

You're listening to Imaginary Worlds, a show about how we create them and why we suspend our disbelief, I'm Eric Molinsky.

READING: Who was it but one of my own race who as Voivode crossed the Danube and beat the Turk on his own ground? This was a Dracula indeed! Woe was it that his own unworthy brother, when he had fallen, sold his people to the Turk and brought the shame of slavery on them! Was it not this Dracula, indeed, who inspired that other of his race who in a later age again and again brought his forces over the great river into Turkeyland, who, when he was beaten back, came again, and again, though he had to come alone from the bloody field where his troops were being slaughtered, since he knew that he alone could ultimately triumph! They said that he thought only of himself. Bah! What good are peasants without a leader? Where ends the war without a brain and heart to conduct it?

We all know this story. The Irish novelist Bram Stoker was inspired to write Dracula when he read the tale of Vlad the Impaler, a 15th century Romanian warlord. Vlad defended his kingdom against the Turks so fiercely; he hoisted his enemy's heads on sticks outside his castle.

But this turns out to be sort of an urban legend. Stoker didn't do much research on Vlad the Impaler. He was originally going to call his character Count Wampyr from Austria until he came across the word Dracul, which he thought was Romanian for devil. It actually means dragon – which could be a positive thing.

Vlad the Impaler was a hero to Romanians – who were pissed off about the whole Dracula connection, until Western tourists showed up looking for Dracula's castle, and they realized they could make money off this thing. And vampires -- they own that folklore.

LW: There are many vampire stories that precede Dracula, Stoker working in long established tradition.

What made Dracula unusual was that he came to London, the height of modern civilization.

LW: I mean prior to that you see stories about women seducing men in remote parts of the countryside, and it turns out the women are vampires, vampire mythology after all came from Eastern Europe, which is a mostly rural region so most of those stories were rural stories.

They say you should write what you know. So if Stoker didn't know a ton about vampire mythology and he knew even less about Vlad the Impaler, literary scholars looked for clues in Stoker's life to figure out where the inspiration for Dracula could have come from.

And that's where things get interesting.

For most of his career, Abraham Stoker was not known as a writer. He was a theatrical manager for the most famous Shakespearean actor in the world – Henry Irving.

LW: Certainly the relationship of manager to star that we know so well from rock bands who split with managers, movie stars who split with their managers, that kind of fraught relationship is something Stoker is living in the 1880s and '90s and it's awful for him at times. It's just terrible.

But he stuck with it.

LW: Stoker came to depend completely on Irving for his employment, and his family's well being and yet Irving could be extremely fickle in his associations, he cultivated close relationships with staff but he played them off against each other, and I think that Stoker found this extremely uncomfortable place to work and worked that out in fiction and I'm not alone in thinking that, there great many writers on Stoker who believe that.

How long did Stoker work for Irving?

LW: Stoker worked for Irving for decades.

I can see why that would have – that seems to be the primary relationship in his life outside of his wife.

LW: Absolutely. And it wouldn't be unusual for a man to spend a tremendous amount of time with someone like Irving who was his employer, and remember Stoker has his cultural aspirations outside Irving that he thinks Irving will help, he wants to be famous as a writer of fiction.

Stoker wrote several short stories – but Dracula was his most ambitious project.

LW: When Stoker wrote Dracula, he wrote it intending for it to become a play in which Irving would star. Irving read the novel and dismissed it with one word – dreadful – and would have nothing to do with it. I think that really bothered him in all the years he worked for Irving, it was one of those cuts that continued to trouble him.

So was Henry Irving the real Dracula? He had the flamboyance and the power to draw people into his orbit and make them do his bidding.

LW: Irving's ability to manipulate people to come to him, to give him what he wanted, always, I think Stoker must have been marveling at his own complicity in this that he continued to work for a man who was in many ways insufferable, and do his bidding through out very long career and yet he never broke away, never could do something else, never was able established himself independent of employment of Lyceum theater. Dracula his own frustration with himself, and how it can suck the life out of you and turn you into one of the undead.

And we know that Stoker used fiction to vent his frustration against his co-workers.

LW: Stoker wrote those people into his Gothic fiction, there are two men in particular he despised who were also in Irving's circle and he wrote them as dreadful monstrous twins, they manage to get a baby killed, actually two babies killed and they're these bloodthirsty creatures and that kind of reaction of Stoker's might have been healthy, it's one way to deal with problems at work, right?

But Louis Warren discovered something and came up with a theory, which is a bit controversial, but it makes to me. The novel Dracula couldn't exist as we know it if Stoker hadn't met the other entertainer in the world who was more famous than Henry Irving: Buffalo Bill Cody. That's right, the inspiration for Dracula didn't just come from Romania. It came from Nebraska.

Fifteen years ago, Louis Warren was doing research in England on Buffalo Bill's Wild West show and the reception it got there. And he was delving into British culture at the time, including Dracula, which came out after Buffalo Bill had passed through the UK.

LW: If you read the novel Dracula three's this curious thing one of the major characters is from Texas, and he's kind of cowboy figure speaks with Bram Stoker's attempt at

Western vernacular, this guy named Quincy Morris, and that was weird. I was thinking, what is Westerner doing in this novel?

READING: Here we were interrupted in a very startling way. Outside the house came the sound of a pistol shot, the glass of the window was shattered with a bullet, which ricocheting from the top of the embrasure, struck the far wall of the room. I am afraid I am at heart a coward, for I shrieked out. The men all jumped to their feet, Lord Godalming flew over to the window and threw up the sash. As he did so we heard Mr. Morris' voice without, 'Sorry! I fear I have alarmed you. I shall come in and tell you about it.' A minute later he came in and said, 'It was an idiotic thing of me to do, and I ask your pardon, Mrs. Harker, most sincerely, I fear I must have frightened you terribly. But the fact is that whilst the Professor was talking there came a big bat and sat on the windowsill. I have got such a horror of the damned brutes from recent events that I cannot stand them, and I went out to have a shot, as I have been doing of late of evenings, whenever I have seen one. You used to laugh at me for it then, Art.' 'Did you hit it?' asked Dr. Van Helsing. 'I don't know, I fancy not, for it flew away into the wood.'

Louis was reading this passage and wondered, did Bram Stoker go to the Wild West show when it came to London? Turn out, Stoker was there. In fact, he helped Buffalo Bill cross the Atlantic.

It all started in 1886. Bram Stoker's boss, the world famous Shakespearean actor Henry Irving was performing in New York. Irving and Stoker went to see the Wild West show, which was playing on Staten Island.

At this point, the Wild West show had grown way beyond Buffalo Bill Cody telling stories about his days as a scout for the army, or Annie Oakley shooting glass balls in the air. Cody had a huge troupe that would reenact entire battles from the Indians wars like Custer's Last Stand. Native Americans signed up to be in the Wild Show show because they got off the reservation, saw the world, sent money back home, and practiced traditional dances that were banned on the reservations – even though the context was humiliating. They were reenacting their own defeat in front of white audiences.

An actor with an ego like Henry Irving could've been jealous of Buffalo Bill. Instead he develops a *huge* man-crush on him. Irving proposes that they bring the Wild West show to London. Cody loves this idea.

LW: What this does for Cody is allow him to get what I would call Middle Class respectability, there were real concerns that these were low class poor people entertain Americans with shows with gunplay and violence, it could be a real problem to attract the middle classes to attract them to your show and Cody had learned the way to do that was to get Middle Class women to come to your show.

And they'll say Queen Victoria.

LW: Oh yeah, that was a huge plus the biggest endorsement that Cody ever got and the only one he ever needed.

Irving says – you want Queen Victoria there? I can make that happen. He's right. She goes twice.

Buffalo Bill Cody sparks a media circus in London that rivals the Wild West show itself. As Irving's right hand man, Bram Stoker is with them every step of the way.

LW: They take Cody to gentlemen's clubs, they're at all these fancy dinners together, and Irving was a constant presence, he had a box at the Wild West show reserved for himself, and his guests and Stoker and Cody corresponded a couple times, you find in Stoker's papers, Cody requesting theater tickets and one point Cody goes on coach drive in open carriage with Henry Irving through park in London and Stoker with them, and Stoker recall that coach trip as they went through park, he said that was the season that Buffalo Bill struck London like a planet.

There are cartoons from that time making fun of Irving for being smitten with this American rube. Stoker may have felt the same way. Buffalo Bill-type characters start showing up in his fiction well before the character Quincy Morris hunts Dracula.

LW: There are two male Western characters, they're both similar to Quincy Morris and they're both buffoons. One is in a story he published in some years before Dracula, in which a Western Elias P. Hutchinson from Nebraska.

Cody was from Nebraska.

LW: Cody was from Nebraska. And he's an idiot, they're visiting castle in Nuremberg, Germany and Elias P. Hutchinson accidentally kills kitten belonging to black cat and decides to go into torture chamber and climb into Iron Maiden to see what it was like and

the cat triggers the switch on the Iron Maiden and kills Elias P. Hutchinson. And there's another story called the Shoulder of Shasta, and this Western frontier figure mountain trapper dresses like Cody in show, thigh length boots and this fancy beaded buckskin outfit and speaks in that Western vernacular, but he's a complete buffoon and his name is unfortunately Grizzly Dick and in the story a young English woman actually rescues Grizzly Dick from a bear and then she falls in love and pine away, and she's rescued from this unfortunate love affair by an American who is never suitable for her by a strapping athletic English artist named Reginald.

Dracula and Buffalo Bill have another thing in common.

LW: Well we all know Dracula is irresistible to women. And Cody when he arrived in England was hailed as extraordinarily handsome man and one eyewitness said bouquets of flowers arrived hourly sent by English women and many, many rumors about Cody's alleged affairs. What struck some commentators in the popular media was how unsavory this was, that this man who after all was a newcomer, had an unknown past, we know he scalped people for a living, he was a scout in the army and was in the Indian wars, that he was known for violence shows up over here and suddenly English women throwing themselves at him.

"I don't know if there be a Mrs. Buffalo Bill. If there is, she must at this moment be tearing her own or more likely her husband's lovely black hair out by the yard with jealousy. One female professor of the Blood Royal, three Duchesses, seven Countesses in their own right, and eight six dittoes with no rights excepting wrongs, have each and every Debretted one of them offered up their richly jeweled hands and highly chase hearts to beauteous Buffalo Bill."

There actually was a Mrs. Buffalo Bill back home tearing her hair out, until she got a good lawyer.

Some journalists wrote that Cody's reception reminded them of two other famous instances when foreigners took London by storm and seduced high society ladies. But when Louis Warren thought that was an odd comparison because in both of those instances, the foreign dignitaries visiting London were not white. Cody is clearly Anglo-Saxon but in one cartoon, he's drawn as a dark-skinned, bushy haired wild man, lounging in a tux as ladies in gowns swoon all over him.

LW: England and America in this period claimed kinship, there was a great deal of fascination with the empire of Anglo Saxondom, but it has a counter point, in this idea

that conquering far away places, emigrating to a different country and conquering that environment turns you into something else, endless warfare on savage frontier with pagan peoples can turn the Anglo Saxons into a bloodthirsty menace in their own right, wars that don't end make for blood thirsty people. I think Stoker plays this out in Dracula. One thing about Dracula himself that is often missed in films we see is that he comes from a frontier and it's called frontier of Turkeyland, where he's been fighting the Turks and his story is that he fought Turks decade after decade and we learn that he made pact with devil to fight Turks and to be able to beat Turks and received this gift of being undead or curse but it's his need to stay eternally awake on that frontier to push Turks back and fight these battles makes him that nightmare figure. What would happen to frontier hero if he had to fight forever? When seduced by the dark side? Which is what happened to Dracula, he's not become the Turk, he's not become Muslim, what he's become a monster that must feed his own appetite for blood endlessly and when the Turk is held at bay, that monster will consume the people that it purported to defend.

Louis says the Gothic stories Bram Stoker liked to tell weren't that different from Wild West narratives we grew up with in America.

LW: If you look at the frontier myth, the frontier myth begins with one way with Christian errant into wilderness there's a hero bears a light into the dark pagan wilderness and in that wilderness founds a city on a hill, beating back forces of darkness. So in the Gothic story you get inversion of that frontier story, you get a traveler in dark, dreary place, usually stormy, there's a light and they go to light and turn out to be castle and go into castle and they're welcomed but that monster that turns them into a monster, these are stories are inversions of each other, they're inversions, they come from the West and where the West expanded and they are ways of imagining what happens when we go beyond borders, when we seek things in strange places, whatever our motivations and intentions those places can change us.

READING: I saw the Count lying within the box upon the earth, some of which the rude falling from the cart had scattered over him. He was deathly pale, just like a waxen image, and the red eyes glared with the horrible vindictive look, which I knew so well. As I looked, the eyes saw the sinking sun, and the look of hate in them turned to triumph. But, on the instant, came the sweep and flash of Jonathan's great knife. I shrieked as I saw it shear through the throat. Whilst at the same moment Mr. Morris's bowie knife plunged into the heart. It was like a miracle, but before our very eyes, and almost in the drawing of a breath, the whole body crumbled into dust and passed from our sight. I shall be glad as long as I live that even in that moment of final dissolution, there was in the face a look of peace, such as I never could have imagined might have rested there.

LW: In the novel it's actually Quincy Morris's death that ends the action. He struggles with Dracula and kills him, when Dracula dies in novel it's not wooden stake, bowie knife drives bowie knife and in process killed himself. He's the last one to die.

READING: Mr. Morris, who had sunk to the ground, leaned on his elbow, holding his hand pressed to his side. The blood still gushed through his fingers. I flew to him, for the Holy circle did not now keep me back, so did the two doctors. Jonathan knelt behind him and the wounded man laid back his head on his shoulder. With a sigh he took, with a feeble effort, my hand in that of his own which was unstained. He must have seen the anguish of my heart in my face, for he smiled at me and said, 'I am only too happy to have been of service! Oh, God!' he cried suddenly, struggling to a sitting posture and pointing to me. 'It was worth for this to die! Look! Look!' The sun was now right down upon the mountaintop, and the red gleams fell upon my face, so that it was bathed in rosy light. With one impulse the men sank on their knees and a deep and earnest 'Amen' broke from all as their eyes followed the pointing of his finger. The dying man spoke, 'Now God be thanked that all has not been in vain! See! The snow is not more stainless than her forehead! The curse has passed away!'

LW: It's a way where Stoker stages a meeting between a hero of the first frontier become monstrous anti-hero and hero of last frontier, Quincy Morris and two collide, that energy that endless war they carry on, in that spirit that they can't let go, they can never stop fighting, they cancel each other out. This leaves the civilized Englishmen and Dutch professor and Mena Harker woman they're saving from becoming a vampire, leaves them to go back to England go back and be civilized and gentile but these two frontier figures are gone. It's almost as if Stoker is saying we're better off without that kind of problem.

Henry Irving dies in 1905. Stoker works for him to the end, and then dies seven years later.

Stoker didn't live to see Dracula become a world famous icon. But his widow Florence Balcombe did. In fact, she filed a lawsuit against Nosferatu, for copyright infringement. She helped to stage a successful play of Dracula – which Stoker would've loved – and that got the attention of Universal Pictures. She finally began to reap the financial benefits in the 1930s, right before she died.

LW: In many ways story of Dracula and production afterward becomes story of figure who is endless adaptable and uncontainable even by the artist who created him.

As for the frontier – the wars without end – they keep adapting to the present moment. And if we can't find a hero to protect us, we'll always settle for a monster in the end.

That's it for this week's show, thanks for listening. This is actually the first in a three part series on monsters including a collaboration next month with one of my favorite podcasts, *Here Be Monsters*.

Special thanks to Louis Warren, John Keating and Katya Rogers. You can like Imaginary Worlds on Facebook. I tweet at emolinsky. The show's website is Imaginary Worlds podcast dot org.