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## Separation Granted; Divorce Denied; Annulment Unlikely

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### Cover Page Footnote

This paper was [Raymond McNally's] rebuttal to Elizabeth Miller's "Filing for Divorce: Count Dracula vs Vlad Tepes", given at "Dracula 97" in Los Angeles. Miller's paper has been published in *Dracula: The Shade and the Shadow* (Desert Island Books, 1998).

## Separation Granted; Divorce Denied; Annulment Unlikely

Raymond McNally

[Co-author of *In Search of Dracula* and *Dracula: Prince of Many Faces*, Raymond McNally is Professor of History at Boston College. This paper was his rebuttal to Elizabeth Miller's "Filing for Divorce: Count Dracula vs Vlad Tepes", given at "Dracula 97" in Los Angeles. Miller's paper has been published in *Dracula: The Shade and the Shadow* (Desert Island Books, 1998).]

Let me begin by making this point clear. I have never claimed that Bram Stoker was a historian, much less a geographer. I have regarded him as a writer of fiction, as he considered himself to be. He recognized the difference between a historian who is obliged to adhere to the facts and a writer of fiction who is bound only to tell a believable story. In a hitherto unknown, complete preface to his last book *Famous Imposters* (1910), which I discovered in the archives of Trinity College, Stoker stated that unlike historians, writers of fiction were only obliged to create what the French called the "vraisemblable" (meaning "like the truth" or "believable"). Hence the fiction writer must strive to tell a plausible story, and Stoker was very good at that. Even now, I make no attempt to claim that Stoker wrote history, and am amused that literary experts such as Elizabeth Miller cannot resist telling historians how to read literature.

In *Dracula: Prince of Many Faces*, I wrote that "Stoker's vampire count is indeed a composite creature, in the end the product of Stoker's imagination, his reading and the result of his life experiences" (234). Earlier I had stated that my book *Dracula: A Biography of Vlad the Impaler, 1431-1476* "stands clearly in the tradition of seeing both the historical and the symbolic aspects of Dracula" and that "Dracula belongs to history as well as to myth" (180). Certainly I should not be held responsible for the excesses of those who have misinterpreted my words.

Now to the real matter -- the connection between the historical Dracula and the Dracula of Stoker's novel. First of all, it is an incontrovertible fact that there was a fifteenth-century Wallachian ruler who referred to himself as Dracula. As Miller admits, there are two surviving documents on which he signed his name "Dracula" or "Draculea." With the help of a Canadian scholar, Benjamin Leblanc, I located and studied the only known full-length painting of Vlad Dracula on which are clearly written in Latin the words "Dracula, voevod of Transalpine Wallachia, the most fearsome foe of the Turks." As for the sobriquet "The Impaler," that is what the Turks pejoratively called him; this negative appellation was unfortunately later picked up by Romanian writers who called him "Tepes" ("The Impaler"). But never in his lifetime, as far as we know, did he ever refer to himself in this way; he never introduced himself as "The Impaler". This nickname is a label which maligns the positive aspect of this Prince of many faces. Bram Stoker tended to emphasize the positive aspects of Vlad. For example, he has Van Helsing say that the historical Dracula was "a most wonderful man" with a "mighty brain, a learning beyond compare, and a heart that knew no fear nor remorse."

Stoker knew a lot more about the historical Dracula than Miller states. For example, he knew the obscure detail that after Vlad's death, his weak brother Radu, a minion of the Sultan, became prince and that this signalled the ignominious decline of the independence of Wallachia. The proof can be found in Stoker's own Working Papers at the Rosenbach Museum, in notes which he took from William Wilkinson's *Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia* (1820) which state in part:

Dracula in Wallachian language means Devil. Wallachians were accustomed to give it as a surname to any person who rendered himself conspicuous by courage, cruel actions, or cunning.

(19)

The Wallachians joined Hungarians in 1448, and made war on Turkey, king defeated at battle of Cassova in Bulgaria and finding it impossible to make stand against the Turks submitted to annual tribute which they paid until 1460 when Sultan Mahomet II being occupied in completing the conquest of islands in Archipelago gave opportunity of shaking pff their yoke. Their Voivode [Dracula] crossed the Danube and attacked Turkish troops. Only momentary success. Mahomet drove him back to Wallachia where pursued and defeated him. The Voivode escaped into Hungary and the Sultan caused his brother Bladus [Radu] received into his palace. He made treaty with this Bladus binding Wallachians to perpetual tribute and laid the foundations of that slavery not yet abolished. (18-19)

In Chapter 18 of *Dracula*, as Miller has noted, Van Helsing speaks about Dracula's famous 1461 attack against the Turks over the Danube into what is now Bulgaria, then under Turkish control. Why does Van Helsing do so? He is trying to impress on the other vampire hunters how powerful and daring is this vampire now resuscitated, since as a living man he once dared attack the Ottoman Turks on their own territory. The vampire Dracula carries with him all of that resoluteness, experience and daring, with make him a formidable foe indeed.

The connection that Stoker makes between the historical Dracula and the vampire Count is not, as Miller suggests, tenuous. Nor is it difficult to keep the two entities separate. I do not know why she finds the process "increasingly difficult" or who those "others" who do so actually are. As a historian, I separate fact from fiction, reality from myth; but this in no way diminishes the power of myth. On the contrary, I accept that myth can have an even greater impact than facts. In our books, Radu Florescu and I separated fact from fiction while maintaining the importance of both.

The character in a book of fiction is generally never any one historical person but rather a composite of several people whom the author either knew or studied. For example, the great Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky revealed that the character of Sergei Trofimovich in his novel *The Possessed* was based on several Russian intellectuals including Chaadev, Belinsky and Granovsky, and was not meant to be a portrayal of any one person. So in *Dracula*, the Count is not only the historical Dracula but a mix.

Miller provides no substantial evidence to support her claim that "it has become commonplace to assume that Stoker was inspired by accounts of Vlad's atrocities." Such an assumption is silly. Stoker's inspiration came from "Carmilla," from elements of the Gothic tradition and other influences. He first planned to set the novel in Styria, where Le Fanu had set "Carmilla". He had intended to name his vampire "Count Wampyr" (which would have been a dead giveaway); fortunately he changed this to "Dracula" and in the final galley proofs altered the title of the novel from *The Un-Dead* to *Dracula*.

What about Vambery? When in the novel Van Helsing says "I asked my friend Arminius from Buda-Pesth university to make his record," he must have been referring to the famous Orientalist Arminius Vambery whom Stoker had met in London and whom he admired. Stoker's biographer Harry Ludlam assumed that Vambery told Bram about Vlad, but this is guesswork. There is no concrete evidence of what Stoker and Vambery discussed when they dined in the Beefsteak Room.

It is unlikely that Stoker could have read the 1491 Bamberg pamphlet about the historical Dracula, though we know Stoker was an active member of that library and that there were exhibits concerning Romanian history there during his lifetime. We also know that Stoker spent seven years researching for his novel, even though Miller claims that his research was "fragmented and at times erroneous." Actually, he took whole passages from several books and wove them into his story. His train schedules were precise, down to the minute. In short, when he wrote from his research and experience he was relatively accurate. In fact, that is part of the attraction of the novel. For the first forty pages everything is factual, so he builds up a sense of reality.

As for the point that Dracula in the novel is a Count rather than a Voivode or a Prince, nobody has yet pointed out, as far as I know, that it is Harker who addresses him as "Count Dracula" (not Dracula himself, who replies simply "I am Dracula"). He certainly would not use that name given to

him by his enemies -- "The Impaler"! As for Miller's statement about Stoker's "intentions," how can anyone know an author's intentions?

My final verdict on this case. Separation of Vlad from the Count is granted, divorce is denied, and any annulment is unlikely. The two Draculas are related because of the relevant passages in Stoker's novel. Bram Stoker linked authentic Transylvanian vampire folklore and elements of the Gothic tradition with the historical Dracula. But, as Miller implies, it was no real functioning marriage -- at best a liaison needing no divorce.