

Rethinking victorian  
russophobia:  
influence of irish  
mythology on dracula



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## Introduction

Many critics and scholars read Bram Stoker's *Dracula* as a political travelogue. Stephen Agatha even writes about *Dracula* that it is "travel narrative which clearly displays aspects of imperial ideology" (Cain, 2006). Each of these theories can be plausible because Stoker travelled a lot all over the Eastern Europe and Russia; consequently, he could use political motif in his book. Nevertheless, there is no documentary evidence of the exact sources for any theory, which exists today. Thus, it is equally plausible to believe that Bram Stoker, whose mother was Irish, imbibed the love for Irish fairytales and folklore with his mother's milk, especially, taking into account the rich Irish tradition of vampires in Celtic. Indeed, Stoker was an inveterate reader, who adored magic, occult and horror stories more than anything. That is why the book's subject was familiar to him from childhood.

This paper is going to examine and proved the following statement: *Dracula* was a product of Bram Stoker's ardent love to Irish Mythology and magic in general but had nothing in common with anti-Russian sentiments peculiar to Britain's high society of Victorian period.

### Dracula and Russophobia

Jimmie Cain dedicated a whole book to the affirmation that Bram's Stokers novel *Dracula* was an imperial travelogue. He asserted that, in *Dracula*, Russia as Great Britain's bitterest imperial enemy of the 19th century had to be seen as the eastern menace, which the British Empire had faced.

Responding to Russia's threat to English hegemony, *Dracula's* author both presents the threat and fictionalizes the magic solution to the danger, which <https://assignbuster.com/rethinking-victorian-russophobia-influence-of-irish-mythology-on-dracula/>

impended over the British nation. In those times, the expansion of the Russian Empire was seen as a real “ unsolvable collision” with the conservation of the British Empire’s power and continuation of the British imperial campaign in the East. Therefore, Bram Stoker offered “ imaginary (magic) solution” to the nation in *Dracula*. Stoker describes the picture of victory after a long and unequal struggle. In such a way, he projects this imaginary victory of his beloved England in order to restore its reputation after England’s unsuccessful encroachment against Russia in the Crimean War and dissipate the anxieties caused by Russian plan to conquer British India and Central Asia.

Bram Stoker was actually strong believer in magic power. In the late 1880s, there were even rumors that he was a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn secret society and practiced ritualistic magic (Clougherty, 2000). Therefore, Cain claims that Stoker’s constant interest in the occult sciences was combined in *Dracula* with his intellectual predisposition towards gothic and romantic themes and his allegiance to Britain’s imperial campaigns. Bram Stoker as the representative of the late Victorian epoch understood the danger to the Great Britain Empire’s hegemony, namely the loss of new colonial acquisitions, as well as the threat of reverse colonization from barbarian Russia. Hence, Stoker’s penchant for gothic occult and literature made him perfect literary practitioner of “ Imperial Gothic fiction” (Cain, 2006).

Crimean War reminded the late Victorians about the restrictions of their military and commercial power and their insecure place in the world of

hostile imperialist forces. However, British literature and art offered a magic  
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sanctuary from these worries and anxieties. Thus, in *Dracula*, Bram Stoker emphasized that English technology, intelligence, righteousness and courage would defeat any threat confronted to the British nation. Cain considers that Russia is described in the book as the monstrous, sinister and insatiable enemy because anti-Russian sentiments were particularly strong during Stoker's lifetime in England.

### Magic in Stoker's Life

This paper, however, is going to reconsider *Dracula* from another point of view than the typical result of the Russophobia peculiar to the Victorian society as the effect of the Crimean War or the Great Britain's phobia of reverse colonization from Russian Empire. Probably, the Crimean war could have a profound impact on the author in general, but the manifestation of Russophobia in *Dracula* is too far-fetched. It is more likely that the origin of Stoker's idea for novel and its notorious title character is in Irish folklore, in which blood-sucking creatures have a rich and long-term history of beliefs, rituals and traditions concerning not only eternal life and death, afterlife and ancestors but also the human sense of being and the nature of magic. Stoker combines native Irish tradition with new technology in his novel in order to demonstrate the changeability of the world's conditions and the constancy and importance of centuries-old traditions, as well. His usage of Irish legends and fairytales highlights the strength and power of natural magic and the greatness, decency, purity of intentions and self-sacrifice of Englishmen (modern heroes). Therefore, Stoker's combination of Irish original material with the following literary genres, such as the Gothic and travelogue, does not merely give the opportunity for his Victorian readers to travel and

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accomplish significant feats and victories in space but also in time. Stoker, a true romantic, restores the spiritual realm of the great heroes, love and feats, which were forgotten as a result of social decadence, in the minds of his audience. Material and financial concerns fully supplanted the wonders of fairytales and the graciousness of romantic chivalry from British mind.

### Stoker's Romantic Fantasies

Gothic literature makes magic: it takes familiar and boring and turns it into an unfamiliar and amazing. Indeed, in *Dracula*, the author has no intention to create a totally different world. He rather presents his worldview and interprets the reality in his often horrific but also magic way because occult, horror, and fantasy were imprescriptible aspects of his own literary and cultural life. Stoker always read a lot, especially such authors like Whitman, Coleridge, Goethe, and Keats, who wrote books about death and horror and, very often, vampirism. Thus, Stoker's ardent predisposition towards gothic subject and romantic impression (Clougherty, 2000) blended with the extensive presence of fantasy and horror in his life gave him an opportunity not only to adopt familiar literary and cultural elements into unfamiliar and fascinating world of his fantasy. It also allowed him to "resuscitate" from the dead spiritual values in the world of spiritual stagnation. Moreover, Stoker went even further and used the same familiar literary and cultural components in order to create the special and magic place for his modern heroes, where everything became possible.

### Transylvania as Magic Place

Bram Stoker never visited Transylvania. Hence, he based his opinion about the region and its cultural and geographical landscape on stories told by his brother that could be biased and prejudiced about people, who inhabited the region and traditions prevailing in Transylvania. Thus, many critics agree that Transylvania in *Dracula* represents a “ masked Ireland” (Gibson, 2006) and Stoker’s attempt to present his readers their native world from a fairytale’s perspective. This wild and unfamiliar but, at the same time, native territory provides the concept of the cultural landscape for the novel, which tells about Gothic times and Irish mythology while reminds very much about Ireland itself. In fact, historically, Ireland was the land, the population of which, particularly due to the Irish Land War, was considered to be wild criminals and barbarians. Stewart (1999) describes that they were viewed as “ something average” between the savage tribes and lunatic people. George Stoker described Transylvania for Bram Stoker in the following way: “ The Slovak people are the weirdest ... the most barbarians from whatever people and whenever I met” (Jackson, 1981). Moreover, the usage of the word “ barbarian” has a lot in common with the Roman-Briton’s initial attitude to the Insular Celts connecting Ireland with Transylvania even more. The matter of fact, in the geographical observations of Jonathan Harker, was noted mysterious similarity between Stoker’s Transylvania and Ireland. In such a way, the real landscape of Transylvania was blended perfectly with the magic landscape of Irish folklore and mythology. That is why those, who visited *Dracula*’s native country, did not feel being deceived by the author.

It is necessary to mention that Celtic folklore and fairytales are filled with prototypes for Stoker’s aristocrats-vampires more than any culture in the

world. Moreover, the morals and manners of Dracula and his reliance upon Transylvania's soil have a lot in common not only with the Irish Land War but also with the myth of Abhartach, a great Celtic tribal leader of the " Glenullin area", who lived approximately the fifth or sixth century A. D (Curran, 2000). Evil and dreadful Abhartach terrorizes peasants and nobility (in some sources, he rises from the grave and drinks people's blood).

## Conclusion

On the one hand, the fascinating Irish spiritual legacy transmitted to Stoker's Transylvania allowed the late Victorian audience to familiarize themselves at least a little with the rich Celtic culture and traditions, which Bram Stoker admired to a great extent. On the other hand, Stoker was able to create the image of the magic world, which existed in modern times and was located in Transylvania, in his audience's mind. Many travelers observe that the train's schedule becomes more inaccurate closer to the East (Gibson, 2006), and it reminds the quote from Parolipomena written by Goethe: " The further northward one may go, the plentier soot and witches grow" (Goethe, 2000). While the first observation shows that the world became closer to the nature and wilderness (and less civilized, however), when it was closer to Transylvania, Goethe's poem tells the same about a trip in the north direction, where Ireland is located. Therefore, whichever direction is chosen - north or east, Transylvania or Ireland - a traveler will be placed in a strange country, where slow and old-fashioned trains are always late. Traveling in this old-fashioned train, he can fall asleep and have a dream about a witch on a broom, vampire or other magic creature. These magic and fantastic dreams and craving for impossible and incredible things are those effects, <https://assignbuster.com/rethinking-victorian-russophobia-influence-of-irish-mythology-on-dracula/>

which Bram Stoker considered being lost and desperately wanted to return them to his audience.