

Dracula: A Historical Figure

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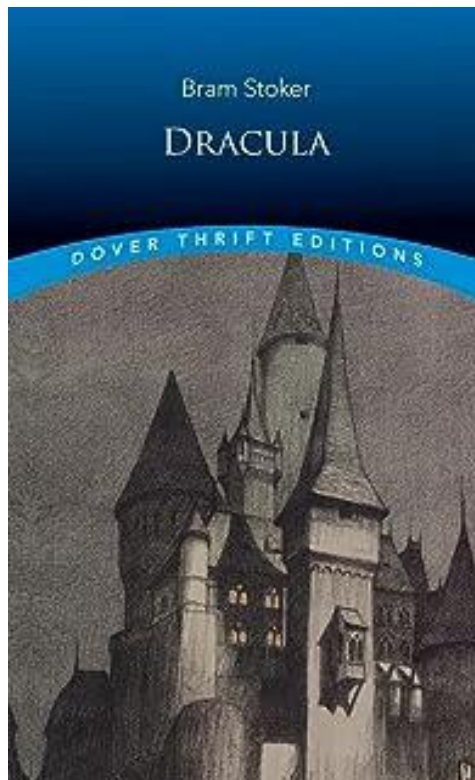
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Abstract

Bram Stoker gave breath to Count Dracula in his Gothic, connecting historical correlation to his creative approach. An account of mystery and realism imbibed within an epistolary novel that dates back to a specific historical context of fifteenth-century Romania. This paper focuses on the revelation of facts and fiction regarding how a prince was *souled* in the *soulless* Count, and how Stoker sew traits in common with differences as a medium of suspense thriller, developing a diary of a moving historical figure.

Keywords: *Dracula*, Historical, Superstition, Myth, Realism, Folklore, Vampire, Order of the Dragon, Voivode, Witch, Psychology, Facts, Fiction

Introduction

Dracula is a word of much contemplation ascending in the Goth environment as human foe, bloodthirsty, dark entity, immortal, sun fearing, supernatural, and evolving to many interpretations. Since the publishing of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), society imaged the mystical figure with such connotations and somehow studying with an eagle eye one finds out that the supernatural being is inspired by a historical warrior prince of *Walachia, Vlad III or Vlad the Impaler. Vlad III Dracula or Vlad the Tepes (born 1431, Sighișoara, Transylvania (now in Romania)—died 1476, north of present-day Bucharest, Romania)*, the infamous bloodthirsty emperor quite resembling the thirst of Count but in a much different way. Referring thus, to the history and the aspect of the word, Romanian language says *Dracula* means “son of Dracul”, where Dracul further explains itself as the Devil (drac- devil, ul –the) evolved from Latin *Draco* meaning dragon. Satan of the undead, murderous in sentiment for survival coincides with the Wallachian prince who inflicted inhumane and sadist punishments on enemies and even on civilians. In this paper, we deal with two figures (**Count Dracula** and **Vlad Dracula**) coinciding each other in given aspects. We shall be holding onto the darkness of the Count who says “*the blood is the life*” and of the Emperor **Vlad Dracula** “*eating bread dipped with the blood of sufferers*”. Throughout the years the vampire breed subsists in fears of people fanged with more superstition and myths which indirectly inspired Stoker in the creation of his work.

Beginning with the title of the novel “*Dracula*”, history reflects a figure of profound stature and horror, an enigma of mystery and a supreme sadist. In the fifteenth century, Romania was powered by a prince who inherited his sobriquet of *Dracula* from his father *Vlad II Dracul*, who received his infamous sign after joining a member of the Order of the

Dragon (monarchical chivalric order for selected higher aristocracy and monarchs, founded in 1408 by the king of Hungary to save their sacred Catholic Church and defense against Ottoman Empire) which Vlad III later joined as a military commander. Second born in the hierarchy of four brothers, Vlad embarked on revenge his whole life and was a victim of the loss of his family one by one in the hands of his enemies. Scholars regarded him as a warrior of utmost valor but extremely cruel because of his pain for revenge which consumed him throughout his days. He ascended the throne of Wallachia three times with durations of exile and prison, ultimately beheaded and gifted to his enemies. (Arie Kaplan, 2012, *Dracula, the Life of Vlad the Impaler*) Whereas on the other side, we have Count Dracula also belongs to an aristocratic hierarchy when he dialogues “*We Szekelys have a right to be proud, for in our veins flows the blood of many brave races who fought as the lions fight for lordship*” (Jonathan Harker’s *Journal continued*, 3). Here Stoker coronates his character on the throne of aristocracy similar to Vlad, and rightfully remarks Wallach and Szekelys as Romanian ancestry. Although we didn't witness direct connotations to the said historical king, but Count Dracula denotes him indirectly,

“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”

(Jonathan Harker’s Journal continued, 3).

Vlad III being a Voivode for his army was against the Ottoman Empire after spoiling terms with them and ambushed them with a Night Attack of Targoviste. He slayed the Turks and destroyed the army, impaling them on stakes and mocking the Ottomans. Later, the betrayal of Radu (Vlad’s brother) is included to depict the historical event. (*Vlad the Impaler, Wikipedia*)

Another reference made by Bram Stoker from the mouthpiece of Van Helsing states yet again an aristocratic and warrior background coinciding with Vlad the Impaler,

“He must, indeed, have been that Voivode Dracula who won his name against the Turk, over the great river on the very frontier of Turkeyland”

(Dr. Seward’s Diary, 18)

Stoker even mentions the popularity and warlord image of Dracula which was then Vlad's highest achievement, his supporters, even now, consider him as a supreme power for their countrymen and how he saved his land from foreign hands denoting him "cleverest and the most cunning, as well as the bravest" which shows the much-needed realism between the two. What Stoker does in his whole novel reiterates his character with dark, mystic, and devilish desires, even after showcasing the great valor and bravery of the ascended hierarchy.

"The Draculas were, says Arminius, a great and noble race, though now and again were scions who were held by their coevals to have had dealings with the Evil One."

(Dr. Seward's Diary, 18)

Here in the above dialogue, Stoker wanted to ascertain his view of how can a human be so bloodthirsty and so suspicious of nature, has he not done an occult practice or is he not devoted to Evil practices, offering them the blood of humans to feed, Stoker remains on a psychology of adopting Vlad as himself a conduit of a vampire who feeds on blood, and he who is a foe to humankind. The infamous doings of this so menacing a prince are more to be taken as "just sadist." Given dialogues describe Count in the novel too who stems from Vlad and his menacing stature. Van Helsing in his revelation speaks of Count being impaled to make this earth free from Devil, the denoting reference is very much visible.

Moreover, the inspiration for setting up a castle in Transylvania, Stoker was imbibed with notes of myths and superstitions of vampires in Romania with that of Vlad's history. Myths had it that vampires had their oldest origin in Romania where bloodthirsty spirits spread their fangs for millennia, folklore about them were so in name which gave rise to the tragic event of mass hysteria. "Moroi" and "Strigoi" were witches in Romanian myths who suck the blood of livestock in the dark and raise corpses from the dead which made the population aware of some dark entity inhabiting the nation. (*Vampire Folklore by Region, Wikipedia*) Such myths inspired Stoker to craft his nobleman in a guise with such qualities. History had it, that born in Transylvania and later on, was captured and made prisoner in one of the towns of the same, Vlad is connected with the place and thus, Stoker came up with Castle Dracula.

The fact that Stoker denotes his character as an evil vampire and gives references to Vlad, speaks his psychological agreement of the prince being not so human himself. With a

such thirst for revenge, blood, and sadism, a sobriquet of The Impaler was given to the Wallachian prince due to the practice of punishing his enemies and those who even oppose him by impaling them on stakes till their last drop of blood. These accounts were recorded by many scholars who studied Romanian history and especially Vlad Tepes where it is cited that Vlad once impaled two monks only to assist heaven to them and their donkey who was simply braying. (McNally, Raymond T. (1991). *"Vlad Țepeș in Romanian folklore"*). Unable to satiate his thirst in prison Vlad would spew doom on rats, cutting them into pieces and impaling them on wood. (Andreescu, Stefan (1991)"Military actions of Vlad Țepeș in South-Eastern Europe in 1476"). Antonio Bonfini in his *Historia Pannonica* talks of Turkish messengers coming to the court of Vlad denying getting turbaned but were punished by nailing the turbans on their heads (Treptow, Kurt W. 2000. *Vlad III Dracula: The Life and Times of the Historical Dracula. The Center of Romanian Studies.*)

... [Vlad] had a big copper cauldron built and put a lid made of wood with holes in it on top. He put the people in the cauldron and put their heads in the holes and fastened them there; then he filled it with water and set a fire under it and let the people cry their eyes out until they were boiled to death. And then he invented frightening, terrible, unheard-of tortures. He ordered that women be impaled together with their suckling babies on the same stake ...
(Treptow, Kurt W. (2000). *Vlad III Dracula: The Life and Times of the Historical Dracula. The Center of Romanian Studies.*)

In Stoker's novel the evil nobleman is bloodthirsty to survive and to live forever, a characteristic of a vampire but resembling Vlad (who died though). Similar to him, Count is too bound for blood which tempts him throughout the novel -

"The mouth was redder than ever, for on the lips were gouts of fresh blood, which trickled from the corners of the mouth and ran down over the chin and neck" ...

(Jonathan Harker's Journal continued, 4)

Transformation of a vampire into a bat, but why bat? How come Stoker came up with the idea? What made him think of such an effect? We talked of the Order of the Dragon and how Dracul is inspired by the name which gives rise to many interpretations for Vlad and his father. Stoker in his novel used this reference in a unique way, which from thence became a connected sort of symbol for Dracula, the vampire. The emblem of the Order is a Dragon,

having extended wings and hanging on a cross, giving the reflection of a bat-like creature. Stoker was thus inspired; he made his Count Dracula transform into a bat who in search of conduit hovers over London. (Arie Kaplan, 2012, Dracula, the Life of Vlad the Impaler)

The positioning and the setting of the novel with circumstanced events taking place; Stoker used real places to make it more elite and eye-striking – Transylvania (the Birthplace of Vlad), Borgo pass (same distance to infamous Bran castle), Bistritz (real town of Vlad's legend), Snagov Monastery (where, according to legend, Vlad's remains were buried) and the city of Brasov (where Vlad led raids against the Saxons merchants). Exploring such places of history, the infamous horror legend gave many reasons to speculate the conditioning of the evil nobleman protagonist on the shade of Vlad the Romanian Prince.

A Dracula entry must be somewhat cinematic and supernatural, thus our author provides us with such an environment which was also present partially if not fully at the time of Vlad's birth, *"It is said that on the night Vlad was born the holy statues of the village bled from their eyes and mouths. The priests that witnessed the royal births took it as a sign from God. Many of the villagers, however, saw it as a mysterious and terrible omen, foreshadowing some unknown evil yet to come"*. (Comparing Impaler and Stoker's creation, ipl.org essays)

Similarly when the Count enters London he possesses powers to corrupt weather foreshadowing thus an unknown evil upon the city. ... *"and the sea for some distance could be seen in the glare of the lightning, which came thick and fast, followed by such pearls of thunder that the whole sky overhead seemed trembling under the shock of the footsteps of the storm.* (Cutting from the Dailygraph, 7)

How Stoker picks up minute details from Vlad's life is remarkably artistic, giving the historical emperor a new face with a glory of a vampire. Imbibing inspiration from such a man who was not only considered evil and sadist by means but by his physical appearance too, for his demeanor was somewhat of mean stature overflowed with general disgust. In his historical paper De Bellis Gothorum written in 1472 Nicholas of Modruš, Croatian bishop, describes Vlad the Impaler thus:

"He wasn't particularly tall, but sturdy and muscular, with a harsh and fierce appearance. His nose was aquiline, his nostrils flaring, his skin fine but ruddy, and he had very long eyelashes that framed large, green eyes. But his eyebrows, dark and thick, gave him a

menacing look. His face was clean-shaven, except for his mustache. His prominent temporal ridges increased his head's appearance and his neck, as thick as a bull's, ended in broad, strong shoulders on which his dark, curly locks rested."

Thus, inspired by mean stature and dark side of the prince, Stoker crafted Count Dracula as: "Tall and thin... waxen... old (although, after feeding, he may appear to be younger)... Nose: "aquiline ... high bridge ... thin... peculiarly arched nostrils"... Hair: scanty around temples, profuse elsewhere... Eyebrows: very massive "almost meeting over the nose"... Eyes: red... Mustache: heavy, concealing much of the mouth... Mouth: "fixed and rather cruel-looking" with ruddy red lips... Teeth: "sharp white teeth protruded over the lips"... Ears: pale, with "extremely pointed" tops... Hands: coarse, "broad, with squat fingers," hairs in the center of the palm, long and sharp fingernails...

(Alluringcreations.co.new-literary-comparison-bram-stokers-dracula-vlad-impaler)

Even the mention of St. George's Day in the novel deals with an iconic and much-believed myth prone to Romania. It is believed that the flames of the treasures hidden underground ahead of the Ottoman invasions of Wallachia show themselves in special blue light, and as Stoker took inspiration from Wallachian history and even the myths concerning it, he is very much present in creating an effect of life from it-

*"Why the coachman went to the places where he had seen **the blue flames**. He then explained to me that it was commonly believed that on **a certain night of the year**—last night when all evil spirits are supposed to have unchecked sway—a **blue flame is seen over any place where treasure has been concealed**".*

(Jonathan Harker's Journal Continued, 2)

The practice of impaling the enemies and even his own countrymen who oppose Vlad is a spitting image of how vampires must be driven to an end. If he was himself not so human who love to taste the blood of his breed, why would he only choose such means as impaling to get fulfilled? The sadist prince was kind of mocking the human punishments to vampires, in the novel; Stoker names such a practice done by Van Helsing to dead the Undead-

"I shall cut off her head and fill her mouth with garlic, and I shall drive a stake through her body" (Dr. Seward's Diary continued, 15)

“Take this stake in your left hand, ready to place to the point over the heart, and the hammer in your right. Then when we begin our prayer for the dead, I shall read him, I have here the book, and the others shall follow, strike in God’s name, that so all may be well with the dead that we love and that the Undead pass away” (Dr. Seward’s Diary continued, 16)

Stoker in his psychological way was denoting a practice of killing such beings with stakes that are parasites to humankind denoting this specific practice to be done on Vlad the prince himself. Every aspect of the novel is purely sewn with the content of knowledge and utmost information. Stoker designated every super humane and even inhumane practice somewhat regarding the prince of Wallachia. It is no lie to speculate that he possesses great knowledge about Vlad and even Romanian history, its facts, its myths, and even its said legend stories. With passing years came additions and more discoveries about this comparison and its revelation, many historians who studied Vlad and inked books on him and many scholars who studied Dracula the novel, were somewhere in clasping hands to its similarities and one leading to the other. Marc Lallanilla claims in his article:

“And if ever there were a historical figure to inspire a bloodthirsty, monstrous fictional character, Vlad III Dracula was one. Stoker drew inspiration from a real-life man with an even more grotesque taste for blood: Vlad III, Prince of Wallachia or — as he is better known — Vlad the Impaler (Vlad Tepes), a name he earned for his favorite way of dispensing with his enemies.”

Pioneers in spreading the knowledge of similarity between the two Dracula, Raymond McNally, and Radu Florescu published their book "In Search of Dracula (1994)" a thesis, in which they both held that Stoker centered his character of Count based on Vlad the Impaler – *“...the amazing accuracy of historical, geographical and topological details lead scholars to accept much in them as fact.”*

In *Rolandia*, a tourist magazine, it was advertised how Romania and Dracula are connected, “Stoker's Dracula became one of the most representative images of the rich and authentic Romanian folklore, a true ambassador of all the Carpathian vampires, a Romanian vampire with Irish roots.”

Callum McKelvie, in his life science essay, remarked Stoker's creation as directly adapted from the historical entity, "Vlad the Impaler was a medieval prince whose bloodthirsty acts inspired the world's most famous Vampire, Bram Stoker's Dracula."

The notion of Vlad III as the model for Count Dracula emerged in 1958, with Basil Kirtley, who asserted that, without question, the biography that Abraham Van Helsing gives for the fictional Count Dracula is that of the Wallachian Voivode. His thesis became the center for Raymond and Radu for their statements and findings, giving more ideas to the said speculation. As history says Stoker was inspired and was clued by Romania and its powerful past, he somehow was struck by the name Dracula, seeing this as a sobriquet of Voivode of a fighting nation but was fearsome and not so human-like in sentiment.

Conclusion

The notoriously violent Prince and his so famous stature became a footnote of Stoker and his Count. A book by William Wilkinson is cited to be a turning point for the author and his character in making, who wrote about Romania and its history. To cite such a character who was considered most evil in Middle Ages and to give him the pedestal of a vampire, Stoker from his remarkable skills and his indirect connotations became successful in giving his message. Vlad and Count are not unlike, but one stems from the roots of another, to show what the reality was, to show what such demeanor means. Being designated in history as a legendary historical tyrant, Vlad became immortal in Count. A mass murderer, a legendary warrior, an evil sadist, a specimen of valor, such traits build up Vlad the Impaler which coincides with Count Dracula. Many cinematic adaptations are present to cite the comparison which after researching the infamous prince brings facts to light. With such an abundance of in-between dialogues and in-depth study, one can easily feel the identity of that mortal vampire in the immortal one. Bram Stoker gave such a spine-chilling draft of Dracula which through the ages remains the pioneer of horror classics, naming first on the list of adaptations (being 500). Only one such real character was present to give justice to this historical adaptation – Vlad the Impaler.

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