



Bram Stoker: A Biography of the Author of Dracula

Barbara Belford

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The first full-scale biography of the complex man known today as the author of Dracula, but who was famous in his own time as the innovative manager of London's Lyceum Theatre, home of the greatest English actors of the day, Henry Irving and Ellen Terry.

Barbara Belford tells the story of Stoker the hidden man. On the surface: the very model of Victorian modesty, reserve, and duty, the devoted husband and father. In actuality: a man whose emotional and working energies were in large part expended on the care and cultivation of the flamboyant, mesmerizing genius of the stage, Henry Irving.

We see Stoker the writer of novels and stories that were imbued with sexuality, violence, and the celebration of death -- works at opposite poles from the decorum he presented in society. And Barbara Belford shows us in Dracula a mirror of the undercurrents of Stoker's own life, as well as a masked exploration of subjects utterly forbidden in his time -- seduction, rape, necrophilia, incest, voyeurism -- universal taboos dramatized with such a myth-making edge that the novel remains resonant and unsettling almost one hundred years later.

We follow Stoker from his sickly childhood -entertained by his mother's twice-told tales of Irish hobgoblins and banshees -- to his years as a Dublin undergraduate and newspaperman, when he first wrote to his idol Walt Whitman, spilling out his innermost thoughts and beginning a lifelong correspondence that culminated in their meeting when Stoker traveled to America on tour with Irving and Ellen Terry. We see Stoker's childhood friendship with Oscar Wilde, and watch as the two young men compete for the hand of the beautiful Florence Balcombe, who became Stoker's wife. And we see Stoker in the literary and theatrical circles of Victorian London among such figures as Mark Twain, Arthur Conan Doyle, James Whistler, Lord Tennyson, and George Bernard Shaw.

Belford gives us a vivid picture of the man, his time, his London -- the domestic and theatrical worlds he lived in -- and the dark imaginary realms that were the wellspring of all his writings, especially of his enduring and enduringly fascinating Dracula.

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