargan,
Whitby Gazette, 1 Aug.

Bram Stoker's Notes for Dracula: A Facsimile Edition_ has just been published.

Bram Stoker's initial notes and outlines for his landmark horror novel *Dracula* were auctioned at Sotheby's in London in 1913 and eventually made their way to the Rosenbach Museum and Library in Philadelphia, where they are housed today. Until now, few of the 124 pages have been transcribed or analyzed. This comprehensive work

reproduces the handwritten notes both in facsimile and in annotated transcription. It also includes Stoker's typewritten research notes and thoroughly analyzes all of the materials, which range from Stoker's thoughts on the novel's characters and settings to a nine-page calendar of events that includes most of the now-familiar story. The coauthors draw on their extensive knowledge of Dracula and vampires to guide readers through the construction of the novel, and the changes that were made to its structure, plot, setting and characters. Nine appendices provide insight into Stoker's personal life, his other works and his early literary influences.

About the Authors

Robert Eighteen-Bisang, who is best-known as the owner of the world's largest private collection of vampire books, is an authority on Dracula and vampire literature. A member of the Horror Writers Association, he lives in Vancouver, British Columbia. Elizabeth Miller is a retired English professor. She lectures regularly at universities throughout North America and Europe. She lives in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Amazon & Cercle-V, 17 Aug.

Dracula versions complement each other

With regards to the letter on Bram Stoker's Dracula in the Whitby Gazette, as a non cultured scholar I had a look on the internet to see what I could find on this subject.

On the website www.aboutaberdeen.com/slainscastle.php I found the following statement: "The locals of Cruden Bay fondly call Slains Castle Dracula's Castle. "It is believed Bram Stoker was so inspired by the Castle that it formed the basis for his most famous novel Dracula.

"Bram Stoker stayed in the nearby hotel, The Kilmarnock Arms, while he wrote his novel.

"Early drafts of his novel had Dracula coming ashore at Cruden Bay after his sea voyage from Transylvania.

"However, this was changed to Whitby in Yorkshire for the final published work."

It would appear therefore that each version complements each other ie story idea formed in Cruden Bay and the story eventually based in Whitby.

J Smith, Briggswath
Whitby Gazette, 26 Aug.

More talk on Dracula links

I may or may not agree with Mr McLaren Hargan (letters to the editor, 1 August) as to the ignorance of at least one of the trio he mentions, Graham Taylor, who a few years ago was decrying the goths as well as all things supernatural (he was quoted in the

Whitby Gazette some years ago as saying 'there are books in children's libraries with real spells in them') and, who later, profited from a complete turnaround when he wrote his Shadowmancer series.

However, following extensive research into Dracula and its Whitby connections, I strongly disagree with him regarding his contention that Whitby was not a major influence on Stoker's novelette.

Slains may well be one of the models for Dracula's castle but that castle is set in Transylvania in the novelette.

Cruden Bay was indeed a favourite holiday destination of the Stokers but so was Whitby.

Sir Henry Irving (with whom Bram Stoker was fascinated) and Stoker holidayed in the Whitby area a number of times.

However, Stoker's novel *The Mystery of the Sea* and some of his short stories have Cruden Bay as their setting while *Dracula* does not – it has three settings – London, Transylvania and Whitby.

Whitby figures quite centrally and very descriptively in a significant section of the novelette *Dracula* (Chapters 6-8) as well as being mentioned elsewhere – its first mention is in chapter two as one of three places Dracula circles on a map of England.

It is where the Russian ship *Demeter* comes ashore and is the location of the first encounters between Count Dracula and Lucy Westenra.

According to Dr Elizabeth Miller, a recognised expert on *Dracula*, 'It was at Whitby that Stoker discovered the name Dracula ... (on holiday in Whitby) in the summer of 1890, just months after he began writing his vampire novel, he visited the local library and borrowed a book entitled *An Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia* (1820) by William Wilkinson.

'He took several notes from it (now part of his papers housed at the Rosenbach Museum in Philadelphia' .

The Whitby dialect features at length in the novelette and there is the old Whitby legend of the Hound of Hagersgate which may well have influenced the idea of the spectral dog who jumps from the *Demeter* and runs through the streets of Whitby.

Stoker could have witnessed the shipwreck of the *Dmitri* in October 1885, or more likely, seen the Sutcliffe photograph of the scene.

The Whitby Gazette of 24 October records: 'The Russian schooner *Dmitri* of Navra, with silver sand, came in suddenly, in heavy weather, but going ashore in Collier's Hope because a total wreck' (*Dracula* includes an extract from the ship's log of the *Demeter* out of Varna – an anagram of Navra).

There is much else to justify a host of connections between Whitby and *Dracula* but the space herein does not permit its exploration.

Most authors and artists take many elements as their inspirations for a given work and then combine them.

Ascribing one influence as the only one demonstrates ignorance of the creative process.

Reading one book, even one based on Stoker's diaries and correspondence, shows ignorance of biographical interpretation of primary historical sources.

Commenting on other's opinions without reading the novelette at the heart of the matter displays an ignorance of the scholarly method.

Perhaps there are others who should shut up until they know what they are talking about.

Perhaps the letter writer should replace one of the trio.

Criticising other people's wit and wisdom is a dangerous business.

Let he who is without wit cast the first word.

Roger R Leeming

Whitby Gazette, 29 Aug.
