

The dreadful influence of books

Description



Over the past few weeks, Iâ€™ve been watching the new show â€œPenny Dreadfulâ€ on Showtime, and it has quickly become one of the most confusing, entertaining and delightfully odd TV shows I have seen in recent memory. If you havenâ€™t given it a watch, I wholeheartedly suggest you do. And I know of what I speak, as I watch a lot of television (probably too much).

Penny Dreadful takes place in London during the early 1890â€™s, and begins with our audience proxy, marksman and con man Ethan Chandler (played by Josh Hartnett) is recruited by Vanessa Ives and Sir Malcolm Murray (Eva Green and Timothy Dalton, respectively) to do some â€œnight work.â€ What follows is a gruesome adventure into Londonâ€™s seedy underbelly, but all is not what it seems. For you see, Ives and Sir Malcolm are hunting something much darker than a murder or a thief â€“ they are hunting vampires. One vampire, to be specific, who stole Sir Malcolmâ€™s niece before the series began

The niece, it is quickly revealed, is Mina Harker â€“ the same Mina who was bitten and transformed into a vampire in Bram Stokerâ€™s Dracula.

Penny Dreadful, named for a type of 19th century cheap British fiction with lurid and sensational subject matter, incorporates many of horrorâ€™s best and most iconic characters as players. Dracula, Frankenstein, Dorian Gray and more have been seen so far, as only three episodes have aired of the first season, and Iâ€™m confident that the Wolfman will make an appearance at some point, along with Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde, the Mummy and more.

I have read all the classic horror novels, with Stoker's Dracula easily being one of my favourite books that I have ever read in my almost 30 years. I read Dracula for the first time in high school, simply for pleasure, when I was around grade nine. The reason was simple – it was a classic and I always liked horror movies, and after reading, the book influenced me significantly. I became fascinated with the horror genre, gobbling up the classic horror novels, along with modern classics like King and Koontz. Which let me into other genres, like thriller, science fiction, mystery, etc.

While Bram Stoker's landmark novel didn't create my love for reading, it stoked the fires and gave me a glimpse of everything I was missing from what had been published before. It also gave me my first lesson in narrative structure, as Dracula wasn't like a normal book – it was told through a series of diary entries, letters, correspondence, recordings and newspaper clippings. It showed me that a novel didn't need to follow the traditional rules of first-person or third-person. This helped me branch out in my own writing, experimenting with structure and flow.

Approximately fifteen years from my first reading Dracula, I still pick it up once every year or so and read it again, to get lost in the adventures of Jonathan Harker, Mina, Van Helsing and Renfield. While not without its problems and plot-holes, Stoker's Dracula still has some mystical hold on me that I cannot shake. It has, and probably always will be, near the top of my list of favourite books.

Well, that and George Orwell's Animal Farm.

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1. books
2. Dracula

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2. Dracula
3. Penny Dreadul

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