

# THE EVOLUTION OF COUNT DRACULA

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Dracula can't see his own reflection in the mirror because he *is* a reflection of the culture around him. Ever since Bram Stoker penned *Dracula* in 1897, the vampire's image has been a work in progress.

In the 43 sequels, remakes and adaptations of Stoker's novel, Transylvania's most famous son rarely appears the same way twice. He has evolved with the society around him. His physical traits, powers and weaknesses have morphed to suit cultural and political climates from the Victorian era to the Cold War.

Read on to see how the "Son of the Devil" has changed over time:

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## 1450: The Real-Life Dracula

The original, real-life Dracula was not a vampire, did not drink blood, and didn't worship the devil, either. But he did do many terrible things (i.e., murder thousands of his countrymen) that would make "actual" vampires pale in comparison.

Vlad III, Prince of Wallachia or "Vlad the Impaler" is Count Dracula's historical namesake. His chosen last name "Dracula" translates to "son of the devil," or "son of the dragon" — a reference to a religious order founded by his father (Vlad Dracul).

Despite his famed ruthlessness, it is most likely that his name — chosen randomly out of a Transylvanian history book — was all that Dracula author Bram Stoker ever knew of him.



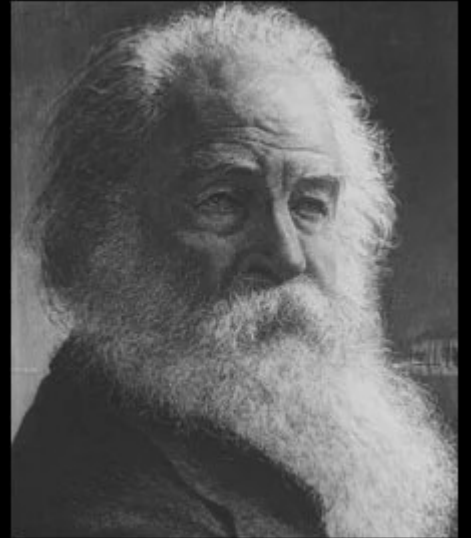
## 1897: Modeled After Walt Whitman?

Today, Dracula often conjures up images of a sexy, mysterious, debonair aristocrat, but Bram Stoker's 1897 Count Dracula was none of those things. There are many theories about how Stoker crafted Dracula's look; some have speculated that the Irish author modeled him after his personal hero, Walt Whitman. (Stoker once confided in a fan letter that Whitman could be "father, and brother and wife to his soul.")

Stoker writes that Dracula had a thick mustache, a large nose and white hair that "grew scantily round the temples but profusely elsewhere." (See how those rumors about Whitman — pictured above — got started?) He describes the Count's general look as "one of extraordinary pallor." Dracula had sharp teeth, pointy ears, squat fingers and hair in the palms of his hands. The sexy, debonair vampire was a creation of later generations.

A lot was going on when Stoker was working on Dracula at the turn of the 19th century: Victorian ideals of repressed sexuality and subservient women's roles were going out of style; Darwinism was just taking hold; and Jack the Ripper was on a murder spree.

Stoker's villain channeled all that — and a lot more — into one super bad guy who resonated with readers for decades. Dracula gradually became the most significant work of Gothic horror literature because it was the perfect vessel for the fears and desires of the era.



## 1931: Dracula As European Aristocrat

As an evil intruder who disrupted innocent lives, Dracula personified all that was threatening, powerful, alluring and evil. In the 1920s and '30s, this translated into an Eastern aristocrat with slicked-back hair, a top coat and a medallion — a look that became the enduring standard for all vampires to come.

Hungarian actor Bela Lugosi became the quintessential Count Dracula in Tod Browning's film adaptation of Stoker's novel. Lugosi refused to wear any makeup that would obscure his face (he declined to play the original Frankenstein for the same reason), and so Lugosi's version of the Count never had fangs.

Lugosi made less than \$3,000 for his work in the role, but nearly 80 years later, he is still considered the definitive Dracula.



## 1958: Dracula As Cold War Enemy

During the Cold War era, Count Dracula became superbad. His motives were unimportant — he was distilled into a vicious troublemaker with an appetite for destruction. Just as the U.S. viewed Cold War enemies as purely evil, Dracula became a character with whom it was impossible to empathize.

Christopher Lee's 1958 depiction of the Count had red eyes and huge fangs, often with some virginal gore hanging off them. Lee was a pro; he played the Count a total of six times — more than any other actor.

Lee's Count was so inherently menacing, that in one 1966 sequel, *Dracula: Prince of Darkness*, he had no lines at all — he just hissed at the camera throughout the film.



## 1979: Disco Dracula

In the 1979 remake of the original Dracula, the vampire was updated for the disco era with chiseled good looks and severely blow-dried hair. Forget politics or world views with this Count. He represented a sexual creature free of moral anchors — able to do whatever (or whomever) he pleased.

It's probably no coincidence that this manifestation of the Transylvanian bad boy debuted less than two years after Saturday Night Fever. Frank Langella looks as if he plans to do "The Hustle" with Tony Manero right after he drains the blood from a few virgins.



## 2004: Dracula Goes Goth

Goth, gaunt and hip, today's vampires look like roadies for the Smashing Pumpkins. They exude absolute freedom and irreverent power — and they're handsome to boot.

Aussie Richard Roxburgh played the Count in *Van Helsing* in 2004. Despite his Johnny Depp good looks, he transforms into a bat-like orthodontic nightmare when provoked.

In HBO's *True Blood* and author Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series, modern vampires disguise ugly evil below sexy allure. Today's Dracula reflects 21st century fears about people who are not what they seem.

